

# Impact Media

## — building common cause

A review of how civil society 'social impact media' is funded, structured and delivers positive social change in the United States, India and Sri Lanka, with recommendations for the UK.

**Caroline Diehl MBE**

“We fund media that is socially impactful: reports, facts and stories that are not just facts in abstraction but favourably impact society and citizens and are potential harbingers of positive change.”

**Sunil Rajshekar, CEO, Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation, Bengaluru, India**

“It’s a very delicate dance to figure out how you stay true to your mission, and really speak truth to power, and create a business model that’s self-sustaining.”

**Sara Lomax-Reese, President & CEO, WURD Radio, Philadelphia, US**

“Our biggest driver of funds is how we relate to our audience — we stopped thinking of our listeners as listeners but as friends, and that’s what they tell us — it’s a two-way street, it advises everything that we do — we are a convener, a haven, an educator, a port in the storm, a constant companion.”

**Molly Davis, Assistant General Manager, WFDD Radio, Winston-Salem, US**

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# Acknowledgements

My heartfelt thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for funding this Fellowship, enabling me to visit many projects and organisations in the US, India and Sri Lanka, and to learn from so many people involved in creating, distributing, researching, supporting and funding social impact media.

My thanks also to the many people who gave up their time to share their expertise, meet with me, show me round their organisations, introduce me to others, and inspire me for future collaborations:

## In the US

Molly de Aguiar, Ashley Alvarado, Sarah Alvarez, Anthony Arrien, Jim Anderson, Daniel Ash, Madeleine Bair, Joe Barr, Steve Bass, Stephen Bediako OBE, Evan Benn, Eddie Berg, David Bornstein, Kellie Castruita Specter, Bettina Chang, Terry Clifford, Dan Coughlin, Sue Cross, Molly Davis, Ted Diedrich, Michael Eugenio, Rick Eytcheson, Alice Ferris, Jennifer Ferro, Ellyn Fisher, Jim Friedlich, Mark Fuerst, Sergio Furman, Carmen Garcia, Linda Gellasch, Ric Grefe, Adam Gronski, Elizabeth Hansen, Angela Harris, Georgeann Herbert, Jake Hoffman, Feather Houstoun, Aziz Isham, Alex Jakana, Jamie Kalven, Sally Kane, Oona King, Michael Max Knobbe, Susan Krachun, Sara Lomax-Reese, David Lowe, Annie Madonia, Tom Mara, Gary Martin, Kyra McGrath, Jim McVane, Ed Moore, Hugo Morales, Terri J. Murray, Barry Nelson, Tim Olson, Tina Pamintuan, Bill Patz, Nancy Racette, Nantz Rickard, Mike Rispoli, Marita Rivero, Liba Rubenstein, Tim Russell, Alex Schaffert, Jason Schumer, Matt Schuster, Jake Shapiro, Neal Shapiro, Bill Siemering, Camille Spalding, Vince Stehle, Matt Sullivan, Tom Thomas, Shamus Toomey, Sofia Triplett, Daryl Upsall, Mike Wassenaar, Jeremy Weinstein, Mike Wilkinson, Ethan Zuckerman.

## In India and Sri Lanka

Santosh Aanabathula, Mohd Talha Abbasi, Chandula Abeywickrema, Ravindra Ambekar, Anisha Annie Saniya, Shalini Goyal Bhalla, Chetan Bhattacharji, Pinky Chandran, Bhupendra Chaubey, Madhav Chinnappa, Grace Clapham, Vincent D'Souza, Chevaan Daniel, Archan Datta, MJR David, Farrukh Dhondy, Barkha Dutt, Vishaka George, Suranjana Ghosh, Eranda Ginige, Sudarshana Gunawardana, Sanjay Gupta, Arti Jaiman, Nidhi Gupta, Nidhi Jamwal, Meera K, Rohan Katepallewar, Ravina Raj Kohli, Prem Koshy, Sashi Kumar, Jessica Mayberry, Dr. Kanchan Malik, Kaushik Mitter, Alcole Narsamma, General Narsamma, Neera Nundy, Priya Padma, Dhimant Parekh, Rajshekar Patil, Professor Vinod Pavarala, Anuradha Prasad, Chaitanya Prasad, Eklavya Prasad, Vijay Sai Pratap, Hassan Rahimtula, Sunil Rajshekar, Meenakshi Ramesh, Tara Rao, Sandya Ravishankar, Rahul Saigal, Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu, P.V. Satheesh, Ashish Sen, Aaditeshwar Seth, Subi Shah, Vinod Shirsath, Bhaskar Sitholey, Chandraguptha Thenuwara, Mitu Varma, Lalith Welamedage, Jayaweera Wijayananda, Minoli Wijetunga, Gayatri Yadav.

Many thanks also to Matt Brittin, Neil Sherlock CBE and many others who supported and encouraged me with this Fellowship.

The innovation, skills and commitment I saw were powerful and inspirational, and my Churchill Fellowship legacy will continue to build closer connections and collaboration between impact media organisations across the UK and globally.

## About the author

Caroline Diehl MBE is Executive Chair and Founder of the UK's only charitable and co-operatively owned national broadcast television channel Together TV, which she first launched in 2000 as The Community Channel.

Caroline has many years' experience of working in social impact media, and widespread connections across the media, digital, non-profit and social enterprise sectors in the UK, Europe, India, Sri Lanka, Japan and the US.

In 1994, after 5 years as UK Director of 'social action broadcasting' for Community Service Volunteers, Caroline founded the Media Trust, the UK's leading communications charity, where she was CEO to 2017, working with a wide range of media and

digital companies, charities, donors and social enterprises. Caroline was also co-founder of Public Voice, the consortium set up to lobby for 'citizens' interests' to be included in the UK's last two Communications Acts, and a board member of the Broadcasters' Diversity Network.

Caroline recently set up the Social Founder Network, a global network for and about founders of charities and social enterprises, including social impact media organisations. She is a Governor of the East London NHS Foundation Trust, a WEA Fellow and an Entrepreneur in Residence at INSEAD, the global business school. She is a proud mother, marathon runner, activist and avid consumer of the arts and media.

Email: [caroline@socialfounder.org](mailto:caroline@socialfounder.org)

Twitter: [@carolinediehl](https://twitter.com/carolinediehl)



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

# Foreword

Thank you to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for a unique opportunity, and to all the inspirational and highly experienced individuals I met with across the three countries I visited, who gave so generously of their time, knowledge and insights.

I hope that my research and report will benefit existing and burgeoning impact media organisations across the UK, at a local, regional, national and UK-wide level, helping media organisations to structure their funding and ownership in such a way as to hit the ‘double bottom line’ — to survive, and grow, financially and to increase their social impact.

With this report I will be looking to influence institutional funders and philanthropists, across trusts and foundations, lottery distributors, government and impact investors, as well as individual major donors. I hope that with my insights and learnings, and the dissemination work I do using this research, we will see a step-change in the amounts and range of investment in impact media across the UK. I hope that the understandings and connections I can inspire between impact media organisations in the UK and funders will have a long-term legacy.

I also want to inspire, inform and resource impact media leaders in the UK to build deep and mutual engagement with their audiences and communities leading to greater *social impact* and a new funding relationship, whereby individuals recognise that the social impact of civil society media is as important as the many other charitable and community causes they support. This won't be an easy mind-shift – we don't have a tradition of funding media in the UK, but I hope that with the support of foundations and philanthropists, lottery distributors and impact investors, and of course our impact media leaders and founders, we can underpin and inspire this shift.

And I hope that impact media leaders and social entrepreneurs can explore the structures and governance of their media organisations, to enable the powerful mix of philanthropy, social investment and commercial income I have seen in the most innovative impact media organisations on my Fellowship travels.

This decade will be a crucially important time for the sharing of diverse voices, for visibility of diverse, under-represented, misrepresented and under-served communities. I hope that this report will help create additional social impact by strengthening the unique role that civil society impact media plays in empowering citizens, building communities and inspiring positive social change.

I will also use my findings and report as a catalyst for global connections across the US, India, Sri Lanka, the UK and wider. Wherever I went on my Fellowship travels, meeting leaders and influencers, from media, digital, charities and social enterprise, funders and academia, I heard the same message: “Caroline, you are so lucky to be having all these amazing meetings. We don't spend enough time learning from each other, sharing our common goals and vision, we don't even know each other in our own countries, let alone across the world! We are just heads down trying to survive. Let's change that, connect and form a movement.”

Together we can build a powerful movement for democratic and civil society media, for social impact media, learning from each other, sharing best practice, resources, content and creativity. Together we can build resilience and solidarity through our shared goals and our common cause.

**Caroline Diehl MBE**

[caroline@socialfounder.org](mailto:caroline@socialfounder.org)

# Executive summary

In the UK, what I call ‘social impact media’ or ‘impact media’ — media rooted in civil society and social impact, in communities of place or interest — is increasingly struggling, with a few innovative exceptions, to maintain audiences, financial sustainability and deliver social impact in our communities and nations.

From earlier connections with media organisations in the US, India and Sri Lanka, I knew there were funding models and ownership structures that we could learn from, replicate and adapt, across both ‘legacy’ and ‘start-up’ impact media, in order to build up and sustain a strong UK infrastructure of local to national social impact media across our four nations, to withstand and adapt to wider economic, social and digital challenges.

For my Churchill Fellowship I set out to research:

- Funding models: what funding mechanisms, processes, messaging and partnerships were being used, and why, what was working well, and how they were evolving.
- Organisational structures, ownership and governance: what was effective in growing both financial sustainability and social impact.
- Social impact: how these funding and ownership models impact democracy and citizenship, voice, visibility and positive social change.

I visited over 50 organisations, and met with over 100 individuals with a wide range of experience and insights. I came back inspired by the innovation, flexibility and adaptability, technical skills, resourcefulness and dedication of the people and projects I visited. I was inspired by the commitment to supporting social impact media — across funders and donors, infrastructure organisations, academics and crucially, among audiences and communities. I am convinced that there is much we can replicate and adapt in the UK to benefit and strengthen social impact media, and civil society, in our four nations.

## My findings in summary

- Social impact media in the US, India and more recently in Sri Lanka, is a vital force for good across grassroots to national audiences and is being underpinned by committed, passionate and entrepreneurial people and communities, from across all ages, social and professional backgrounds, and skill sets.
- A majority of funding for impact media in the US and India is now coming from individual supporter contributions from audiences and communities, alongside significant financial support from charitable foundations and philanthropists, and more recently, impact investors. Entrepreneurial income models are growing.
- Organisational structures, ownership and governance models are, in the most effective organisations, entrepreneurial, dynamic, and often in transition, involving partnerships, collaborations and mergers, leading to increased audiences, social impact and financial sustainability. I saw less rigid differentiation between charity and commercial, non-profit and for-profit models than in the UK, with a focus on structural and governance solutions to drive, and evidence, social impact and audience engagement — and the supporter contributions to deliver these.
- Where social impact media was lacking, disappearing or weak, whether for geographical communities or for ‘communities of interest’, I often found a powerful mix of entrepreneurial innovation and philanthropic intervention, working together, to retain, re-build or start up an impact media infrastructure, through both legacy media and digital innovation.
- An impactful coalition of civil society in the US and India, and increasingly in Sri Lanka, values social impact media, and wants to find solutions to maintaining and growing this social and democratic resource. Social impact media is seen as a major driver of community, social change, democratic and civic engagement, voice and equity, education and skills, social enterprise and innovation.

## My recommendations in summary

To strengthen social impact media and civil society, in communities across the UK, I am recommending that we should:

- 1 Inspire and enable UK charitable foundations, lottery distributors, philanthropists and impact investors to fund and support social impact media.
- 2 Grow individual contributor income from audiences and communities, developing the culture, skills and resources across our impact media sector to build sustainable income from individuals, through donations, membership, community shares, social enterprise and subscriptions.
- 3 Create more entrepreneurial and flexible ownership and governance models for UK impact media organisations, including a mix of charitable and social enterprise strategies to enable growth in grants and donations, individual contributions, commercial income and impact investment.
- 4 Invest more in growing, evaluating, communicating and celebrating the social impact of impact media, to grow positive social change across our communities and inspire new sustainable funding models and partnerships.
- 5 Develop specialist infrastructure support for impact media in the UK, to provide best practice, training, policy and research, alongside initiatives such as match funding challenges and awards, building connections with impact media in other countries, and creating a network of local impact media hubs across the UK.

## Conclusion and next steps

My thanks again to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for enabling this research. My Churchill Fellowship has reinforced how much more we can do in the UK to foster and support civil society impact media, as a vital part of strengthening community and civil society, engaging disadvantaged and disenfranchised communities, and providing entrepreneurial opportunities for creative media social entrepreneurs.

I look forward to sharing my report with the main stakeholders in the UK: impact media organisations, funders and impact investors, academics, regulators and policy makers, and to hearing your feedback and suggestions. I hope that my recommendations will be a catalyst so that together we can secure the resources to reverse the decline in impact media in the UK, supporting a growing multi-layered network of creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, highly impactful, value-led and financially sustainable initiatives.

Now is the time, while ensuring we do not lose our unique public service and commercial media ecology, that in parallel we invest in growing a third layer of media — civil society media, community media, media with social impact as its primary objective — impact media. Together we can build a powerful movement for democratic and civil society media, for social impact media, learning from each other, sharing best practice, resources, content and creativity through shared goals and common cause.

**Caroline Diehl MBE**

[caroline@socialfounder.org](mailto:caroline@socialfounder.org)

# Introduction

## Aims of my Churchill Fellowship

I set out to understand how in the UK we can support, enable, underpin and scale innovation in civil society social impact media, to build the sustainability and impact of existing impact media, and to understand how best to inspire and enable more media social enterprises to launch and evolve.

I wanted to understand how some of the alternative funding models and structures for impact media outlets that are adapting and growing fast in the US and India, and emerging in Sri Lanka, might be adapted for the UK, to sustain both existing impact media and new forms of media in our four UK nations.

Specifically, I set out to:

- Review how and why civil society ‘impact’ media in the US, India and Sri Lanka are funded and structured through audience contributions, innovative forms of ownership, social enterprise, and support from foundations, philanthropists and impact investors.
- Understand the most effective governance and ownership structures, and how they influence process, partnerships, financial models, plus the impact these funding and ownership structures have on democratic engagement, civil society, voice and social change.
- Consider how these can be replicated or adapted in the UK to sustain both existing impact media and new forms of impact media, and media ownership, influencing policy and practice.
- Disseminate my findings and recommendations to benefit existing and burgeoning media outlets at local, regional, national and UK level, helping them structure their finances and ownership to survive financially and to increase their social impact.
- Influence media owners, practitioners, funders and philanthropists, academics, regulators and policy-makers to support social impact media.
- Build stronger connections across the UK, US, India, Sri Lanka and globally, for those of us in the field of impact media, whether as practitioners, owners or funders.

## My approach

For my Fellowship travels in the US, India and Sri Lanka, I researched, connected with and visited a range of over 100 public, commercial and community media projects, non-profits and for-profits, grassroots to global, all with a strong social impact purpose. I also met with over 25 media funders, infrastructure organisations and academics working in the same field.

I met with leaders, senior managers and editors, sometimes the original founders, talking to them on and off ‘the record’, and often, with their permission, recording our conversations, which has given me an in-depth note of our discussions for future reference. I also recorded interviews with some of the impact media founders, for my *Social Founder Stories* podcast series.

I studied their websites, read, watched and listened to their content, channels and stations, and I continue to follow their social media, newsletters and content.

I looked to identify trends, best practice, innovation, learnings, and key catalysts for positive change, specially where these could be applied to the UK.

I also read many articles and reports both during and after my travels, which helped with understanding the wider context and trends behind my meetings and visits.

I used the extensive contacts I made during my research and travels, including many people I was not able to meet with, but was connected with, to build a database of organisations and individuals working across social impact media: media owners, managers, trustees and practitioners, funders, academics, support organisations, consultancies and outreach projects, so that we can continue to share learnings, best practice and impact.

## Background to the research

I have known from my decades-long involvement in social impact media, working across mainstream and community media, nationally and locally, that there is much innovative work happening in the US and India, and now beginning in Sri Lanka, across both legacy impact media, new digital media, and indeed mainstream media, that we in the UK could learn from.

Through my Churchill Fellowship I sought to combine insights and learnings from the US and India's long tradition of civil society, philanthropy, media democracy, public service broadcasting, from national to local media, plus Sri Lanka's changing media ecology as it emerges from a twenty-five year civil war, alongside innovative digital media initiatives in all three countries, founded and run by media social entrepreneurs. As in the UK, these three countries share a tradition of mixed ethnic, faith, social and political communities, and benefit from a diversity of media ownership and voice, from grass-roots to national and international platforms. But as in the UK, all three countries continue to struggle with mainstream commercial media, social media, and indeed some non-profit media, that can be divisive, foment misunderstanding and hate, perpetuate inequality and misrepresentation, and exclude opportunities for positive social impact.

In the three countries I visited, as in the UK, extremes of wealth and poverty are growing, and mainstream media are becoming more ruthlessly commercial in their fight to survive and to generate profit. Public broadcasting is being challenged on many fronts and is losing younger audiences. The massive global digital 'social media' platforms have created a communications revolution that in my opinion is largely generating unprecedented social and economic benefit in its ability to connect and inform citizens, but which is also struggling with the negative impact of 'fake news', superficiality, 'tribalism' and lack of trust, as well as the 'digital divide'. The dominance of commercial advertising, alongside reduced independent editorial fact-based content has led to a loss of traditional media content, particularly local newspapers in communities.

There is a need for more media that is rooted in social purpose, community and civil society benefit – what I call 'impact media', and during my Fellowship travels I saw multiple examples of this happening, and growing fast.

## UK context

Ofcom, the UK media regulator, has a principal duty, as set out in section 3(1) of the Communications Act 2003, "to further the interests of UK citizens in relation to communications matters".<sup>1</sup>

There is so much more that could be done to engage and support citizens' interests, and civil society, through media. In the UK there are gaps in voice, diversity, media representation and community engagement that the BBC and the public service commercial broadcasters do not find it easy to fill. UK regulators, and those of us who should hold them to account, have allowed much of our valued community media infrastructure to fizzle out – local and regional content, citizens' voice, diversity and representation.

The once independent commercial local radio stations, and to some extent the well-resourced BBC local radio stations, have lost much of their local voice and impact. Commercial local newspapers are struggling or have disappeared.

The community media movement in the UK is also struggling to have impact and reach, there are few new digital-born impact media initiatives. Hyperlocal social media sites are growing and super-useful, but tend to be functional, and even factional, and social media based, very few have in-depth content, most are Facebook-based. There are a few community papers, a handful of media social enterprises, co-operatives and Community Benefit Societies, but hardly any, and most struggle.

'Local TV' across the UK could have been an amazing opportunity if regulated and supported properly. Jeremy Hunt MP, Culture Secretary at the time, had an exciting vision, saying in a formal statement released by the government in 2011:

"Sixty-five towns and cities are in the running to pioneer the UK's first local television services... These new local TV services will be a fundamental change in how people get information about their own communities and how they hold their representatives to account. There's a huge appetite for local news and information in communities the length and breadth of the country. I want people to be able to watch television that's truly relevant to them."<sup>2 3</sup>

But as predicted during the consultations, the initial stations licensed were quickly taken over by the commercial sector,

1 <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/research-and-data/multi-sector-research/general-communications/citizens-comms-services>

2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/potential-local-tv-locations-revealed>

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMqNVYb8vDc>

creating group-owned clusters that have mostly reneged on their local commitments. It seems to me that UK regulator Ofcom has allowed licence holders to backtrack on the original pledges for local content and community engagement, missing a great opportunity.

It seems that much communications policy in the UK continues to be predominantly driven by financial for-profit consumer priorities rather than considerations of civic society, democracy, education and the interests of UK citizens. The BBC remains exceptional, and its future must be safe-guarded, alongside our commercial public service broadcasters, but with an injection of resources and skills, a new layer of social impact media across print, tv, radio and digital, could flourish, and have real impact.

It is worth emphasizing that wherever I went on my Fellowship travels, people envied the UK having the BBC, and indeed the BBC's content is widely accessed in all three countries I visited. Some of the people I met with on my Fellowship assumed that the UK does not need an independent movement of civil society 'impact' media – because we have the BBC.

The BBC is a unique and highly valuable resource, and we lose it or weaken it at our peril; the BBC provides a unique force for good and holds the UK commercial public service broadcasters to account as well, driving competition for viewers across entertainment, education and information. The BBC is the driver for a powerful ecosystem of public service information, education and entertainment. However, there are gaps that the BBC does not fill — it does not reach, or engage, many communities across the UK, and still has a challenge with representing and giving a voice to under-served, misrepresented and diverse communities, and younger audiences.

Nor can the BBC take too many risks with UK social action campaigns and grass-roots content, given its funding and regulatory structure, and its relationship with government. Furthermore, the BBC's local services and indeed even mainstream national channels serve an increasingly older audience.

A decade of 'austerity' cuts in public services, rapid growth in inequalities across the UK, reinforced by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, all mean that we need to move fast to give voice to and engage our UK communities through a third layer of meaningful trusted civil society social impact media, delivered through television, radio, print and digital.

## A few innovative media platforms are emerging in the UK

Digital-born platforms, and also print, radio and television, and some of the legacy media platforms are innovating with new funding models and structures. The social founders and entrepreneurs driving these are having a growing impact and build on a powerful tradition of social action media across the UK. I have been following some of these with interest and inspiration: Bristol Cable, with its 2000 Members; Sheffield Live TV and radio; The Waltham Forest Echo and The Tottenham Community Press, both run by Social Spider; as well as Together TV (The Community Channel) now a co-operatively owned charitable Community Benefit Society, thriving financially.

However, many other impact media and community media organisations in the UK are struggling to grow audiences and financial sustainability. Current funding models for most impact media in the UK seem limited, with little tradition of funding from charitable foundations, audiences, communities or impact investors, and little innovation around entrepreneurial income models.

There are often complex restrictions around structure, charitable status, access to funds, use of commercial income (advertising, sponsorship etc), regulation and more. There's little infrastructure to support impact media with training, advice, research or best practice, and little awareness of the potential, or the processes, to 'start up' more media platforms.

The innovation, activism, voice, grassroots and national engagement through impact media, old and new, that I saw across the US and India is, for me, largely missing across the UK's civil society media ecology.

My research for this Churchill Fellowship reinforced how much more we could be doing in the UK to foster and support civil society impact media, as a vital part of strengthening community and civil society, engaging disadvantaged and disenfranchised communities, and providing entrepreneurial opportunities for creative media social entrepreneurs.

Now is the time, while ensuring we do not lose our unique public service and commercial media ecology, that in parallel we invest in growing a third layer of media — civil society media, community media, media with social impact as its primary objective — impact media.

## US, India and Sri Lanka context

“Non-profit public media in the US is in such a different place than it was even three years ago. The ambition for engagement on a local level is super-exciting, and I’m very hopeful about the innovation happening out there.”<sup>4</sup>

### Tracy Wahl, Public Media Consultant and NPR Executive Producer

In the three countries I visited, innovative funding, governance and ownership structures are emerging for both the ‘legacy’ civil society impact media and the newer digital-born impact platforms. Most innovation is in the cities, but with some fast-growing rural media platforms and a keen concern to revive media outlets in towns and rural areas in response to the rapid closure of traditional local news outlets:

“News deserts — communities with limited access to credible and comprehensive news — are especially prevalent in rural America. More than 500 of the 1,800 newspapers that have closed or merged since 2004 were in rural communities.”<sup>5</sup>

The collapse of local news is driving innovative new models, and digital platforms, and is also seen to benefit the US non-profit city-based ‘public broadcasters’, non-profit and mostly charitable, who are fast adapting to economic and social change, in a way that we in the UK can learn from:

“Most have to increase the amount of local content – and are becoming increasingly local. Part of broadcast success comes from where other people have failed – the collapse of local print media has created a vacuum for public media to fill, and this has been reflected by the growth in individual donations.”<sup>6</sup>

The US has a strong and rapidly adapting network of regional, city-based Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR), and Community Cable stations, alongside national commercial broadcasters, rapidly growing digital

on-demand networks, targeted ethnic audience stations, newspapers, podcasts and social media. Typically the public broadcasters are independent charities, with over 90% of their budget coming from a mix of individual donations, foundations, and some corporate support. Across the country there are new and older social impact media initiatives, stations, and digital platforms. Supporting these are a wide range of philanthropic donors, both institutional, family and individual.

“The term ‘media’ now means so much more than just journalism and newspapers. It encompasses a vast array of activities from developing mobile phone apps to launching advocacy campaigns to strengthening the policies and infrastructures involved in media creation, transmission and access.”<sup>7</sup>

India still invests state funds in the state-owned Doordashan national and regional television channels, including regional language channels, and in national state-controlled All India Radio. India also has a wide range and number of commercial channels and newspapers, digital-born platforms, podcasts, text and social media take-up. However, there is widespread concern that the mix of commercialisation and political control of legacy media is harming democracy, citizenship and community. Sevanti Ninan, writing for the India Forum outlines some of the new digital-born independent news sites in India:

“The niche media landscape has also been enriched by several other sites. Region-specific news sites have blossomed. Many of these have benefitted from a new trend of corporate philanthropy funding independent media. That has enabled individual journalists from the mainstream to break away and set up their own journalism ventures ... they constitute a dogged counter to co-option, self-censorship, fake news and much else.”<sup>8</sup>

The Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF) gives the Indian media context on its website:

“While there is a legion of honest journalist and ethical journalism being practised across the length and breadth of India, it is also a sad reality that journalism as a ‘service’, as a mission, has seemingly and steadily eroded. More importantly, there has been an infiltration of media entities by corporates, either through direct ownership or by leveraging their advertising pay-outs to be on the board.”<sup>9</sup>

4 <https://current.org/2018/09/letter-from-the-executive-director-announcing-local-that-works-finalists/>

5 Penny Muse in her report on “The Expanding News Desert”, <https://www.usnewsdeserts.com/>

6 Mark Fuerst, Director, Public Media Futures Forum (interview October 2019)

7 Media Impact Funders: <https://mediaimpactfunders.org>

8 <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/how-indias-media-landscape-changed-over-five-years>

9 <http://ipsmf.org/about-us/vision-values>

Sri Lanka, like India, has a government-owned and controlled media, with the top executives and board replaced by new political appointments with each change of government. Alongside government channels there are various private networks, including minority language channels, and the commercial but social impact driven Maharajah TV group.

There is little local or community radio, or civil society media, and the legacy of 25 years of civil war, from 1983 to 2009 is still felt in the restrictions on independent civil society at every level. However, a small group of digital-born news and community media platforms, innovators and media social entrepreneurs are emerging, attracting funding and audiences. Freedom House noted in its annual report on the global media:

“Web-based media and blogs have taken on a growing role in the overall media environment in Sri Lanka, with outlets such as Groundviews and Vikalpa providing news and a range of commentary, even on sensitive stories and events that are barely covered by the mainstream media.”<sup>10</sup>

The people I met on my Fellowship travels were very open about the internal and external pressures and opportunities facing their media projects and visions for the future; they were often in the midst of managing major structural, operational, cultural, economic and political change, both internally in their companies and externally in their communities and countries. I was inspired by their vision for the social impact they believed that their platforms could increasingly deliver, and their belief in the value of their media platforms for their fast-growing audiences and communities. They were enthusiastic about creating more connections and support networks across the global movement of civil society impact media.

As I finish this report the people I met have been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in their communities, with the catalyst and challenges of the Black Lives Matter movement, and most recently regional and national elections. They share a mix of deep commitment, values and resilience, an openness to partnerships and innovation, and profound belief about the important role the impact media platforms they run or fund can play in providing a vital voice for communities.

