

# FUNDING JOURNALISM:

## A Guide for Canadian Philanthropy

November 2023

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# FUNDING JOURNALISM

## A Guide for Canadian Philanthropy

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# About this resource

*"Funding Journalism: A Guide for Canadian Philanthropy"* is part of Inspirit Foundation's ongoing effort to bridge the information gap between philanthropy and journalism in Canada. It supplements the first resource in the series, "[Funding Journalism, Strengthening Communities](#)," a set of case studies highlighting philanthropic support for journalism across the country, published last spring.

This guide, created in collaboration with the [Local News Research Project](#) at Toronto Metropolitan University and [Philanthropic Foundations Canada](#), contains practical information and tools for foundation staff and board members interested in funding journalism. It is divided into four sections. The first section explores the rationale for funding journalism while the second looks at the nuts and bolts of how to go about it. The third section offers up a list of possible funding models for you to explore, and the fourth provides a roadmap for engaging in this field as a funder.

A resource for journalists and news organizations is forthcoming.

## About the authors:

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Inspirit is a public foundation based in Toronto, that supports arts and media to advance an inclusive and pluralist Canada. Over the past five years, Inspirit has supported a wide range of journalism initiatives and collaborated with philanthropic peers in this space.

### April Lindgren

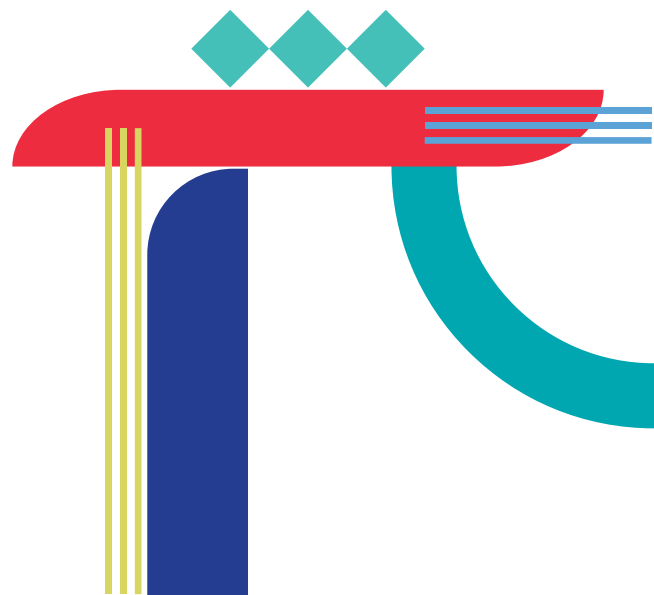
Professor, School of Journalism, Toronto Metropolitan University and principal investigator for the [Local News Research Project](#).

The LNRP's news philanthropy research is supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded grant awarded to PhiLab, the [Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Network](#).

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# Introduction

During the past decade, a small but growing number of foundations in Canada have started supporting journalism. These funders are not granting to news organizations because they want to save the media. They are supporting journalism because it is much more difficult to accomplish their missions without it.

Funders want to help build an informed and engaged society, and journalism is increasingly recognized as an important contributor to that goal. In a well-functioning democracy, quality journalism feeds trustworthy information into the public realm to help people understand the world around them. It helps citizens hold power accountable. And at its best, it creates a forum where people from diverse backgrounds can engage in civic dialogue and have a say in decisions that affect their lives. Funders are stepping up to support public interest journalism because it is a natural ally in tackling many of the complex issues facing communities, including health and education services, climate change, and social and racial justice.

While journalism's contributions to a healthy society are [widely recognized](#), the challenges that undermine its ability to serve the public good [are many and varied](#). Industry revenue that covers the cost of journalists' salaries and other expenses has [declined precipitously](#) as advertising has shifted to digital platforms. Trust in news continues to [erode](#), especially in English-speaking Canada. Technology has changed how journalism is delivered and consumed. And recently, the federal government passed Bill C-18, the Online News Act, a widely debated piece of legislation requiring tech companies Google and Meta (Facebook) to compensate news organizations for content posted on their platforms. Meta has responded by blocking Canadian news on its platform and Google has [indicated](#) it will follow suit – actions that many online news outlets [say](#) threaten their survival.



