The Community Foundation & Local Media Guidebook

A Guide for California Newsrooms and Funders
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Publisher’s Note

I first became interested in the community news and media activities of community foundations after I joined the Inland Empire Community Foundation board of directors. I started hearing about media initiatives at other California community foundations and as publisher of the Black Voice News and then-president of California News Publishers Association (CNPA), the state’s trade association for newspapers, and I wanted to explore more.

Then I attended my first Knight Media Forum in Miami in 2019. I remember noticing a special closed session with Knight’s community foundation trustees and Knight’s CEO Alberto Ibargüen and while I didn’t belong to a Knight supported community foundation, I asked if I could attend as a trustee of my regional foundation. “Well I doubt you’ll get turned away,” was the response. As I sat in the room with trustees from foundations in communities where the Knight brothers once owned newspapers from Long Beach, California to Charlotte, North Carolina and regions in between and heard Alberto articulate the role that we can play in building resilient communities by supporting local information ecosystems, I was intrigued.

Later that year my CNPA board colleague Simon Grieve connected me with the Long Beach Community Foundation (LBCF) to learn more about the Long Beach Media Collaborative and their collective impact reporting on issues like housing and broadband access. I asked LBCF’s CEO Marcelle Epley as well as Lauren Gustus, who then served as Regional Editor, McClatchy West Region and was the architect of several reporting labs funded regionally through community foundations, to participate in CNPA’s Capital Conference sharing how local philanthropy can expand news coverage through this local news+community foundation collaboration model.

I continued to do my research, and as a member of the California Press Foundation marketing and fund development committee I shared some of my initial thoughts on how our organization could potentially expand the reach and impact of our internship program through a community foundation media initiative. My fellow committee member Eric Johnston joined me in an initial landscaping activity to get a better sense of what was already happening in community foundations across the state. And John Burns, our committee chair, encouraged us to continue the work by providing monthly deadlines — every time I saw it on the upcoming agenda I knew I needed to have something more to report.
My colleagues at Media in Color (MIC), the philanthropy-supported initiative I co-founded with Arturo Carmona, supported the work by providing a living laboratory of our own. As one of the MIC funders, the California Community Foundation’s Efrain Escobedo, secured funding from a major donor to support community news organizations vitally serving communities of color in Los Angeles County. That funding also allowed us to complete a mapping of the over 300 ethnic media outlets representing the diverse communities of the region providing the groundwork for an information ecosystem assessment process that will allow us to better understand gaps in coverage.

As an indication that we were on the right track, Laura Seaman, CEO of the League of California Community Foundations, hosted a panel discussion during that time featuring four community foundations that are attempting to address community news and information needs. Additionally, Report for America, which has created a business model that relies on cultivating local philanthropic support, released a report identifying Community News Funds as an emerging strategy that allows community foundations working in conjunction with local news leaders to create single, permanent funds that draw upon donations from multiple sources to support local news. Our MIC work was highlighted in that report.

To accelerate our process, and actually make sure something of value was produced, we secured funding and hired media executive and consultant Jane Elizabeth and her team to complete the project. What you have here, The Community Foundation & Local Media Guide For California Newsrooms and Funders, is a guidebook designed to encourage collaboration between community foundations, community media, and other philanthropic organizations. It is our hope that it will serve as an impetus to facilitate more accessible and better quality news in our diverse regions with a goal of building vibrant and resilient communities throughout the State of California and beyond.

Paulette Brown-Hinds, PhD
Riverside, California
May 2022
INTRODUCTION

“With expert input from philanthropic and journalism professionals, this guide takes a straightforward look at the benefits and potential pain points in the foundation-media relationship, and suggests solutions for working towards success.”
INTRODUCTION

When the Community Foundation of San Benito County set out to see how they could help improve the lives of people in their rural county, they held listening sessions — for everyone, about everything.

“You name it, we tried to get them together. Teachers, doctors, farmworkers,” says Gary Byrne, CEO of the community foundation. And when they synthesized and assessed a year’s worth of conversations, one problem rose to the top.

“We recognized we were a media desert,” Byrne says. Three of the four newspapers that had once covered the county were gone. The remaining newspaper published only one day a week and wasn’t even located in the county. San Jose and San Francisco media were nearby but “they really didn’t venture down into our community,” says Byrne.

So the foundation put its support behind a project that would eventually become Benito Link, a non-profit newsroom that covers a county that no one else would.

The San Benito project is just one example of the growing support for local media by community foundations that “had their finger on the pulse of their communities and took action,” says the latest annual report from the Council on Foundations and the Common-fund Institute.

To help both local publishers and funders work together in this growing partnership, a coalition of groups including the California Press Foundation, Media in Color, and the League of California Community Foundations joined together to produce this guide for media and community foundations in California and across the country.

This guidebook is divided into two sections: Guidance for community foundations who want to embark on relationships with local media; and guidance for local journalism leaders seeking funding and support from their region’s community foundations.

Each section examines best practices in building relationships, assessing community needs, managing contracts and establishing ethical guardrails. This guidebook also explains the work of community foundations and of local media, compiles a directory of California’s community foundations, and offers a glossary of important terms and phrases.

With expert input from philanthropic and journalism professionals, this guide takes a straightforward look at the benefits and potential pain points in the foundation-media relationship, and suggests solutions for working towards success.
WHERE WE ARE NOW?

Before venturing into the guidebooks for foundations and for media, let’s take a look at the current state of each institution.

Since the explosion of the coronavirus pandemic that began in early 2020, at least 85 local newsrooms in the U.S. have closed. Others have barely remained in operation, cutting staff, salaries, work hours. But the pandemic only added fuel to a fire that’s been burning for years. About 1,800 newspapers have closed around the country since 2004, according to “news desert” authority and researcher Dr. Penny Abernathy, a former professor at the University of North Carolina.

Meanwhile, community foundations have been raising their profile across the country. In 2020, as the pandemic raged, 67 percent of community foundations reported spending more money than the previous year, according to Commonfund’s annual report. And 10 percent of those actually doubled their spending rate.

In general, foundations provided close to half of nonprofit news organizations’ revenue, according to a September 2021 study from the Institute for Nonprofit News, which lists about 40 non-profit California news organizations among its members. Those include Bay City News Foundation in Berkeley, Center for Health Journalism in Los Angeles, KPCC in Pasadena, San Jose Spotlight, CalMatters in Sacramento and the Voice of Orange County.

And donations to community foundations also have risen significantly. Around 45 percent of the local foundations reported higher donations in 2020, with a median increase of more than 83 percent in total dollars donated. But the smallest community foundations reaped the largest jump with a median increase of 126 percent in total dollars donated, according to the Commonfund Report.

Since 2009, community foundations have given $1.1 billion in media support grants.
Since 2009, community foundations have given $1.1 billion in media support grants. Some details from a 2021 report by Media Impact Funders:

• The funding was distributed through more than 43,000 grants to 8,000 recipients by 461 funders.

• Most of the funding went to a broad category called “media content and platforms” at online media, broadcast, film and print organizations.

• Grants of $159.2 million supported media literacy, education and First Amendment work.

• About $124 million was spent on investigative, citizen and advocacy journalism.