## Purpose of this report

I hope that my report will be a useful catalyst for debate and change, encouraging and supporting:

- Owners, board members, trustees, staff and volunteers across civil society impact media, to explore new ways to grow their financial sustainability and social impact.
- Funders, philanthropists and impact investors to support impact media to grow, adapt and innovate.
- Policy-makers, regulators, infrastructure support agencies and academics to value, enable and underpin the work of impact media practitioners and funders.
- New social entrepreneurs and founders of impact media start-ups to be inspired and flourish.

There were so many examples of fascinating work that I came across, some highlighted in this report, but all listed in the appendix. There is innovative activity – content, campaigns, engagement, fundraising, partnerships and organisational structures - across the US and India, and growing in Sri Lanka, from which, in the UK, we have so much to learn and be inspired by.

This report is just an overview, but I hope it will also be the beginning of a deeper and more joined-up movement and network to understand and grow media for social change — impact media — across our communities in the UK, and across our increasingly inter-connected world. More case studies, advice and links to the organisations I visited on my Fellowship travels are included on my Impact Media website.

"Use only your own voice, it matters;  
tell the stories you want to tell.  
People know that their stories  
matter, that caste and gender are  
not shackles to hold you back.  
They should set you free."

**Meera Devi, Chief Reporter, Khabar Lahariya,  
India's largest network of rural women  
reporters.**

<sup>10</sup> <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press>

# Findings from my Fellowship

My findings are structured within the three themes I set out to research:

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## Theme 1: Funding and Income models — building financial sustainability

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**Finding 1** Foundations, philanthropists and grant-makers

**Finding 2** Individual contributions – audience, readers, community

**Finding 3** Commercial income: advertising, sponsorship, CSR and the US cable anomaly

**Finding 4** Social Enterprise and Impact Investment

**Finding 5** Impact Media support agencies

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## Theme 2: Structures, ownership and governance

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**Finding 6** Charitable and non-profit

**Finding 7** For-profit and social enterprise

**Finding 8** Employee and share ownership

**Finding 9** University and school ownership

**Finding 10** Collaboration, mergers and transition

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## Theme 3: Social Impact

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**Finding 11** Impact Media: a catalyst for positive social change

# Theme 1

## Funding and income models — building financial sustainability

### Finding 1

Foundations and philanthropists are increasingly funding impact media across the US and India, unlike in the UK.

#### Overview

In both the US and India there is fast-growing recognition among funders of the power of impact media to drive positive solutions, behaviour change, voice, diversity, social inclusion, democratic and civic engagement, equalities, and much more. Foundations and philanthropists are increasingly wanting to fund impact media, and seeking advice and opportunities to do so. The US umbrella body for media funders, Media Impact Funders, states:

“U.S. funders, media makers and non-profits are working together to unleash the power of media to move the needle on important social issues. Media has become central in philanthropic strategies across all funding areas. Data show that in 2009, U.S.-based funders made \$888 million in media grants, but in 2015, funding topped \$1.8 billion—an increase of over \$912 million.”<sup>11</sup>

In India, the new Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation echoes the importance of philanthropic funding of media:

“India now has a unique opportunity to create a philanthropy-driven ecosystem of media excellence. This ecosystem could support public-interest journalism; influence and complement the mainstream media; help recreate the citizen’s compact with democracy; place, once again, the highest obligations on journalists—and set an example to the world.”<sup>12</sup>

Individual philanthropists and major donors play an active role in funding media, often routing their philanthropy through their own family or corporate foundations, or through impact investment.

In the UK, funding of civil society media and impact media via grants and major donors is considerably less. According to Media Impact Funders only 527 UK grants to media were made in 2019, totaling \$51.7 million. There is a nervousness

<sup>11</sup> <https://mediainpactfunders.org/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://ipsmf.org/about-us/vision-values/>

among UK funders around funding media, but also fewer social impact media projects to fund, and little resource and support to help them prove impact.

In the US and India, there has been a conscious aim and investment to create scale across civil society impact media, by joining up the work of different organisations that support impact media. Foundations:

- Collaborate and share knowledge.
- Jointly fund and resource media projects to work together.
- Fund impact media infrastructure agencies, both to help distribute funds, and to build capacity in impact media – skills, technology, internal fundraising resource, impact research, buildings and more.

### Generalist grant-giving foundations are increasingly giving grants and contracts to a wide variety of impact media initiatives

Generalist foundations fund a range of media activity, from grassroots community media to global impact media initiatives, including:

- Infrastructure costs such as key staff posts, technology and buildings.
- Production and distributions of news, documentaries and film, wider content and campaigns.
- Community outreach and engagement around media, voice and visibility.
- Media training for diverse and disadvantaged communities to create content.

“While not all funders expressly consider themselves media funders, more are becoming aware that—regardless of their programmatic goals and issue area—supporting media not only helps them achieve their stated objectives, but also serves as a powerful tool for social change.”<sup>13</sup>

Many of the larger generalist foundations are building up specialist knowledge in funding impact media, hiring staff and trustees who understand media and its potential for social impact, and proudly telling the story of their media funding in their websites and reports.

Wyncote Foundation is one of many: it makes grants in a

broad range of areas including arts & culture; education; the environment; health & human services; and preservation.

Their Public Media & Journalism programme invested \$4.5m in media & journalism grants in 2017, 14% of their overall grants that year:

“Wyncote Foundation works to further a thriving public media ecosystem that is vital to animating and sustaining democracy’s public sphere. By public media we mean mission-driven media produced in the public interest, including legacy public broadcasting, digital-first enterprises, and independent makers producing news, educational, and cultural content that engages the public and stimulates community dialogue.”<sup>14</sup>

In the US the city-based Community Foundations are increasingly becoming major funders of impact media: in the Philadelphia area, two years ago, the Lenfest Institute of Journalism, a recently established non-profit major owner and funder of media, was able to bring together the local Community Foundations in the area for the first time, to collaborate on impact media funding in the Greater Philadelphia area, jointly funding a range of grassroots and mainstream impact media initiatives.

The Chicago Community Trust, one of the largest Community Foundations, recently appointed highly experienced public broadcaster Daniel Ash as Vice President. He is determined to grow the already, in UK terms, huge budget for impact media in Chicago:

“A simple belief anchors the Trust’s commitment to building the capacity of community-centered media. Hyperlocal platforms are more likely to reflect the communities they serve accurately. And eventually, larger regional media platforms such as the legacy newspaper and TV news brands—must, in turn, reflect these community truths.”<sup>15</sup>

The Tata Trusts in India are one of the largest philanthropic foundations putting grants into media, mobile and digital.<sup>16</sup>

### Media Foundations have recently been established with the sole purpose of funding social impact media, in both the US and India

Their purpose is to be a centre of expertise to fund and

<sup>13</sup> Media Impact Funders, <https://mediainpactfunders.org/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.wyncotefoundation.org/>

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Ash (interview October 2019)

<sup>16</sup> <https://horizons.tatatrusts.org/2020/april/tata-trusts-tribal-development-bultoo-radio.html>

support social impact media initiatives, and a catalyst for further funding and match funding from others for the media projects they support.

Set up in 2015, the Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF) is based in Bengaluru, and funds impact media across India. IPSMF is breaking new ground in India, using both grant-giving and contracts for local to national media. Where the recipient media organisation is a charity, IPSMF makes a donation; where the media organisation is for-profit, but with social purpose, IPSMF contracts with them to produce and distribute specific agreed themed content, including outputs such as number of stories, or community-based activity, or themed campaigns. This flexibility has enabled high impact and innovative interventions, and many of the media organisations I met with cited IPSMF as being the main catalyst for significantly increased audience reach, digital innovation, financial sustainability, new partnerships, funding, and increased social impact.

The Foundation's priority is to fund digital content, enabling legacy media (print, radio, tv) to develop a digital audience and sustainable model, and also funding innovative 'digital-born' media. It also funds news, positive solutions stories, educational content, and crucially, media infrastructure – salaries, technical and running costs. IPSMF acts as a conduit for philanthropic funds from a range of foundations, major donors and corporates, with a fiercely independent board and staff team with expertise in media, journalism, grant-making, impact investing and evaluation.

"If the inherent talent can be married with the technology of the digital dawn, the possibilities for 'new' journalism infused with the highest and purest obligations—and, by extension, a renewal of the social and democratic compact—are immense. But it cannot happen without pro-active intervention. India now has a unique opportunity to create a philanthropy driven ecosystem of media excellence. This ecosystem could support public-interest journalism; influence and complement the mainstream media; help recreate the citizen's compact with democracy; place, once again, the highest obligations on journalists—and set an example to the world."<sup>17</sup>

In Philadelphia, the Independence Public Media Foundation (IPMF), is dedicated to funding social impact media initiatives in Greater Philadelphia:

"The Foundation has a vision of the citizens of Greater

Philadelphia creating and sharing information, ideas, and stories that foster shared understanding and mutual respect, an engaged and informed citizenry, and dynamic, thriving communities.

"The Foundation hopes to achieve this vision by funding and supporting media and related programs that strengthen and connect diverse voices and foster greater understanding across communities in Greater Philadelphia.

"IPMF seeks to build power with communities across Greater Philadelphia by investing in community-owned media and community-led media-making. We support work that amplifies voices, ideas, and solutions rarely heard in mainstream media. We support media that tells complex and nuanced stories with care and compassion. We believe that media should be a force for change and justice, for fostering understanding, bringing people together, and strengthening the fabric of our communities... We have made \$13 million in grants overall to support media and media making that creates and holds space for communities fighting for change and justice."<sup>18</sup>

### **In the US and India, foundations and philanthropists will fund infrastructure costs and capacity-building for civil society impact media, in addition to content**

Foundations and philanthropists in both countries are prepared to fund impact media at a structural level to build their capacity, support their infrastructure costs, financial sustainability and scale their reach and impact. They also take risks to fund the infrastructure needed for innovation, pilots and start-ups.

They provide infrastructure funds to enable impact media projects to increase and diversify their income from wider sources, such as individual donors, subscriptions and membership, sponsorship, training and sales. In the US and India, grants are given for technology infrastructure and databases, for training in fundraising and engagement, for senior experienced fundraising roles, for journalists, management and outreach staff, and for capital infrastructure for edit suites, cameras, media centres and buildings.

The MacArthur Foundation, one of the largest generalist foundations in the US, based in Chicago, is just one of many foundations that openly fund media infrastructure that

<sup>17</sup> <http://ipsmf.org/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://independencemedia.org/>

leads to sustainability, impact and impact evaluation, with a 'Journalism and Media' grant-giving programme that, "seeks to strengthen and sustain an independent media ecosystem that investigates the actions of institutions, explores the implications of policies, challenges social norms, amplifies diverse perspectives, and creates opportunities for individual action and public conversations on urgent contemporary issues."

In Chicago, the innovative Block Club Chicago newsroom received funding for a Development Director, to lead income generation for the charity.<sup>19</sup>

EBay founder Pierre Omidyar's The Democracy Fund, is also grant-funding impact media infrastructure:

"No matter where they live or who they are, Americans should be able to get the news and information they need to engage in civic life and to use their voices without fear of being harassed or silenced. The rapidly evolving media landscape presents new challenges and opportunities for our communities. Our Public Square program responds by supporting trustworthy local news and investigative reporting, more equitable newsrooms, press freedom, community engagement, and digital spaces that advance democracy, not hate."<sup>20</sup>

In Detroit, Sarah Alvarez, Founder & Executive Editor at Outlier Media, highlighted the supportive funding processes of The Democracy Fund:

"I love them, they are so smart and transparent. They said, 'tell me what you want': so they are funding the person who is helping us with our planning for a possible merger with a national media outreach organisation."<sup>21</sup>

In the US and India foundations are making considerable investment into transition to digital, both for 'legacy' print, radio and tv-based impact media enabling them to build and grow digital platforms and skills to reach new audiences and develop new income models, and for innovative start-ups to test new models of content, distribution, impact and financial sustainability.

IPSMF in India invested in Weekly Saptahik Sadhana a highly-regarded Marathi-language weekly publication that launched in Pune in 1948. Vinod Shirsath, editor since 2015, was approached by IPSMF with an offer of funding to build a

digital platform for the magazine. The board originally turned this down, but after some persuasion by IPSMF, have taken the funding, built a digital offer, and an archive for 70 years of historic content, and hugely increased their audiences across both the 83 million Marathi speakers in India and more widely.

IPSMF also funded Max Maharashtra, a Mumbai-based start-up Marathi 'news and views' portal focussed on issues in Maharashtra (population of 125 million) with a special focus on video journalism and Right to Information (RTI) stories, enabling it to reach enormous new audiences, and income, through digital. Founder and editor Ravindra Ambekar launched the magazine working from his late wife's hospital bed for 3 months, in 2012.

The IPSMF funding enabled massive growth, taking the website, facebook page and YouTube channel to 3-4 million web users per month, and 8-9 million on national news site the Daily Hunt, as well as similar numbers on YouTube, creating a financially sustainable model.<sup>22</sup>



Ravindra Ambekar, Founder Editor, Max Maharashtra.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.macfound.org/programs/media/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://democracyfund.org/what-we-do/>

<sup>21</sup> Sarah Alvarez, Founder, Outlier Media (interview October 2019)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.maxmaharashtra.com>



All photographs © Caroline Diehl



Top: Aziz Isham, BRIC TV, and the donor wall.  
Bottom: Vinod Shirsath, Editor, Weekly Saptahik Sadhana, Pune.

## In the US, foundations and philanthropists recognise that providing ‘match funding’ is a highly valued driver of additional funds for impact media

In the US, foundations and philanthropists recognize that providing ‘match funding’ is a highly valued driver of additional funds for impact media: match funds come from audiences and the public, from other foundations, major donors and corporates. Match-funding gives other donors an incentive, a finite timeline, and brings credibility and endorsement — as well as additional funds that guarantee additional impact. There are many examples of successful match-funding for impact media across the US and increasingly in India — sometimes for specific content and campaigns, sometimes for the overall media platform, sometimes for core infrastructure and buildings, sometimes for innovation. Perhaps the most well-known is the annual ‘NewsMatch’ fundraising campaign in the US, raising funds for non-profit news:

“NewsMatch is a unique collaboration between newsrooms, funders, and industry experts that is designed to strengthen the fundraising capabilities of non-profit newsrooms and promote giving to journalism in the U.S. Through NewsMatch, individual donations made to nonprofit newsrooms between November 1 and December 31 are matched by a coalition of national funders.

“Since 2016, the campaign has helped raise over \$100 million for non-profit journalism, helping jumpstart small, emerging newsrooms, supporting newsrooms that serve or are led by underrepresented communities, and strengthening mission-based organizations. In 2019, with an initial pool of \$3.37 million in philanthropic funds, NewsMatch raised \$43.5 million from individuals. Key is the initial pledge coming from foundations and major donors.”<sup>23</sup>

## Collaborative working across foundations and media is common, growing and effective

In the US and India collaborative working among the growing number of foundations interested in supporting impact media is becoming more usual, strategic and high impact. Many media projects will have a long list of foundations backing them, whether for ‘core’ funding or project funding, campaigns or media centres, outreach work or community journalism.

Foundations and major donors come together jointly to fund, and even initiate and organise, collaborative cross-media initiatives, such as NewsMatch above. Support from foundations can be a catalyst for bringing a number of competing media organisations together to create incremental social impact, through cross-media social action campaigns, or community media training initiatives, where across the US and India, as in the UK, inequality and poverty are growing. Foundations will also fund a mix of media — non-profit and for-profit, community and commercial, legacy and digital media — incentivising them to work together to create common themes, build shared audiences and shared social impact. Sometimes this will lead to more permanent collaboration, partnership and even mergers.

The Lenfest Institute for Journalism in Philadelphia is the most sophisticated city-wide example of this, bringing together foundations and media to create campaigns, fund content, training and infrastructure costs, and to sustain social impact media platforms across legacy and digital media.

The ‘Community Listening and Engagement Fund’ (CLEF) is one of many grant-making initiatives to help news organisations produce more relevant and trusted coverage for the diverse audiences they serve. CLEF was created jointly by The News Integrity Initiative (NII), the Democracy Fund, the Knight Foundation, and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.<sup>24</sup>

Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Officer at the Lenfest Institute, also talked about Resolve Philadelphia — a great example of collaboration and social impact:

“And then we're funding organisations like Resolve Philadelphia. Resolve Philadelphia is a collaborative newsroom, a non-profit, it's two years old, maybe 18 months old. They brought together 20 different newsrooms and two universities to collaborate on a common story theme for 12 to 18 months in a year. It was started by one woman who was a dynamo force of nature, we're a pretty significant funder there. She now has a staff of seven. This is a city where newsrooms didn't talk to each other, they didn't know each other, they didn't like each other, they were competitive with each other, and somehow she's brought together 20 of them - from the Inquirer and WHYY (non-profit public tv channel), WURD Radio to Al Dia to small grassroots organisations, to work together, focusing on stories about economic inequality in Philadelphia.

“We are the poorest big city in America, and she surveyed the community, that let her know that this was

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.newsmatch.org>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.lenfestinstitute.org/community-listening-engagement-fund/>

a topic that was of great importance to them - making Philadelphia a better place to live. And so these 20 newsrooms now work on stories on these issues, and they share the information with each other, they have a pot of money and they can give you a few thousand dollars to go off to another city, so you can report on something somebody else is doing and bring it back as a possible solution for Philadelphia.

"Her name is Jean Freedman Rogowsk, she's fabulous, she's the Co-director along with a woman named Cassie Haines, and it's nine cities across the country where we're looking to replicate what they're doing. As an example, they created a whole dictionary glossary of language in talking about poverty and economic inequality and economic justice, by interviewing people in the community, who don't say "I'm poor", they say "I'm broke." Language is so important, so they created this glossary, only to find out weeks later that Bloomberg had adopted it for their own use, so they're really doing amazing work."<sup>25</sup>

Sandra Clark, VP News & Civic Dialogue at WHYY, Philadelphia's public TV and radio channels, was so positive about this funded collaboration:

"One of the great things has happened here, is that we've become very collaborative across our organisations. We're actually part of a collaborative now. And that has 24 different news organisations working together to cover economic mobility issues. And combining our forces means there's TV stations, newspapers, there's public media stations and community media, it has really helped a lot in terms of building relationships, engagement and not being quite so egotistical ... We have some grant-funded projects for journalism, but our biggest grants recently have come in support of civic dialogue, from foundations."<sup>26</sup>

In Chicago, WTTW's VP of Community Engagement, Tim Russell, has devised FIRSTHAND - an initiative that brings together grassroots communities, film-makers and influential stakeholders, powerful content for both TV, digital, print and social, and foundation donors. FIRSTHAND is a themed content initiative based around 10 minute filmed stories from people in the community, linked to filmed talks and articles from 'experts'. The first topic was gun crime, and Tim worked closed with The Trace, a non-profit media and journalism



"Your news lives here." banner, Seattle

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

organisation that specialises on reporting gun crime issues and solutions. "My role is to really figure out how do we engage more with communities that historically have not been engaged with WTTW," said Tim, but as the Founder of the Chicago African-American Philanthropy Association, he will be opening doors for WTTW at all levels.<sup>27</sup>

In Detroit, The Detroit Journalism Co-operative is a small but influential initiative that brought together Detroit's public TV, radio, commercial newspapers and non-profit digital initiatives, which funded new outreach into, and journalism about, Detroit's poorest communities, that in turn drove engagement, audiences and individual donations. This collaboration, itself grant-funded by a mix of foundations, also led directly to new sources of grant funding for all the participating media organisations.

"The more of this collaborative work we do, the more funding, grants, philanthropic donations and state funds we receive, and the more impact we can have with our viewers and communities."<sup>28</sup>

Collaboration amongst media funders also acts as a spur for innovation, as innovative media initiatives and media organisations are often able to attract multiple grant funders, philanthropists and impact investors, who will jointly fund media activity, a pattern I saw repeatedly across the US, growing in India and Sri Lanka, and which could be mirrored in the UK with enormous benefits.

25 Annie Madonia, Lenfest Institute (interview October 2019)

26 Sandra Clark, VP News & Civic Dialogue at WHYY (interview October 2019)

27 Tim Russell (interview October 2019)

28 Georgeann Herbert, SVP, Strategy & Community Engagement at DPTV, Detroit's Public TV channel (interview October 2019)

## Foundations and philanthropists are targeting geographical areas where social impact media is scarce or even non-existent, such as inner cities and isolated rural communities

A common theme I heard consistently was that in the poorest rural and inner-city areas, mainstream media no longer has a presence, with few journalists based in these areas or venturing into them, nor engaging with and reporting on grassroots communities. Foundations and philanthropists are stepping in to try to fill this gap, funding inner-city, urban and rural impact media initiatives, often charitable and non-profit, often targeting a particular ethnic, faith or language-based community, developing networks of skilled community reporters and an increasingly sophisticated chain of content-supply into mainstream media.

Groundviews in Sri Lanka, and its sister sites in Singhala and Tamil are funded by overseas foundation grants, the National Endowment for Democracy, Ford Foundation and others.

In India the IPSMF part-funds Khabar Lahariya, India's women-led network of rural journalism, 'for the purpose of reporting and publishing stories of public interest'.

"What makes Khabar Lahariya unique is not just our journalists – women from Dalit, tribal, Muslim and 'backward' castes – but also our ground-breaking rural journalism... which follows the everyday stories of everyday people in areas that are completely out of the spotlight of media attention..."

"We are now the country's only women-run brand of ethical and independent rural news. Khabar Lahariya reaches five million people a month through multiple digital platforms. We have a network of 30 women reporters and stringers in 13 districts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh."<sup>29</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum, in inner-city Hyderabad, UNICEF is grant funding Radio Charminar, a local radio station, that reaches out to the local Muslim communities, through FM radio and digital, supporting programming, outreach and training of reporters to report on local culture and issues:

"Our income is mainly from donations, events, grants,

and partnerships with NGOs. The station is on a lot of different platforms, which enables us to reach wide audiences. We do a mix of music, including community music, old songs, and campaigns and discussions like the child health care challenge and child marriage, funded by Unicef. We get 100-200 calls every day."<sup>30</sup>

UNICEF has been grant-funding urban and rural local radio across India, which is providing a vital communications channel during the COVID-19 pandemic:

"Local and Community Radio with their community listening clubs play a pivotal role in disseminating information, dispelling myths, influencing public opinion, and documenting change at the local level, providing regular 'credible' messaging and engagement with the community."<sup>31</sup>

City Bureau in Chicago has received funding from seventeen charitable foundations, to support their outreach journalism training in some of the poorest areas of Chicago.

"Founded in 2015, City Bureau is a non-profit civic journalism lab based on the South Side of Chicago. We bring journalists and communities together in a collaborative spirit to produce media that is impactful, equitable and responsive to the public."<sup>32</sup>

"We're just trying our best to get out there. But really the work that we do is not about reaching as many people as possible. It's about reaching the right people. So the work we do is much more targeted around how do we build capacity for people to be able to demand the kind of media that they want, rather than like, how do we change the entire industry, which I think is probably a losing proposition! There is an infrastructure, there are people working in these neighbourhoods, they just currently don't see journalism as their vehicle because it's really failed them for so long."<sup>33</sup>

Over 20 US foundations support Radio Bilingüe the US national Latino public radio network and non-profit media producer, distributor and broadcaster based in Fresno, California, and broadcasting since 1980, via their network of Spanish-language stations, across the US in both rural and inner-city areas.

29 <https://khabarlahariya.org/about-us/>

30 Santosh Aanabatula, Station Manager, Radio Charminar (interview January 2020)

31 <https://www.unicef.org/india/media/3491/file/Response-Plan-to-COVID-19-Pandemic.pdf>

32 <https://www.citybureau.org>

33 Bettina Chang, Co-Founder & Editorial Director, City Bureau (interview October 2019)



Top: Santosh Aanabatula, Station Manager Radio Charminar, with RJ Anisha Annie and RJ Talha.  
Bottom: Bettina Chang, Co-Founder & Editorial Director, City Bureau, Chicago, with Caroline Diehl.

The long list of foundations that contribute to Radio Bilingüe are celebrated in the network's websites and publications: "Our ground-breaking programming is supported by foundations, publicly-funded institutions, organisations and individuals committed to keeping the airwaves open to our unique, and growing, Latino audience," said Hugo Morales, Radio Bilingüe's 71-year-old founder and Executive Director.<sup>34</sup>

Also Spanish-speaking, but very grassroots, is El Tímpano in Oakland, San Francisco, whose mission is to work in collaboration with Oakland residents and community partners to create empowering, two-way channels of information. El Tímpano's methods of civic engagement include a community microphone that travels the streets, libraries, churches, and laundromats of East Oakland to gather residents' stories on pressing issues, and an SMS-based reporting platform to provide timely information and facilitate conversation. Through these and other innovative, community-driven approaches that leverage the tools, experiences, and assets of Oakland's Latino immigrants, El Tímpano seeks to foster civic engagement and political empowerment while building more inclusive local media.

"We spoke with two-dozen community leaders and 300 residents to hear what they want to see in local, Spanish-language media. El Tímpano's editorial priorities and distribution strategies are shaped by what we heard, and will continue to be informed by ongoing conversations with community members."<sup>35</sup>

El Tímpano is funded by over ten foundations.

The media gaps across rural areas of the US and India, while in many ways worlds apart, share common challenges, and in the UK we are also seeing growing inequality of both infrastructure (access to transport, digital, housing, jobs etc), families and individuals, and a new level of poverty of information and access to information, voice and representation. It's important in the UK to re-build a strong infrastructure of civil society impact media, that is led by social purpose not just commercial profit. Thirty years ago in the UK there were thousands of community reporters attached to local radio stations, regional TV stations and newspapers across the country, funded by foundations and by government. This has largely disappeared. Mainstream media in the UK is ambitious to recruit more diverse staff. Funding impact media initiatives to engage and train grassroots

reporters and content-creators is a fantastic stepping-stone.

"These are issues that are coming from or being reported by individuals who are, to some extent, marginalised, and City Bureau gives them the space to feel validated."<sup>36</sup>

### **Foundations are funding media 'infrastructure agencies' in the US and now in India too, as well as university-based evaluation and research into social impact media, underpinning all the above grant-giving**

This is so important, and much needed in the UK. These infrastructure agencies are set up specifically to support impact media organisations with training, fundraising, advice and practical services, networking and collaborations. They may be for-profit or non-profit agencies — the foundations who fund them do not seem to differentiate — the importance and impact of their work is what matters. US foundations have even come together to create a dedicated and innovative organisation, called Media Impact Funders, whose sole purpose is to support, resource and encourage foundations who fund media:

"Media Impact Funders provides resources for funders and media producers seeking to build impact strategies and evaluate the outcomes of media projects... Since 2013 we have been curating impact-related tools, original analyses on impact trends, and a monthly impact newsletter. We also convene funders to discuss impact, and conduct research on how funders are thinking about and assessing impact in the field."<sup>37</sup>

I met with Vince Stehle, Executive Director at Media Impact Funders:

"UK Foundations are probably ten years behind the US in recognizing the importance of impact media. The most important insight that I would share on this is not fixating on getting funders to identify as media funders. There's a really deep resistance, because the foundations want to have identifiable strategies around programmes, which they work hard to narrow down, and then they say: 'These are the three things we do.' Relatively speaking, it's much harder to get people to re-evaluate those three things they do, and then force them to drop one and add another strategic plan. It's much easier to encourage them

<sup>34</sup> <http://radiobilingue.org/en/quienes-somos/>

<sup>35</sup> Madeleine Barr, Founding Director, El Tímpano (interview November 2019)

<sup>36</sup> Tonika Johnson, City Bureau alum

<sup>37</sup> <https://mediaimpactfunders.org/our-work/impact/>

to say: ‘These are the three things we do. And one of the most effective ways to achieve our programmatic goals is to inform and and inspire people through media that relates to our programmatic goals.’ And those could be about anything – they could be about areas as general as civic engagement, or healing, or the environment, or what have you.