## What is Quality Journalism

This guide defines quality journalism as the act of reporting and disseminating originally produced news and stories that serve the public interest. Quality journalism maintains independence from the vested interests of those it covers and demonstrates a commitment to accuracy and transparency in reporting methods, regardless of the platform.



## Snapshot: Trouble in journalism

511 | 212  
Closed | Opened

In Canada, between 2008 and October 1, 2023, 511 local news outlets (most of them community newspapers) [closed](#) in 342 communities while 212 new local outlets launched in 150 communities.



Layoffs have reduced the capacity of many newsrooms to [cover](#) civic and other public interest stories, hold power accountable and inform conversations about important issues. According to union data, the *Ottawa Citizen*, for instance, had 190 people in its newsroom in 1990. Today, it has about 20. The *Toronto Star*'s newsroom complement fell to 172 in 2022, down from 610 in 2009.

Recognizing that quality journalism is crucial to a well-functioning democracy, the federal government [introduced](#) regulatory changes in 2019 that created [registered journalism organizations](#) (RJO) as a new type of qualified donee. These tax-exempt entities can issue donation receipts and receive funding from registered charities. To date, only [11 journalism organizations](#) have qualified donee status.

There are, however, other ways for foundations to work with independent nonprofit and for-profit media organizations to advance the public interest and support civic dialogue. For the evolving relationship between philanthropy and journalism to thrive, the two sectors need to build a shared understanding about their respective fields. This resource is a step in that direction.

“Only 11 newsrooms have received qualified donee status to date.”



## Section I

# The case for funding journalism

Funding journalism is still uncharted territory for many philanthropic donors, staff, and boards of directors. Still, there is growing recognition among foundations that journalism plays a critical role in the wellbeing of our communities, democracy and planet. That is because quality journalism:

...equips citizens with the trusted information they need to participate in democracy, hold power accountable, and make informed decisions in daily life and during emergencies;

...puts issues that are important to communities, funders and the wider charitable sector on the agenda of policy makers and the public; and

...introduces into the public domain information, stories and ideas that can influence or challenge dominant narratives in a way that changes minds and spurs action.

**"Information is as vital to the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools and public health." - [Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, 2009](#)**


Studies around the world point to a powerful [link](#) between journalism and well-functioning democracies. In Canada, research suggests the loss and erosion of credible news sources has resulted in [uneven access to information](#) about local candidates and issues in federal elections and to a [decline in reporting on civic affairs](#) and democratic institutions. Without access to trustworthy information, it is more difficult for people to make informed choices when voting and more challenging for them to have a say in decisions that affect them. Quality journalism also plays a major role in countering rumours, disinformation and conspiracy theories.



### Journalism sparks conversations, puts issues on the public agenda, and attracts the attention of policy makers and communities

Grantmakers have a natural ally in journalism because it has the power to draw attention to issues and inform civic dialogue around many of the challenges foundations work to address. The work of newsrooms across Canada illustrates this. Montreal-based *La Presse*, for instance, helped uphold Canada's open court system when it exposed the secret trial of a police informant in the Quebec Court of Appeal. The Public Prosecution Service of Canada attempted to impede the investigation, but reporting by the news outlet eventually led Quebec's justice minister to vow such trials will never again be conducted in secret. This coverage earned *La Presse*, [a registered journalism organization](#), a 2023 [Press Freedom Canada award](#).

On the West Coast, *IndigiNews*, an Indigenous-led newsroom supported by multiple foundations, has been providing ongoing coverage of issues related to Indigenous reproductive health. Its reporting on the British Columbia government's now discontinued use of [birth alerts](#), which saw a disproportionate number of Indigenous babies taken from their mothers at birth, earned the newsroom a 2023 CJF Jackman [Award](#) for Excellence in Journalism. The coverage also informed a subsequent class action [lawsuit](#) on behalf of parents subjected to birth alerts.