Beneficiaries of community foundation support in 2021 included the nonprofit Wichita Beacon newsroom, which received a $1.1 million grant from The Wichita Community Foundation. Startup publications, nonprofits and for-profits are part of the Southwest Michigan Journalism Collaborative, whose 10 members are receiving funds from The Kalamazoo Community Foundation.

Report for America, which relies partly on donations to place young journalists in understaffed newsrooms across the country, in 2020 saw a 124 percent increase in the number of community foundations that supported the program. The foundations contribute directly to non-profit news organizations; if the newsroom is for-profit, the foundation contributes to RFA which then disburses the funds to the newsroom.

“By making big investments in local news, community foundations are amplifying community voices to bolster civic engagement and foster more active, informed communities.”
EQUITY & DIVERSITY: Amplifying Community Voices

When two residents of Kalamazoo launched the Spanish-language newspaper New/Nueva Opinion, they turned to the Southwest Michigan Journalism Collaborative for help in amplifying the voices of the local Latinx community.

Lucinda Mosquera, who founded New/Nueva Opinion with her husband Jesus Grillo, says the publication fills a Latinx news void in the region. “Our community deserves to be recognized,” Mosquera told Second Wave. “They deserve the same equality as other communities and minorities. We are a minority of a minority.”

“I feel like if we don’t do it, no one will,” says Grillo.

The historic lack of diversity in U.S. media translates to a lack of coverage of communities of color and LGBTQ issues. Some startups and nonprofits are stepping in, while some legacy newsrooms are working to improve their lackluster hiring practices.

And because community foundations traditionally have focused on inclusion and equity, they’re well-positioned to help those efforts in direct and indirect ways.

“Fewer local journalists means less representation for increasingly diverse communities throughout California,” say the leaders of the California Community Foundation. “By making big investments in local news, community foundations are amplifying community voices to bolster civic engagement and foster more active, informed communities.”

Efrain Escobedo, the foundation’s vice president of policy, says the organization views supporting ethnic media from the lens of “civic engagement.” The media outlet can give voice to an underrepresented population and also can identify the top issues to engage on — for instance, the community’s response to the U.S. Census.

The Delaware Community Foundation helped establish a summer internship program for that reason, Allison Taylor Levine, vice president for marketing and communications, told the Knight Foundation. “The idea was to hire BIPOC interns to cover the pandemic’s effect on communities of color.”

“In California, an increasing number of community foundations recognize “that their community sees better outcomes when residents are well-informed, when local governments are held accountable, when there’s transparency around civic life.”
– Laura Seaman, CEO, League of California Community Foundations.
The Sacramento Region Community Foundation started its Impact Media Fund in 2020, supporting a new special section to illuminate BIPOC communities in part by supporting the salaries of journalists.

In Michigan, the Community Foundation of St. Clair County funded a new position for a writer to cover neighborhoods and social justice from communities of color in the county.

While many more funding relationships between community foundations and media organizations are needed across the U.S., says the Media Impact Funders report, “the scope of giving today is an encouraging sign that community foundations are recognizing the importance of supporting media as part of a larger strategy to build and sustain healthy communities.”

In California, an increasing number of community foundations recognize “that their community sees better outcomes when residents are well-informed, when local governments are held accountable, when there’s transparency around civic life,” says Laura Seaman, CEO of the League of California Community Foundations. “It is the foundation for the other types of work that they already do in their communities.”

**If you’re a newsroom leader looking for information on how to work with your local community foundation, click here to read the Guidebook for Local Journalism Organizations.**

**For community foundations exploring support for local media, click here to read the Guidebook for Community Foundations.**
Community foundations “are unique in philanthropy and yet they’re one of the original forms of organized giving in this country,” says Laura Seaman, CEO of the League of California Community Foundations.
INTRODUCTION: Why work with community foundations?

Before media organizations embark on a quest for a potential funding relationship, it’s important to first define the reasons for working with a community foundation. What’s in it for your staff, your journalism and your business?

Here are some of the benefits cited by local news organizations who have developed programs and partnerships with support from their community foundations:

**Increasing readership/audiences.** Community foundations have particular expertise in learning about the needs of the community. Listening sessions and surveys can help you determine what people want and need from your news organization. The San Francisco Foundation supports The Oaklandside’s Mission Metrics Initiative, at the heart of which is a group of paid community advisors who provide input.

**Reaching new communities.** One way to do this is to offer content in more languages and on more platforms. The Humboldt Area Foundation and the Wild Rivers Community Foundation worked with California news organizations to translate stories from English to Hmong and Spanish, and to use local cable television and radio to reach wider audiences.

**More content for your site or publication.** Story-sharing and smart partnerships can strengthen your organization’s output. In Long Beach, the community foundation supports writers and editors at four small, local news outlets who share their reporting on “quality of life” issues in the region including community access to Internet and affordable housing.

**Launching a nonprofit news organization.** The Wichita Community Foundation is the top funder behind the non-profit Wichita Beacon newsroom, which covers state and local news in Kansas.

**Producing more — and better — investigative reporting.** The Community Foundation of Snohomish County in Washington established a $250,000 fund to support investigative reporting at The Daily Herald in Everett, Wash. The Silicon Valley Community Foundation helps to fund the Bay Area Media Collaborative to “investigate the region’s most pressing problems and... produce powerful journalism with far-reaching impact.” Both the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation and the San Diego Foundation have made grants to inewsource, a nonprofit investigative organization in San Diego.

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Story-sharing and smart partnerships can strengthen your organization’s output. In Long Beach, the community foundation supports writers and editors at four small, local news outlets who share their reporting on “quality of life” issues in the region including community access to Internet and affordable housing.
Fill gaps left by staff cuts. Community leaders in Palm Springs created a foundation to help the area’s struggling local newsrooms — including funding the Desert Sun’s opinions page editor position which had been eliminated in staff cuts. In California’s Stanislaus County, the community foundation created a Media Lab fund to support journalists’ salaries after one local paper lost dozens of staffers and much of its education reporting, says the foundation’s chief strategy officer Amanda Hughes. “We just wanted to see more stories on issues that impacted kids,” she said.

And the Ventura County Community Foundation reached out to the Pacific Coast Business Times with an idea that resulted in a grant to support a health-and-wellness reporting position. “It’s not a huge amount of money, but it’s an impact I feel good about,” says president and CEO Vanessa Bechtel.

Hire summer interns. The North Carolina Community Foundation helps fund internships for college journalists, and the Delaware Community Foundation raised funds to help expand 2022 summer internships at southern Delaware news outlets.

Hiring journalists through reporting fellowships. Employing journalists through programs like Report for America, Poynter-Koch and AAAS science fellowships can be a huge benefit for newsrooms. But such programs aren’t always expense-free, and community foundations can help newsrooms with those costs. In Alabama, the Community Foundation of the Chattahoochee Valley is one of many organizations that actively recruit funds to help support a Report for America reporter, investing $40,000 in the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer’s first RFA reporters in 2020.

KNOW YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

If you’re not sure what a community foundation does, or even if there’s a community foundation in your region, that’s understandable. The community foundation-media relationship is in relatively early days and not all organizations have entered into partnerships. To explore how to change that, start with these basics.

What does a community foundation do?