“What we’ve learned in the US is that we should push less on getting funders to commit to the identity of being a media funder, and more to the practice of funding media with an understanding that this can improve their practice and impact. There’s a greater upside to getting people to engage and increase impact around funding media for their original purposes. So I think that’s got to be equally true in the UK.”

Vince also emphasised that:

“Foundations sometimes need to be encouraged to support existing ‘legacy’ media initiatives and not to be seduced by ‘innovation’, which is not always the best route to social impact. There is real value in strengthening some of the existing impact media projects, that are often trusted and valued in communities.”<sup>38</sup>

US and Indian foundations will also fund universities to carry out deep research into impact media evaluation and best practice, and there are many highly regarded specialist media departments in universities across the US and India, underpinned by grants and donations from foundations and philanthropists.

These include The Center for Media & Social Impact at American University’s School of Communication in Washington, D.C. — “an innovation lab and research centre that creates, studies and showcases media for social impact” — or Hyderabad University’s Department of Communications, hosting the UNESCO Professor of Community Media, or the Shorenstein Center, a Harvard Kennedy School research centre with, “its mission of protecting the information ecosystem and supporting healthy democracy by addressing the twin crises of trust and truth that face communities around the world.”

## Finding 1

Foundations and philanthropists are increasingly funding impact media across the US and India, unlike in the UK.

## Recommendations for the UK

- There’s a real opportunity to inform, inspire, encourage and connect UK grant-givers, philanthropists and major donors, in order to increase their support for and investment into UK social impact media, to support content, campaigns and outreach, community reporting, diversity and equity, infrastructure, digital and technical costs, capacity-building, innovation and impact research.
- We should encourage UK foundations and major donors to collaborate in their support of impact media; to fund impact media work jointly, and for their collaborative funding to be a catalyst for increased impact, partnerships, financial sustainability and innovation across civil society media, including match-funding, all leading to a wide range of social and democratic benefits.
- UK charitable foundations could be encouraged to fund one or more dedicated agencies, either new or existing, to lead on, and be a catalyst for this work, building and sharing in-depth specialist knowledge and evidence to inspire increased philanthropic investment in civil society impact media, including impact research, and to enable more charitable and philanthropic funding of impact media.

38 Vince Stehle, Media Impact Funders (interview October 2019)

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## Finding 2

Individual ‘contributor’ income from audiences and individual supporters is the fastest growing and largest source of income for most civil society impact media initiatives in the US, fast-growing in India and starting in Sri Lanka.

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### Overview

“Can we re-imagine the media as a joint venture in the public sphere between journalists, readers and a concerned citizenry? ...In a democracy, this is the least that readers or viewers expect.”<sup>39</sup>

“Individual contributions are the largest source of revenue for public media entities, which primarily come through membership donations to local non-profit stations.”<sup>40</sup>

Individual contributor income includes donations, membership, subscriptions, event tickets etc. Individual contributions into impact media in both the US and India are growing fast, and in the US are the fastest growing and largest source of income for most civil society impact media including the PBS and NPR city-based non-profit public broadcasters. Significant investment goes into building and sustaining individual contributor income, and it is seen as the most important income source to sustain and grow the media project, whether grassroots, city, regional or national — or even international, such as Global Voices.

There is a self-reinforcing cycle of income and audience engagement, data capture and social impact. This individual contributor income, and engagement, comes from audiences (viewers, listeners, readers and followers) and also from the wider community, who are encouraged to support the social impact of the media organisation.

“When I give money to Netflix I’m making myself smart, when I give to WDET (Detroit non-profit public radio) I’m supporting others to become smart.”<sup>41</sup>

Loyalty and donor care is seen as crucial, leading to recurring, and often increasing, contributions. Considerable investment goes into the whole cycle of donor acquisition, donor retention, donor engagement, community impact and impact storytelling. Individual contributor income is highly valued and celebrated – across all staff, volunteers and board members, in communities, among high profile stakeholders and across all media platforms – tv, radio, print, digital, social, events and wider marketing:

“There’s been a huge success in fundraising for impact media through canvassing door to door in the US. For many stations this is now the number one source of recurring monthly memberships and younger, under 50, donations.”<sup>42</sup>

### Combining social purpose with sophisticated contributor fundraising

In the US there is a 50 year old tradition of public non-profit media being supported by individual supporter contributions, from membership donations and event tickets, to, in the ‘old media’ days, sales of DVDs and videos.

Individual income mainly comes from one-off and, increasingly, regular donations, membership and ‘contributions’ that support the social impact of the media company. In some cases, impact media is funded by commercial ‘transactional’ subscriptions, and/or individual purchases of products, but this message can be harder to sell than the one of public good and social impact. A majority of the recipient media organisations, from the largest to the smallest, are charitable and non-profit, though interestingly not all are — individual contributors particularly in India, are encouraged to contribute to for-profit media as well, where there is a strong social impact message.

I saw fewer examples of one-off time-limited ‘crowdfunding’, though this is growing for start-up funding, such as for non-profit Block Club Chicago or for the employee-owned Colorado Sun, both of which raised considerable sums at start-up from crowdfunding campaigns, or the award-winning Radio Sangham where the Dalit women villagers raised money for their new radio station transmitter through a crowdfunding campaign. In the US and increasingly in India, the win-win mechanic, and priority to invest in, is sustained monthly or annual regular giving, alongside the long-term donor engagement it can bring.

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39 The Wire, India: <https://thewire.in/>

40 US Corporation for Public Broadcasting: <https://www.cpb.org>

41 WDET individual donor

42 Barry Nelson (interview March 2020)

The US has an engrained long-standing culture of individual giving to non-profit media, with a recent big investment in growing this income, from foundations, philanthropists and from the media company's own reserves – with a highly successful 'return on investment' in the majority of cases.

In India the model is newer, although there are wonderful examples of radical funding by individual small-scale donors of newspapers and radio going back to pre-Independence and Gandhi times, such as 'Congress Radio', a clandestine and underground radio station which operated during the Quit India Movement of 1942, organised by freedom fighter Usha Mehta with the help of ham radio operators. Within a week of launching of the Quit India Movement, the Secret Congress Radio, went on air, with Dr.Usha Mehta herself broadcasting this announcement: "This is the Congress Radio calling on (a wavelength of) 42.34 meters from somewhere in India."

Individual giving to media is now fast-growing in India for the more sophisticated digital impact media platforms, with massive audiences consuming digital media via smart phones, and used to making regular payments and donations via their phones for a range of goods and services, enabling an easy transition to include paying for, subscribing to, or donating to, impact media. IPSMF has funded the investment in staff and technology to drive much of this.

US restrictions on commercial advertising in public media, alongside the increasing difficulty in securing commercial 'underwriting' (ie sponsorship) of programming, have been drivers of the recent investment in individual contributor income, the latter being seen as an investment in sustainable income, that has very little 'churn' or drop-off, a good ROI and fast growth potential.

The role of foundations and philanthropists in supporting this important income stream through match-funding and infrastructure costs is crucial, widely recognized and highly valued. The Indian philanthropy and foundation movement is following the US example in beginning to provide similar infrastructure and match-funding support to media.

Barry Nelson, at the US media fundraising agency 'Contributor Development Partnership', knows the UK well and advised that it should not take a major step for us to grow individual contributor income for media:

"The intellectual and emotional infrastructure of donating to charity is already in place for you to use in the UK."<sup>43</sup>



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Terri J. Murray VP Programming & Production, WHYY, Philadelphia.

However, there is a bigger step, and cultural shift, to take in the UK to engage audiences and create awareness of impact media in the UK before we can generate income from individuals. "Your readers need to know that they need to support you, and that's a task that requires much more sophisticated communication than a paywall that suddenly shows up one morning" says Joshua Benton, Director, Nieman Journalism Lab, Harvard.

"Our biggest driver of funds is how we relate to our audience – we stopped thinking of our listeners as listeners but as friends, and that's what they tell us – it's a 2 way street, it advises everything that we do – we are a convenor; a haven, an educator; a port in the storm, a constant companion."<sup>44</sup>

Terri J. Murray, Vice President, Programming & Production at WHYY, Philadelphia's public TV and radio station, talked about the tension between on-air fundraising, which audiences do not like, but which can bring in \$50,000 in a night, and the need to reach out to communities and new audiences:

"For such a long time WHYY wasn't in the community when I came in. Now we're at the point of rebuilding those relationships out in the community, with local producers in different organisations. And so part of our

43 Barry Nelson (interview March 2020)

44 Molly Davis, Assistant General Manager at WFDD in Winston-Salem, N.Carolina

doing the immigrant stories was actually finding filmmakers from within those communities, so it wasn't us coming into your community and telling your story, it was like the story being told from within the community out.”<sup>45</sup>

This growth in individual giving is being mirrored across the wider impact media sector in the US and India, both non-profit and for-profit, where there is clear social purpose and social impact. I saw this pattern across the US, in legacy media and innovative digital media, across television, radio, newspapers, podcasts and digital-only sites, as well as production companies - wherever the media platform had a clear social purpose, a good impact story, entertaining and interesting content, and a sophisticated cross-organisational goal to drive supporter income.

I believe that, with investment and training, this model can be developed in the UK to fund our civil society media, both the old and the new.

## Rapid growth in individual contributor income

The last few years have seen a rapid growth in the number of individuals contributing, following investment in fundraising, and likewise in the percentage of overall income coming in from individual contributions, into both traditional public TV and radio, but also into innovative digital impact media platforms and grassroots community media, the exception being most of the US public access community cable stations, who currently have a massive annual income from the commercial cable companies' levy (see below under commercial income).

Individual contributions include one-off and recurring donations and/or 'contributions', membership, subscriptions, event ticket sales and sales of products.

The numbers of contributors are high:

- At WDET, the public radio station in Detroit, one of the US's lowest per capita income cities, 10% of weekly listeners now donate regularly ie. c.12,000 donor accounts contributing \$60 per year on a regular basis, bringing in c.\$720,000 pa.<sup>46</sup>
- Chicago's public radio station is 60% funded by individual listener contributions. As the station proudly acclaims: "WBEZ is non-profit and funded in large part by listeners just like you. Close to 60% of our revenue comes from about 86,000 individuals making mostly small, affordable

donations (of \$60/year)."

- Bridge Magazine, a non-profit digital magazine in Michigan, has seen a 30-50% growth in individual supporter contributions in the last 18mths. As a result, it has also been able to launch Bridge Detroit in 2020.
- WGBH and its programming, including FRONTLINE, are supported by a broad mix of funding sources, including more than 150,000 individuals, along with foundations, corporations and the federal government. "This prevents our reliance on any particular funding source and contributes to assuring our independence."<sup>47</sup>
- Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) in Portland, Oregon, the public and charitable TV and radio broadcaster, is 91% funded by individuals, foundations and a small amount of corporate support. "All of that is tied to our local presence," said Steve Bass, OPB's President and CEO, "66% comes from our 150,000 individual donors, averaging about \$150 a year. We're raising about \$23 million a year from individual contributions and about \$5 million from sponsorships." Steve Bass, interview October 2019.

Moving to monthly giving, by direct debit from cards or bank, rather than one-off or annual gifts, has been key to both cost-effectiveness, donor retention and growth of individual fundraising, alongside legacy giving. Steve Bass, President and CEO of Oregon Public Broadcasting (OPB) in Portland explained how this has changed at his station:

"We have a very good rate of return; our cost of fundraising is below 30%, and it's actually getting better. I would say the real secret for us has been getting people to become monthly donors, who have a very high loyalty rate. I'll always remember this one comment that came in a number of years ago - we were doing a membership drive and the guy left a message and said, "You know, I can't afford \$35 but I can afford \$5 a month." And I thought, that is actually really interesting, so our main push now is to get people to make monthly contributions, and we want them to do it not through a credit card but through an electronic funds transfer from a bank account, because the stick rate for that is even higher.

"And what this has done for us is that it's changed our risk profile. I remember, 20 years ago, at another station, coming into a budget year and saying "What are the revenue sources that I know are certain?" And in the past, that would have meant what are we going to get from the

45 Terri J. Murray (interview October 2019)

46 Carmen Garcia, Associate Director of Philanthropy (interview October 2019)

47 <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/about-us/our-funders/>

state Commission for Public Broadcasting (CFPB) - and maybe that was 10 or 15% of our budget. We now have well over a million dollars a month that comes in from monthly contributions, and as they call it in the Nashville song-writing world, that's 'mailbox money', and it's been growing, so when we go into a budget year now we actually have more predictability of our revenue lines than we've ever had, which is a good thing.

"Then the other thing that has been very successful for us, that I would really credit my predecessor for, is that more than 30 years ago OPB started a 'planned giving' legacies programme. So we generally also bring in upwards of a million dollars a year in legacy gifts that come from bequests. All of that is put into an endowment, and we've built an endowment now that's close to \$40 million dollars, and it's all been pretty much built on bequests. In many cases, these gifts come out of nowhere, I mean literally there are people that we don't know personally — we just put spots on air and just tell them how to do it, to leave it in your will. We started a thing called the Legacy Society so when people tell us they've left money to us in their will we do some cultivation with them to keep them in the loop.

"OPB is a very visible organisation here in Oregon and people love to be associated with it, so the T-shirts and the tote bags and the coffee mugs, actually are pretty popular. But I would say that the typical mindset of an individual donor here is much more that they feel like they're investing in Oregon, through OPB."<sup>48</sup>

In India The Wire is held up as the most financially successful non-profit digital news media organisation. It was set up in 2015 as a charitable non-profit trust, the Foundation for Independent Journalism (FIJ), by its three founding editors, specifically to house The Wire. The Wire now has massive online readership and YouTube viewers.

On its website it is open about the need for, and benefits of, individual donations:

"As a not-for-profit media venture, The Wire is dependent on donations from readers and philanthropically-minded individuals (who, by law, must be Indian citizens) for the bulk of its revenue. The FIJ would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have made donations and would like to appeal to The Wire's readers and supporters to help supplement the money raised so



Steve Bass, President & CEO, Oregon Public Broadcasting.

far with contributions, large and small, to help us meet current and future expenditure."<sup>49</sup>

The Wire also takes commercial advertising, but the bulk of its income comes from foundations and a diverse base of individual donors. Its individual donations programme was launched in 2018. According to MK Venu, one of the founding editors, about 50,000 individuals have made donations so far and they aim to stabilise recurring donations at about 15–20 percent of that total. Numbers are up by 20–30 percent.

"The founding premise of The Wire is this: if good journalism is to survive and thrive, it can only do so by being both editorially and financially independent. This means relying principally on contributions from readers and concerned citizens who have no interest other than to sustain a space for quality journalism."<sup>50</sup>

Individual giving is driven by social impact stories: Civil society media organisations are seen as providing an important social function in addition to their provision of content. And they are increasingly investing in telling this impact story to their audiences and wider community stakeholders. Individual contributors are therefore proud to be associated with both the social impact and editorial outcomes of their personal financial contribution to the media company, and in

48 Steve Bass, President & CEO, OPB (interview October 2019)

49 <https://thewire.in/about-us>

50 <https://support.thewire.in/>

return usually receive a high level of donor care and public acknowledgement.

The social impact can range from just providing original unheard news and stories, to solutions and community initiatives, to wider educational campaigns, to grassroots practical support for particular communities or individuals, or just a much loved familiar voice, in a familiar language, from a familiar culture – and much more.

KPCC/Southern California Public Radio, Los Angeles, are working closely in communities to provide information, food donations, access to benefits, housing information and education alongside news and entertainment. As Kristen Muller, Chief Content Officer, says:

“We don’t thrive as a media organization unless the community we’re in is thriving. Half of our 10m county residents (Los Angeles) are out of work. Public radio is not for everyone. Highly affluent educated audiences want something else. We’re designed to come in where the market fails. Our mission for public media is all about civic society and democracy, but who has time for that if you can’t eat — right now we need to think about the real information needs for more diverse audiences.”<sup>51</sup>

### It’s not just audiences giving: a wider individual donor base is driven by impact storytelling

The social impact story is attractive to a wider community of individual contributors than just the actual media audience. In my visits and meetings, there was considerable discussion around how individual contributor income comes increasingly from a wider supporter base, who are encouraged to value the impact of the media platform across its target audiences and communities. Many stations talked about how they have invested in promoting their ‘mission’ not just to their audiences but also to their wider communities and stakeholders, from schools and parents to politicians and local businesses.

Their message often emphasizes the impact of an individual donor’s contribution on others in the community:

- The Moth’s online donation page encourages target donors to identify with the following statement:

“I want to help The Moth share stories that comfort, connect and entertain during this challenging time with my gift of \$...”

- Detroit’s non-profit radio station WDET’s on-air message to millennial viewers is explicit:

“When I give money to Netflix I’m making myself smart, when I give to WDET I’m supporting others to become smart.”

- KQED (non-profit radio and TV) in California emphasises the donor’s role in the community:

“KQED supporters help enrich lives by providing quality programming as well as resources that strengthen media literacy skills, empower youth voices and encourage civil discourse. We rely on support from people like you. Donate today to help provide your community with independent reporting, television, and radio programming.”

- In March 2020 Boston’s non-profit NPR news station WBUR raised \$1m through a pledge campaign including 30 second ‘spots’ in the run up to a single day’s fundraising campaign — a very different pitch to the usual week-long fundraising campaign. They focussed much more on the simple message of how the donor can make a difference to others:

“We were attempting to connect with people in a human way, in an authentic way, in a more conversational way, rather than purely putting on a standard fundraising message. For 10+ years the movement in non-media philanthropy has been toward giving the donor credit for the quality and impact of the projects and missions that donors support.

“Public media has been way behind in doing this: our pledge-drive messaging tends to be station-focused; we talk about how essential we are, we use the word “we” a lot, and elevate our provision of the service as a key talking point. The smallest pivot to giving the donor credit for the power to create change in the world could make the difference between appealing to just enough people to make the goal—and far surpassing or even doubling the goal.”<sup>52</sup>

Which they did, raising \$1 million in one day.

David Lowe, President and General Manager at KVIE, Sacramento’s PBS TV channel, also a charitable non-profit, talks about the importance of connecting with the community to raise and grow individual membership

51 Kristen Muller, Chief Content Officer, KPCC/Southern California Public Radio, Los Angeles (interview November 2019)

52 Mike Steffon, Director of Membership and Campaign Strategy, WBUR, Boston

contributions, alongside foundation and local corporate support:

“We don't do local news, we do local storytelling. For us, we are the premier storyteller about our community. And our community will carry on supporting us because we're values based. They don't see it as accessing the content, they see it as something they agree with, even if they don't watch it, and that's what we've heard through the research - they feel like we need to exist, there needs to be an alternative to all of the commercial media.

“So when we look at what we want to be known for, and what drives us, it's audience engagement. It's not about membership engagement, necessarily, not about just viewer engagement, it's about both, whether you pay or not, we are in the business of serving you and engaging with our audience. The way to do that though, is to be a little bit more 'feet on the street'. Netflix, for as good as they are, doesn't have local people. And because what we're really trying to do is build a quality of life. If you look at the studies, they show that if a community has a strong sense of place then health is better, wealth is better, everything about the community is better. That's our reason for being, to create that strong sense of place, not only locally though, but with your view of where you are in the world, which is why we have to have the national shows as well. So it's about creating that local content and then localising the national content. Our mission statement now is: To inspire you to explore the world and connect with your community.”<sup>53</sup>

KVIE's website proudly confirms:

“We are member-driven: Over 52,000 members, from Sacramento, Stockton, Modesto, the foothills, and everywhere in between, support us at every level. We know the power of people – member contributions make up 47 percent of our yearly budget. PBS KVIE's mission is to inspire you to explore the world and connect with your community through the integrity of public media.”<sup>54</sup>

I saw this reflected in many media platforms, large and small, in India: Citizen Matters, a radical new online news platform, owned by the charitable Oorvani Foundation, is growing individual donor income through its reach into a mix of professional and grassroots communities in Bengaluru, Chennai and now Mumbai. The Donate button is on every page.



KVIE TV proudly broadcast their values on screen. 47% of their yearly budget comes from individual member contributions.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

### Investment in infrastructure and skilled staff is crucial to successful fundraising from individuals

The media organisations I met with that had seen a big growth in individual supporter income over the last few years, had recently invested in specialist fundraising, marketing and engagement staff, technical infrastructure, consultancy, training and content, alongside investment in prospect research and donor management. Many stations have received dedicated funding for this investment from grant-giving foundations, in India and the US.

In the smaller media stations in the US, fundraising activity is often provided by external agencies, who come into the media station and help script messaging, shape fundraising campaigns, coach staff and advise on donor care, including taking part in making the on-air asks. Goalbusters is one agency that does this for a range of smaller radio stations in the US. I watched their joint MDs, Jim and Alice, in action at KALW radio in San Francisco, where they had been joining in as pledge presenters on-air alongside the station's own presenters and General Manager Tina Pamintuan, and celebrating as they raised well over their \$300,000 target for the week's campaign.

Across the US and India, I met and heard about people hiring new roles — CTO, VP Development, Director of Marketing and Engagement etc. And these expert roles were in turn growing bigger teams with technical, fundraising, membership and engagement skills.

<sup>53</sup> David Lowe, President & General Manager, KVIE (interview October 2019)

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.kvie.org/facts-public-info>

Tim Russell joined WTTW, Chicago's public TV station, in 2018 as their first Vice President of Community Engagement to drive community engagement, both at the grassroots with communities not engaging with WTTW, and with his amazing network of stakeholders. He works alongside the Director of Development — Tim develops strategic initiatives and partnerships, and she converts them into income. Tim also advised, wherever possible, having different people whose role it is to fundraise from different sources — corporates, major donors, foundations, individuals, giving a real focus.

WNET, New York's only public television station, and the most successful station at individual fundraising, has a fundraising team of 28, raising well over \$100m a year; two-thirds of its annual income from individuals.

Unlike in the UK, as outlined in the above section, US and Indian grant-giving foundations and philanthropists understand the win-win importance of building engagement to drive individual donor income, and in many cases are proactively involved in persuading, enabling and training media companies to do this.



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Tim Russell, Vice President of Community Engagement, WTTW Chicago.



All photographs © Caroline Diehl



Clockwise from top: Live pledge in KALW Radio studio with the Goalbusters fundraising agency team and KALW staff; KALW radio poster; KALW staff and Goalbusters celebrating after raising over \$300,000 from their on-air campaign.

## Building an internal culture change in boards and staff is seen as key to growing individual giving

The stations with the most pronounced growth in income from individual contributions have worked hard to build skills and a common culture across fundraising, marketing, digital, content and engagement teams, with a parallel increased focus on content that is impact-led and that drives engagement and behaviour-change in the communities they serve. Interestingly a common message I heard was that the challenge of getting the whole company behind this new fundraising emphasis and culture was even more challenging than reaching out to the new donors!

The Texas Tribune puts this internal culture change at the heart of their 2025 Strategic Plan:

“Growing our Texas Tribune community — our ranks of readers, members and evangelists — isn’t just the audience team’s responsibility: Going forward, it will be part of the job description for everyone on the Tribune staff.”

Strong leadership from the CEO and senior team has been important. Culture change has not always been easy. In some stations, the investment in individual contributor fundraising has coincided with mergers with other media – eg radio and digital, or TV and radio, adding complexity to the internal cultural shifts and brand messaging, but also giving the legacy media culture a ‘boost’ into a more forward-thinking digital engagement and income model, and creating an opportunity to change management structures and staff roles, and bring in new skills.

Detroit Public Television talked openly about their internal challenges, and the conflict of interest between on-air messages that drive audiences, and those that drive donations. They have continued with week-long pledge campaigns, but are sensitive to external competing charitable demands on their audience, e.g. at Thanksgiving time, when their listeners are asked to donate to conventional charities, and also have to be sensitive to competition internally around airtime, content and audience drivers:

“In October we just have messages between programmes. After the Thanksgiving period, when we get into our full-blown fundraiser in December, we change the schedule to fit in our fundraising pledge content. But there’s a real reluctance in our teams to push the (charitable) mission

instead of promoting broadcasts of local concerts, which bring in people who aren’t regular viewers.”<sup>55</sup>

“It’s difficult building a mindset across the organisation – culture change is hard. Keep focused on the audience. We always ask ourselves: Is this what is best for the listener? Listener/mission/station first for all our staff – it has a direct impact on membership growth.”<sup>56</sup>

One of the leading US media fundraising consultancies summed up the internal challenges:

“In our experience, to succeed with regular giving a non-profit media organisation has to be willing to adopt new best practices and new benchmarks. In addition, each non-profit has to be prepared to embrace a new philosophy and approach to membership and fundraising, and this thinking must be spread across the organization.”<sup>57</sup>

From my visits to a wide range of media companies around the US and India, most had responded to this challenge. Can the UK’s impact media sector, old and new, do this too? And will foundations and philanthropists invest in the staff skills, technology and marketing infrastructure to help us succeed?

## Audience and Community Engagement inspires individual giving

Many of the media companies I met with have recently set up new Community Advisory Boards to enable and better understand the social impact they can have, and to drive the new priority funding mechanism of audience contributions, alongside grant funding. Engagement leads to viewer and donor acquisition and retention – “it’s the long tail” as Kellie Castruita Specter, Chief Marketing & Engagement Officer at New York’s public television channel WNET, said. The Engagement Team will work very closely with the Development Team, going out together to community and stakeholder events. Engagement will vary depending on audiences, from much increased direct community outreach, to social media, print fliers and on-air/screen/print engagement.

Senior leaders work hard to ensure all their staff understand the importance of engagement, listening and communicating with audiences and wider communities. The challenge of breaking down old ‘silos’ to achieve this is a common theme.

55 Georgeann Herbert, SVP, Strategy & Community Engagement at DPTV, Detroit’s Public TV channel (interview October 2019)

56 Molly Davis, Assistant General Manager at WFDD in Winston-Salem, N.Carolina

57 Media fundraising consultancy Appleby Arganbright, <https://www.applebyarganbright.com/>

“Thank-yous are key to contributor retention, whether in the non-profit or for-profit media,” insisted Amalie Nash, Vice President for Local News at the nation’s biggest, and highly commercial for-profit newspaper chain, Gannett, where in the Local News team they have a ‘subscriber nurture’ email series. “We recently had our editors write email thank-yous to subscribers, which then we converted into some print promo ads for newspapers as well as an on-site thank-you that targeted subscribers that were logged in.” Nash said, adding that the emails had “huge open rates and response rates.”

“We’ve even had people reach out and say, ‘I’m a subscriber. How do I give you more money?’ or ‘How do I buy a subscription for someone else?’”<sup>58</sup>

Establishing a more personal connection with subscribers is key.

“Close engagement is the key. We get dozens of thank-you emails, tweets and social media messages daily because we’re asking relevant questions at news conferences and providing easy-to-access information.”<sup>59</sup>

Joshua Benton, Director of the forward-thinking and prestigious Nieman Journalism Lab at Harvard, and previously an editor of a Dallas local newspaper, sums up his advice to newspapers wanting to grow reader contributions:

“There are some lessons I think can inform useful strategies:

“Have an identity. Be seen as fighting for something, even if in your case it might be your community’s interests instead of a political philosophy. The bland voicelessness of traditional American print newspapers is uniquely disadvantageous online, where the surfeit of free alternatives means a reader’s attachment to you must go much deeper than it used to.

“Remember that people’s financial relationship with a publication isn’t purely transactional. “You write stories I want to read; I give you money” is one way to view the paid-reader relationship. But so are “I like what you stand for; I give you money,” “I want others to be able to read your stories, I give you money,” and “I want to be the sort of person who supports you, I give you money.” With a functionally infinite supply of free news available, the

relationship your reader has to you has to be a lot more like the one public radio listeners have with their favourite station. They’re not buying access; they’re supporting a cause.