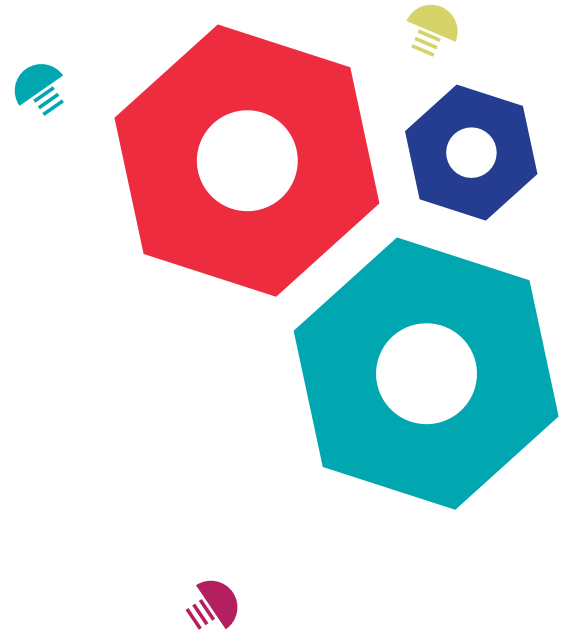
### "Nothing happens in the "real" world unless it first happens in the images in our heads." - Gloria Anzaldúa, Chicana poet, writer, and theorist

Stories and narratives shape beliefs, change mindsets and inspire actions. By introducing new perspectives and voices into civic dialogue, journalism can influence dominant narratives and play an important role in [driving public conversations](#) that result in change. The Atkinson Foundation's concerns about the erosion of decent work and the need for more equitable economic growth, for instance, led it to fund a work-and-wealth beat at the *Toronto Star*. The foundation's contract with the newspaper wasn't just about funding news coverage. Its goal was, in its own words, to tackle the ["inequality of voice that exists in society."](#) The high-impact, public interest journalism subsequently produced by *The Star* included an [expose](#) of rampant abuses by temp agencies that resulted in legislated improvements in workplace protection for vulnerable workers.

## Section II

# The nuts and bolts of funding journalism

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# I. First steps


## ➤ Key factors for the early stages of funding journalism and guidance for engaging your board and team

When presented with an opportunity to fund journalism, staff and board members might be hesitant. Some may ask: 'How can we justify funding journalism, when there are so many competing priorities like health, reconciliation, the climate, and others?' The reality is that individuals, communities, and institutions cannot effectively make progress on social, environmental, and economic issues, if they do not share access to trustworthy information about those issues.

Funders do not need a complex new strategy or a lot of money to get started in supporting journalism. It's okay to start small and build from there.



**“When The Winnipeg Foundation started down this road a dozen years ago, our board was open to the idea that an informed and engaged community is a more caring and giving community. There was vibrant discussion around the board table about the role of a community foundation in supporting local news, but ultimately they saw and supported the alignment with our overall community building mandate. It was a progressive move at the time – fast forward to today and many other funders see the inherent value in investing in local news.”**



**LuAnn Lovlin, Vice President, Communications & Marketing, The Winnipeg Foundation**

## Discussion Questions

Begin exploring the link between journalism and your philanthropic mission by discussing the following questions with your colleagues and community:

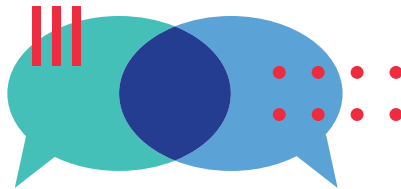
- Where do the communities you work with go for information, including about the issues central to your mission? Are they getting the information they need to participate in decision-making and hold power accountable?
- What sources of information do the communities you work with trust or distrust?
- Whose views are missing or misrepresented in dominant media narratives around issues of public interest? What are the effects of this?
- What could be achieved through increased access to reliable and nuanced reporting around the issues central to your mission?