Community foundations “are unique in philanthropy and yet they’re one of the original forms of organized giving in this country,” says Laura Seaman, CEO of the League of California Community Foundations. A Cleveland banker created the first community foundation in 1914, with a goal of establishing a fund large enough to last for decades. It worked: Today the Cleveland Foundation awards about $130 million in grants every year across the region.

Community foundations are local hubs of charitable giving. They are tax-exempt, public charities that help individuals, families, companies and nonprofits create and manage charitable funds and understand the specific needs in their communities, region or state. Most community foundations also have their own endowments from which they make discretionary grants. Many serve as conveners and leaders, bringing stakeholders together to mobilize pooled resources and solve long-term, complex issues in their communities.
“Community foundations are almost your de facto chamber of commerce and your city council,” says Todd Franko, director of local sustainability and development at Report for America. When local officials get “tangled up in politics,” Franko says, “a lot of [residents] run to their community foundations for leadership.”

“Your community foundations often are the ones that are looking out for investment opportunities, two, four and six years down the road,” he says. “So it’s just an ideal organization to try to get acclimated to funding local news.”

In its helpful FAQ about community foundations, the Communities Foundation of Texas explains to potential donors: “Setting up a charitable fund... is an easy way to streamline your giving and realize your philanthropic goals.”

And those goals often lead to funding very specific projects supported by those donors, whose interests might range from fighting food insecurity to funding child care to maintaining community greenspaces. But donors’ interests can change quickly and community foundations are set up to respond to the latest cause or “adapt to local conditions,” as Seaman says. Here are a few common ways community foundations can distribute their funding. (Note: Other useful definitions are included in a glossary at the end of this report.)

- Designated funds — One or more specific charities are selected for funds
- Field of interest funds — Funds used only for selected issues, such as the environment or health care.
- Scholarship funds — For students who meet a wide variety of criteria
- Donor-advised funds — Accounts donors can use to make grants to nonprofits
- Agency funds — Nonprofits’ own reserve funds or endowments, managed by the community foundation
- Unrestricted funds — Used to meet a community’s sometimes unexpected needs such as opioid addiction or natural disaster relief

In 2020, many community foundations used their unrestricted funds for the Covid-19 pandemic. And increasingly, the foundations are seeing the alarming disappearance of professional news organizations as a similar community emergency.

**Investigate the landscape.** Before approaching your community foundation with a proposal for supporting your journalism, do what journalists do best: Ask questions. Find out what the foundations support, what they don’t fund, and why. You can also consult this report’s directory.
A helpful general resource is the Media Impact Funders’ compilation of data from 2009-2021. The report details the issues supported by community foundations. Overall, here are the journalism-related programs receiving the highest dollar amounts during that time period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funder</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>*Dollar Value of Grants</th>
<th># of Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina Coastal Federation</td>
<td>Newport, NC</td>
<td>$6.7 million</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Daily Memphian</td>
<td>Memphis, TN</td>
<td>$6.7 million</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EdSurge</td>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>$3.4 million</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee to Protect Journalists</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$2.7 million</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solutions Journalism Network</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$2.5 million</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CALmatters</td>
<td>Sacramento, CA</td>
<td>$2.3 million</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern California Public Broadcasting</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$2.2 million</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalkbeat</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$2.2 million</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut News Project</td>
<td>Hartford, CT</td>
<td>$2 million</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Oregon Foundation</td>
<td>Eugene, OR</td>
<td>$2 million</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Media Impact Funders*

Laura Seaman

CEO, League of California Community Foundations
The report also offers a breakdown of community foundation/media projects by U.S. region. On the west coast:

### Top 10 Western Community Foundations for Media Funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funder</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>#Dollar Value of Grants</th>
<th># of Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silicon Valley Community Foundation</td>
<td>Mountain View, CA</td>
<td>$485 million</td>
<td>4,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The San Francisco Foundation</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$37.3 million</td>
<td>1,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle Foundation</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>$28.3 million</td>
<td>3,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii Community Foundation</td>
<td>Honolulu, HI</td>
<td>$12.4 million</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Denver Foundation</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>$12.3 million</td>
<td>480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marin Community Foundation</td>
<td>Novato, CA</td>
<td>$10.1 million</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The San Diego Foundation</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>$8.8 million</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon Community Foundation</td>
<td>Portland, OR</td>
<td>$8 million</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Bay Community Foundation</td>
<td>Oakland, CA</td>
<td>$7.8 million</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange County Community Foundation</td>
<td>Newport Beach, CA</td>
<td>$7.3 million</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Funders based in West; starting in year(s) 2009 - latest available; where funder is a Community Foundation

### Top 10 Recipients from Western Community Foundations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funder</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>#Dollar Value of Grants</th>
<th># of Grants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EducationSuperHighway</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$61.5 million</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Look Media Works</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$56 million</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Frontier Foundation</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$50.8 million</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GiveDirectly</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$50.3 million</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Online Giving Foundation</td>
<td>Safety Harbor, FL</td>
<td>$17.7 million</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern California Public Broadcasting</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$12.4 million</td>
<td>1,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sundance Institute</td>
<td>Park City, UT</td>
<td>$10.3 million</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures for Justice</td>
<td>Rochester, NY</td>
<td>$9.7 million</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Sense Media</td>
<td>San Francisco, CA</td>
<td>$8.2 million</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ProPublica</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$7.9 million</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recipients based in West; starting in year(s) 2009 - latest available; where funder is a Community Foundation
Your due diligence also should include contacting organizations that have already received funding from the community foundation. Depending on the size and resources of the community foundation near you, their website may have details on which media they’ve funded. (In California, community foundations’ staff can range from all-volunteer teams to nearly 100 full-time paid employees, notes Laura Seaman.) Here’s what the Mountain View-based Silicon Valley Community Foundation supported in 2021:

**Local Journalism 2021 Grantees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Area served</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EASTSIDE Magazine</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPA Center for Community Media</td>
<td>San Mateo County, Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India Currents Foundation</td>
<td>San Mateo County, Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martha Street Art Night</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Peninsula Boys &amp; Girls Club Inc</td>
<td>San Mateo County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosaic Journalism Program</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peninsula 360 Press</td>
<td>San Mateo County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWC PAL</td>
<td>San Mateo County</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose Spotlight</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ Community Media Access Corporation</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ Shooters</td>
<td>Santa Clara County</td>
<td>$20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Pacific Islander Organization</td>
<td>Bay Area &amp; CA</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Leadership Institute</td>
<td>San Mateo County</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total:** $309,000

*Silicon Valley Community Foundation*

How are recipients chosen to receive funding? Depending on the foundation, a detailed strategy and structure might be deployed in the decision-making. But sometimes, says Gretchen Moore, former chief strategy officer at Central Valley Community Foundation in California, it’s simply a “confluence of funders and projects...there’s a bit of matchmaking there.”
Check with the foundation to obtain their criteria for support. Be aware that descriptions may be a little dense; if you need more explanation, ask a foundation official. Mostly, it’s important that your goals align with the potential funders’ priorities. For example, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation describes their funding criteria like this:

Grants will be for general and program support to nonprofit organizations that:

- **Prioritize engagement of communities of color, including Black and Indigenous communities.**
- **Address emerging community needs with projects designed collaboratively with community residents working toward social and racial justice.**
- **Develop and facilitate cooperative journalistic projects across diverse local nonprofit organizations working to address issues affecting those communities.**
- **Produce media rooted in communities’ values, attributes and aspirations to advance civic engagement practices.**
- **Advance fact-based storytelling using video, audio, photography, illustration, text or animation to build a sense of community and strengthen communities’ resilience.**

The foundation also describes what it will **not** fund:

- **Capital improvements**
- **Budget shortfalls or fundraising events**
- **Previously planned or long-term campaigns**
- **Funding gaps due to internal organizational emergencies, such as office vandalism, resignation of an executive director or sudden loss of funding**

Be aware that IRS rules and community foundation guidelines can prohibit certain expenditures, depending on how the funding is set up. For example, the Fresno Bee’s Education Lab supported by the Central Valley Community Foundation can use grant funding only to pay for program expenses directly related to the Lab. This includes the Lab’s staff salaries or direct needs such as reporters’ computer equipment or transportation expenses. But it can’t, for instance, make the newsroom’s electricity payment. An attorney can help you navigate the regulations for your individual project, says Gretchen Moore, former chief strategy officer at the foundation.

Also, remember that most community foundations are set up to distribute other people’s money in specific ways, and sometimes have little of their own money to spend. “I would encourage media organizations to understand the mechanics of a community foundation; oftentimes, much of the giving we do is donor-directed,” says Courtney Bengtson, director of strategic initiatives for the Wichita Community Foundation. The foundation does have its own discretionary fund, Bengtson says, “but it makes up only 8% of the dollars we have going out the door annually.”
Find your local community foundation and set up a meeting. There are more than 700 community foundations in the U.S., and you can find yours on the Council on Foundations map. (Note: If your community foundation is not accredited, it might not appear here.) Also, this guidebook provides a list of California community foundations, contact information and details about their support of local media.

The states with the highest number of community foundations are Indiana (78), California (64) and Michigan (63). At the other end of the scale: Vermont, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and the District of Columbia each have one community foundation.

Check your community foundation’s website to see if their staff includes anyone you know. If so, check with that person for advice on setting up a meeting: who, when, where. If you don’t know anyone, consult the foundation’s communications/marketing director or a senior program officer for advice.

Todd Franko, who’s helped countless newsrooms obtain funding for their Report for America reporters, suggests a low-key initial meeting. “You don’t necessarily want to ask them to assemble 20 or 30 people out of the gate,” he advises. “You want to just have a private one-on-one conversation.”

Know your impact. Talk less about how the foundation can help your project and more about how the project will help the community. An example from Todd Franko shows what that might look like. Franko was an editor at a Youngstown, Ohio, newspaper when he began seeking donations and grants to keep the paper in business. Instead of emphasizing the recent cuts in his newsroom’s staffing, he told the potential funders about the impact on the community. He calculated the number of stories that were not written that year because of the newsroom’s disappearing resources. “I said, here’s the reality of local news,” Franko recalls. “We’re not at the mental health meetings, we’re not at the women’s shelter, we’re not at the Boys and Girls Club. All the things that make people want to embrace living in Youngstown, those are the stories that we’ve lost first…I hate it, but that’s the boat that we’re in.”

Here’s what you should know about your Vindy journalism:

3,840 less stories
(That is 8 reporters x 40 stories/mo x 12 mos)
**Prepare for meetings and paperwork.** Eventually, you’ll need to make a detailed case for why the foundation should support your news organization or project. Be prepared to give a formal presentation. As much as you might dread creating PowerPoint-type presentations, it’s the best way to collect, update and share your information. And compiling that information can show you where your weak points might be. Information that funders likely will need:

- **One-page summary.** Highlights of your project, starting with an “elevator pitch.” Even if you don’t have a funder in mind, a well-written, one-page document that explains your project, goals, and needs will help focus your efforts.

- **Company bio.** A brief history and details about your company’s status and type of ownership (nonprofit, hedge fund, startup, etc.). Include your company’s mission statement, ethics policy, or other relevant guidance. Don’t have a mission statement? Consider writing one for your newsroom. They’re typically very short; for an example, see ProPublica’s [mission statement](#).

- **Staff diversity statistics.** Information about gender, race, nationality, languages spoken. Funding organizations often have requirements about diversity among their grantees. You may be asked detailed questions about the gender breakdown of your staff as well as race and ethnicity, employee age range, and the diversity of leadership in your news organization. Be ready with those numbers.

- **Prepare to talk about money.** For-profit, nonprofit, fiscal sponsor? Know your status, and be ready with a financial summary. You might even be asked for your organization’s “most recent audited financials.” If the community foundation says it only works with nonprofits, discuss whether a fiscal sponsor (a nonprofit that will accept grants and donations on your behalf) is a possibility. And in general, be prepared to do something you may have never done before: Ask for money to support your work. “It’s definitely a new space for journalists,” says Amanda Hughes, chief strategy officer for the Stanislaus Community Foundation. The foundation recognizes “this is a different mindset” and can walk newcomers through the process, she says.

- **Audience metrics.** Website views and visitors, circulation numbers, any other engagement statistics you’re able to share. Potential funders can keep this information confidential.
GET READY FOR CHALLENGES.

Ethics and standards. Your presentation is only the beginning of a discussion that’s bound to get more complicated. Any funder wants to know their money is well-spent, meets their needs and their donors’ preferences. During negotiations, they might make requests or ask for concessions you hadn’t considered.

One media organization, for example, was surprised when the community foundation asked them to remove the paywall on any content that was underwritten through its grants. After considering the pros and cons and doing some math, the media organization agreed it was a fair — and doable — request.

Two critical topics often come up during meetings between media organizations and community foundations: discussions about editorial control over foundation-supported projects; and whether the non-profit community foundations should even consider supporting for-profit newsrooms.

The Knight Foundation makes a case for supporting certain projects proposed by a for-profit newsroom, which may be owned by economically challenged corporations or unpopular hedge funds. Say, for instance, a funders’ goal is to fight misinformation by providing the community with trustworthy and professional journalism.

Who has “editorial control” over content produced by, for instance, a team of reporters whose salaries are paid through a community foundation? Journalists know the ethical answer must be “the newsroom.” But some funders might not understand that function of journalism, so editorial control should be defined and approved in any funding agreement. Many news organizations that receive community foundation funding are transparent about their policy, like this one from the Atlanta Civic Circle which receives funding from the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta:

Our organization retains complete authority over all editorial content to protect the best journalistic and business interests of our organization. Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsement of donors or their products, services, or opinions.

...We will cede no right of review or influence of editorial content, nor of unauthorized distribution of editorial content.
At the Modesto Bee, where some reporters’ salaries are supported by community foundations and other contributors, the editorial control policy is attached to each published story:

This story was produced with financial support from the Stanislaus Community Foundation, along with the GroundTruth Project’s Report for America initiative. The Modesto Bee maintains full editorial control of this work.

**Paperwork and project management.** Unless your news organization is fortunate enough to have a development director on staff, another challenge will likely be your lack of expertise in grant-writing, grant management and the workings of the nonprofit world. However, with a little practice and some assistance from the community foundation, a journalist’s communication skills can translate easily to grant writing. Community foundation staff might also handle grant writing and project management, particularly if the foundation receives a percentage of the grant.