“Just ask. While the travails of the news industry is depressingly old news to most Nieman Lab readers, many, many, many people are still in the dark. A Pew study in March found that 71 percent of Americans believe that “their local news outlets are doing very or somewhat well financially.” (Not unrelated: Only 14 percent have paid for or given money to local news of any kind — print, digital, public radio pledge drive, anything — in the past year.) Your readers need to know that they need to support you, and that’s a task that requires much more sophisticated communication than a paywall that suddenly shows up one morning.”<sup>60</sup>

The Texas Tribune, a hugely successful non-profit charitable digital newspaper has ambitious plans to double its membership revenue by 2025, which in 2018 contributed 23% of annual income:

“From our founding, the Tribune’s diverse revenue model - drawing on foundations and corporations as well as individuals to fund our operations - has been one of our biggest strengths. But ultimately, our sustainability as a news organization will depend heavily on the last of that group: fellow Texans who believe enough in our mission to invest in it.”<sup>61</sup>

On-air fundraising pledge campaigns: These are the norm across the older style TV and radio public stations, though there is a recent trend away from week-long campaigns in a few stations, with audiences preferring shorter more frequent campaigns. Phone lines are still much in use to capture an immediate response, but audiences are also driven to websites. There is a move away from using volunteers on the phones in the media station, to using skilled phone-bank agencies, who are skilled in converting the caller into a paying contributor, and in record their data, in a fast, professional and cost-effective way.

WNET 13, New York’s public television channel:

“We’ve moved from doing four one-week pledges a year to running 7-minute pledge films every Thursday evening, once or twice an hour, from 8.30–11pm. We now use a

58 <https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/posts/2020/06/15/pandemic-subscribers-retain/index.html>

59 Maple Walker Lloyd, Block Club Chicago’s Director of Development and Community Engagement

60 <https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/05/want-to-see-what-one-digital-future-for-newspapers-looks-like-look-at-the-guardian-which-isnt-losing-money-anymore/>

61 <https://www.texastribune.org/about/texas-tribune-strategic-plan/>

commercial call centre to take phone calls, instead of the less professional banks of volunteers that used to fill our corridors during pledge weeks.”<sup>62</sup>

Digital fundraising, via websites, text and social media: all the media organisations I met with, large and small, are pushing digital fundraising, alongside their impact message in the community they serve. Their websites encourage giving and/or subscription in a visible and accessible way. Mixing a donation/contribution offer alongside a subscription offer, as does The Guardian in the UK, is a growing model where there is a range of content on offer, whether written, audio or video — the donor/member/contributor gets the main offer free, and if they decide to subscribe they have access to additional online content. The subscription will often also be a donation.

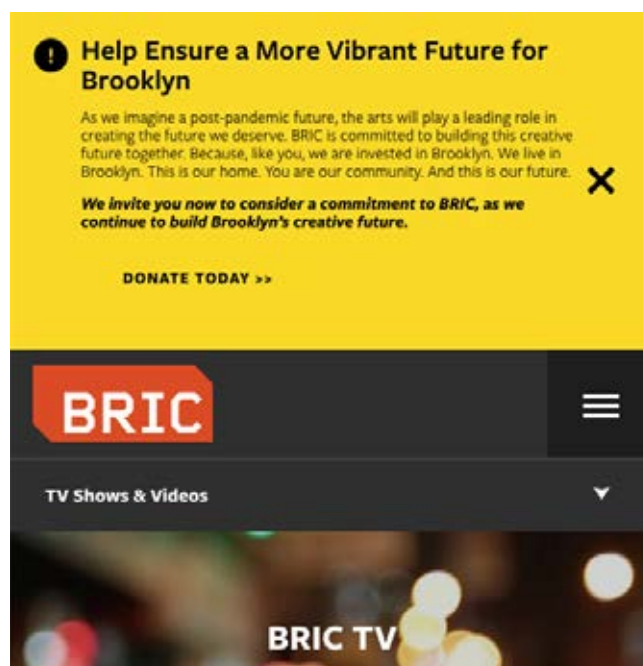
The Texas Tribune offers free subscriptions, to then convert the mass subscribers into regular donating members. Across all impact media newsletters and social media reinforce the message around individual contributions, and there are few opportunities missed to capture data and financial contributions via a ubiquitous donation/subscription form, present on almost all webpages, social media sites, print publications and on-air. The cyclical message of community benefit, community value and social impact, alongside donor ‘feel-good-factor’, from any form of contribution is constantly reinforced.

At Los Angeles radio station KCRW FM, Head of Development, Jeremy Weinstein described how:

“We spend a lot of time on community engagement, that’s for sure, because we really believe in that type of engagement. We see ourselves as a community organisation, as well as a media station. In order for our programme to be effective, we have to be responsive to our community.

“And so we do it through a variety of different ways: with our larger membership pool (of 45,000 regular donors) we do surveys, reach out to them through different emails and social media to collect information about their interests and their responses, we have tons of different areas for them to provide commentary, on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and, you name it.

“So we have over 45,000 Members giving \$10 or \$20 a month - and that adds up. Our Guardians give just under \$5000, and there’s different benefits associated with that,



The BRIC website homepage.

our Champions are those who give \$5,000 or more, and then there’s planned giving for legacies...”<sup>63</sup>

Brooklyn’s dynamic, creative and lively cable TV station BRIC TV openly asks for individual donations, positioning the channel and its fantastic media hub BRIC Arts & Media, at the centre of Brooklyn’s community and creative future.

The link takes the reader through to a compelling donor ask: <https://www.bricartsmedia.org/we-live-brooklyn>

### Match-funding from grants is seen as a major driver to increase income from individuals and is often used in time-limited fundraising drives and campaigns

The example of NewsMatch, which brings in millions from individual donors each year is given above. Again the ask to the public is blatantly for media costs – paying for journalists, or programme production, which in turn will change lives.

The Salt Lake Tribune newspaper was just one of many local media papers and stations that raised match funding – in their case \$31,500 from 330 donors, matched by \$20,000 from Report for America, to pay for a reporter, who was already on their books, through a Crowdfunder campaign based on 5 emails sent over a few weeks to their existing list of email

62 Kellie Castruita Specter, Chief Marketing & Engagement Officer (interview October 2019)

63 Jeremy Weinstein, Head of Development, KCRW FM, Los Angeles (interview November 2019)



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

KEXP radio's studio and café space, funded by public donations.

newsletter subscribers. A few months later the Tribute was able to repeat the Crowdfunder to raise further match funds for a second reporter. At the time the Tribute was a for-profit paper, but has since become a charity.<sup>64</sup>

Events add engagement, especially if there is a media hub to invite the community into: Around the basic on-air, direct mail and digital fundraising campaigns, the media companies will often create a range of events that target and engage their individual contributors — e.g. pre-sales codes for arts events, or entertaining speakers such as David Sedaris, or family 'meet and greet' invitations to the Thanksgiving Parade, or a travel club to Italy, joined by famous presenter, or film screenings and debates. These kinds of events are also then used to encourage people to increase their gifts, while reinforcing the brand of the media project in the community. The events are often fundraisers, raising regular annual income from sponsorship or tickets or sales of produce. In India many of the media organisations I met were holding high profile recorded debates, a way to give communities a voice, and to engage them with local politicians or inspirational speakers, to then more easily raise contributions.

In both countries the media stations are also community

hubs, inviting audiences, donors and wider communities into their building — at least until Covid-19 hit. Many media buildings I visited had purpose-built spaces for these gatherings, in some cases built, designed and paid for with funds from the individual donors themselves, such as in the stunning media hub in Seattle for radio station KEXP, that can hold 400 guests for live recorded events, funded through public donations.

Or Los Angeles' radio station KCRW FM, where on top of raising \$20 million through their usual individual donor fundraising in 2019, they also raised \$50 million for construction of a new 'state of the art' building, based in the university that owns the station. The names of the tens of thousands of individual donors who raised this fund are etched into the paving stones in the outdoor courtyard, on the stairs and on the walls of the staircases, offices and studios:

"We raised \$50 million for construction of this building and all of the equipment, the programming, which is terrific. Just for the capital campaign. It really helped us engage our members, and in a way that we had never done before, the capital campaign

64 <https://www.lenfestinstitute.org/solution-set/heres-how-the-salt-lake-tribune-crowdfunded-31000-to-support-a-report-for-america-journalist/>

drove our membership. So now all of a sudden this building is really a wrapper around everything we do. People want to be a part of it, and we bring the community in here as often as possible.”<sup>65</sup>

Award-winning Joe Barr, Chief Content Officer at Capital Radio Group in Sacramento, described how they have created a garden for the community:

“The CapRadio Garden is an extension of our storytelling initiative. It provides a gathering space for community members, policy makers, educators and students. Through hands-on activities, lectures and dialogues, CapRadio furthers the conversation and brings public awareness to the multi-dimensional issues around food.”<sup>66</sup>

In Chicago’s South Side, Experimental Station is a community cultural centre hosting the Invisible Institute — a radical journalism production company, South Side Weekly — a non-profit community newspaper, City Bureau’s community reporter Documenters initiative, a lively bicycle repair studio, a buzzy café, a Farmers’ Market and more.

“The Experimental Station is working to build independent cultural infrastructure on the South Side of Chicago. We do this by fostering a dynamic ecology of innovative educational and cultural programs, small business enterprises and community initiatives.”<sup>67</sup>

“The South Side Weekly is a non-profit newspaper dedicated to supporting cultural and civic engagement on the South Side, and to developing emerging journalists, writers, and artists. We publish in-depth coverage of politics, the arts, and issues of public interest alongside oral histories, poetry, fiction, interviews, and artwork from local photographers and illustrators. The Weekly is produced by a mostly volunteer editorial staff and seeks contributions from across the city.”<sup>68</sup>

## Specialist agency support

As in section 1 above on grant funding, in the US, and now beginning in India, there are a number of specialist and experienced media fundraising consultancies, training agencies and membership associations that provide best practice, training, consultancy, research, campaign creation and campaign management to media organisations in the art of individual fundraising strategies. The News Revenue



All photographs © Caroline Diehl



Top: Joe Barr in CapRadio's new community garden, Sacramento.  
Bottom: South Side Weekly, a non-profit newspaper, South Side, Chicago.

Hub referred to in the Report for America example is just one of many. These agencies will usually charge the media organisations for membership, training and consultancy, but also receive funding from foundations and sponsorship from corporates to subsidise their member stations. Across all the media I visited, these agencies were seen as a much-valued part of the impact media fundraising and engagement ecology. External agencies will even come into the media station to actively run a fundraising pledge campaign, and help script messaging, shape timings of pledge breaks, donor care and much more, including actually making the on-air asks alongside the presenters and Station manager.

<sup>65</sup> Jeremy Weinstein, Head of Development, KCRW (interview November 2019)

<sup>66</sup> Joe Barr (interview November 2019)

<sup>67</sup> <https://experimentalstation.org/>

<sup>68</sup> <https://southsideweekly.com/about/>



The KCRW (Santa Monica, Los Angeles) donor wall, just one example of donor recognition through their new donor-funded building.

In India the tradition of individual audience contributions to support impact media is old, but until recently had not been widely used. However, across the country over the last five years there has been a flourishing of contributor-supported digital media, from local to national, non-profit to commercial, with a range of entrepreneurial solutions and models, and exponential growth in income. This is happening for both start-up 'digital-born' media, and the new digital platforms of traditional old media (TV, print, radio), often with costs covered by grants from the IPSMF and more generalist foundations in India.

The parallel growth in audience engagement and financial contributions has also attracted commercial advertisers in India, where the regulatory restrictions are less limiting than in the US.

Based in Sri Lanka, the Good Market, has grown from an ultra-local outdoor market in Colombo to a global digital story-telling platform, and is also now asking for individual

regular donations:

"The future of the Good Market platform depends on the community members that use it.

"Good Market is set up as a not-for-profit social enterprise, which means there are no private owners. There are no ads, no equity investors pushing for returns, and no exits.

"If we want a better world, we need as many people involved as possible, and we need to celebrate the steps along the way."<sup>69</sup>

The win-win double benefit of investing in a fundraising mechanic that also secures a sustainable growing income stream, alongside individual data capture, engagement and social impact measurement is a big incentive to grow individual contributor fundraising, and creates a positive cycle of connection, engagement, income and impact. Both the sustainability of income and the audience engagement

69 <https://www.goodmarket.global/about>

element can, and should be, attractive to institutional funders and major donors, creating a win-win cycle of funding opportunities for the media project.

My research emphasised that building a significant income stream from individual giving is not easy, internally or externally, but has enormous potential, with a UK vacuum to fill, and if we are to grow this area of income in the UK, as I strongly believe we should, it will need effort, determination, vision, resources and investment. We can do it!

## Finding 2

Individual ‘contributor’ income from audiences and individual supporters is the fastest growing and largest source of income for most civil society impact media initiatives in the US, fast-growing in India and starting in Sri Lanka.

## Recommendations for the UK

- Raise awareness of, and build capacity in individual giving options across impact media organisations, supporting investment and training in skills and infrastructure to deliver this.
- Encourage impact media organisations to invest in piloting and growing individual contributor income, to convince audiences and communities that a small, ideally regular, donation, can be as worthwhile as giving to an animal, children’s, environmental, educational or cancer charity.
- UK impact media organisations should work together to build awareness of their impact and importance in our society and communities, creating a ‘your media week’ or similar, along the lines of Giving Tuesday (which is also a big driver of media income in the US), or Refugee Week, Carers Week and others. ‘Support the media you love’, ‘media that makes an impact’ and a host of other messaging can add impact.
- Persuade UK funders to support the costs of individual giving to impact media, supporting them by contributing funds towards infrastructure costs, staffing, capacity-building and match-funds, to grow sustainable new income streams from individual contributors.
- Develop one or more specialist media fundraising agencies to provide specialist support to impact media in raising individual contributor income.

## Finding 3

Commercial income from advertising, sponsorship and corporate social responsibility initiatives adds to the impact media funding mix and contributes to financial sustainability.

### Overview

The US has long-standing strict regulation preventing public and community media stations from taking commercial advertising and sponsorship. However, they have a 'loophole' that allows for a softer form of commercial 'support' known as 'underwriting'. This appears to be win-win, as 'underwriting' can provide significant funds to stations, while giving corporates generous brand association and CSR opportunities, both on-air and off-air (e.g. in communities, schools, arts and sporting events). Underwriting is usually secured for the content broadcast by the networked PBS and NPR stations, guaranteeing significant viewing figures.

However, there was consistent feedback across the US and Indian media I met with that corporate 'underwriting' funds, and sponsorship, are increasingly hard to secure and retain, even more so since the COVID-19 pandemic, and are an increasingly risky source of income to rely on, hence the trend to invest in growing sustainable individual contributor income as detailed above. Corporate 'underwriting' and sponsorship tends to be used for one-off campaigns and programming, where if the funding is withdrawn, the impact on the station is not so great.

In India and Sri Lanka, commercial sponsorship of high impact social action campaigns is common across mainstream media, but comes with a level of distrust, as the corporates are often assumed to be supporting a campaign in exchange for government favours. Across smaller civil society impact media companies, commercial sponsorship alongside advertising can often be a valuable part of the income mix, particularly those that are structured as, or include, a for-profit model. There is a creative and flexible approach, leading to some innovative and sustainable sources of commercial income.

### A change of management brings in commercial skills and income

There seems to be a growing divide between the stations that are reluctant to become more 'commercial', seen by some as

'old-fashioned', and those that are deliberately recruiting staff with commercial media expertise, to attract more member income, and corporate partnership funding, within the regulatory possibilities. Across think-tanks, advisors and more successful stations there was agreement that to drive social impact, stations need to bring in commercial funding and a commercial mind-set, but this is causing tensions at board level and in staff culture, unless very well handled.

A growing number of the larger non-profit media organisations in the US and India are being set up by or recruiting senior staff from the commercial media sector. The Better India, based in Bengaluru, with its audience of 50 million readers a month, and its focus on positive solutions content, is run by the two founders who have brought their business school commercial tech, engineering and business experience to growing their for-profit social impact media company.

WHYY in Philadelphia, after a merger between the previously independent non-profit TV and radio stations, rapidly replaced most of its senior management team, bringing in more commercial expertise to continue to drive a charitable, non-profit and social impact purpose, but underpinned by sustainable income from commercial partnerships, alongside massive increased income from individual contributions and foundation support. WHYY has been actively recruiting diverse senior media professionals, black and brown women from the commercial media industry, to change the older white, male culture, and better reflect the communities they serve.



Digital poster for *You Oughta Know*, WHYY's flagship community engagement programme.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Mark Fuerst advises many non-profit media organisations. He strongly endorses this commercial approach:

“The mix of commercial experience coming into the best of non-profit charitable public media is high impact. The more commercially minded management are succeeding in PBS, such as Steve Bass in Oregon; the station in Sacramento has carved out a franchise that is as vibrant as any in the States - the manager comes from commercial broadcasting – he’s comfortable with sales, the content director is very good.”

Mark went on to add, a little disparagingly, that, “Many of the PBS lot have almost religious worthiness!”

### Corporate funding of big social change campaigns

It’s worth highlighting the massive impact of mainstream media social action campaigns in India and the US, and increasingly now in Sri Lanka, often funded by corporate sponsors, or government or both. Recent campaigns in India have included:

- Clean Up India, a Toyota-sponsored campaign on NDTV around environment including a specific goal of placing 100,000 solar lamps into homes.
- Tigerthon on NDTV, to save the Indian tiger, in association with Aircel.
- Ruthlessly commercial Indian national channel group Star India has created its brand identity around social action, starting with the long-running soap ‘Satyamev Jayate’, presented by celebrity Aamir Khan, sponsored by Reliance for \$1 million, covering hard-hitting issues such as female foeticide, and raising \$20 million in audience donations for 7 nominated charities. Other Star campaigns have included blindness/vision, the ‘missed calls’ campaign to raise funds for ‘dying rivers’, with 100 million target for the calls, and 160 million reached. One channel, Star Plus, is dedicated to challenging female stereotypes, through drama and entertainment, including the successful campaign for all Indian top cricketers to wear their mother’s surname on their shirts, rather than their own (father’s) surname, asking “Why is your identity just your father’s?”. Star Plus also ran a campaign about ‘father & daughter’ businesses, which had huge impact across India.
- Government-funded campaigns will be carried widely on mainstream commercial media and Doordarshan, as in the US where the 1940s charity the Ad Council, set up by Roosevelt, still runs massive public campaigns.
- For-profit Maharajah TV in Sri Lanka uses its own funds to run high impact and long-running social action initiatives — Gammadda, V-Force and village reporters, described in the Social Impact third section of this report.



Republic Day campaign by Doordarshan, India's public service broadcaster, funded by the government.

For-profit impact media and ‘social enterprise’ models have fewer restrictions on commercial sponsorship and advertising, and often are rooted in a mission to drive social impact, so can combine the best of both structures, also tapping into individual contributions, even donations, and institutional grants.

WURD Radio in Philadelphia creates extensive social impact, serving the African-American community in Philadelphia, and generating commercial income through advertising and sponsorship. Privately owned and for-profit, WURD holds dearly to its deeply held mission to serve and give a voice to a specific community of Philadelphia:

“It was difficult, it was actually pretty challenging figuring out the business model for doing something that is very socially conscious when you are a for-profit entity. People always ask, are you non-profit? No, we are a for-profit entity. And so it's a very delicate dance to figure out how you stay true to your mission, and really speak truth to power, and create a business model that's self-sustaining.”<sup>70</sup>

In India a wide variety of commercial advertising and sponsorship opportunities are available for the more commercially minded media organisations, whether traditional media or digital, established media or start-ups. There are however strict regulations on community radio stations, preventing them from taking corporate income or from broadcasting news. They can take 7 minutes an hour of advertising.

At Gurgaon ki Awaaz, based in Gurugram, a new city outside New Delhi, and one of the most grassroots and ethical community stations I saw, the Station Director Arti Jainan expressed her ongoing surprise that she had managed to secure commercial sponsorship for a sexual health campaign, on her grassroots FM community radio station, targeted at often illiterate migrant workers and their families working on the mega-building sites in Gurugram.

**A strange anomaly: in the US the extensive network of independent charitable local cable ‘public access’ Community TV stations still receive significant funding from a regulated levy on the commercial cable operators.**

Local cable channels, often two or three in each city, have their own funding ecology that for the moment brings in \$1-2 million each year to each local community station from the commercial cable companies via a statutory levy of c.3% of



Sara Lomax-Reese, President and CEO, WURD Radio, Philadelphia.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

the cable fees towards ensuring each community has a Public Access, an Educational, and a (local) Government broadcast television channel – known as the ‘PEG’ channels. This model goes back to the early days of cable, and has so far been fixed in legislation, and upheld. I was really quite astounded by the amount of money going into each very local channel. The community impact varied enormously from one station to another. These channels have minimal output requirements in audience targets, content or parallel income generation. Additional income is really not needed, as the costs of running the stations is minimal, and only a very few forward-looking community boards and CEOs are building new income models to grow their audiences and impact, and to prepare for a future of reduced cable income and regulatory threats.

These cable channels receive significant income via the cable levy, but are often restricted to spending it on capital, building huge ‘state-of-the-art’ studios for local groups and schools to use for free, and buying digital cameras, recording equipment and banks of the latest Apple computers for editing and training. As I travelled around visiting these stations, some of these studios and training rooms were empty, even in the major cities, with only a few hundred local groups a year, at most, coming in to use the facilities. Viewer audience statistics “weren’t available” as numbers watching were too

<sup>70</sup> Sara Lomax-Reese, President & CEO, WURD Radio (interview October 2019)

low to be rated, and the costs of paying for viewer ratings unaffordable. In some cities I visited, the cable stations seemed both an anomaly and an irrelevance. Few had developed a strong digital or social media presence. Many of these cable stations had a reputation of being out of touch with younger communities and being led by older white men. In two of the stations I visited they admitted to showing programmes made by and about the Klu Klux Klan, saying that their governance regulations did not allow them to say 'no' to any local group wanting access to the Public Access channel.

However, a few of the Community Cable Channels I visited, mainly in the larger cities, were successful and dynamic, moving into the modern era, using their cable income to partner with other funders and other media companies, building high impact digital and social media platforms, reaching and engaging wide audiences, often people without access to digital, via strong content on their cable platforms and vibrant community activities, delivering a high level of community outreach, engagement, and social impact. These latter channels are also starting to raise individual donations and sponsorship, both to fund additional content and activity, and to prepare for the likelihood that the cable levy will be withdrawn.

The successful New York City cable channels I visited, Bronxnet and Manhattan Neighbourhood Network, and Bric TV in Brooklyn were predictably lively and proactive, with sophisticated content partnerships, and generating significant sums from individual membership and foundations, in addition to their cable fees income. Cable channels such as PhillyCam in Philadelphia and DCTV in Washington DC are investing in new roles and activities to grow individual membership, community engagement and justify increased foundation support. The smaller cable channels I visited in Chicago, Sacramento and Oregon were well connected into their local community, with less sophisticated but busy community activities, and again, massive studio space, and technical equipment from the cable fees levy. It will be interesting to see how they all develop.

From the best of community access media, under the leadership of creative and impact-driven social entrepreneurs, there is much to recommend to the UK, even if the concept of a levy on commercial operators is unlikely to be achievable, as a vibrant open-access community media hub is a catalyst for community development and community cohesion in a locality.

## Finding 3

Commercial income from advertising, sponsorship and corporate social responsibility initiatives adds to the impact media funding mix and contributes to financial sustainability.

## Recommendations for the UK

- Impact media projects in the UK should give full consideration to building commercial income models, where possible in parallel to other income models, and to building partnerships that can attract commercial sponsorship and corporate social responsibility budgets and objectives – as long as there are no editorial or brand influences.
- Impact media stations, channels and platforms, looking to grow commercial income need to review options and regulations, structures, costs, benefits and risks very carefully.
- The guidance from UK regulators, agencies and associations needs to give the full and clear range of options, pros and cons, and there should be a review of the restrictive advertising limits on community radio, and relevant structures and resources needed to maximise hybrid income sources.
- Attracting staff, board members and advisors with commercial media experience and skills will be necessary, alongside professional investment in content and marketing. Foundations, major donors and impact investors should be encouraged to invest in business development roles, training and consultancy.
- An entrepreneurial mind-set in parallel with a mission-driven focus on social impact, able to scale the 'double-bottom-line' of both financial and impact growth, can create a wonderful 'sweet-spot', and with the right people, messaging and 'case', can be attractive to impact investors, sponsors, government agencies and individual contributors. UK impact media should be encouraged to explore these options.



All photographs © Caroline Diehl



Clockwise from top-left: Inside the DCTV editing lounge; Nantz Rickard, Founder President & CEO, DCTV, with Angela Harris, new VP Community Engagement; BRIC TV: Brooklyn Without Boundaries; outside the CAN TV studios; Gary Martin in the Access Sacramento cable edit suite.

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## Finding 4

### Social Enterprise models and Impact Investment are growing.

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#### Overview

Impact investing in independent impact media, while less common, and at an early stage, is beginning to grow as an investment resource both for media start-ups and for scaling and diversifying impact media.

Impact investors are encouraging and enabling new mindsets and skills that underpin and drive, and crucially scale financially sustainable business models, while keeping social impact as a core purpose.

In India I saw successful developments in media social enterprise, often growing out of initial grant-funded operations, having proved a need, and built an audience and income model. As well as building a commercial subscription or contributor model, some are able to raise funds from selling products and services associated with their content and station, alongside advertising and sponsorship. These ranged from the sophisticated, now investor-funded digital 'positive news' platform The Better India, to the tiny but influential grassroots village community radio station Sangham Radio.

#### The Better India

India's biggest media platform for positive stories, started by husband and wife co-founders 12 years ago over a cup of tea one Sunday morning, now has over 50 million weekly readers. Initially 'boot-strapped' by its founders, The Better India scaled rapidly with a small contract from the Independent & Public-Spirited Media Foundation. "IPSMF funding was a key intervention. It allowed us to focus on business development, as the editorial was funded by the IPSMF", explained Dhimant Parekh, CEO and Co-founder. The IPSMF funding took them to a stage where they could then access almost \$2 million from a Series A impact investor, and are now earning income from online sales of own-brand eco-products.

#### Gram Vaani

The university-incubated mobile platform for isolated rural and urban communities in India, has moved successfully from grant-funding from the Knight News Foundation to impact investment funding, raising an early stage investment from the Digital News Ventures (Media Development Investment



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Dhimant Parekh, CEO & Co-founder, The Better India, Bengaluru.

Fund) and the Indian Angel Network, to expand the Mobile Vaani platform and build a sustainable business model. After a further entrepreneurial merger, they now have a powerhouse team of over 70+ organisational members spread across Delhi, Bangalore, Ranchi, Chennai, and field teams in Bihar, MP, Jharkhand, and Tamil Nadu.

#### The Ken

A pan-Asian, digital, subscription-driven in-depth news publication headquartered out of Bengaluru, India. Founded by a team of experienced journalists and entrepreneurs, The Ken pioneered subscriber-only online business journalism. They raised series A investment, led by the Omidyar Network, and have fantastic support from angel investors. They have also received financial support, again as a contract for specific content, from the charitable IPSMF for the purpose of reporting and publishing stories of public interest.

#### Ath Pavura

Ath Pavura in Sri Lanka is a well-known and high impact social impact media brand, funded through impact investment. It's the equivalent of Dragons' Den, on broadcast television, but raising funds for social entrepreneurs, who pitch to Ath Pavura's impact investors live on TV. The impact investors on Ath Pavura are high net-worth individuals who are committed to investing in enterprises with a social and environmental impact while contributing their financial resources, mentor time, and industry expertise. They are referred to as 'Tuskers'

to signify the protective nature elephants have for their young in the wild. The investors are the adult tuskers, guiding and nurturing the 'young' entrepreneurs, as they develop their business. The literal meaning of Ath Pavura is "elephant wall." In nature, tusker elephants stand next to each other and form a wall to protect their young.