## Best practices



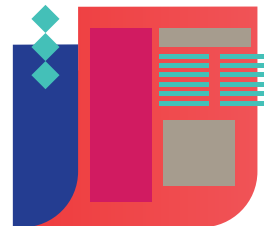
### Mission alignment

Consider your support for journalism through the lens of your philanthropic mission. Identify the potential impacts of more and better media coverage about the issues you work on.



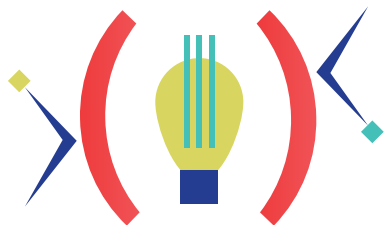
### Talk to others

Connect with other funders of journalism. Ask about their processes, challenges, and solutions. Collaborate where possible – this gives you a chance to dip your toes in the space and learn.



### Journalism, not communications

Be clear about the difference between funding journalism and commissioning communications content. These are very different approaches to advancing your philanthropic mission. Journalism is not communications for your organization.



### Editorial independence

Educate your team and board on expectations about the stories that will be produced and make sure they understand that they may not always agree with the content published by a journalism grantee. They cannot be involved in editorial decisions. Address this from the get-go using the guidance in [Section 2.III](#).



### Trust-building

Take time to build relationships with prospective partners. Discuss and identify shared goals before deciding who you will support and how.





## Tools and resources



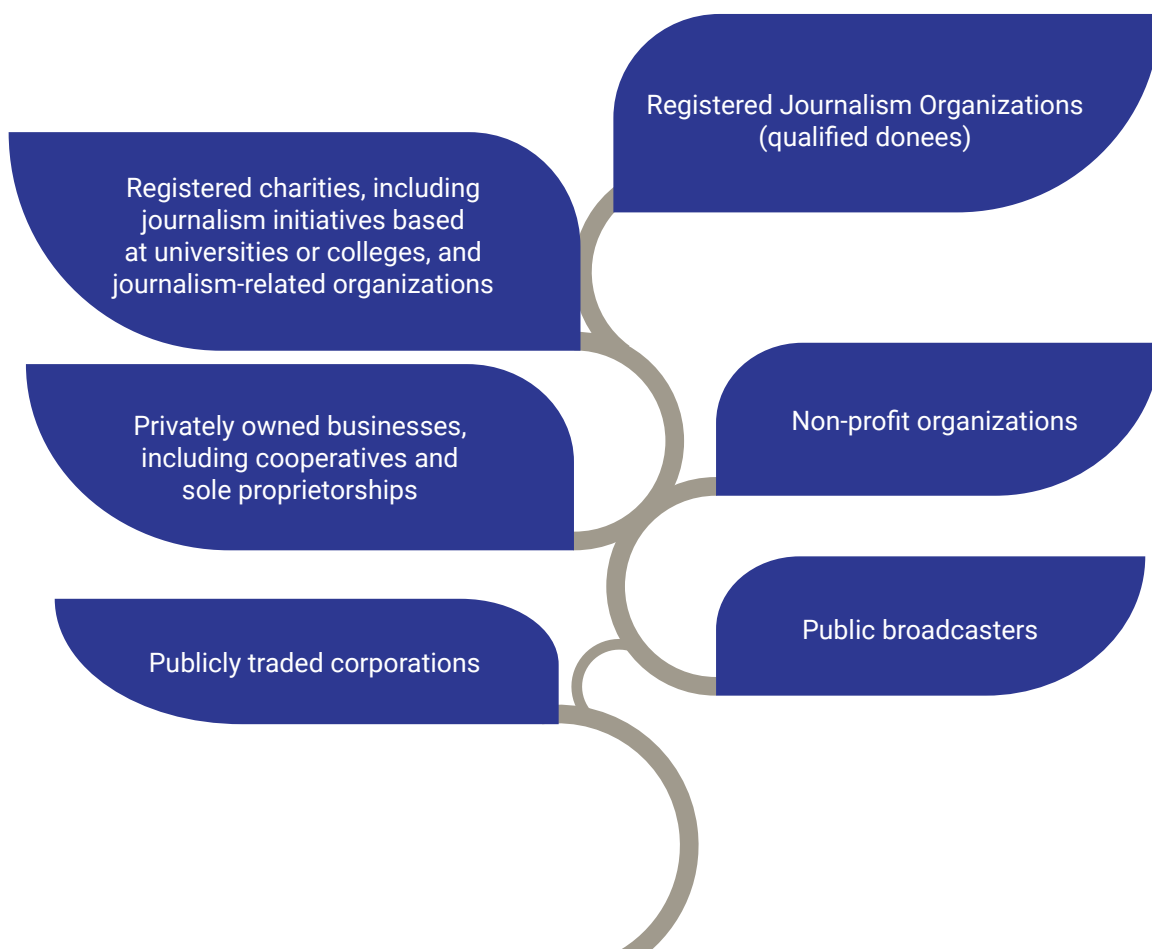
- A [recent report](#) by [LION Publishers](#) identified 270 digital publications in Canada that serve a particular geographic area or focus on a single topic.
- The [Local News Research Project](#) combines content analysis and digital mapping to explore issues related to local news in Canada.