**Proving your worth.** Funders want to know that their money makes a difference, and most grant contracts will require you to assign someone to track and detail the impact of your project. That might include audience metrics like page views, but most funders would like you to “actually demonstrate outcomes from the reporting that lead to something new and different, what type of engagement happened as a result of a story,” says Amanda Hughes at the Stanislaus Community Foundation. That could be “a policy shift or a public outcry and more investigation,” she says.

**UNSUCCESSFUL? TRY THIS.**

For any number of reasons, your request for community foundation support may not be accepted, initially. Try again at the next opportunity, because persistence can pay off. In the meantime, consider these ideas offered by both potential recipients and funders:

**Suggest another type of support.** If your for-profit newsroom will seek another financial source, ask the community foundation about being a fiscal sponsor — which means they can be the non-profit go-between. The Post and Courier in Charleston, S.C., used the Coastal Community Foundation as its fiscal sponsor. “All donations go to a fund they manage, which allows donations to be tax deductible. When we need to access the money, we fill out a form that explains to the foundation how we will use it,” says the Post & Courier executive editor Autumn Phillips.

Or ask the foundation to simply “endorse” your project or application. Smaller steps like these can help form a bond between the news organization and the community foundation, which can allow you to build professional connections and trust.
Explore partnerships. Especially in regions covered by several media organizations, community foundations might balk at providing financial support for one over another, says Arturo Carmona, a founder of Media in Color and Latino Media Collaborative who advises media organizations that cover communities of color in California. Forming a coalition with other local newsrooms to cover aspects of a particular issue — climate change, for example — can help alleviate those concerns and produce more wide-reaching journalism, says Carmona.

Find matching funds. If you have financial support from other sources, that may help your request for community foundation support. So, consider applying for grants from other organizations, even for smaller amounts. And get in touch with NewsMatch, which the Knight Foundation report called “the force multiplier for local news fundraising.” In 2020, the report says, NewsMatch helped hundreds of media organizations raise more than $8 million in national, regional and local matching funds “with almost 20% of that coming from family or local foundations.”

WHAT TO LOOK FOR BEFORE YOU SIGN A CONTRACT

You might not have much of a legal background, but you’ll learn fast when dealing with grants and fundraising. Here’s a checklist of elements to look for, along with some important red flags.

- **Everyone involved in the agreement should be listed in the agreement**, including any “third parties to the Agreement.”

- **A clear description of required support.** This should include any reports or deliverables requested in exchange for the grant money. Make sure this is clearly stated and that you’re able to support all requested deliverables with the funds you’re being given.

- **Ownership of intellectual property.** Most newsrooms will want to state that they retain sole ownership over the intellectual property created by any of their employees or contractors. This includes all articles, editorials, research notes, photos, graphics, videos, and other materials — which often is collectively called “content” in the contract. This includes any content that was funded in whole or in part by the grant. However, your legal department can agree to give the grantor limited licenses to use this content for non-commercial and non-competing purposes (for example, linking to it on their website or newsletter, using it in a brochure, putting pieces of it in marketing materials for their own promotional purposes).

“Forming a coalition with other local newsrooms to cover aspects of a particular issue — climate change, for example — can help alleviate those concerns and produce more wide-reaching journalism.”

— Arturo Carmona, founder, Media in Color
• **Editorial Integrity.** Nothing in the contract should indicate that grantors have a right to tell your organization what to cover or how to cover it except as expressly provided in the grant itself. In most cases, grantors do not have the right to pre-review or pre-approve any content, even if funded in whole or in part by the grant, nor to demand that content be deleted based on after-the-fact objections.

• **Autonomy as an employer.** If grant funds are specifically used to hire an employee, your company should have the right to select the employee and control the scope of the employee’s work. Meanwhile, the employee needs to be subject to the same employment requirements as any other employee, including compliance with company policies, performance standards and requirements. Your organization should retain the right to terminate any grant-funded employee for any reason and at any time without prior authorization from the grantor.

**SUCCESS! NOW WHAT?**

If your efforts with your community foundation have been successful, here’s what you might do next:

- **Write a thank-you note.** Express your appreciation and ask about next steps. The note should be signed by anyone on your staff who will be involved in the project.

- **Hold a community meeting.** Involving the community in a community foundation project is essential, right from the beginning.

- **Announce it publicly.** It’s good for your reputation, gets your audience interested in your project, and funders appreciate the recognition as well. (Ask about issuing a joint press release.)

   Carolina Public Press is pleased to announce it has received a $100,000 grant from the North Carolina Local News Lab Fund, which seeks to support people and organizations making sure that North Carolinians have greater access to the news and information they need to participate fully in their communities and our democracy.

   These are the first grants made from the Fund since it was established in 2017, and Carolina Public Press is one of 10 organizations to be be awarded a grant.

*Carolina Public Press news release*
This guide will take you through the steps to working efficiently with your local media outlets in a way that benefits all stakeholders.
INTRODUCTION: Why work with local media?

The idea that community foundations can benefit from working with their local media hasn’t always been popular. And some community foundations still are wary of forming those partnerships.

But look closely, and you’ll see that foundations and local journalism have essentially common goals.

“From an impact standpoint, foundations that care about amplifying their message and maximizing their investments should look to support local news,” says Nina Sachdev, a former journalist who has worked in the foundations sector for several years.

Julie Sandorf, president of the Charles H. Revson Foundation, says communities need “a bedrock of local civic leadership, philanthropy, and readers willing to nurture local journalism as a valued community asset.”

So it simply makes sense for community foundations to step into that role, says Gretchen Moore, former chief strategy officer at Central Valley Community Foundation in California. The foundation’s goal is to ensure that the community “is informed and engaged, and the best way to curate that civic space for conversation and discussion and ideas and information,” she says, “is through local journalism.”

It might not be immediately clear how your foundation’s goals and mission align with the work of local media, says Moore, but a closer look at “the cracks and crevices” can be revealing. Consider these examples:

Do you want to ensure that non-English-speaking communities are informed about issues like the Covid-19 pandemic and the local help that’s available? Foundations have supported translations of news reporting through projects including San Benito Community Foundation’s BenitoLink and the Humboldt Area Foundation’s Community Voices Coalition.

Do you want to see more access to reliable information about diverse communities in your region? The California Community Foundation helped fund such an effort in Los Angeles County. They persuaded a regional donor to provide small grants to reporters on topics of particular interest to cover the elections, the pandemic and the census with a focus on diversity.

Do you have a goal to make sure the community has reliable information so they can make important decisions at elections? The Long Beach Community Foundation led an effort to fund journalists from four community newsrooms to expand their reporting on “quality of life” issues in the city.

This guide will take you through the steps to working efficiently with your local media outlets in a way that benefits all stakeholders.
GET TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL JOURNALISM COMMUNITY.

The local media business has changed — dramatically in some cases — in communities around the country, especially over the past decade. The first step to learning about the current state of media is researching a new and alarming designation for an increasing number of communities around the country: the “news desert.”

A news desert is “a community, either rural or urban, with limited access to the sort of credible and comprehensive news and information that feeds democracy at the grassroots level,” according to the University of North Carolina’s Center for Innovation and Sustainability. The Center pioneered news desert research and has created a tool for each state to learn about their own local news deserts. At usnewsdeserts.com, you also can assess the quality of your local media outlet. Does it help you to be safe and healthy? Spend your time and money wisely? Make informed decisions about local elections?