Run in partnership with charity Social Enterprise Lanka and the Lanka Impact Investing Network, Ath Pavura is broadcasting its third series now on ITN, one of the major government-owned broadcast TV channels in Sri Lanka. Ath Pavura also has a large audience on YouTube. It's a great awareness-raiser for the concept of social enterprise, impact investment and impact media. It should absolutely be replicated in the UK.

### Suno India

Suno India is India's first podcast-only start-up, a for-profit dedicated to social impact, it launched in 2018 in Hyderabad. In 2019 they received funding from charitable IPSMF, and have now raised 'angel' impact investment:

"Suno India exists to shine a spotlight on under-reported issues that are fundamental to our rights as citizens of India."<sup>71</sup>

### Sangham Radio

Sangham Radio is run by village Adivasi 'Dalit' women who also run a wider village-based social enterprise through the Deccan Development Society. At Sangham Radio, village women take funds for government campaigns such as health, farming, literacy, girl education and a wonderful sounding programme series called 'Sister-in-law Gossip' - the issues that women talk about when their men are in the fields!

Also skilled in video production, they run a Community Media Trust, generating income by making films for charities, corporates and public sector organisations in Hyderabad and surrounding smaller cities. They also promote and sell local farm products through local shops, a branded community restaurant in the local main town, and a new website. This income-generating social enterprise is all happening in a Dalit village where there is only running water for up to two hours a day, led by the heroic 'General' Narsamma and her team.

## Finding 4

Social Enterprise models and Impact Investment are growing.

## Recommendations for the UK

- Impact media organisations should consider a range of opportunities for social enterprise activities that can grow to deliver a sustainable income stream, including via partnerships.
- Foundations should consider supporting impact media to develop and grow a sustainable social enterprise within or alongside the media platform.
- Impact investors should consider a range of digital, mobile and broadcast impact media initiatives in their portfolios.
- Media social enterprises should consider impact investment to enable scale and innovation.
- The UK should consider a social enterprise equivalent of Dragon's Den.

71 Padma Priya, Co-founder, Suno India (interview January 2020)



Clockwise from top-left: 'General' Narsamma and colleagues, Sangham Radio; Sangham Radio Community Media Trust members; Sangham Organics, locally produced goods sold in local shops; The transmitter outside Sangham Radio.

## Finding 5

The US and increasingly India are investing in infrastructure support agencies for impact media, that build capacity in income generation.

As referred to in the above findings, there are a growing number of extremely experienced and sophisticated infrastructure agencies, consultancies and funding bodies (both charitable and commercial) with a specific focus on supporting impact media. There is also a lot of investment of time and resource in networking among impact media organisations — conferences, webinars, newsletters, podcasts — all focused on building the capacity of impact media to innovate in income generation; whether driven by changing the old or starting up and scaling the new. Unlike in the UK, funders of media in the US and India understand that it is vital for at least some of their funding and investments to go into infrastructure and building capacity — into staffing, training, technology, marketing, audience engagement, fundraising, and much more. The foundations understand the need for resourcing infrastructure to grow and sustain the impact of the media, whether old or new, that they support. The Wyncote Foundation funds Current, the non-profit support agency for and about public media in the US, as well as The National Federation of Community Broadcasters, founded in 1978, the oldest and largest national organisation dedicated to community stations within the public media system.

Gather is a database of non-profit and community media initiatives, hosted by The Agora Journalism Center at the School of Journalism and Communication in the University of Oregon — a ‘gathering place’ for innovation in communication and civic engagement. The center works to create and support transformational media innovations in service to civic engagement, and civic engagement that informs media innovation, funded by The Democracy Fund and the Knight Foundation amongst others.

The IPSMF, based in Bengaluru, India, sees infrastructure support for impact media organisations as a key part of its role:

“Some of our grantees are fairly savvy and professional in running their operations. But there are others who need some help in understanding the intricacies of

setting up a ‘business’ venture — local licencing and legal requirements, financial planning and taxation aspects and even technology needs for setting up a robust web and mobile platform. We share best practices and experiences with the grantees and also help in connecting them to the right kind of consultants and vendors.”<sup>72</sup>

The MacArthur Foundation, based in Chicago, US, is clear in its funding guidelines that it wants to:

“Promote learning, leadership, innovation, and field-building opportunities that explore timely and emerging issues related to the production, dissemination, and engagement with journalism and media, support organizations and activities that support the infrastructure for, and contribute to learning and innovation in, the field of civic media.”<sup>73</sup>

These media infrastructure organisations also play a key role in helping coordinate joint funding initiatives. They will manage match-funding campaigns such as NewsMatch, run by the Institute of NonProfit News, or Report for America’s match funding for journalists.

## Finding 5

The US and increasingly India are investing in infrastructure support agencies for impact media, that build capacity in income generation.

## Recommendations for the UK

- Together the impact media movement in the UK must persuade funders, government and major donors to support the infrastructure of this vital sector, articulating and proving the impact we can have on communities, citizens and our wider society.
- Boards and staff in impact media organisations need to recognise that to shift to a more impact driven and financially sustainable model they need to invest in staff expertise and technology, and that investing in specialist infrastructure advice is an effective way to do this.

<sup>72</sup> <http://ipsmf.org/>

<sup>73</sup> <https://www.macfound.org/>

## Theme 2

### Structures, ownership and governance: optimising innovation and impact

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“I believe wholeheartedly that Black media ownership is essential — and always has been — so we have the freedom to tell our own stories in our own voices.”

**Sara Lomax-Reese, President and CEO, WURD Radio, Philadelphia, USA**

“I would love to see major funders recognize the importance and potential long-term gains for supporting diverse ownership of media.”

**Molly de Aguiar, President, Independence Public Media Foundation, Philadelphia, USA**

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This section of my report looks at a selection of organisational structures, ownership, governance and staffing models supporting the more effective and sustainable media projects I visited in the US, India and Sri Lanka, and makes recommendations for the UK. I have separated my findings into the following 5 areas, although there is overlap between them, and a wide range of mixed models.

- Charitable and non-profit media
- For-profit and social enterprise media
- Co-operative, employee-owned and share-ownership models
- University or school owned media
- Collaboration, mergers and transition

#### Overview of findings

With the burgeoning media social enterprises and innovative media community-ownership structures in the UK, I wanted to understand if there were useful structural, ownership and governance trends in the US, India and Sri Lanka, that I could share with the UK, to support and encourage innovative, and optimum, structures and governance for civil society ‘impact’ media in the UK.

I found, among both the legacy media projects and the new initiatives, an increasing trend towards flexible structures, and transition to structural solutions that maximise both social impact and financial viability. In the US the legacy broadcasters are usually structured as non-profit charities, with boards of trustees.

These non-profit broadcasters are increasingly exploring mergers with other media organisations, often print media and radio stations that have built up large digital offerings and data.

But in contrast to the relatively healthy and entrepreneurial broadcast ecology, many local rural and urban newspapers were closing down, or hanging on 'by the skin of their teeth' — unless they had radically refocused and restructured. There are some exciting examples of success rising out of the newspaper flames, usually linked to innovative structures, ownership and governance, and a focus on social impact.

In India and Sri Lanka, the government-owned and controlled public broadcasters seemed stagnant, with little change, losing audiences and impact fast, and being overtaken by commercial and non-profit broadcasters often highly committed to social impact, and mobile media consumption. Regulation is becoming more complex as structures diversify and merge, with a range of charitable, fundraising, data protection, company, co-operative and media regulation to deal with, as in the UK.

Digital-born media platforms, with strong editorial content and values, and social media with its immediacy and impact, are building large audiences, though in all three countries there are still many millions of citizens without access to digital, with little or no access to bandwidth, and/or the financial resources to afford data.

### **Impact media, with its editorial values, brand identity, trust and audience engagement, is growing, not declining, as a powerful force for good**

I heard about and met with successful and entrepreneurial re-structures, mergers and transformations, where organisations have diversified their governance, financial and editorial models to create more relevant content, build new audiences, engagement and partnerships, develop a stronger news and digital offer, secure new and growing forms of income, merge, renew, and in many cases to radically transform their ownership and governance structure.

I saw multiple start-ups, new formats and platforms, new financial models and new audiences, led by passionate

social entrepreneurs. Flexibility in structure, ownership and governance characterised both the start-ups and the more innovative transitions and mergers.

I met with lucrative for-profits whose primary purpose was social impact, and non-profits who were running increasingly financially successful businesses.

In the US and India, I found a highly energised media ecology (other than the state-owned media), combining and interweaving legacy media, digital innovation and social media, emerging out of the old ways.

As with the funding trends outlined in the above section, there was strong support for a re-think of structures, governance and ownership models from philanthropic funders, impact investors, infrastructure agencies and some boards.

There were few examples of community ownership of media, but big numbers of individual regular contributors, who feel some sense of ownership, even if this is not formalised. Individual supporters/donors/members, and even some grant-givers and philanthropists seemed happy to contribute funds to a range of structures, including for-profit purpose-driven media.

Many of the most successful digital-born innovative and successful new organisations were set up as and remain non-profit, e.g. The Moth, familiar to many BBC Radio4 listeners, or The Wire in India, but others, such as The Colorado Sun in the US, The Better India in Bengaluru, Max Maharashtra in Mumbai, Suno India in Hyderabad, and Maharaja's MTV in Sri Lanka, were driving social impact through a for-profit structure and private ownership, while also attracting foundation money and individual contributions.

Messages around social impact, social purpose, and transparent audience-led impact stories were often the main drivers of both financial sustainability and social impact, irrespective of the ownership and governance structure.

My visits and meetings reinforced the positive impact, on both social impact and commercial viability, that can be delivered through a range of structures, as indeed we have proved with the innovative structures recently put in place by Together TV, Positive News, Social Spider and Bristol Cable in the UK. The potential to share learnings in the UK, encourage innovation, mergers and start-ups in impact media, is exciting, and much needed.

Below are some examples and trends I saw on my Fellowship.

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## Finding 6

**Charities and non-profit ownership:**  
Many impact media organisations are structured as, or owned by, non-profits and charities, and some have recently transitioned from for-profit to non-profit and charitable structures.

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Non-profit governance is common across a wide range of impact media, from the new digital start-ups to the older traditional media e.g. PBS and NPR, community TV (cable) and radio, often with a strong regulatory mission and structure. I met with, and heard about, powerful diverse ethnic stations such as the Native American owned community radio stations in Dakota and Arizona, and Radio Bilingue's amazing US-wide 'Latino' network headquartered in Fresno, California.

Of the non-profit media companies I met with, usually the whole media company structure is charitable. Sometimes the media project is owned by a charity but is structured within a separate company. Sometimes a separate charity is attached to the main corporate structure, allowing for focused 'restricted' funding from foundations to come in for specific charitable purposes. Individual supporter income can be routed through the charity or through a for-profit structure. The US charitable 501C3 designation provides a flexible business model that allows the media company to accept both donations and paid advertisements or 'underwriting'. Both in India and the US there are regulatory, financial and tax advantages — and disadvantages.

Non-profit digital-born impact media start-ups are thriving in India, with The Wire being held up as one of the most successful. The Wire is published by The Foundation for Independent Journalism (FIJ), the non-profit set up to house it. Launched in 2015 by three journalist founders, and grant-funded by the IPSMF and other charitable donations, The Wire is now generating significant income from individual contributions, advertising and ongoing donations. In May its editors wrote:

"...as our readers and viewers will testify, the bet we took on the main advantage of being non-profit — that it would help our journalism remain fiercely independent — has proved a winning one. The fact that we answer to no 'boss' is what has enabled us to follow the story no matter whose toes end up getting trod on."

MK Venu, one of the Wire's three founding editors, told Medium in May 2020 that it now has 16–17 million page views and 7 or 8 million uniques a month across the English and Hindi editions, with 24 million views a month on YouTube — comparable to a mid-sized television channel.<sup>74</sup> The Wire's founding editors are passionate about the need for new business models for impact media. On their opening statement of their website they write:

"Instead of the traditional models of family-owned, corporate-funded and controlled, or advertising-driven newspapers, websites and TV channels, can we reimagine the media as a joint venture in the public sphere between journalists, readers and a concerned citizenry?... In a democracy, this is the least that readers or viewers expect. And yet, the business model that underpins most Indian news media seldom allows editors the freedom they need. Worse, it has slowly eroded professional standards of reporting and contaminated the media ecosystem with toxic practices like rampant editorializing, paid news and 'private treaties'...

"The founding premise of The Wire is this: if good journalism is to survive and thrive, it can only do so by being both editorially and financially independent. This means relying principally on contributions from readers and concerned citizens who have no interest other than to sustain a space for quality journalism."<sup>75</sup>

In India, where licences for community radio are restricted, foundations are now able to apply to hold a community radio license.

### Gurgaon ki Awaaz

Gurgaon ki Awaaz ("Voice of Gurgaon") is a high impact grassroots community radio station. It is owned, and was set up by, an independent charitable foundation based in Gurugram (previously Gurgaon), a new purpose-built tech city on the outskirts of New Delhi. The Foundation's founder is also founder and chairman of the community radio station and plays an active role in fundraising to support and grow the station, which has a track record of social impact among

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<sup>74</sup> <https://medium.com/thestory-asiapacific/indias-the-wire-answers-to-no-boss-but-its-audience-and-that-pays-off-8d92ae08bd75>

<sup>75</sup> <https://thewire.in/about-us>



Arti Jaiman with the Gurgaon ki Awaaz schedule.

the highly disadvantaged displaced and migrant communities it serves.

In the US there are many and diverse charitable impact media initiatives from the long-established public broadcasters PBS and NPR city-based stations to new digital start-ups such as Block Club Chicago or Berkeleyside.

## The Moth

A successful charitable audio production company, The Moth makes content for a wide range of radio stations and podcast platforms, including the BBC's Radio 4:

“The Moth's mission is to promote the art and craft of storytelling and to honor and celebrate the diversity and commonality of human experience .... The Moth podcast is downloaded more than 50 million times a year, and each week, the Peabody Award-winning Moth Radio Hour is heard on over 480 radio stations worldwide .... At The Moth, we believe that one of the best ways to take care of one another is by listening to and sharing true, personal stories. This season of giving, spread empathy and compassion by making a donation to The Moth ... As a nonprofit organization, we run on

donations from supporters like you to continue to bring personal storytelling to all corners of the world.”<sup>76</sup>

## The Texas Tribune

The Texas Tribune describes itself as the only member-supported, digital-first, nonpartisan media organisation that informs Texans — and engages with them — about public policy, politics, government and state-wide issues. It's a registered charity 501c3. The Tribune was founded in 2009 by John Thornton (a venture capitalist in Austin for nearly 20 years and passionate believer in public media) who with his co-founders raised \$4m seed funding:

“Our bold vision for enabling serious journalism turned on our embrace of the nonprofit business model. Like our public media peers, we would raise money from our stakeholders: the individuals, foundations and corporations that shared our commitment to civic health and purpose.”<sup>77</sup>

## Charitable group structure

Increasingly, media organisations with more than one media outlet will house the ‘group’ of companies under a charitable parent company. The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, recently set up by Gerry Lenfest, the original owner of the commercial loss-making Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper, has adopted this structure, with a massive endowment funding the media platforms it owns, and wider community based media initiatives. At the small end of the market, so did Berkeleyside, a local digital news platform. A few years into its existence, the founders of Berkeleyside, serving Berkeley, in California, with a population of 120,000, set up Cityside, a charitable ‘umbrella’ organisation to own the digital platform. This structure has enabled the founders to grow their fundraising from grants, sponsorship, ‘underwriting’ and community events, and develop two more local digital news start-ups, The Oakleyside and The Tyler Loop. See also Berkeleyside's Direct Public Offer story below, under Finding 9.

“Cityside is a nonpartisan, nonprofit media organization committed to building community through local journalism. We provide readers with fact-driven, nonpartisan, informative reporting that seeks to reflect the diversity and complexity of the communities we serve.”<sup>78</sup>

In the US, while many local radio stations have a strong local identity and community brand, with community boards,

<sup>76</sup> <https://themoth.org/>

<sup>77</sup> <https://www.texastribune.org/about/>

<sup>78</sup> <https://www.citysidejournalism.org/about-us/>

they are often owned by large, charitable, media groups, the biggest of which is American Public Media (APM), a registered non-profit charity. Minnesota Public Radio, which started as one small classical radio station, is now the largest regional charitable radio network in the country, with 45 stations and three services and a massive membership. It is in turn owned by APM which is open about their model in their charitable messaging to donors:

“Your Support Matters — Thank You! Your contributions make what we do every day possible. A strong tradition of philanthropic support from individuals, foundations and corporations has helped build American Public Media into one of the country’s leading public media organizations. As a nonprofit-501(c)(3) organization, APM’s mission cannot be realized without the tremendous support from more than 100 foundations and 200,000 individuals who believe in our programming and our commitment to serve our audiences and communities.”<sup>79</sup>

Radio Bilingüe is a fantastic story of entrepreneurial leadership, growth, innovation and public service, while retaining overall non-profit charity status and purpose within a charitable group structure. Founded in 1976 by Hugo Morales, now 71 and still in charge, Radio Bilingüe started as one small local radio station in Fresno, a mid-size California agriculture-based town. The station was set up to broadcast to the Spanish-speaking mainly Mexican and ‘chicano’ immigrant farmworkers. Hugo Morales has grown the network to own over 30 radio stations, and a trans-US satellite network.

The charitable non-profit Capital Public Radio Network (CPRN), based in Sacramento, has an affiliate network of c.50 public radio stations in California, Oregon and Nevada, reaching about three-million listeners a week. Joe Barr, Chief Content Officer, developed CapRadio’s award-winning, nationally distributed community engagement documentary series, *The View From Here*.<sup>80</sup>

### Addressing governance and staffing in a charitable media organisation

Non-profit media organisations need to ensure that their boards and staff teams have a complex mix of skills and knowledge, to balance the charitable mission of the organisation with the need to be financially sustainable. They

need breadth on their board to represent their diverse communities and to advise on the professional and business strategies needed to ensure editorial expertise and financial sustainability. I met many media charities who had recently restructured their management teams and boards to bring in more commercial and fundraising expertise, and also to bring more diversity to their governance and management team.

“So we’re really trying to change the dynamics - you have to change the people in order to change the culture sometimes, and the people who remain have to get on the bus - or they can leave.”<sup>81</sup>

Boards tend to be small, and include the Executives and some high profile influential local leaders. Steve Bass, President & CEO at OPB in Portland, noted:

“We’re a self-perpetuating board, our board of directors is not elected by the 150,000+ contributors, which is safe. And I would say there are some organisations that have done that, and it’s kind of a disaster, such as Pacifica which has always been a dysfunctional mess, and part of it is because of their governance structure, where there is democratic election of the board of directors.”<sup>82</sup>

Transition from for-profit to charitable ownership: In both India and the US there is a new trend for impact media organisations to transition from a commercial for-profit structure to become charities, primarily to secure more sustainable income models, but also to safe-guard the purpose and values of the media project. The US is seeing ground-breaking structural changes where a commercial media company becomes a charity or sets up a charity that then takes over ownership of the, often loss-making, commercial media. The most well-known and high impact example in the US is the establishment of The Lenfest Institute of Journalism. Gerry Lenfest, the owner of the Philadelphia Inquirer, a famous large and commercial newspaper, set up a charitable trust, the Lenfest Institute, with an endowment of \$20 million. He then restructured the news organisations he owned as public benefit corporations and put them into ownership of the Trust. The Trust has gone on to be an incredible resource to impact media organisations across Philadelphia and the surrounding areas, as well as a model that is being copied across the US and India. The news companies have been secured, as they can now attract wider funding from institutional and individual donors.

79 <https://www.americanpublicmedia.org/>

80 <https://www.capradio.org/news/the-view-from-here>

81 Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Office, Lenfest Institute for Journalism (interview October 2019)

82 Steve Bass (interview October 2019)

## Case Study

### The Philadelphia Inquirer: Transitioning from commercial newspaper group to charitable foundation ownership, and the massive culture change needed in the organisation.

The Lenfest Institute for Journalism is a non-profit charitable organisation whose sole mission is to develop and support sustainable business models for great local journalism. The Institute was founded in 2016 by cable television entrepreneur H.F. (Gerry) Lenfest. Lenfest gifted to the Institute an initial endowment of \$20 million, which has since been supplemented by other donors, for investment in innovative news initiatives, new technology, and new models for sustainable journalism.

Gerry Lenfest also gifted his ownership of the Philadelphia Media Network (The Philadelphia Inquirer, Philadelphia Daily News, and Philly.com, the Philadelphia region's largest local news website). The Institute is overseen by a Board of Managers including news executives, media entrepreneurs, software and technology executives, philanthropists, community leaders and leading academics — a powerful mix.

The Philadelphia news properties are now the largest newspapers in America each operated as a public-benefit corporation, under the non-profit ownership of the Institute, dedicated solely to the mission of preserving local journalism nationwide. These news properties also serve as a live lab for the Institute's innovation investments.

"The Foundation hopes to achieve this vision by funding and supporting media and related programs that strengthen and connect diverse voices and foster greater understanding across communities in Greater Philadelphia."<sup>83</sup>

Its list of media-related grants is impressive and exciting.

Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Officer at the Lenfest Trust, talked about the need to reflect the diversity of their city in their media and in their staff teams:

"I'm seeing a really big, very strong push on building community relationships, and the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in media. Equity, because you can be diverse and you can be inclusive but that doesn't



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Officer at the Lenfest Trust.

mean what you're doing is equitable and fair, and the role that media plays in social justice is key. There's just a lot of work around community to do.

"We came into this three years ago and had these ideas that we were going to invest in these start-ups and we were just going to sort of see what stuck, and as we went deeper and deeper into it, really began to see this tremendous groundswell of support and push for making sure that what has traditionally been an old white male industry is turned upside down on its head. It's no longer enough to sit in your ivory tower and say this is what you need to know. These organisations need to turn themselves inside out and go out to the community and bring their needs back into the newsroom.

"And then, in order to do that, the newsrooms need to reflect the communities that they're serving because even, you know we're all writing in English but different communities have different language, different ways of saying things and different ways of understanding things, and trying to figure out all of that, while still maintaining some of the traditions of great Pulitzer Prize winning, you know hard-hitting, impact journalism ... it's an interesting dynamic and particularly here in Philadelphia, we are a 'minority majority' city, 45% of our population is African American and we have a strong Hispanic population, Indian population and Asian population, but our newsroom, up until recently, just speaking about the

83 <https://www.lenfestinstitute.org/>

Inquirer, was 70% white men. And so, driving change in the industry also requires driving deep and systemic cultural change in these organisations that have been around for a long time.

“We think that one of the biggest ways we can influence media in Philadelphia is to figure out ways to get the Inquirer to partner differently with all the other stuff that's happening with citizens, community members and community media, in a different kind of way. So whereas in the past, when perhaps the Inquirer never paid attention to WURD Radio (Philadelphia's independently owned black radio station), or if the Inquirer was going

to pay attention to WURD Radio, they would say 'If you want something, WURD radio, you have to come on board here and maybe we'll give it to you.'

“Now it's like turning it around and understanding that WURD Radio has a very important demographic, a very important story to tell; very important work that it is doing that can influence this newsroom, and how can we all partner together in new ways to benefit, so that's where we're focusing a lot of our funding and resources.”<sup>84</sup>

84 Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Officer, The Lenfest Institute (interview, October 2019)

## Citizen Matters and the Oorvani Foundation: Transitioning from for-profit to charitable Foundation ownership

Citizen Matters was originally set up as a for-profit print and digital newspaper in Bengaluru (Bangalore), to address the huge changes happening as the city grew from 6 million to 12 million inhabitants in just a few years, with challenging social, environmental and diversity issues that the mainstream commercial media were not covering, or not covering equitably. The commercial funding model was hard to keep going, while still prioritising their community outreach and voice, so in 2013 the founders set up the Oorvani Foundation and restructured Citizen Matters into a non-profit digital only platform.

At the same time, they took on three other non-profit community media initiatives that also needed a secure home and partnership. Funding is still tough, but the Foundation ownership model has enabled them to access charitable grants as well as regular reader contributions, and to carry out other charitable activities such as training, education and events. Sponsorship still comes in, but with strict rules protecting editorial independence and transparency.

Citizen Matters' readership has since grown exponentially, with a monthly readership of between 1.1million and 600,000. They have set up a further platform and small staff team in Chennai and Mumbai, and are building a national audience. They share stories with other media platforms,



Meera K, Founder of Citizen Matters in Bengaluru, Chennai and Mumbai.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

both traditional print and radio channels and national digital platforms such as Scroll and NewsMinute, receiving a by-line for Citizen Matters.<sup>85</sup>

## Intermediary charity fiscal sponsor

If a media organisation does not have charitable status, or its own charity, there are some media infrastructure organisations that will act as the charitable partner, the 'fiscal sponsor', to enable charitable funds to be routed through them. One of these is the Local Media Association (LMA) in the US:

85 Meera K, Founder, Citizen Matters and the Oorvani Foundation (interview January 2020)

“News organizations that are looking to fund journalism with philanthropic partners can now work directly with the LMA team to set up the infrastructure to make this happen. Local Media Foundation, a 501(c)(3) charitable trust, is ready to serve as the fiscal sponsor. Simply contact us to set up a time to discuss. Community and national foundations, philanthropists, corporations and others can donate to the Fund for Local Journalism with assurance that LMF will properly administer the program designed to educate the public on important community issues.”

El Timpano, a grassroots community voice and media initiative in Oakland, California, that does not yet have charitable status, is fiscally sponsored by Independent Arts & Media, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organisation dedicated to building community through media and the arts, with over 10 foundations routing their grants to El Timpano through this model.

The Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF) in India plays the same intermediary role, channeling charitable funds from philanthropists, corporates and foundations into both charitable and non-charitable media organisations, and safeguarding, monitoring and evaluating the charitable purpose of the original donation. Interestingly the recipient beneficiary media organisations also see the IPSMF intermediary role as a useful protection from over-interference from the original donor or from related political influence.

## Finding 6

Charities and non-profit ownership: Many impact media organisations are structured as, or owned by, non-profits and charities, and some have recently transitioned from for-profit to non-profit and charitable structures.

## Recommendations for the UK

- There should be a clearer rationale and more support for impact media organisations to have full charitable status in the UK should they wish. Impact media organisations have well-evidenced social impact. Impact media organisations should work together to lobby to have this option.
- There should be clear guidance on mixed models and alternative non-profit structures for impact media in the UK, including Community Interest Company, Community Benefit Society, Co-operative structures and other options.
- Impact Media organisations should explore group structures, allowing for a hybrid mix, and consider carefully the governance implications of any transition.
- There should be a shared database of impact media organisations, their structures, governance, ownership and funding models, for reference and sharing of best practice.

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## Finding 7

### For-profit impact media social enterprises and ‘start-ups’, generating ‘profit with purpose’, are flourishing in the US and India, and attracting younger digital social entrepreneurs.

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Social Enterprise is a growing concept and phenomenon in India, Sri Lanka and the US across all sectors. Many of the impact media start-ups, and increasingly some of the legacy media companies, are using a social enterprise model, to drive social impact while growing financial sustainability and profit from contracts, sales and trading.

This is the UK Government’s definition of social enterprise:

“Businesses with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximise profit for shareholders and owners.”<sup>86</sup>

Impact media companies that see themselves as social enterprises are both mission-driven and finance-driven, with the double-bottom line of financial self-sufficiency and social impact. They tend to be led by one or more ‘social entrepreneurs’, usually the original founders, who remain as the owners, executive leaders and board members, with a high level of strategic and management control.