## II. Regulatory landscape and funding mechanisms

- An overview of the current regulatory landscape and the funding mechanisms available to funders interested in supporting journalism in Canada

There have been exciting changes in how funders can support journalism, primarily in the regulations and policy governing the types of organizations that can receive charitable dollars in Canada. While more than two dozen Canadian foundations have found ways to collaborate with mission-aligned journalistic projects of all kinds in recent years, funding journalism remains a relatively nascent field for Canadian funders.

Funders can work with a range of organizations to support journalism in Canada:



In 2019, the Canadian government introduced [new measures](#) to support journalism, including the creation of registered journalism organizations (RJOs), a new type of qualified donee. These changes mean that for the first time, qualifying news organizations can issue receipts to donors and receive funding from registered charities. As of November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, [11](#) organizations have been designated as RJOs by the Canada Revenue Agency.

## What are Registered Journalism Organizations



[RJOs](#) are nonprofit journalism organizations that can issue receipts to donors and receive funding from registered charities. They are recognized by the Canada Revenue Agency as a type of qualified donee, and have been previously designated a [qualified Canadian journalism organization](#) (QCJO), a status that entitles the news organization to certain federal tax credits and benefits.

### To be a QCJO, news organizations must:

- operate in Canada;
- produce original news content that does not promote the interests of an organization, an association, or its members;
- regularly employ two or more journalists; and
- satisfy an Independent Advisory Board that will rule on requirements regarding the production of original news content and adherence to journalistic processes and principles including:
  - verification of information before publication,
  - rebuttal opportunity for those criticized,
  - an honest representation of sources, and
  - a practice of correcting errors.

### To receive RJO designation, a QCJO must:

- produce original content and ensure all business activities relate to journalism (i.e. sale of advertising and subscriptions);
- have trustees and a board of directors;
- refrain from accepting gifts from any one source that represents more than 20% of its total revenue; and
- refrain from making its income payable to any proprietor, member, shareholder, director, trustee or like individual.

# Mechanisms available to foundations interested in supporting journalism

## 1. Gifts to qualified donees

A foundation can make gifts to news outlets with [Registered Journalism Organization](#) status or to journalism-related organizations with charitable status.

### Examples:



*La Presse* is a **registered journalism organization** that receives **grants** from private and public foundations. It also receives donations from individuals and provides charitable tax receipts.