In some cases, the answer to these questions have been less than positive, and that’s where community foundations and other philanthropic organizations have begun to step in. In 2020, philanthropy provided $111 million to media and journalism efforts around the U.S.

The threat of a news desert designation can be a call to action for community foundations. The first action might be gathering facts about each media organization, including:

• Ownership and type of organization (non-profit, corporate, family-owned, etc.)
• Current news staff size
• Change in news staff size over the past several years, and why (layoffs, closure, change in ownership?)
• Publication or broadcast frequency (daily, weekly, monthly?)
• Daily operating hours (24/7, part-time, regular business hours?)
• General focus (communities of color, social issues, sports, education, general?)

Gretchen Moore also recommends conducting a “landscape analysis” of your community

Gretchen Moore
Formerly of Central Valley Community Foundation
residents: Where do they get their news and why? What are their concerns? Whose voices are represented – and whose are not? Is there clear support for certain topics that align with your own goals and initiatives? The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan studied a detailed assessment of the Detroit journalism landscape before launching the Detroit Journalism Engagement Fund. Here’s a sample of what they found:

Local Content, Local Accountability:

SERVING A DIVERSE DETROIT

There is demand for more:

- In-Depth Watchdog Journalism
- Representative Coverage Across Detroit Region
- Media Engagement With All Of Detroit’s Citizens
- Journalists Who Reflect The Backgrounds Of The Population

Detroit Journalism Landscape Executive Summary

The Listening Post Collective conducted an assessment of California’s Inland Empire news and information ecosystem in 2021. The top recommendation, which the Inland Empire Community Foundation plans to follow, was to start a community news fund. The report also recommended creating a Spanish language media source, community fact-checking service and paid opportunities for local BIPOC communities.

“Civic and foundational support has historically helped foster community service media efforts and enabled local voices dedicated to better and more reliable information flow in their neighborhoods to survive and thrive,” the report says. “While there are national grants and funds that local media can tap into, having a local funding effort creates ongoing relationships and synergy between local communities and the media that seek to serve them.”

Courtney Bengtson, a former journalist who’s now director of strategic initiatives for the Wichita Community Foundation, emphasizes “the importance of building trust with your potential partners in this effort long before you move from casual conversations to speaking about funding particular projects or initiatives.”

“It takes significant time,” says Bengtson, “but should be a priority of all funders to do so with their partners.”
EXPLAIN YOUR WORK.

Most journalists have never participated in a fundraising effort for their own organizations, and many have little knowledge about the work of community foundations. Their first outreach to you likely won’t be a phone call to a community foundation staffer — it will be a visit to your website. So it’s important that your initiatives and processes are easy to find, clearly written and jargon-free.

A web section that clearly explains the purpose and work of community foundations also is important. The Community Foundation of Texas site offers a good example in its “What is a Community Foundation” section.

Potential media partners also will check the site to see if missions and goals are aligned, so clearly listing your priorities is important. The Silicon Valley Community Foundation describes their funding criteria like this:

Grants will be for general and program support to nonprofit organizations that:

• Prioritize engagement of communities of color, including Black and Indigenous communities.
• Address emerging community needs with projects designed collaboratively with community residents working toward social and racial justice.
• Develop and facilitate cooperative journalistic projects across diverse local nonprofit organizations working to address issues affecting those communities.
• Produce media rooted in communities’ values, attributes and aspirations to advance civic engagement practices.
• Advance fact-based storytelling using video, audio, photography, illustration, text or animation to build a sense of community and strengthen communities’ resilience.

Importantly, the organization’s website also describes what it will not fund:

• Capital improvements
• Budget shortfalls or fundraising events
• Previously planned or long-term campaigns
• Funding gaps due to internal organizational emergencies, such as office vandalism, resignation of an executive director or sudden loss of funding

Newsrooms also will need guidance on the basics of fundraising as well. A recent Report for America report, for instance, described a project in which a Michigan newsroom wanted to raise funds for the salary of their RFA reporter, and suggested a $20,000 goal. The foundation official, however, advised the journalists to be less modest, saying, “We can raise that in a couple hours.” The new goal was higher and more specific: $300,000, with 10 donors donating $10,000 each, renewable each year for three years.
GET READY FOR CHALLENGES.

Community organizations that have already made the decision to support local journalism have heard the question many times: Why give funding to the media industry? The challenges come from foundation staff and board members and from individual donors and organizations. In a fractured political climate, that pushback may be more significant in some communities.

The “community perception can be on a completely different end of the spectrum, especially these days,” says Laura Seaman, CEO of the League of California Community Foundations. “The information ecosystem...is a lot more polarized than it used to be.”

While Seaman acknowledges it can initially be difficult “to help the board and the donors feel comfortable” with supporting local media, it’s worth the effort. “Funders can see it as part of their community leadership work,” says Seaman, and realize that “their community sees better outcomes when residents are well-informed, when local governments are held accountable, when there’s transparency around civic life.”

Efrain Escobedo, California Community Foundation’s vice president of policy, worked to obtain a $100,000 donation from the Ballmer Group to support the Ethnic Media Roundtable. His pitch to the donors: demonstrating how the infrastructure established to promote census response could also be used to spread factual information about COVID-19.

It helps to be ready with a persuasive narrative. The following section can help you with talking points.

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FAQs.

Why support the media? Local news is a public good. That can be demonstrated in part through research including a study from the University of Notre Dame and the University of Illinois which noted these outcomes in news deserts: Residents pay more in taxes; government payrolls become bloated; and municipal borrowing costs increase. Why? A lack of reliable information and less community engagement with civic issues.

Public good also can be demonstrated through challenges that have impacted the community. For example, the Stanislaus Community Foundation faced some resistance when they decided to help fund the salary of a Report for America medical reporter at their local newspaper. But the reporter’s value became clear when COVID-19 hit California. “We raised eyebrows last year when [we] decided to co-fund a Modesto Bee reporter,” Marian Kanaon, CEO of the foundation, told Report for America. “But...I hope we remember, when this public health crisis lessens, the importance of local journalism, just like supporting local business.”

At the Wichita Community Foundation, Courtney Bengtson recalls that “when we began this process a handful of years ago, the thought of taking gifts to subsidize the media business...was unheard of.” But as a former journalist, Bengtson already recognized “access and dissemination of information to be a public good that all – no matter race, economic status or geographic location – should have the privilege to receive.”
Should a for-profit media company receive philanthropic funding? The case for supporting for-profit orgs might come down to numbers. Local non-profit news organizations operate only in 29 states, according to a 2021 report, and many are targeted at tiny geographic areas or audiences. So the total reach of those organizations is much smaller than the collective audience of the established for-profit media.

And economically, there’s no case to be made that every for-profit local newspaper is actually profitable enough to survive. Writing for The Atlantic, journalist Elaine Godfrey outlines the dire financial position of her hometown newspaper, The Hawk Eye in Burlington, Iowa. “Its staff, now down to three overstretched news reporters, still produces a print edition six days a week. But the paper is dying,” she wrote. Because of loss of advertising revenue, production costs and the resulting staff layoffs by owner Gannett Co., Inc., most of the articles are written by other Gannett reporters in cities hundreds of miles from Burlington. The opinion pages are dominated by national columnists who write about national issues that seem far removed from Burlington, Iowa.