Groundviews in Colombo, Sri Lanka is an award-winning citizen journalism website, founded by Sanjana Hattotuwa in 2006. Groundviews’ ‘institutional anchor’ parent company is the highly respected (amongst liberals) research and campaigning organisation, the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) founded by Dr. Paikiasothy Saravanamuttu. The CPA has a small board of influential directors. Groundviews uses a range of genres and media to highlight alternative perspectives on governance, human rights, the arts and literature, peace-building and other issues related to Sri Lanka. It has a ‘sister’ site Vikalpa.org with content in Sinhalese, and another in Tamil.

Their vision is ‘to demonstrate, by example, that citizen journalism can enable civil, progressive and inclusive discussions on democracy, rights, governance and peace in Sri

Lanka.’ They describe their site:

“... the first attempt in Sri Lanka to create a means through which citizens in civil society could pen their own perspectives of life in conflict zones, call attention to humanitarian emergencies, give information on security and ground conditions and present alternatives to the status quo. The site is a forum for critical debate, including academic commentary anchored in ground reality that would or could not find expression in traditional mainstream media in Sri Lanka today. It is also a site for new media innovation, demonstrating by example how web and mobile platforms, apps and technologies can, inter alia, bear witness to violence, document rights violations, record corruption as well as stories of resilience, courage and hope.”

Groundviews’ for-profit structure does not preclude them receiving a range of funding from foundations.

Interestingly a number of for-profit media social enterprise co-founders I met were family as well as business partners: The Better India, based in Bengaluru, is led by married couple Dhimant Parekh and Anuradha Kedia. He is CEO, she is COO; two of Good Market’s three co-founders in Sri Lanka are married: Amanda Kiessel and Steve Francone; and 2 of Suno India’s three co-founders are married: Padma Priya and Rakesh Kamal. At WURD Radio, the station is now being brilliantly led by the original founder’s daughter, Sara Lomax-Reese, President & CEO. And see below for some non-profit husband-and-wife founders too.

## Impact investment

A social enterprise structure also allows for impact investment, venture capital funding and a sales-driven culture. The social impact brand is seen as the driver of commercial purpose as much as social impact, and a big brand advantage for marketing, advertising, customer acquisition and retention. The listener/viewer/reader is often also the purchaser – of the subscription, but also of the products, often ethical, sold through the platform. The Better India, which built a massive audience as a media platform, then started selling its own-brand ethical products through its digital channels. Good Market, in Sri Lanka, did the opposite, moving from being an outdoor and online market for Sri Lankan social entrepreneurs to become, with impact investment, a fast-growing global story-telling site for social enterprises around the world.

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86 <https://www.socialenterprisemark.org.uk/what-is-social-enterprise/>

Investors expect a financial return and a focus on commercial strategies, management skills and governance, often taking a place on the board, which can be both transformational and disruptive. It's important to ensure that the impact investors really do buy into the double bottom line of social impact alongside profit.

Impact investors have so far tended to target the digital-born media platforms — news, audio, radio, podcasting, mobile, as well as those that are combining selling products with storytelling to generate sales income, such as at The Better India and Good Market in Sri Lanka.

For-profit 'ethnic' radio stations such as WURD Radio in Philadelphia, or Max Maharastra in Mumbai, targeting a particular ethnicity or language, with huge underserved markets, are rapidly developing the models and language of social enterprise. Independent producers of social impact content are also attracting commercial investment from impact investors.

## Finding 7

For-profit impact media social enterprises and 'start-ups', generating 'profit with purpose', are flourishing in the US and India, and attracting younger digital social entrepreneurs.

## Recommendations for the UK

- The social enterprise and tech start-up culture in the UK is exciting and well supported, but impact media social enterprises are few. The potential is exciting.
- We should support existing impact media leaders to become more entrepreneurial, sharing best practice and offering access to training and social investment.
- We should inspire and support social entrepreneurs to consider creating impact media platforms.
- Social enterprise models and skills should form part of media and creative industry degrees.
- We should encourage impact investors, angel investors, and regulators to provide investment and infrastructure support for dynamic entrepreneurial ownership models.

## Case Study

### Suno India: a for-profit social impact podcast platform for “issues that matter”.

Suno India is one great example of a purpose driven for-profit impact media platform, podcast-based, and another story of a husband and wife media start-up. Based in Hyderabad, but with an all-India reach, Suno India was set up in 2018, (Suno means ‘listen up’ in Hindi) under company ownership of Every Voice Matters, a private company limited by shares, set up to house the Suno India product and brand, with the three editorial co-founders as company directors.

The company’s social purpose runs across all their podcast series, topics and content, their website and social media. They have received funding, structured as a contract, to produce particular content, from the charitable IPSMF, and also receive a mix of commercial sponsorship and grants. On their website and in their podcasts, they ask for individual contributions from listeners and supporters, with no pretence to be a charity or non-profit, just a media platform creating social impact and needing funding. Suno India now has over half a million regular listeners across India.

In August 2020 they secured angel investment from a highly regarded successful film producer Shobu Yarlagadda, who said, “At a time when most mainstream media is sensationalising news for the sake of TV ratings, many stories that deserve our real attention are left out. Suno India, through their podcasts, is focusing and bringing to light social and current issues that really need to be discussed and debated! I am happy to be associated with this young team in a small way and wish them all the success.”

In March 2020, Suno India’s new Telugu-language kids podcast, *Katha Cheppava Ammamma*, launched only a few months earlier, had reached 100,000 listeners.

“Suno India is a multilingual, multi-generational podcast platform solely dedicated to audio-stories on issues that matter. Suno India shines a spotlight on under-represented and under-reported stories using audio as a medium. We set our own agenda and we are editorially independent. The podcasts on Suno India are well-researched yet personal. Our stories are steered by hard facts from the ground up.



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Padma Priya and Rakesh Kamal, Co-founders, Suno India.

“We also believe that there is an urgent need to give a platform to issues that are often side-lined as inconvenient, irrelevant, or are simply invisible; that’s what sets us apart from others. At a time when attention spans are reduced to 15-second videos, we are here for people who want to understand an issue without reacting. We also don’t tell our listeners what to think and equip them with all the information required for them formulate an opinion. In short, we believe in the core principles of public interest journalism. We take our time to report and tell our stories packed with the right mix of human interest stories and facts.

“We are a group of storytellers from diverse backgrounds and a proven track record of an international and national impact having worked across various sectors such as media, international diplomacy, and the non-profit sector. We started Suno India — a podcast platform for issues that should matter — in 2018 and are based in Hyderabad and Delhi.”<sup>87</sup>

87 Padma Priya and Rakesh Kamal, Co-founders, Suno India, Hyderabad (interview January 2020)

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## Finding 8

### Employee and Share Ownership is of growing interest for both non-profit and for-profit impact media.

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Employee-ownership and share-ownership is emerging as a successful model for impact media; however true co-operative ownership, while common across the US, India and Sri Lanka in agriculture, retail and utilities, does not seem to be an attractive option for impact media.

#### Media Co-operatives

Truly co-operative models for impact media are not really taking root in the US, India and Sri Lanka, and are viewed with some nervousness, both around governance and ownership complexities, and possible restrictions to access charitable funds.

The Banyan Project was a top-down attempt to build a network of independent but co-operatively owned local newsrooms in the US. Banyan's founder Tom Stites noted that, "The Banyan Project is still alive as an idea but has never attracted the multi-year funding needed to staff up and start planting co-ops community news sites."

I asked Tom why he thought co-ops would be more financially sustainable than other models for media, such as for-profit, non-profit, charitable, public benefit corporation etc. He remains convinced that individual contributors to media, as donors and members, would prefer to sign up as co-operative members if given the opportunity:

"Co-op memberships offer far more value than the memberships offered by non-profit and for-profit news sites, where essentially, being a member means that you just give money. Co-op membership gets you a small chunk of equity, a vote in board elections, and a serious voice in what gets covered and how. What it boils down to is that a co-op, properly presented, is monetising a sense of civic potency or possibility."

Tom noted that in other sectors across the US co-operative structures are much in use:

"The most common co-ops in the US are credit unions — there are thousands of them. There are hundreds of food co-ops. About 30 percent of the US agriculture

economy runs through co-ops, which include some well-known brand names. Co-op electric and telephone utilities serve huge rural areas. Worker co-ops are being formed at a good clip."

But not in media clearly.

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser wrote a report about media co-operatives in the US, looking at the Banyan Project, but was not very encouraging, noting that while there was fast-growing interest from the public in donating to media, and in increasing their engagement, taking the next step to community ownership was not yet there.

She also noted potential regulatory and financial issues around combining a charitable structure with a co-operative structure:

"Unlike a cooperative, a 501c3 (US charity) non-profit cannot be owned by its members. It is, fundamentally, owned by the public.

"For example, if a non-profit shuts down, its assets must flow to another non-profit. For that reason, a 501c3 cannot really be a cooperative in the true sense of that business model. There are many reasons organizations might prefer the 501c3 model instead of the cooperative business model. For one, most philanthropists and major donors will only provide grant money to a 501c3.

"A significant number of organizations — including many independent media organizations — would simply not be viable without some philanthropic support."<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile, six months on, Tom Stites is still hopeful that there will be a move to co-operative ownership of impact media:

"The coronavirus's crushing of the economy has accelerated the trend toward 'news deserts' and that has rekindled interest in the co-operative Banyan model, which is designed to thrive in the digital future and not wither and die as we watch. So something may yet come of it."

Perhaps media owners and founders in the US are also put off having a fully co-operative model by the decades of negativity around the governance structure of the Pacifica Foundation, where a 75 year old vision and legacy of impact and audiences has been seriously damaged and hampered through the co-operative ownership and elected governance structure.

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88 Media Cooperatives: Challenges and Opportunities @2019 Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

“The Pacifica National Board, re-elected each year, from its mass membership, has eight sub-committees, each with up to 20 members. In addition, there are eight PNB working groups, with unspecified memberships. This structure seems unwieldy and unnecessarily complex.”<sup>89</sup>

“What is the Pacifica National Board doing? The governance structure of Pacifica, our historic culture of the usual political infighting, etc., has led to disagreement and paralysis. Unless action is taken pretty immediately, we may cease to exist.”<sup>90</sup>

I advise that the UK should not rule out co-operative or mass member-ownership models for impact media, but anyone considering this model should take careful advice from Coops UK, our main co-operative infrastructure organisation, and related regulators, funders etc. And beware of the Pacifica story — mass-ownership governance can be a challenge.

### Employee-ownership is a growing ownership model for impact media, in both the US and India, generating much interest

In the US, The Colorado Sun’s innovative structure is much talked about and admired. The Colorado Sun describes itself as “a reader-supported, journalist-owned newsroom”. A hybrid employee-owned newspaper, with a for-profit ‘public benefit corporation’ structure, ‘The Sun’ has had real success – both financially, building 10,000 regular member donors in 18 months, and with its social impact across Denver and Colorado.

The Colorado Sun was set up in 2018 as a public benefit corporation with the support of Civil, the non-profit news catalyst infrastructure organisation, recently closed, and a Kickstarter fundraising campaign. This structure was put in place as a direct alternative structure to the dearth, and death, of local newspapers in Denver, and wider Colorado.

Under Colorado law, a public benefit corporation is a for-profit corporation “that is intended to produce a public benefit or public benefits and to operate in a responsible and sustainable manner.” It’s a classic social enterprise. This structure enables the paper to receive charitable funds, commercial sponsorship and membership donations, all of which they proudly acknowledge on their website and in their print newspapers, emails and social media.<sup>91</sup>

Larry Ryckman, Editor and Co-Founder, writes:

“Now for the good news: Our readers have stepped forward in a big way. We have seen remarkable growth in our membership, a 45% surge in the past eight months that has propelled us to the verge of 10,000 paying members. More than 50,000 people subscribe to our newsletters.”

Members donate a minimum of \$5 a month – or \$60 a year, though many pay \$20 a month - \$240 a year, or more.

At the opposite extreme, in 2001 in India, a group of eleven Adavasi ‘Dalit’ women took on joint ownership of the Deccan Development Society’s Community Media Trust, based in the tiny rural village of Pastapur in Andhra Pradesh, India. I was hosted by the DDS founder P.V. Sathesh and was lucky enough to visit their video production and training centre in the village and the nearby radio station in the fields that they own, while visiting Hyderabad University’s award-winning Department of Communications, which specialises in Community Media, and hosts the UNESCO Professor of Community Media, Vinod Pavarala.

The women’s co-operative and the radio station are flourishing, with a mix of older and younger women leading the work, building their own skills and those of the local villages.



Deccan Development Society’s Community Media Trust poster.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

<sup>89</sup> Carole Travis, Board Chair of one of the Pacifica-owned stations, KPFA LSB

<sup>90</sup> Quincy McCoy, General Manager, Pacifica Network

<sup>91</sup> <https://coloradosun.com/members-sponsors/>



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Deccan Development Society's Community Media Trust screening with young village film-maker.

An article from the Deccan Herald in 2001 describes the event – 19 years on the women are still going strong:

"In a pathbreaking exercise 10 Dalit women of Andhra Pradesh have been trained in wielding the video camera. More importantly these women have been handed over the ownership of this tool to voice their opinions and grievances.

"A pathbreaking experiment has been attempted and proved successful in empowering illiterate rural women that can well stand all earlier premises and theories of development and communication on their head. A group of 10 Dalit women of Pastapur in the backward and dry Medak district of Andhra Pradesh have been trained not only in wielding the video camera but also in scripting,

editing and dubbing the films. And perhaps for the first time in India and the world even, the women have been handed over the ownership of this powerful tool of communication.

"The Deccan Development Society's Community Media Trust was formalised on October 15, the International Rural Women's Day and handed over to the Trustees. As the preamble of the Trust says, it was formed "in fulfilment of the wishes of thousands of women from DDS Sanghams who wish to have their unrecognised voices heard and recognised by the world outside. Six women trustees formally signed the trust deed. The 11 trustees include eight Sangham members and three nominated members."<sup>92</sup>

92 R. Akhileshwari Hyderabad, DECCAN HERALD October 21, 2001 (Virtual voice) <http://www.ddsindia.com/www/cmt.htm>

## Share ownership

There is a new development in the US for impact media to make share offers, as a means to raise cash investment, a model that is also just starting in the UK.

### Berkeleyside: a much talked about example in the US

In 2016, Berkeleyside, a local digital news site founded in 2009, in Berkeley, just outside San Francisco, became the first local news site in the US to launch a 'direct public offering' (DPO), offering up to \$800,000 in preferred stock to California residents. A DPO is similar to an initial public offering (IPO) in that securities, such as stock or debt, are sold to investors. The DPO closed two years later in 2018, after Berkeleyside had raised \$1 million from 355 readers. Nieman Lab reported in October 2016, when Berkeleyside launched its DPO:

"While Berkeleyside could have chased investment from more traditional financiers, there was something symbolically compelling about giving readers the opportunity to have a direct role in the site's future."<sup>93</sup>

The DPO promised investors a 3 percent annual dividend, a higher return than the 7-year US Treasuries at the time. Many Berkeley residents said they invested in Berkeleyside because they valued reading about their own community and getting information that is not readily available from other news organisations.

In addition to the 355 investors, more than 4,000 people are now Berkeleyside members, contributing a minimum of \$60 a year to the site, which publishes five to 10 stories a day about issues in Berkeley and the East Bay. The membership has doubled over the last year. Readers can also subscribe to the newsletter, which is a free subscription, building a big potential donor/member base to cultivate. The Donate and Contribute buttons are on each page of the website, sometimes with a short message such as, "SUPPORT OUR JOURNALISM Donate to Berkeleyside and support independent local journalism."<sup>94</sup>

Below is the wording from Berkeleyside's 18-month DPO campaign, and the link to the original website:

"A Direct Public Offering, or DPO, is a public offering of securities by a business or nonprofit made directly to both accredited and non-accredited investors. By using a DPO, also known as investment crowdfunding, Berkeleyside ensures our pool of investors is from the 100%, not the 1%. Berkeleyside is reaching out directly to those who are already invested in our business in a different way: our community of readers. Our DPO gives you the opportunity to invest financially in something you believe in and to support a local business, thus keeping your money in the local economy. You invest in Main Street not Wall Street."<sup>95</sup>

In 2017, before the DPO had closed, Berkeleyside received a \$60,000 grant from the Lenfest Institute of Journalism to teach other news organisations how to launch a DPO. When I met Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Officer, (another new interesting role and title) at the Lenfest Institute, she was still excited by the Berkeleyside model:

"They fashioned it after the Green Bay Packers football team in America, where you can buy shares. So they offered up shares in their media organisation. It's not a dividend producing share [CD: actually it is, 3%], more of an ownership share, and I think they raised a million dollars. We were one of the early funders, small funders to it, because we thought it was a really interesting experiment in community ownership and community investment."<sup>96</sup>

I was excited by the Berkeleyside DPO too, given Together TV's own community share offer in 2016. And I liked the way Berkeleyside are successfully managing a hybrid combination of income from shareholders, a growing wider member base of donors, commercial advertising and sponsorship, high profile community events alongside free subscriptions (giving the station the email data that they then convert to engaged member donors) - all within a charitable 'parent' company, Cityside, giving them enormous flexibility around income and structure. They have now launched two more new news sites in other areas.

Understanding Berkeleyside and Cityside's model reinforced the success of the two UK impact media organisations that have been able to use the hybrid cooperative Community Benefit Society (CBS) model to raise community shares:

93 <https://www.niemanlab.org/2016/10/with-a-direct-public-offering-berkeleyside-wants-to-turn-its-readers-into-its-newest-owners/>

94 <https://invest.berkeleyside.com/>

95 <https://invest.berkeleyside.com/>

96 Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Officer, Lenfest Institute (interview November 2019)

Together TV (The Community Channel)<sup>97</sup> and Positive News<sup>98</sup>.

The CBS structure in the UK allows for 'exempt' charitable status via HMRC, giving charitable tax benefits, and enabling access to charitable funds from the more enlightened foundations, though not all, to lottery distributors and individual donors, triggering both Gift Aid from donations, and 30% Social Investment Tax Relief from any share purchases. In the UK, Together TV and Positive News successfully transitioned their ownership, governance and funding structures through becoming a CBS and running a share ownership Crowdfunding campaign.

It was good to learn from the sophisticated and flexible mix of income models, structures and governance that Berkeleyside, and their 'parent' charity Cityside, are using.<sup>99 100</sup>

## Finding 8

Employee and Share Ownership is of growing interest for both non-profit and for-profit impact media.

## Recommendations for the UK

- Employee, audience and community share ownership models should be considered by both existing and start-up impact media organisations in the UK.
- More infrastructure research, advice and regulatory support should be provided, noting that these media ownership models in the UK currently require a complex and bureaucratic mix of regulation from multiple bodies, such as the FCA, HMRC, Companies House, Ofcom, Charity Commission, Scottish Charity Regulator and others.
- Some charitable funders will not give grants to organisations not fully registered as a charity, or 'exempt' charities registered with the HMRC. Boards should consider carefully all the opportunities and potential disadvantages of going down a hybrid model. UK charity regulators should also review their policies to allow full charitable registration for impact media organisations with 'mutual' ownership.

<sup>97</sup> <https://www.togethertv.com/>

<sup>98</sup> <https://www.positive.news/>

<sup>99</sup> <https://www.berkeleyside.com/2016/11/03/an-invitation-to-our-readers-invest-in-berkeleyside-help-ensure-the-future-of-a-free-press-in-berkeley>

<sup>100</sup> <https://invest.berkeleyside.com/investment/>

## Finding 9

### Impact media owned by schools and universities can be well-resourced and effective.

In the US and India, it is common for universities to own impact media, from grassroots community media stations to multi-million PBS and NPR stations, to innovative digital media initiatives born out of university innovation labs. There is potential to replicate the best of these models in the UK.

University-owned community media is common practice across India, and in parts of the US and Sri Lanka. When community radio first launched in India the only way to access one of the new community radio licenses was via an established, and politically neutral non-profit organisation — a university initially, then widened, to include schools, charitable foundations and agricultural institutions. That requirement continues, with only a few exceptions. The typical model is that the university, school or charitable foundation provides the infrastructure (radio mast, tech support and premises) and can more easily secure the broadcast license from Government.

In India and Sri Lanka it was commonly noted to me that any non-governmental organisation (NGO) with a radical or campaigning agenda would not be given a license by the government; partnership with a university can give more flexibility, including easier access to overseas foundation grants.

The media project and platform also provides opportunities for students to train, learn new skills, volunteer, and there is often a track record of these students moving into mainstream media or setting up their own digital media platforms. The university can ensure that the radio station is delivering social impact activity in the community outside the university – such as educational campaigns and volunteering opportunities in the station and the community, providing access to impact research.

I do think there is enormous potential and need for the UK to build a stronger grassroots local media infrastructure through partnerships with universities and colleges, and even schools and academies. The training opportunities of working on broadcast stations allows for real benefits, from engagement to skills, and future educational and career opportunities. In parallel, the university is providing the local community with a useful community resource.



Pinky Chandran with Radio Active's rescue dog.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

There are enormous advantages to impact media, educational establishments and charities in the UK to learn from, and replicate or amend these ownership structures, which, when done well, can create a win-win partnership and enable access to resources.

Radio Active in Bengaluru is owned by the India-wide JGI Group, an education provider and an entrepreneurship incubator in India. The JGI Group successfully operates 85 educational institutions with 51,600 students and 6,450 employees engaged at the K-12, undergraduate and postgraduate levels spread across 64 campuses pan India.

Radio Active is a highly respected and influential non-profit community radio station, based in Jain University in Bengaluru. Pinky Chandran, Director and Co-founder of the station, noted that with the recent Indian government's restrictions on allowing charities to receive grants and donations from outside India, it is easier for their university owners to access external funding for the station, in addition to their extensive free office space, access to student volunteers, digital skills and technical infrastructure. Pinky noted that Radio Active is well-integrated with diverse communities in Bengaluru, helping the university reach out to potential students from poorer communities.

Radio Charminar in Hyderabad, is owned by and based in the Ahle Bait Institute, a secular Hyderabad education society and school with 600 pupils, privately owned by a leading Muslim educationalist, Hassan Rahimtula. The station provides a vital



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

RJ Anisha, Radio Charminar.

voice to the Urdu and Hindi speaking communities across Hyderabad, including running paid campaigns for UNICEF and other foundations. It provides skills and training opportunities to the school's students, and wider community and has impressive listening and engagement numbers.

Detroit NPR station is owned by Wayne University, also able to benefit from the university's charitable status, research facilities and student volunteers. The University has been particularly useful in providing impact evaluation and research resources, to underpin the growth in outreach to potential individual and institutional donors, who want to see effective 'proof of impact' not just audience numbers.

KCRW, the Los Angeles multi-million dollar radio station, is owned by Santa Monica College, with a major KCRW Foundation that manages the charitable giving. The radio station has access to talented creative media students and a high profile location for their new building, where even the benches are sponsored, as part of the \$50million raised from the public and foundations to build the new HQ and studios.

University incubators: In the US and India, universities are seeding, growing and sometimes keeping part-ownership of innovative digital impact media initiatives, born out of their innovation labs.

Gram Vaani, meaning 'voice of the village', is a social technology company incubated out of the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi. Gram Vaani started in 2009 with the intent of "reversing the flow of information", that is, to make it bottom-up instead of top-down:

"Mobile Vaani is a unified platform for rural voice-based social media that integrates our phone networks in Jharkhand, Bihar, and the North East, with our network of over a dozen community radio stations in the Hindi belt. This gives Mobile Vaani a reach of over half a million households, primarily comprised of low-income families in rural areas. Mobile Vaani provides a facility of reaching out to this population with development messages, employment alerts, entrepreneurial activities, and also conduct market research studies.

“We have won several awards, including the Knight News Challenge in 2008. We work with organizations all across India and in other developing parts of the world.

“We want to remove the word “media dark” from the face of the Earth. We want to write history of having created a novel medium that actually leads to change. We want to see a better India and a better world, that uses technology appropriately, as Santosh, our volunteer in Madhubani, said: to help us reflect and form our own conclusions and act accordingly, which we are sure will bring for everybody peace and clarity to move the world forward.”<sup>101</sup>

## Finding 9

Impact media owned by schools and universities can be well-resourced and effective.

## Recommendations for the UK

- I would recommend that more research across UK universities and schools is undertaken and shared to explore opportunities for both community media and digital media ownership and incubation. This is potentially a win-win-win structure — for access to funding and resources, skills development, innovation, and community impact.
- Existing impact media organisations that are struggling, or looking for investment, should consider partnerships with universities and/or schools, including Academy groups.

101 Aaditeshwar Seth, Co-founder and Director, Gram Vaani

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## Finding 10

Transition: collaboration, consolidation and mergers to create more flexible ownership structures are increasingly common and delivering strategies for greater financial sustainability and social impact.

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The UK impact media ecosystem could benefit from reviewing potential transition opportunities from one governance structure to another, and from considering collaboration, joint ventures, and mergers.

### Sharing of content and content distribution

The NPR and PBS model is one that could be replicated across the UK, if not globally - a central distribution function for content is vital to the structure of the local radio and TV stations in the US. This could be an exciting solution for civil society social impact media in the UK. There is a wealth of dynamic and impactful content created in impact media projects that hardly gets seen or heard, and that could be shared across a range of impact media organisations. We should explore having a central function that aggregates, commissions and distributes social impact content to both mainstream and community media outlets. This function could play a major role in widening the diversity of voices and independent content makers, helping content makers reach new audiences, and earn more, as well as providing content for independent media outlets that attracts audiences, funding, content and advertising. And it could be a hub for training, diversity, across a wide range of functions from commissioning to rights and distribution.

The power of an editorial platform and voice remains, and interesting partnerships are now emerging with the social media giants.

Impact media think tanks are imagining scenarios where funding and distribution can be made available outside the commercially owned, government owned and digitally controlled networks.

Timothy Karr, Senior Director of Strategy and

Communications at Free Press, wrote a detailed paper in late 2019 looking at funding options for public interest media, and suggested taxing the online advertising economy in the US:

“A 2% tax could get you anywhere from two-three billion dollars in tax revenues. That would then go towards a public interest media endowment to support local non-commercial media, in addition to supporting the creation of non-commercial distribution pathways and platforms.”<sup>102</sup>

Ethan Zuckerman, MIT Media Lab and founder of Global Voices, also argues for a neutral non-profit online content distribution network, independent of the existing internet providers.<sup>103</sup>

### Merger, growth, acquisition to create ‘group’ structures

In the US, while many local radio stations have a strong local identity, community boards and brands, they are often owned by large, often charitable, media groups, as discussed in Section 1 above. Large groups can share content and overheads. Unlike the UK though, where local station identity, and local content, is rapidly being lost within a commercial media group structure, in the US the charitable purpose ensures that the individual stations put increasing effort into building local identity, local content, and local audience engagement. Group structure is more often seen as enabling, supporting and resourcing, and stations continue to have local boards, that report into the group board, ensuring that local donors and members identify with their local station, as individual contributor income is now the fastest growing income source in most non-profit media.

Radio Bilingüe unusually has a powerful brand and group identity across all of its stations and distribution channels, including its own transmitter, and has grown from a small local station to having a broadcast presence across the US and global online reach. It's a fascinating example of entrepreneurial growth within a charitable structure, with a core target audience and impact purpose.

### Transition from for-profit to charity

I came across high impact examples of for-profit media companies that have transitioned into becoming, or being owned by, charitable non-profit foundations. These often ground-breaking and influential examples are often cited in meetings and case-studies, and are a growing trend across all

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102 Bot Populi article/iv 18 October 2019

103 Social Founder Stories podcast

three countries, as a solution to tough commercial economic environment, and the challenges of making profit, and delivering social impact, from commercial income alone.