*The Narwhal* is a **registered journalism organization**. In 2022, it received a **grant** from The Winnipeg Foundation for the creation of a Manitoba environment beat reporter, a position created [in partnership with](#) the *Winnipeg Free Press*, a **for-profit news organization**.



The Indigenous Communications and Fine Arts program at First Nations University (FNU) provides journalism education and has received foundation funding via **grants** to FNU.



*Surviving Hate* is a **collaborative journalism project** housed at Humber College's StoryLab, which seeks to fill in the data gap on hate crimes in Canada. The stories produced are disseminated via different online outlets. The project has received funding from the Inspirit Foundation via a **grant** to the college.



Journalists for Human Rights is a **registered charity** that runs capacity building programs for journalists, news outlets, civil society organizations and other stakeholders. It has received **grants** from multiple Canadian foundations and donations from individuals.



## 2. Agreements with or grants to non-qualified donees (NQDs)

A charity can advance its activities within Canada by entering arrangements with an intermediary, meaning an individual or organization that is a non-qualified donee. According to the CRA, “when a charity transfers resources to its intermediary, it must direct and control the use of those resources.” Some common arrangements used by foundations to partner with non-qualified donees, including journalism organizations, are:

### I. Contract agreement:

A foundation can directly hire an individual or organization as a contractor to carry out specific activities on its behalf. This type of intermediary may be a non-profit organization or a for-profit contractor.

#### Example:

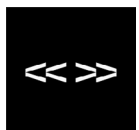


IndigiNews is an independent news organization that is a part of Discourse Community Publishing, a privately owned business. It covers issues important to Indigenous communities and has received funding from foundations via **contracts for services** and **charitable partners**.

### II. Agency agreement:

A foundation can directly use an agent to carry out activities on its behalf. The charity must be able to demonstrate direction and control over the funding provided to the agent.

#### Example:



La Converse is a digital **non-profit news organization** that serves communities traditionally underrepresented and misrepresented in Quebec and Canadian media. It has received foundation funding via **agreements with a charitable partner, contracts for services, and agency agreements**.

## What are non-Qualified Donees (NQDs)



NQDs are entities who have not received charitable designation from the Canada Revenue Agency, such as nonprofits, associations, businesses.

### III. Gift via a partnership with a charitable trustee:

A foundation can make a gift to another charity that in turn, can carry out its activities through an intermediary, such as a non-qualified donee.

#### Example:



The Investigative Journalism Foundation is a **non-profit news organization** that has received foundation funding through a **charitable partner**.

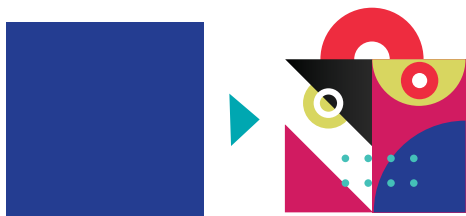
### IV. Grant to a non-qualified donee:

In late 2022, Canada's Income Tax Act was amended to allow NQDs to receive funding from registered charities (including foundations). [Guidelines](#) to support the sector in carrying out these types of relationships are still being drafted and are expected to be finalized later in 2023. In these types of relationships, the legislation asks charities to conduct due diligence, ensure there's a written agreement and an accountability mechanism of some kind in place, and that the activities of the grant further their charitable missions.



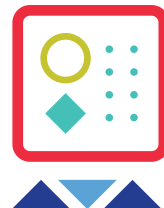
The latest Canada Revenue Agency guidance on how to carry on a charity's activities by working with an intermediary can be found [here](#)

## Best practices



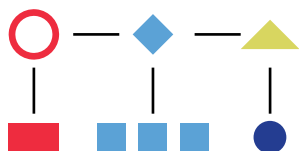
### Customized solutions

Review existing models for funding journalism to identify approaches that will work for your organization. You can find examples in [Section 3](#).