Vanessa Bechtel, president and CEO of the Ventura County Community Foundation, notes that she spoke with a lawyer before partnering with the for-profit Pacific Coast Business Times. Benefit to the community — rather than benefit to the media company — might be what makes your involvement charitable.

Many local media organizations are owned by hedge funds or huge corporations from out of state. Do they deserve philanthropic funding? “Our board is fully aware that our largest newsroom in the region is owned by a hedge fund, but anecdotally, I don’t think the community knows that,” says Courtney Bengtson. “They just want access to information and they seem to be extremely upset with paywalls and lack of substantive content.” As far as potential funders, she says, the structure of the organization is less important than carrying out their mission.

It’s also important to note the emergence of a new trend: local newspapers leaving their mega-chains. Local investors — including support from community foundations — are buying news outlets from large chains and seeking “to reverse what they see as decades of disinvestment,” according to a Northwestern University report.

Some community foundations, in an effort to build trust with funders concerned about the volatility of a hedge fund-owned newspaper, distribute grants to those news organizations on a quarterly basis rather than providing a lump sum.
ESTABLISH ETHICS AND STANDARDS.

Another essential way to build trust with the community and with funders: Make sure your ethics and standards are thorough, transparent and public. Stakeholders might be concerned, for instance, about who has “editorial control” over content produced by reporters whose salaries are paid through a community foundation. Journalists know the ethical answer must be “the newsroom.” But some funders might not understand that function of journalism, so editorial control must be defined and approved in any funding agreement. Foundations and news organizations should work together to devise a policy like this one from the Atlanta Civic Circle, which receives funding from the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta:

“Our organization retains complete authority over all editorial content to protect the best journalistic and business interests of our organization. Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsement of donors or their products, services, or opinions. ...We will cede no right of review or influence of editorial content, nor of unauthorized distribution of editorial content.”

At the Modesto Bee, where some reporters’ salaries are supported by community foundations and other contributors, the editorial control policy is attached to each of those reporters’ stories:

This story was produced with financial support from the Stanislaus Community Foundation, along with the GroundTruth Project’s Report for America initiative. The Modesto Bee maintains full editorial control of this work.

Gretchen Moore modeled the Central Valley Community Foundation’s editorial independence and donor transparency guidelines using the policy established by the Institute for Nonprofit News. “We actually built that language into our contracts,” says Moore, who offers a grants contract model that includes the independence clause. Moore says transparency was essential to the foundation and that the foundation would not work with any news organization that didn’t have an editorial independence policy.
OFFER PROOF OF CONCEPT.

Around the country, there’s no shortage of examples where community foundation efforts have clearly paid off, with demonstrated impact. In Fresno, the Bee’s Education Lab quickly proved its worth by producing “outstanding reporting,” says Gretchen Moore, formerly of the Central Valley Community Foundation that supported the education lab. “They broke a couple of impactful stories early on that led to local policy changes, they engaged new and diverse voices in conversations around education, and they were the number one source for education news in the early days of the pandemic. The Education Lab showed its value from the start.”

At the Wichita Community Foundation, three years of “local news and information projects including research, professional development, a community News Lab, a journalism collaborative” led to the launch of the non-profit Wichita Beacon in 2021, says Courtney Bengtson.

The Silicon Valley Community Foundation has granted over $200 million to more than 200 organizations since 2009. What started as a project on the periphery is now a key tenant of how the foundation functions, notes Mauricio Palma, director of initiatives and special projects. One of the foundation’s biggest investments was creating the Renaissance Journalism’s Bay Area Media Collaborative to publish community-centered journalism.

The San Diego Foundation has provided operating grants to the Voice of San Diego and inewsource, a nonprofit investigative organization, through its own funds as well as donor-advised funds. The Marin Community Foundation also has supported several news organizations through their donor-directed funds.

“They broke a couple of impactful stories early on that led to local policy changes, they engaged new and diverse voices in conversations around education, and they were the number one source for education news in the early days of the pandemic. The Education Lab showed its value from the start.”

Arturo Carmona
Tzunu Strategies, Latino Media Collaborative, Media in Color
EMBRACE CHANGE.

The political and pandemic challenges of 2020 drove a directional change for many organizations. And that change often involved a new or stronger partnership with local journalism. In Humboldt County, local media “was struggling when we hit Covid,” says Lindsie Bear, a vice president with the Humboldt Area Foundation. That was a catalyst for the community foundation to “reimagine the entire foundation” from an application-based grantmaker to a community response team, Bear says.

That kind of transformation is the basis of the Central Valley Community Foundation’s “Theory of Change” statement. “It laid out the fact that, for us to do our work, we need an engaged and informed community, and in order to do that we have to have good local journalism, focused on community issues,” says Gretchen Moore.

The Impact Media and Measurement Fund at the Central Valley Community Foundation

The Central Valley's transformation requires informed and engaged residents who monitor progress on community priorities and hold themselves accountable with measurement and transparency for achieving them.

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<th>Issues &amp; Challenges</th>
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<td>• The changing media landscape with “information bubbles” and self-selected “echo chambers” and a lack of in-depth, fact-based, local reporting on community challenges</td>
<td>• Local “solutions journalism” focused on priority issues (education, economic mobility, neighborhood quality, and environmental stewardship)</td>
<td>Dedicated, fact-based spotlight on priority issues to create awareness and momentum for change</td>
<td>Community has increased information and awareness of key issues impacting the community</td>
<td>Community change and transformation advanced by the Impact Media and Measurement Fund.</td>
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<td>• Difficulty in developing a shared, community understanding of challenges in CVCF priority issues resulting in a lack of “community will” to address the challenges</td>
<td>• Community engagement and voice</td>
<td>Improved civic engagement and amplified community voices that are not traditionally reflected in media and local decision making</td>
<td>Improved local decision making resulting from engaged and inclusive civic culture that values data and problem solving</td>
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<td>• Risks to quality decision making by local government as the broader public is disengaged and not providing accountability</td>
<td>• Supporting nontraditional media actors to diversify sources of information</td>
<td>Research, measurement, and reporting progress on community indicators</td>
<td>Measurement and communication of results from community initiatives</td>
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<td>• Missing key community voices</td>
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Central Valley Community Foundation
OTHER WAYS TO WORK WITH LOCAL MEDIA

If you’re not ready to commit to direct funding or want to find other ways to support local media, here are some ideas from community organizations around the country.

**Serve as a fiscal sponsor.** This can be a first step in building a relationship with a local news organization. The Post and Courier in Charleston, S.C., uses the Coastal Community Foundation as its fiscal sponsor. “All donations go to a fund they manage, which allows donations to be tax deductible. When we need to access the money, we fill out a form that explains to the foundation how we will use it,” says the Post & Courier executive editor Autumn Phillips.

At the Inland Empire Community Foundation, donors can make grants and other donations directly to the Black Voice News’ Mapping Black California project. “This Field of Interest Fund has not only supported the training of our data journalism and mapping team, it has allowed us to fund other Black-led organizations who are exposing young people in our community to GIS technology and teaching them the value of maps and data in journalism and community storytelling,” says Paulette Brown-Hinds, publisher of Black Voice News, IECF chair of the board and founder of the fund.