The media companies I met with, now owned by a charitable foundation, are still able to earn commercial income (advertising, sponsorship, underwriting, sales, etc.) but profit remains within the charitable group, and of course the new

'parent' charitable company can more easily access donations and grants, alongside fiscal benefits.

See more detail and case studies about this common transition under Finding 7: Charities and Non-profits, above, including the new Lenfest Institute, set up to house the Philadelphia Inquirer, and the Oorvani Foundation, housing Citizen Matters.

## Case Study

### Block Club Chicago: Building innovation through market failure.

**Block Club Chicago is a 501(c)(3) non-profit news organisation dedicated to delivering reliable, non-partisan and essential coverage of Chicago's diverse neighbourhoods, created by two former DNAinfo Chicago editors following the financial collapse and shutdown of two long-established for-profit Chicago city newspapers, DNAinfo and Gothamist in November 2017.**

Thanks to more than 3,000 Kickstarter backers (who pledged \$183,720), and generous support from Civil, Block Club Chicago was able to recruit a dedicated team of reporters ready to hit the streets. Their focus remains on telling 'stories that matter' in the neighbourhoods and growing their coverage sustainably through amazing reader and donor support. From the start they wanted to be rooted in their communities:

"We decided to call ourselves the Block Club because we felt it reflected our mission: to build community through truly ground-level reporting of the city's neighbourhoods."<sup>104</sup>

Traditional 'block clubs' in Chicago are groups of people who have homes and families on any given block in the city and have organized to improve the quality of life in their neighbourhoods.

"People who form block clubs are concerned and care about their communities and share information, identify concerns and act collectively to address those concerns."

Block Clubs are seen as "sometimes the major outlets for community organizing in the city — especially in



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

neighbourhoods otherwise lacking in political strength and clout."<sup>105</sup>

Block Club Chicago's financial model is based on membership, donations and grants. 3,000 people contributed to a 4-week Kickstarter campaign in February 2018, enabling Block Club to launch in July 2018. By October 2019, when I met with their Co-Founder and Editor Shamus Toomey, they already had 10,000 subscribers, regularly contributing either \$6 a month, or \$59 a year (the vast majority), with a target of 20,000 subscribers to break-even by 2021.

The MacArthur Foundation had just grant-funded the costs of a 3 year Development Director post, in keeping with the MacArthur Foundation's stated commitment to fund infrastructure costs for social impact media projects. Block Club Chicago's Editorial Independence Policy is based on the standards of editorial independence adopted by the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN) – yet another of the

104 Co-Founder and Editor, Block Club Chicago, Shamus Toomey (interview October 2019)

105 Amanda Seligman, Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, in Chicago's Block Clubs 2016

infrastructure organisations in the US that underpin civil society impact media.

On Block Club Chicago's donations page, they expand on their charitable mission:

“Block Club Chicago is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit news organization dedicated to delivering reliable, relevant and nonpartisan coverage of Chicago’s diverse neighbourhoods.”

Their social purpose is clearly stated:

“Block Club believes all neighbourhoods deserve to be covered in a meaningful way. We amplify positive stories, show up to development and local school council meetings and serve as watchdogs in neighbourhoods that are often ostracized by traditional news media. Our reporters don’t parachute in once

to cover a story. They are in the neighbourhoods they cover everyday building relationships over time with neighbours. We believe this ground-level approach not only builds community but leads to a more accurate portrayal of a neighbourhood. Block Club is the most prolific hyperlocal news operation in the Chicago area. We’ve published more than 5,000 stories on Chicago’s neighbourhoods, covered hundreds of community meetings and send our newsletter out to more than 82,000 people daily.

“We’ve built this loyalty by proving to folks that we are not only covering their neighbourhoods, we’re actually part of them. Some of us have internalized the national media’s narrative of a broken Chicago. We aim to change that by celebrating our neighbourhoods and chronicling the resilience of the people who fight every day to make the city a better place for all.”

## Mergers and acquisitions: driving sustainability and impact

Particularly in the US, I saw some interesting mergers and collaborations between media companies, that enhanced their social impact and their financial sustainability. Digital platforms and skills were often the driver: the legacy TV and radio stations had not invested in digital and lacked experienced staff. Many of the commercially unviable legacy newspapers have developed a strong digital presence and expertise, but no viable financial model. Merging the two — broadcast and print/digital, while creating big cultural and structural challenges internally, and brand challenges externally — seems to offer a way to bring the best of both worlds together.

Kristen Muller, Head of Content at KPCC, a non-profit Los Angeles radio station owned by Southern California Public Radio, talked passionately about the benefits and challenges of their acquisition of LAist, two digital news sites with millions of readers and email lists. Driving internal culture change was a challenge, bringing together the radio reporters and the digital journalists/marketers:

“It was very difficult internally, with a sense, in the radio station, of ‘we’re reporters, we know what the community needs’”<sup>106</sup>

While the LAist digital news site was reader driven, with 30,000 email addresses:

“The (radio) Newsroom has now really changed its philosophy; there’s been massive culture change, breaking down silos, allowing for different models such as acquisition of business lists. We started a daily email and use daily text to reach out to communities that don’t have digital, plus local fliers. The discrepancies between households with no digital access are extreme. We identified households unlikely to have internet, and sent out 12,000 copies of a flier, using direct mail, offering resources, games, with a special link so we could track who was coming to us. We had to go to the community rather than expect them to come to us.”<sup>107</sup>

## Collaboration and partnerships

In Philadelphia this high-impact structural change is most in evidence – often encouraged and driven by grant funders’ requirements, but seemingly to the benefit of all the media outlets, and the wider community. Collaborative cross-media reporting and campaigns take place across large mainstream media outlets TV, Radio and Newspapers, working collaboratively with smaller outlets, such as the black community radio station WURD, the local community TV cable station PhillyCam and others. The benefits of cross-

<sup>106</sup> Kristen Muller, Head of Content at KPCC

<sup>107</sup> Kristen Muller *ibid*.

working and collaboration are mutual: smaller media outlets get access to funding, brand exposure and cross-promotion, new skills and training; the large media outlets get access to grassroots stories and reporting, diverse new talent (lack of diversity is a big issue in the old mainstream media outlets, which until recently have been seen as “male, pale and stale”), new audiences, and better credibility and engagement with diverse audiences and communities. The wider media industry across the US was constantly referring to Philadelphia as a model for the future – restructured media ownership and governance, new leadership and management, innovative cross-media partnerships, deep community engagement, diversity of voice, and campaigns that drive social change and community cohesion. There needs to be a catalyst for this to happen though – in Philadelphia that is the Lenfest Institute, which through the major financial and visionary investment of a long-term ‘historical’ civic leader, created ongoing impetus.

### One radical transition

One of the most exciting grant-making foundations I talked to was born from the sale of a Public TV station WYBE transitioning into a radical grant-making endowed media foundation. No longer an impact media broadcaster, but instead making a myriad of innovative funding interventions to enable others to create impact media. WYBE was the only station in the country to seize the opportunity of a bandwidth auction to transform itself from a broadcaster into a private foundation, Independence Public Media Foundation, believing it could have far greater and longer-lasting impact on communities as a funder. IPMF has already made more than \$10 million in grants in its first year as a foundation:

“... honoring and carrying forward the very best of what WYBE offered the region, while also exploring new ways that media can foster understanding and improve people’s lives ... Through grant-making and other programs, the Foundation supports building and strengthening networks of people who are creating and sharing information, ideas, and stories for change and justice.”<sup>108</sup>

Infrastructure advice for transition, structures and governance: In the US, and now in India, there are organisations that will provide advice on options and implications for ownership, governance and structural models, such as the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), who give model constitutions, advice on regulation, funding and editorial policies. These organisations, often charitable non-profits themselves, can also be a proactive catalyst for partnerships that then lead to merger and restructure.

## Finding 10

Transition: collaboration, consolidation and mergers to create more flexible ownership structures are increasingly common and delivering strategies for greater financial sustainability and social impact in the US and India.

### Recommendations for the UK

- UK impact media organisations should review potential opportunities and benefits to transition from one governance structure to another, to drive increased financial sustainability, entrepreneurialism and social impact
- Collaboration, joint ventures, and mergers should be considered to provide more resource, content and cross-platform opportunities.
- Regulators and funders should be encouraged to support more flexible structures and governance.
- The UK would benefit from infrastructure agencies to advise on impact media structures and governance.

108 <https://independencemedia.org/>

## Theme 3

### Social impact

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#### Finding 11

The changing funding and ownership structures across impact media in the US and India are generating increasing social impact for citizens and communities. This social impact is visible, tangible, evidenced and celebrated. Social impact is a catalyst for growing funding from institutions and individuals, which in turn creates more engagement and impact. At its best, it's a perfect circle.

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Across three very different countries there was a strong social impact story running through each media organisation I visited, often well measured, evidenced and shared with audiences, communities and stakeholders.

The social impact varied from one media organisation to another, in what it achieved, how it was achieved, how it manifested, as well as in the ratio of media output to social impact, but it was there, in the content, in the messaging, in the audience feedback, in community and stakeholder feedback, and reflected in the often generous financial support coming into the media projects from audiences, communities, funders and impact investors.

Across the staff, board members and volunteers I met with there was a passion for, belief in and commitment to the purpose and social impact of their media output, across legacy and digital-born media, from the most grassroots to the largest, from the purely charitable to the for-profits and social enterprises. Many of the companies I met are newly ensuring that a senior staff member has 'engagement' in their title, and the responsibility to ensure that across all teams, engagement is seen as a priority: Kellie Castruita Specter is Director of Marketing and Engagement for WNET/13 in NYC; Chicago Public Television, a non-profit charity, has recently created a new role of Director of Engagement, appointing Tim Russell, a high-profile senior Chicago leader.

These new roles are seen as key to the future brand of the media organisation, including with wider stakeholders, redefining its social purpose, its audience relationship, and

underpinning the strategy to grow audience contributions, donations from major donors and foundations.

And this was echoed by the media funders, media infrastructure agencies and academics I met with, whose own research and findings make a powerful case for growing and strengthening the network of impact media across our four UK nations and globally. The massive growth in social media across all three countries, while bringing many social, democratic and economic benefits to communities, was seen as a reason to donate and invest even more into impact media platforms, with their trusted editorial content, and strong links to their audiences and communities.

**The changes in funding strategies highlighted in Theme 1 and 2 above — such as increased grant funding, investment and expertise into individual giving infrastructure, the developments in ownership structures, governance and staffing — were nearly always consciously put in place to drive an increase in social impact, alongside improved financial sustainability.**

I found a strong cyclical link between social impact in communities, impact storytelling, audience engagement, community loyalty, and then financial contributions into the media projects. Social impact is a catalyst for further funds which in turn create further impact. At its best, it's a perfect circle:

“Donors are much more interested in understanding the impact that the journalism has had on the community, and the belief that if your journalism has an impact on the community, then the journalism will thrive, because people will see the impact. It becomes a virtuous cycle. And so we're starting to look at, and tell our donors about, things they funded that have actually changed legislation, or that has stopped some kind of abuse, and really trying to show how the journalism has impacted the civic life of Philadelphia, as opposed to ‘Now the newspaper's healthy and it's thriving.’”<sup>109</sup>

Media Impact Funders, the US charity supporting philanthropic funders of impact media, highlights the power of media to create social change:

“More than any other resource, media brings home the reality behind social issues in a visceral way. It is far

more likely that audiences will remember a compelling television documentary or radio segment than a bar chart or a lengthy print report riddled with statistics. Great storytelling through media gives foundations unique opportunities to capture the attention of general audiences, legislators and other media outlets.”<sup>110</sup>

The Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation (IPSMF) in India defines the media they invest in as:

“... Media that is socially impactful: reports, facts and stories that are not just facts in abstraction but favourably impact society and the citizens and are potential harbingers of positive change.”

The IPSMF has a detailed theory of change for their investment in media, which they use to attract funding and then invest, via grants and contracts, in ‘socially impactful’ media initiatives. Their theory of change captures the link between media and social impact, and the IPSMF's rationale for setting up their media foundation, and for continuing to support impact media in India to grow its reach and impact:

“... Through grants, fund initiatives and actions that create an ecosystem that sets trends; fosters and accelerates excellence in public-interest journalism; influences public debate and policy; informs, influences, challenges and complements the mainstream media; and creates a narrative that empowers individuals and communities to exercise their democratic franchise in a responsible manner.”

The IPSMF uses a complex diagram to show the inter-related cycle of social need, impact media and social impact.<sup>111</sup>

In the impact media projects I visited, or researched on my Fellowship there was an interweaving of social impact on:

- Community.
- Democracy, citizenship and accountability.
- Voice and visibility.
- Equity and human rights.
- Entrepreneurship, jobs, training and skills.
- Impact research, measurement and evaluation — and celebration.

Below are some examples of my findings in these areas, with

<sup>109</sup> Annie Madonia, Chief Advancement Officer, The Lenfest Institute (interview October 2019)

<sup>110</sup> <https://mediaimpactfunders.org/>

<sup>111</sup> <http://ipsmf.org/about-us/vision-values/>

overall recommendations on how impact media can increase social impact for the UK at the end of this section.

Impact media strengthens communities – bringing people together in communities of place and interest, and connecting people through their common use of the medium — as readers, viewers and listeners (including those not online), and as media-makers — community journalists and film-makers, from the most professional and skilled, to trainees, volunteers, activists and faith groups.

Some of the best community impact came from cross-media collaborations as highlighted under Theme 2 above.

“The past few years have been dedicated to getting into the community. Our team has been back in the community 4 years now. There’s an everyday mindset of getting into the community. There’s a recognition that we have to get more local, and balance Downton Abbey. We resurfaced old contacts that did community engagement, to connect with stakeholders, community leaders and content derived directly from our local communities.”<sup>112</sup>

Impact media organisations will often invest in bringing communities together physically for events and activities. I visited many impact media hubs that were a central point of contact for communities of all ages and background to come into, involving schools and charities, arts organisations, politicians, audiences, donors and members — for events, recordings, concerts and talks, debates, training, making media, or just for a coffee and cake, or an evening drink. What I call the ‘impact media hub’ would often be the biggest and most used community centre in an area, whether a radio station in a Dalit (‘untouchable’) village in rural India, or a vibrant community media hub in the Bronx or Detroit, whether the hidden-away ‘safe home’ of the radical digital Groundviews platform in Colombo, or City Bureau’s creative newsroom, café and bicycle-repair workshop for community reporters and film-makers in Chicago’s Southside, whether Seattle’s multi-million dollar new radio centre, or the Gaon Connection’s rural network of community media hubs across India – and so many more, deliberately reaching out to engage communities of all backgrounds, ethnicities, class, caste, abilities and ages in impact media.

The Texas Tribune, a high-profile non-profit and charitable digital news platform, sees community events as key to its civic role, as well as being a means to engage and grow both readers and members:

“Each year we host 50-plus on-the-record, open-to-the-public live events — on college campuses, in community centers and everywhere in between — at which public officials, policy wonks and newsmakers answer for the work they’re doing and how they’re spending your tax dollars. Events are often available via livestream video, for those who can’t attend in person, and following the conversation we publish and archive video online. Our signature annual event, The Texas Tribune Festival, attracts thousands of attendees to downtown Austin to learn about Texas’ biggest challenges and to engage in thoughtful discussion about their respective solutions. Decision-makers, industry leaders and community activists from near and far come to take part in this three-day event.”<sup>113</sup>

One of my strongest recommendations to the UK is that we should envision and make happen a network of creative social impact media hubs across our cities, towns and villages, linked to impact media outlets, where communities can come together to create content, engage with media and each other, debate, have a voice, learn new skills and much more. Our dying high streets could be revitalised.

“Community engagement is a practice. It is a calling. It is principled. It is agile. It goes sideways. It gets lonely. It is exhausting. It is painful. It is exhilarating. It evolves. It manifests in as many ways as we are human. It is the long game.”<sup>114</sup>



Ashley Alvarado, explaining KPCC’s Community impact theory.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

112 Detroit Public Television’s Ed Moore (interview October 2019)

113 <https://www.texastribune.org/about/>

114 Ashley Alvarado, Director of Community Engagement, KPCC, LAist, Los Angeles (interview November 2019)

“We’re changing the narrative — that PBS is coming into the neighbourhood,” reinforced Georgeann Herbert, SVP, Strategy and Community Engagement at Detroit Public Television, when I met with her.

### Impact media that reaches across geographies brings together communities of interest

Examples are Suno India’s podcast series on adoption (one of many topics), listened to by millions across India, or Radio Bilingüe’s network of Spanish-language stations across the US, some targeted at migrants, farm-workers, undocumented Spanish speakers, those living in poverty and constant fear, as well as the better-off Hispanic communities, providing support, advice, news and entertainment.

Or India’s networks of rural reporters, generating media for their local communities, for their own national networks, and feeding into mainstream media. Well-known and thriving rural media networks, talked about wherever I went in India, are the Gaon Connection, Khabar Lahariya, PARI and Video Volunteers. All four, in response to a dearth of reporting in mainstream media about rural lives, have evidenced an increase in legislative, economic, social, educational and health-based support for rural communities, by raising awareness of the issues and solutions for rural communities — and in India, according to the World Bank, 66% of the population are living in rural areas.<sup>115</sup>

### “In an era where India’s media industry concentrates on the urban concerns, Gaon Connection strives to give rural citizens a voice of their own.”<sup>116</sup>

“Gaon Connection is India’s biggest rural media platform, a two-way street that takes information to knowledge-starved rural communities and brings information about everything from problems to role models from media-dark areas to urban India. We create content customised for the rural citizens. We create innovative outreach mechanisms to directly reach rural citizens. We work with brands and Government to take their message to rural citizens. Gaon Connection has several key verticals which includes digital, video content, print, audio content, India’s biggest rural media survey team, and a massive ground presence of smartphone-armed cadres at the

district, block and gram panchayat levels. Together, it is a combination unmatched in India’s media landscape.”<sup>117</sup>

Journalist S.Mitra Kalita recently co-founded URL Media in the US, a network of Black and Brown impact media organisations, with Sara Lomax-Reese. Kalita reinforces the importance of connecting communities across geographies:

“Everything I’m doing now is rooted in community, but community isn’t just where you live. It might be your neighborhood or a diaspora or a network of newsrooms serving communities that mainstream media often ignores and rarely reflects.”<sup>118</sup>

Impact media strengthens democracy, citizenship and accountability: Much of the impact media I visited was focused on encouraging democratic engagement — using news, content, education and information to encourage voting, involvement in local to national politics including health and education, agriculture and business issues, influencing legislation, and driving social change through fostering active citizenship.

Daniel Ash, VP, The Chicago Community Trust, is determined to increase further the funding going into communities for media, to drive specific social outcomes:

“Journalism is critical to democracy and vital to informing and sustaining civic participation in communities.

“Since 2019, I have worked with my colleagues at The Chicago Community Trust to develop a strategic focus that will guide our work over the next decade. Our north star is to close the racial and ethnic wealth gap in our region because doing so benefits us all.

“One facet of our strategy is to create conditions whereby residents, especially in Black and Latinx communities that have experienced decades of disinvestment, are more active civic participants. We aim to do this by supporting infrastructure that connects residents to one another, so they are better able to generate and advance their own civic agenda. This strategy is called Building Collective Power.

“One essential aspect of it is a commitment to support local journalism and storytelling platforms authentic to and anchored within Chicago’s Black and Latinx communities.”<sup>119</sup>

115 <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS>

116 Neelesh Misra, Founder & CEO, Gaon Connection

117 <https://www.gaonconnection.com/about-us>

118 <https://www.poynter.org/locally/2021/how-s-mitra-kalita-went-from-leading-coverage-of-the-world-at-cnn-to-connecting-her-neighbors-in-queens/>

119 Daniel Ash, VP, The Chicago Community Trust (interview October 2019)

Khabar Lahariya, India's women-led digital rural news network, is clear about their democratic and civic role:

"We have been called a powerful local watchdog, an instrument for enforcing robust grassroots governance and accountability. We expose the acts of omission and commission by the local bureaucracy/political class. Our news – in video, text and audio formats – brings to light the growing distance between the promises made by the government in terms of rural development and empowerment, and the actual delivery on the ground."<sup>120</sup>

The Texas Tribune is upfront about its ambitions to encourage voting and civic participation, amongst much more:

"With Texas' abysmal voter turnout only one of many measures of the state's flagging engagement, we enthusiastically reaffirm each day our mission to motivate civic participation through civic education."<sup>121</sup>

### Impact media leaders and funders will frequently give examples of where they have impacted democratic structures and civic institutions

Annie Madonia talked of two Philadelphia examples:

"There was a school, a juvenile centre for young men who've had criminal lives at a young age, and they get put in there to be rehabilitated or whatever. One of our reporters uncovered that the kids were being beaten. This was a heavily subsidised school through the justice system, the court system. And within a week 50 of the boys were removed from the school, within a month the school was completely shut down. After years and years of these young men being treated this way."

"We have this new nonprofit newsroom called Spotlight PA, an investigative newsroom based in Harrisburg, they published six stories since they went live a couple of weeks ago. One was that the state police, no-one knew this, but years ago the state police stopped tracking whether or not they were getting more traffic stops and more arrests on the road of people of colour versus white drivers, no-one ever knew they stopped tracking, and so no one was holding the state police accountable for these injustices that happen all the time. Before the story even went live The State Police changed its policies and its programmes."<sup>122</sup>

Also in Philadelphia, Sara Lomax-Reese, President and CEO of WURD, the City's only black-owned and run radio station puts democratic engagement at the heart of her station's purpose:

"WURD has been really the primary vehicle through which people have been invited to call and march and show that particular police or city officials' behaviour is unacceptable. Some say that's not the role of journalism, but for me, looking at the legacy of black media, even from the abolitionist era, it has always been about championing justice for our people, and there's a lot of injustice right now, in Philadelphia and across the country, that disproportionately impacts black people along racial and socio-economic lines. And so, I would feel like we weren't really doing our job if we weren't actually galvanising people to show up, and to stand up, and to articulate what has to change."<sup>123</sup>



WURD Radio, Philadelphia, community events poster.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

120 <https://khabarlahariya.org/about-us/>

121 <https://www.texastribune.org/about/texas-tribune-strategic-plan/>

122 Annie Madonia, Lenfest Institute (interview October 2019)

123 Sara Lomax-Reese (interview October 2019)



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Radio Active office with trans-gender presenter from the Bengaluru community.

In Sri Lanka, Capital Maharajah's News 1st channel has:

"... Re-invigorated the Village Council fora, by taking it to the masses, and strengthening the fundamentals of democracy by instilling the ideal that even the highest echelons of government are directly responsible to the people."<sup>124</sup>

Gram Vaani, an impact media company rooted in mobile technology, and working in villages across much of India, incubated by the Delhi Institute of Technology, and now receiving impact investment, has democratic accountability as its core purpose:

"Using simple technologies and social context to design tools, we have been able to impact communities at large. Forty rural radio stations are able to manage and share content over mobiles and the web, corrupt ration shop officials in Jharkhand were arrested due to citizen complaints made on our platform, Women Sarpanches in Uttar Pradesh shared learning and opinions on their work with senior government officials, and citizens were able to monitor and report on waste management in 18 wards of Delhi to hold MCD officials accountable for their work."<sup>125</sup>

Ashish Sen, a community media practitioner across India over many years, as the founder of Voices, talked to me about the

impact of Radio Active on legislation around trans-gender people in Bengaluru:

"We need to build allied spaces and encourage cross-learning, media that is targeted and gives a voice to communities of interest, across geographies is as important as local cross-community media. Radio Active in Bangalore does both, working with communities of special interest, such as their content and stories around transgender communities, and has helped change legislation."<sup>126</sup>

The MacArthur Foundation, based in Chicago, and a US-wide funder, gives a detailed civic and democratic rationale for their impact media grant-giving:

"Despite abundant and growing sources of news and information, only a small percentage of journalism and media is created with an intention to engender deep understanding about current events; lift under-reported or misunderstood issues; include and amplify diverse perspectives; promote self-reflection, empathy, and mutual respect; and inspire civic engagement and action.

"As a result and compounded by systemic social and economic disparities and a highly polarized political

124 <https://www.newsfirst.lk/about-us/>

125 Aaditeshwar Seth, Co-founder, Gram Vaani

126 Ashish Sen (interview January 2020)

culture, large segments of the American public are misinformed, disengaged, and cynical about their role as civic actors and agents for social change.

“A small but growing community of nonprofit journalism and media organizations, supported by philanthropy and enabled by digital technologies, is working creatively and entrepreneurially to provide the American public with the information it needs for rigorous critical thinking and informed decision making and the opportunity and tools to share authentic and alternative perspectives for a robust civic dialogue.

“These organisations create and disseminate journalism and media content by professionals and citizens that is original, illuminating, and engaging, and they achieve a level of influence and impact disproportionate to their size and resources.

“Our Journalism & Media program seeks to strengthen and sustain an independent media ecosystem that investigates the actions of institutions, explores the implications of policies, challenges social norms, amplifies diverse perspectives, and creates opportunities for individual action and public conversations on urgent contemporary issues.”<sup>127</sup>

### At its best, impact media is often talked about as a source of trusted news and information versus the growing awareness of ‘fake news’ on social media

There is a powerful combination of trusted impact media, and related trusted social media, in-depth stories and reporting rather than soundbites, trusted well-known and loved presenters that often reflect audiences’ own backgrounds, media that meets with its audiences in person in media hubs, community centres, schools, churches, mosques, temples and synagogues, courts and town halls; media that invites its audiences into its buildings for events, training and celebrations.

Media that increasingly is community-owned, and almost certainly is community-funded. Media where neighbours, friends and family can work, or train, or volunteer, that will film or record the local concerts and plays you can’t afford to go to, or the local government and school meetings you can’t attend.

Trust was a strikingly common ingredient across the wide range of impact media organisations I visited in the US, India and Sri Lanka.



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

GRTV: Grand Rapids TV, Radio and Community Media Centre.