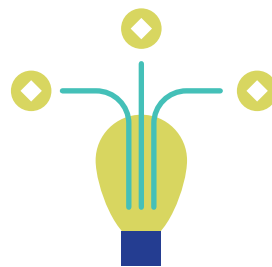
### External support

Connect with your philanthropic peers and explore how other Canadian foundations have funded journalism. Seek external perspectives, including legal advice where needed.



### Know your foundation's charitable structure

Your charitable objects, bylaws, and disbursement quota objectives may impact the journalism funding mechanisms available to you. To make grants to non-qualified donees, it's possible you may need to make amendments.



### Knowledge sharing

Share your learning and be transparent about your foundation's goals, processes, and requirements. Be clear on your website, in documentation, and when speaking about your funding for journalism. This can help inform and inspire journalism organizations and other funders about what is possible in this field.

## Tools and resources

- [Funding Journalism, Strengthening Communities:](#) The Inspirit Foundation shares a set of five case studies of philanthropic support for community-serving journalism in Canada.
- [Using an intermediary to carry on a charity's activities within Canada:](#) The Canada Revenue Agency provides guidance for charities working with intermediaries.
- [What The Saskatchewan Roughriders Can Teach Canadian Journalism:](#) The Public Policy Forum outlines alternative ownership and financing models for journalism in Canada.



### III. Ethical considerations and respect for editorial independence

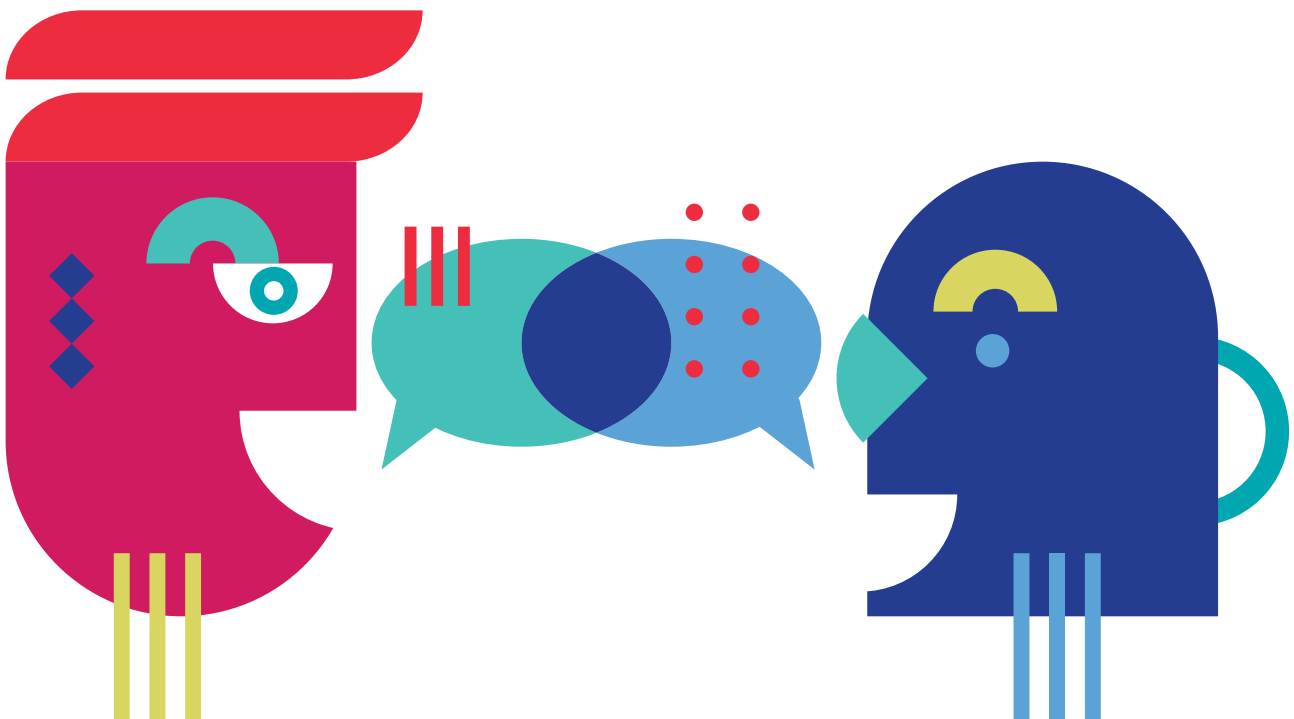
- ⑤ Best practices to protect journalistic integrity and editorial and managerial independence in funding relationships