You might also consider simply providing an endorsement for the news organization’s grant applications to other organizations, if the project aligns with your foundation’s goals.

**Explore partnerships.** If your community foundation is in a region served by several media organizations, you might balk at supporting one over another, says Arturo Carmona, who advises media organizations that cover communities of color in California. Forming a coalition with other local newsrooms to cover aspects of a particular issue — climate change, for example — can help alleviate those concerns and produce more wide-reaching journalism, says Carmona. Consider the model of the Coachella Valley Journalism Foundation in Palm Springs which is set up to serve a variety of journalistic projects. They’ve provided Report for America matching funds, salary support for the Desert Sun’s opinion page editor, and worked with a community college to fund an internship program. Writing for the Chronicle of Philanthropy, Julie Sandorf of the Revson Foundation says that “pooled journalism funds could help save local newspapers” and cites the Central Valley Community Foundation’s Impact Media Fund as a model.

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> 
> – Paulette Brown-Hinds, publisher, Black Voice News
Help establish a media collaborative. Reporting collaborations and content-sharing among media organizations in the same community have slowly begun to take shape across the country. But journalists often have neither the time nor the experience in creating and leading such partnerships. The Long Beach Community Foundation stepped in to lead the Long Beach Media Collaborative in which journalists from several community newsrooms produce deep reporting on important quality-of-life issues. The Center for Cooperative Media has published a list of media collaborations and how they’re funded.

“If funders are able to develop and challenge the media to break through the natural competitiveness to promote collaboration and to focus on solutions, I really think there’s a big sweet spot there,” says Arturo Carmona. “The need is there.”

Be creative. Brainstorm with other funders and journalists to find even more ways to support local journalism. “What I think is important for other community foundations to know is you don’t actually have to have a media fund in order to invest in journalism,” says Amanda Hughes, chief strategy officer for the Stanislaus Community Foundation in California. “Maybe you have another field of interest funds, and you want to invest in storytelling around that interest area. There may be a way to partner with a local media outlet to do that.”

CHECK YOUR CONTRACT

Community foundations are accustomed to dealing with contracts, but a relationship with a media outlet may require some less familiar contractual language. Here are some of the elements that need particular attention.

- **A clear description of your support to the organization.** This should include a timeline of the release of funds, and a detailed explanation of what the funds can and cannot be used for.

- **A clear description of required deliverables.** Be precise about your need for any reports and metrics. Recognize that many local media outlets are short-staffed and have little experience with grant reporting, so keep reports and measurements to a minimum. Instead of a compilation of numbers and metrics, consider opting for short narratives that demonstrate the local impact of specific reporting projects.

- **Ownership of intellectual property.** Most newsrooms will want to state that they retain sole ownership over the intellectual property created by any of their employees or contractors — articles, editorials, research notes, photos, graphics, videos. This includes any content that was funded in whole or in part by the grant. However, your legal department can agree to give the grantor limited licenses to use this content for non-commercial and non-competing purposes (for example, linking to it on their website or newsletter, using it in a brochure, putting pieces of it in marketing materials for their own promotional purposes.)
• **Editorial Integrity.** Be wary of presenting a contract that indicates the foundation has a right to tell the newsroom what to cover or how to cover it. In most cases, grantors should not have the right to pre-review or pre-approve any content, nor to demand that content be deleted based on after-the-fact objections.

• **Autonomy as an employer.** If grant funds are specifically used to hire a newsroom employee, ensure that the media company has the right to select the employee and has control over the scope of the employee’s work. The grant-funded employee needs to be subject to the same employment requirements as any other employee, including compliance with company policies, performance standards and requirements. The media organization should retain the right to terminate the grant-funded employee for any reason and at any time without prior authorization from the grantor.

**Marian Kaanon**
President & Chief Executive Officer, Stanislaus Community Foundation
A list of terms that may be used in the foundation grant-making space.
**501c3.** What people are usually talking about when they say “non-profit.” But there are different types of non-profits; this one is an IRS tax-exempt designation that usually has an education focus. 501c3s also often focus on religion, amateur athletics, science, literature, and support for animals and children, for example.

**Capital Grant.** A grant that must be used for building costs, equipment or materials.

**Community Foundation.** A non-profit group that handles funds established by a collection of donors who want to fund projects in their own community or state. Community foundations help donors spend their money efficiently and can match up their needs with the needs of organizations that are looking for funding.

**Corporate Foundation.** A charitable organization connected to a for-profit business.

**Designated funds.** A category of funds used to support one or more specific designated charities in the supported region.

**Discretionary grants.** A category of grants made internally, by the community foundation itself, as opposed to those specified by a donor.

**Donor-advised Funds.** A category of funds in which a donor has directed grants to a specific entity. The community foundation operates the fund and may vet any potential grant recipients but does not select them.

**Employer Identification Number (EIN).** A nine-digit IRS number given to tax-exempt nonprofit organizations.

**Expenditure Responsibility** Community foundations are required to exercise expenditure responsibility when granting to organizations not exempt under Section 501(c)(3). Rev. Rul. 68-489, 1968-2 C.B. 210 provides that an exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) may grant funds to organizations not themselves exempt under Section 501(c)(3), provided the exempt organization: (a) retains control and discretion as to the use of the funds, (b) maintains records establishing the funds were used for Section 501(c)(3) purposes, and (c) limits distributions to specific projects that further its own exempt purposes.

**Field of interest funds.** A category of funding used for particular issues, such as the environment or health care.

**Financial Report.** An accounting of income, expenses, assets and liabilities.

**Fiscal Sponsor.** A nonprofit organization that provides help in managing the funding given to projects at for-profit organizations. Some grantors don’t fund for-profit ventures, so a fiscal sponsor can be set up to administer those funds. A fiscal sponsor is sometimes referred to as a “pass-through” but this is not the preferred terminology.

**Funding Cycle.** Generally identifies how many times a year the granting organization will make donations. Some do it yearly, others twice a year or quarterly.

**General Operating Grant** that can cover everyday expenses, such as salaries, utilities, office supplies.
Giving Pattern. The types of projects and programs a donor has typically supported in the past. Every grantseeker should know the giving pattern of the entity they’re trying to get money from.

Grant Monitoring. After you receive a grant, a program officer will check in with you through phone calls, site visits, emails or a mandatory report for you to complete.

Grantee. The person or organization that gets the grant.

Grantor. The donor or funder.

Grant Evaluation. A review of agreed-upon metrics of a grant program, mainly aimed at determining whether the grant met its goals and objectives.

In-kind contribution. A contribution of goods or services rather than cash. This might include lodging or travel to training conferences.

Letter of Intent (LOI). A pre-application letter or form, through which the grantor asks for brief details on the grant proposal.

Program Grant. The opposite of a general operating grant, this type of grant funds a particular program instead of day-to-day expenses.

Scholarship funds. A category of funding used to support the education of students who meet certain criteria.

Unrestricted funds. A category of funding that is used to meet a community’s unexpected needs such as opioid addiction or natural disaster relief.
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For more information, please contact:
Dr. Paulette Brown-Hinds, paulette@voicemediaventures.com