127 <https://www.macfound.org/programs/media/strategy/>

Media Impact Funders in the US gives much weight to philanthropy's role in supporting civil society media to help counteract 'fake news' and 'discern agreed-upon truths':

"Right now, there's an intense debate happening about the fundamental value of facts and the ability to discern agreed-upon truths. So as civil society continues to grapple with the need to address climate change, racial and gender inequities, nuclear disarmament and many other pressing social issues, the case for media and journalism, across the board in philanthropy, is stronger now than ever before. In response, more and more foundations, regardless of strategic objective or whether they expressly consider themselves media funders, are recognizing the power of the media to combat these problems."<sup>128</sup>

### Impact media champions voice and visibility, equity and human rights: Voice has always been seen as a route to empowerment and equity

Khabar Lahariya is India's largest network of rural women reporters. Meera Devi, Chief Reporter, for HuffPost India:

"Use only your own voice, it matters; tell the stories you want to tell. People know that their stories matter, that caste and gender are not shackles to hold you back. They should set you free."<sup>129</sup>

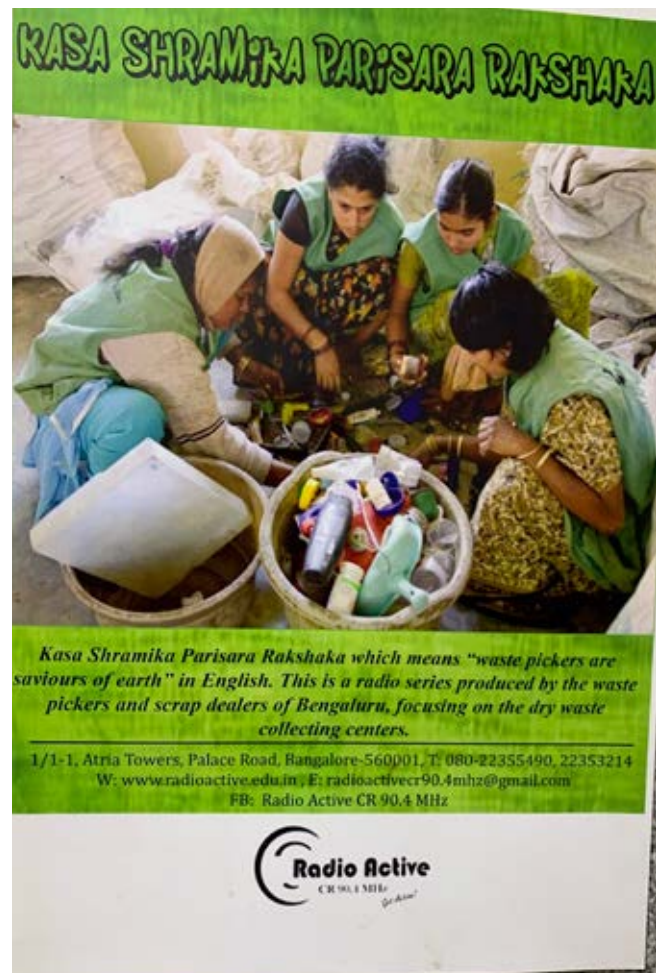
News1st in Sri Lanka has a network of 18,000 trained community reporters based in villages across the country, provided with training, and paid per story. Regularly giving a voice to unheard villagers has reached millions of influencers and decision-makers young and old, and their campaigns have had a direct impact on government policy and grants according to Managing Director, Chevaan Daniel:

"We have the strongest Provincial Correspondent Network and U-Reporter network of over 18,000."<sup>130</sup>

Daniel Ash, VP at the Chicago Community Trust, is clear about the impact of civil society media on misrepresented lives and communities:

"For communities that have their narratives co-opted or consistently portrayed inaccurately, civic power begins with reclaiming the power to document and tell their own stories."<sup>131</sup>

Radio Active in Bengaluru also has a hub based in the Jain University that owns and funds the station in the heart of the city. Spacious offices and studios are used to bring in the wider community who in turn are trained to create content, alongside student volunteers. While I was in the building for a few hours there was a constant stream of groups coming for meetings, debates and recordings – mothers of children with disabilities, waste-workers, sweepers (one of the lowest castes in India) who had a regular slot on the station, a local dog charity that uses the station to find lost dogs and place others for adoption, some of the traditional Bengaluru trans community, who also have regular programming slots on the station, with well-known trans reporters. Engagement drives impact.



Bengaluru waste-workers have their own regular Radio Active programme.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl

<sup>128</sup> <https://mediainpactfunders.org/>

<sup>129</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.in/khabar-lahariya/what-it-takes-for-a-woman-to-be-a-journalist-in-the-regressive-backlands-of-uttar-pradesh\\_a\\_23369114/](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/khabar-lahariya/what-it-takes-for-a-woman-to-be-a-journalist-in-the-regressive-backlands-of-uttar-pradesh_a_23369114/)

<sup>130</sup> <https://www.newsfirst.lk/about-us/>

<sup>131</sup> <https://www.cct.org/2020/06/why-community-media-matters/>



Pinky Chandran, Radio Active: 'Being the voice of the voiceless' article

Many impact media organisations are campaigning for access to basic human rights — for water, health, food, education, jobs and digital access — from inner city food distribution campaigns such as the 'back-pack' food parcels distributed by KPCC radio in Los Angeles (long before COVID-19 hit) to campaigning for access to running water in homes across Detroit or in Indian villages. No wonder that one Detroit audience member wrote in to say to the local station:

"You are our friend. We love you. We love what you do for us and for others."

The 'digital divide' is an equity issue in so many ways — education, information, education, health, community, work and so much more. Wherever I went, in cities and rural areas, people told me about the enormous numbers of people not online, not using digital, using mobile phones maybe but not being able to afford data other than for text, or at home not having access to broadband, or even the most basic internet. Internet access was costly when, in some communities, such as those I visited in Detroit or Gurugram (Gurgaon), many people struggled to afford access to running water, gas and electricity. While I expected this in villages and urban slums across India, I was not expecting to see such poverty as I saw across cities in the United States, in Washington DC, in Detroit, in Fruitvale, Oakland just 15 minutes from the centre of San Francisco, and in Los Angeles. For these communities, access to 'legacy media' - television, radio, newspapers, text messages - remains important. Millions of people still do not have access to digital data and bandwidth, even if they have managed to access a smartphone or laptop. The widespread digital training opportunities, and access to

computers, provided by those impact media hubs reaching into the poorest communities is much valued. In India where more than half of the population do not have access to the internet<sup>132</sup>, impact media organisations are, alongside the government and mobile companies, finding solutions:

"The Gram Vaani team shares one idea — 'junoon', meaning 'passion', bordering on obsession. We work to create better, more community-relevant technology because we believe it can fundamentally improve social structures."<sup>133</sup>

In Sri Lanka, News 1st and Sirasa TV, for profit channels rooted in social impact, owned by the Capital Maharaja network, have been running Gammadda, an innovative initiative, founded and led by Group Director Chevaan Daniel, to identify and highlight the socio-economic challenges, and inequities, faced by individuals and villages in the most rural areas of the country:

"We send out experienced reporters to villages across the island as part of our ground-breaking Gammadda initiative, linking the most isolated villages to mainstream national broadcast audiences, raising awareness of rural village issues, and the villagers' own solutions. Key to the initiative is to identify the solutions, and support the villagers to implement them, as well as to influence political change."<sup>134</sup>



Chevaan Daniel, Group Director, Capital Maharaja, and Founder, Gammadda.

132 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/792074/india-internet-penetration-rate/>

133 Aaditeshwar Seth, Co-founder, Gram Vaani

134 Chevaan Daniel, Group Director, Capital Maharaja (interview February 2020)

## Case Study

### Gammadda



**“Since independence, the people of Sri Lanka have been forced to rely on the activities of successive governments which move at a snail's pace. As a result, there continues to be many areas all around the country that need urgent assistance. The time has come to break the system, destroy the norm and stand up for ourselves.”**

“Gammadda simply is an initiative for the people by our people. For decades Sri Lankans have suffered and have waited for someone to help them, provide the necessities

they very badly require. One person or one government cannot fulfill their wishes. This is where News 1st jumped into action and began the Gammadda initiative. It has become Sri Lanka's largest ongoing humanitarian initiative in its history both in terms of its reach and diversity of projects.

“Every year men and women of News 1st travel to the far corners of the nation ignored by political bodies because they believe that the key to Sri Lanka's development lies in the majority of rural folks. The people are questioned as to what they need and what requirements they are missing in their daily lives. It could be water sources, roads, light towers, power and in some cases, a cemetery. Gammadda works with the University of Peradeniya to investigate the issues in villages island wide and design ways to apply the best solutions.

“That is where as a media-focused business we break the stereotypical picture and paint a new one.”<sup>135</sup>

135 <https://www.gammadda.lk/>

## Championing rights

In rural India, Khabar Lahariya's network of women reporters is championing the rights of women and girls:

“Our rural journalism is feminist. We report on issues of violence against women with an astute understanding of gender and caste structures within which this violence is situated. News reports in Khabar Lahariya question structures of power and inequity in the personal sphere of the family, as well as in the public realm.”

And Radio Active in Bengaluru is making programmes to challenge discrimination against sex workers, who are also the presenters, as with their ‘Waste pickers are saviours of the earth’ programme series, giving a voice to those most marginalised and discriminated against.

In Detroit, Bridge Magazine has seen civic action taken after highlighting the plight of the 23,473 Detroit citizens who had their water cut off in 2019:

“Detroit officials took steps this week to quell the flood of water shutoffs, as the controversy has become an issue

in the Democratic presidential campaign. On Wednesday, board members of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department voted to ask a regional authority to double the amount of aid available to residents to avoid shutoffs. The action came two days after Bridge Magazine reported that city shut-offs last year jumped 44 percent to 23,473.

“As of January 15th 2020, 37 percent of homes in the City of Detroit, about 9,500, that were shut off in 2019 still didn't have service.”<sup>136</sup>

In the poorest communities across the US, India and Sri Lanka, urban and rural, text is commonly used by the TV & radio stations large and small, urban and rural, and even by digital-born initiatives such as media charity Outlier Media in the US and media social enterprise Gram Vaani in India.

Outlier Media, based in Detroit, uses text/SMS to reach, engage with, and provide vital information and direct support to residents without internet access — advice about housing eviction, benefits, health, and now most recently the Coronavirus.

136 <https://www.bridgemi.com/michigan-health-watch/bernie-sanders-calls-detroit-shutoffs-outrage-city-seeks-more-help>

Text is a massive medium for social impact in India and Sri Lanka, where, there are also communities that have no, or very little access to data and bandwidth. 10% of US adults do not use internet.<sup>137</sup>

Across all three countries WhatsApp is seen as a major tool for engagement, local community action, for national and local campaigns, for bringing people together to do something practical, meet, talk - also counteract loneliness and enhance mental health – a major issue among audiences of civil society public and impact media across all three countries, where depression and suicide is a growing trend among adults and young people. SNAP, based in Santa Monica, invests a lot in supporting the Crisis Text Line in the US, to support young people at risk of suicide.<sup>138</sup>

Sri Lanka, emerging so recently after a 25-year civil war, has and continues to create impact media that addresses human rights issues around the legacy of war, the ongoing trauma and injustices, in the context of governments that can be repressive and censoring. This from the *Freedom in Solidarity: Media Working for Peace in South Asia* report:

“The citizen journalism website Groundviews did some of the most telling early reporting on the conditions within the IDP camps, alerting national and international opinion to the growing conditions of squalor and distress ... The website’s reporting was accompanied by a poignant commentary on the level of concern of the mainstream media in the situation in the camps.”<sup>139</sup>

Groundviews, and its sister channels in Sinhalese and Tamil, have citizen journalism at their heart:

“The site uses a range of genres and media to highlight alternative perspectives on governance, human rights, the arts and literature, peace-building and other issues”

In 2009, Groundviews won the prestigious Manthan Award South Asia. The jury noted:

“What no media dares to report, Groundviews publicly exposes. It’s a new age media for a new Sri Lanka. Free media at its very best!”<sup>140</sup>

## Impact media leads to entrepreneurship, jobs, training and skills

Many impact media organisations have training initiatives built



Photograph © Caroline Diehl

Radio Active poster: sex workers programme series and presenter.

into their activity and brand, enabling them to reach out to diverse young people, skill them up to be the voice of their media project, send them back into communities as trusted reporters, and then sometimes take them on as more senior staff. Training provides wider skills useful for a broad range of future study and work as well as confidence, voice and visibility in the community.

From the rural village video reporters across Sri Lanka and India, to the network of community cable tv and public broadcasting stations in the US, people of all ages and backgrounds are skilling up, connecting with the lively media spaces in villages and inner cities – something to replicate in the UK, particular in areas where digital access is low and unemployment high.

I am encouraged by the number of impact media start-ups I came across too and see this as a big opportunity for the UK, to create a new layer of impact media social entrepreneurs.

## Impact media must invest in research, measurement, evaluation and celebration of their social impact

As in the UK, media companies large and small struggle to research, measure, evidence, and pay for, impact evaluation. This is where the fundraising investment in digital, telephone and door-to-door fundraising doubles up to capture impact in a win-win cycle of positive stories and contributions, community support and community loyalty.

137 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/22/some-americans-dont-use-the-internet-who-are-they/>

138 Camille Spalding (interview November 2019)

139 [https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/images/Asia\\_Pacific/IFJ\\_AP/reports-etc/2010\\_USIP\\_Freedom\\_in\\_Solidarity\\_-\\_English.pdf](https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/images/Asia_Pacific/IFJ_AP/reports-etc/2010_USIP_Freedom_in_Solidarity_-_English.pdf)

140 <https://groundviews.org/about>

In the US, India and Sri Lanka, partnerships have been grown, and funded, with local universities who carry out research, evaluation, impact measurement, such as in Sri Lanka, where Group Maharaja's TV channels have partnered with the University of Peradeniya to evaluate the long-standing Gammadda initiative (see above). Grant-giving foundations understand the importance of evaluation and are prepared to pay for it.

The non-profit charitable public TV station in New York, WNET's strapline is "Media with Impact". It has a main section on its website with that name, where it showcases the impact of its content on individuals, families and communities.

The impact media organisations I met with across the US, India and Sri Lanka have social impact at the heart of their work, output, financial models, governance and purpose. This is what we can inspire, strengthen and grow across the UK.

"We want to remove the word "media dark" from the face of the Earth. We want to write the history of having created a novel medium that actually leads to change. We want to see a better India and a better world, that uses technology appropriately, as Santosh, our volunteer in Madhubani, said: to help us reflect and form our own conclusions and act accordingly, which we are sure will bring for everybody peace and clarity to move the world forward."<sup>141</sup>

## Finding 11

The changing funding and ownership structures of impact media in the US and India are generating increasing social impact for citizens and communities. It is visible, tangible, evidenced and celebrated as a catalyst for growing funding.

## Recommendations for the UK

- Invest in social impact research and storytelling around impact media. We need to invest in researching, evaluating and sharing the social impact that impact media projects have, to tell this story and make the case with funders and regulators, audiences and communities — who can donate, become members, subscribe, and invest — and of course provide untold stories and impact solutions.
- Encourage and resource impact-driven media partnerships with charities, the public sector and government, universities, funders and mainstream media. UK public broadcasters should reach out to impact media organisations, to support a funnel of new and diverse talent and content from communities across the UK.
- Set up a Centre for Impact Media: a dedicated centre of excellence specialising in research, best practice and evaluation, training, skills and funding, including collaboration with impact media in other countries.
- Build a network of creative impact media hubs in communities. We should pilot and grow a network of creative impact media hubs across our cities, towns and villages, linked to impact media outlets, where communities can come together to create and share voices, content, engage with media and each other, debate, learn new skills, develop their own media initiatives, and much more, revitalising high streets and empowering communities. We could create a new layer of social media social entrepreneurs.

Photograph © Caroline Diehl



Poster for WNET, a non-profit public TV station in New York.

141 Aaditeshwar Sethi, Co-founder, Gram Vaani



Clockwise from top-left: The actual Secret Radio used by Ghandi's followers during India's struggle for independence, with an image of Dr. Usha Mehta above; Founder and Editor of Outlier Media, Sarah Alvarez (left) with colleague Katlyn Sofaea Alo Alapati; Radio Charminar presenter RJ Anisha with Station Manager, Santosh Aanabathula; on set at the WHY? television studio for the *You Oughta Know* programme.

# Recommendations and conclusion

## Five recommendations for the UK

Inspired and informed by my findings during my Churchill Fellowship travels in the US, India and Sri Lanka, visiting a wide variety of impact media projects, media funders, media social entrepreneurs and media support agencies, I am making the following five recommendations for the UK.

Taken together and implemented widely, my recommendations will, I hope, create a powerful and high impact network of flourishing, well-funded and well-governed civil society social impact media organisations across our four UK nations, in our cities, towns and villages, using both digital and legacy media. These will be a catalyst for strengthening communities, citizen engagement, and for positive social impact for people and places.

Now is the time, while ensuring we do not lose our unique public service and commercial media ecology, that in parallel the UK can invest in growing a third layer of media — civil society media, community media, media with social impact as its primary objective — impact media.

As impact media owners and boards, as funders, philanthropists and investors, as community leaders, social policy influencers and regulators, we can come together to make this happen and build common cause.

## Recommendation 1

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**Inspire and enable UK charitable foundations, lottery distributors, philanthropists and impact investors to fund and support social impact media.**

There's a real opportunity to inform, inspire, encourage and connect UK grant-givers, philanthropists and major donors, in order to increase their support for and investment in UK impact media, to support content, capacity-building, campaigns and outreach, infrastructure, innovation and impact research.

We should encourage foundations, lottery distributors and major donors to collaborate in their support of impact media - to jointly fund impact media work, and for their funding to be a catalyst for increased impact, diversity, partnerships, financial sustainability and innovation across civil society media, including match-funding, and support for impact media infrastructure bodies, all leading to a wide range of social and democratic benefits.

Impact investors should consider including a range of digital and technology impact media initiatives in their portfolios, using media as a route to deliver their strategic impact aims. Media social enterprises should consider accessing impact investment to enable scale and innovation, whether as start-ups or established organisations.

## Recommendation 2

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**Grow individual contributor income from audiences and communities, developing the culture, skills and resources across our impact media sector to build sustainable income from individuals, through donations, membership, community shares, social enterprise and subscriptions.**

My findings showed that individual contributor income is an area of rapid growth in the US and India. UK impact media should invest in both short-term and long-term campaigns to persuade their audiences, communities and stakeholders of the social value of their media product, and to convince them that contributing a small

amount to media, ideally on a regular basis, can be as worthwhile as giving to an animal, children's, environmental, educational or cancer charity. The UK is far ahead of the US and India in per capita regular individual giving in other charitable areas, and it should not be so difficult to build a similar case for support for impact media.

Media organisations in the UK will need to access training and expertise, and to consider implications for culture change, new staffing skills and internal communications to ensure effectiveness. A change in external communications and engagement, brand messaging and strategies, will be vital, and re-energising.

We need to raise awareness and build capacity in individual giving options across impact media. There should be a campaign to enable, inspire, sustain and grow individual contributor income for impact media in the UK, with investment in building the capacity and infrastructure to deliver this, and in parallel to drive engagement and social impact.

UK funders, impact investors and major donors should be persuaded of the value of helping impact media build sustainable new income streams from individual contributors, by contributing seed funds towards infrastructure costs, fundraising talent, marketing, capacity-building and match-funds.

UK impact media organisations could collaborate to build awareness of their impact and importance in our society and communities, creating a 'your media week' or similar, along the lines of Giving Tuesday. 'Support the media you love', 'media that makes an impact' and a host of other messaging can add impact, as it does in the US, India and Sri Lanka.

## Recommendation 3

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### **Create more entrepreneurial and flexible ownership and governance models for UK impact media organisations, including a mix of charitable and social enterprise strategies to enable growth in grants and donations, individual contributions, commercial income and impact investment.**

The main recommendation I make to impact media founders and owners, media social entrepreneurs, charitable boards, regulators, investors and funders in the UK is to be much more entrepreneurial and flexible regarding the structural and governance models for impact media, looking widely at optimum structures that will help drive a flexible and entrepreneurial mix of income, engagement and social impact. I recommend being open to considering transition from one governance model to another, and to building hybrid models within a group structure, allowing for more than one company that can, for example, separate for-profit trading from charitable activity and fundraising. I also recommend exploring possible mergers and joint ventures, between impact media organisations but also with others such as universities, charities and commercial organisations, to bring in new skills and resources, new audiences, content and operational models.

I recommend more risk-taking and innovation in the UK, where we are only just starting to experiment and innovate in media ownership models, far behind the innovation I found in the US, India and Sri Lanka. Entrepreneurial cultures and skills can deliver wide-reaching social impact via media — this should be encouraged and enabled, through an 'accelerator' programme of support for impact media start-ups, to inspire and invest in new creative media social entrepreneurs in the UK.

Boards and staff teams of impact media organisations need to diversify to include a wider range of skills, experience and backgrounds — commercial and charitable, business and community, diversity of race, faith, culture, ability and age, and of course bringing in creative media and digital expertise, mirroring the 'double-bottom line' that leads to financial sustainability and social impact, but also the parallel worlds of legacy and digital media. Boards should be open to and encourage innovation in income generation, including mirroring the success of individual contributor income that is growing so fast in the US and India.

Funders, major donors and impact investors should be encouraged to invest in supporting organisational change and development in impact media organisations, building the capacity to enable all the above.

## Recommendation 4

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**Invest more in growing, evaluating, communicating and celebrating the social impact of impact media, to grow positive social change across our communities and inspire new sustainable funding models and partnerships.**

We need to invest in social impact research and storytelling, to understand, measure, evaluate and share the social impact that our civil society media projects have. We need to tell this story and make the case with funders, regulators, and influencers, and also with citizens, audiences and readers – who can donate, become members, subscribe, buy community shares, invest — and of course provide untold stories and impact solutions.

We need to encourage partnerships to scale social impact. For impact media to have the greatest social impact, partnership activity is key: with charities, with the public sector and government, with universities, with funders and with mainstream media. This is an area that funders could support, as it is time-consuming and resource heavy. The UK public broadcasters could do much more to reach out to civil society impact media organisations, to support a funnel of new and diverse talent from across the UK, alongside news, stories and outreach into our communities.

I recommend that the purpose and vision, and crucially the social impact of any impact media organisation is clarified, emphasised, and built into every element of the organisation's activities and brand, whether a for-profit, non-profit, cooperative or hybrid model, so that staff, stakeholders, volunteers, audiences, funders, donors and members, regulators and communities are constantly reminded about this purpose, and are able equally to contribute to it and benefit from it.

## Recommendation 5

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**Develop specialist infrastructure support for impact media in the UK, to provide best practice, training, policy and research, alongside initiatives such as match funding challenges and awards, building connections with impact media in other countries, and creating a network of local impact media hubs across the UK.**

Specialist agencies can support civil society impact media, public and community media, as well as social action campaigns on and with mainstream media. They can provide specialist support in individual contributor fundraising. In the US, and increasingly in India, these agencies provide much needed best practice, training and practical support to enable and grow individual contributor income and are a vital part of the impact media ecosystem. A dedicated Centre for Social Impact Media in the UK would be a catalyst for all my recommendations, specialising in research and best practice in media social impact, attracting funding for media partners for social impact activity and evaluation, for skills training and development, infrastructure and resources for civil society media. This centre could work closely with impact media in other countries, to learn and share best practice, and collaborate on international activity.

Policy work should be a major part of its remit, influencing communications policy and regulation at local, national, European and global level, and ensuring common understanding of the value of civil society impact media, and public service media, across all regulators – charitable, financial, fiscal and of course media and technology. Such an organisation would also be an inspiration to a wide range of funders and donors, sponsors and impact investors, as well as strategic and operational partners to support and work with impact media. I recommend that we build on this research to create a space where we can easily share learnings, and collaborate, through online conversations, mentoring and training, research and comparative studies, staff exchanges, and close collaboration with academia, funders and existing infrastructure organisations.

One of my recommendations to the UK is that we should envision and make happen a network of creative impact media hubs across our cities, towns and villages, linked to impact media outlets, where communities can come together to create content, engage with media and each other, debate, have a voice, learn new skills, develop their own media initiatives, and much more. Our dying high streets and disempowered communities could be revitalised, creating vibrant community hubs, engaged story-tellers and a new layer of media social entrepreneurs.

## Conclusion and next steps

My heartfelt thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for giving me this unique opportunity. It has been an incredible privilege to visit so many organisations and people in the US, India and Sri Lanka that have much for us in the UK to be inspired by and learn from. The innovation, skills and commitment I saw were powerful, and my Churchill Fellowship will continue to build closer connections and collaboration between impact media organisations across the UK and globally.

Those of us working in, volunteering with, and supporting impact media share common goals, vision and values across the world, and certainly in the UK and the three countries I visited on my Fellowship. However, as I was often told on my travels, “We don’t spend enough time learning from each other, sharing our common goals and vision, we don’t even know each other in our own countries, let alone across the world! We are just heads down trying to survive. Let’s change that, connect and form a movement.”

I look forward to sharing my report, findings and recommendations with the main stakeholders in the UK: impact media organisations, funders and impact investors, academics, community leaders, regulators and policy makers, and to hearing your feedback and suggestions. I hope that we can work together on a journey to make impact media one of the major drivers of positive social change across our communities, nations and world.

This document just skims the surface of the stories, learnings and great skills there are outside the UK that we in the UK can learn from, and we have much to share as well. I hope that the accompanying Impact Media website will be a resource to explore more case studies, link to media organisations mentioned in the report and many more, and engage in ongoing discussions and action.

My report will be disseminated at a key time for the UK, as we deal with the ongoing social and economic after-effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, and the challenges to us all to reverse the inequalities and social and economic exclusion across our four nations, and to celebrate the diversity, creativity and heritage of the 70 million people in our country, alongside our wider world.

Impact media is a powerful catalyst for social impact and for building a stronger civil society, and can play a major role in making positive change happen in an inclusive, equitable and solutions-based way.

I hope that my recommendations will be a catalyst so that together we can secure the resources to reverse the decline in impact media in the UK, supporting a growing multi-layered network of creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, highly impactful, value-led and financially sustainable impact media initiatives.

Together we can build a powerful movement for democratic and civil society media, for social impact media, learning from each other, sharing best practice, resources, content and creativity through shared goals and common cause.

**Caroline Diehl MBE**

[caroline@socialfounder.org](mailto:caroline@socialfounder.org)

# Appendix: Organisations visited or contacted in the US, India and Sri Lanka during my Churchill Fellowship 2019–2020

## US

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Access Sacramento	Freedom Forum Institute	Pasadena Media
Ad Council	Gather	PBS: Public Broadcasting Service
Agora Journalism Centre	Global Voices	Philadelphia Inquirer
Alliance for Community Media	Goalbusters	Phillycam
American Journalism Project	Grand Rapids Community Media Centre	Public Media Futures Forums
Berkeleyside	GRTV	Public Media Network
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Independence Public Media Foundation	Radio Bilingüe
Block Club Chicago	Innovation4Media	Shorenstein Center
BRIC Arts Media	Invisible Institute	SNAP
Bridge Detroit	KALW	Solutions Journalism Network
Bridge Michigan	KCRW FM	South Side Weekly
BronxNet	KEXP	Station Resource Group
CAN TV	KPCC/Southern California Public Radio	Texas Tribune
Capital Public Radio	KVIE	The Drum
Chicago Community Trust	Lenfest Institute for Journalism	The Rapinian
City Bureau	Manhattan News Network	Turning Basin Labs
Current	Media Impact Funders	WDET
DCTV	MIT Media Lab	WETA
Detroit Journalism Co-operative	National Federation of Community Broadcasters	WHYY
DPTV: Detroit Public Television	Newseum	WNET + 13
El Timpano	Nieman Lab	WTTW
Experimental Station	Oregon Public Broadcasting	WURD Radio
Forensic Architecture	Open Signal	WYCE
Free Press & News Voices	Outlier Media	Wyncote Foundation

## India

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Asian Age	Gram Vaani	Oorvani Foundation
Asian College of Journalism	Gurgaon ki Awaaz	OurGroundworks
Asiaville News	Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation	People's Archive of Rural India (PARI)
BAG Films & Media	Indian Philanthropy Forum	Radio Active
Citizen Matters	Khabar Lahariya	Radio Charminar
CNN News	Max Maharastra	Sangham Radio
DASRA	Media Development Foundation - ACJ	Saptahik Sadhana
Deccan Development Society	Megh Pyne Abhiyan	Star TV
DocSociety India	Ministry of Information & Broadcasting	Suno India
Doordarshan	Mojo Story	The Better India
FAT	My Right to Breathe	The Lede
Film SouthAsia	Mylapore Newspaper	University of Hyderabad
Gaon Connection	NDTV	Video Volunteers

## Sri Lanka

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Ath Pavura	Lanka Impact Investment Network	University of Peradeniya
Capital Maharaja Group	Lanka Social Ventures	University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Centre for Policy Alternatives	Local Drums	Social Enterprise Lanka
Gammadda	Mahaweli Community Radio Project	UNESCO
Groundviews	MTV	Vikalpa
IMAlanka	News 1st	
iVoice.lk	Rupavahini	

**Impact Media — building common cause**

Caroline Diehl MBE  
[caroline@socialfounder.org](mailto:caroline@socialfounder.org)

**Design & layout**

[Patrick-Miller.co.uk](http://Patrick-Miller.co.uk)