Journalists play a key role in holding power accountable and helping people make sense of the world by providing information about issues of public interest. The alignment between philanthropy and journalism in their commitment to the public good, while strong, is not without tensions.

Trust in institutions, [including media organizations](#) in Canada, is fragile and declining. Given this reality, journalists and grantmaking organizations must stay clear of real and perceived undue influence on editorial or managerial decisions. This is critical to the impact and legitimacy of journalism produced with philanthropic funds. By enshrining these notions in formal agreements and publicly-accessible policies, the journalistic process is protected and audiences are more likely to trust that the coverage supported by philanthropy is produced without funder meddling.

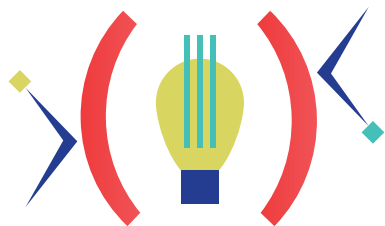
“Investing in journalism may give new meaning to the term trust-based philanthropy. We are asking foundations to provide support without trying to influence outcomes or have a say in how the work is done,”

[says](#) Lisa Gibbs, vice-president of philanthropic development at The Associated Press.





## Best practices



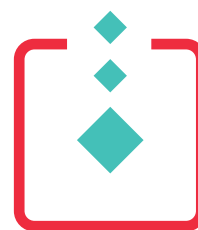
### Editorial independence

Embed editorial independence in your funding agreements, making it clear that editorial control and legal responsibilities rest with the recipient.



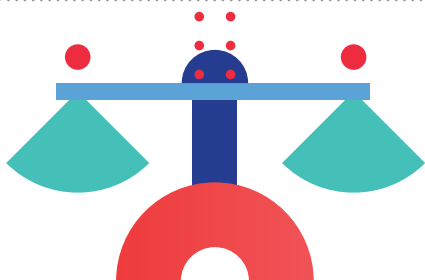
### Radical transparency and donor disclosure

Publicly report on your funding for journalism and require journalism grantees to do the same. In your reports, share the name of the recipient, total amount granted and general goals of the partnership.



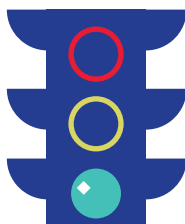
### Open access

Ensure, via your agreements with journalism organizations, that the content produced with your support is publicly available, instead of only accessible to paid subscribers.



### Journalistic ethics

Work with media outlets and projects that have clearly defined codes of ethics. Where relevant, request grant recipients share these publicly.



### Unrestricted funding

Provide operational support where possible so that news organizations decide what stories need to be told.



## Tools and resources

- [Guidance on philanthropic funding of media and news:](#) The American Press Institute shares guidelines for funders and outlets, with a focus on journalistic independence.
- [Ethics Guidelines:](#) The Canadian Association of Journalists provides guidance to help journalists hold themselves accountable in their work.
- [Sample Ethics Policy:](#) This template is provided by PressForward, a Canadian organization working to support and advocate for independent newsrooms.
- [Framing the philanthropic relationship with news media companies:](#) The Atkinson Foundation offers helpful guidance for contracts, based on its work with the *Toronto Star*.
- [Four things you need to know before signing that grant agreement:](#) Nicole Campbell, CEO of Build Up Advisory Group, shares critical components to include in agreements.

### Sample template

#### Inspirit Foundation's principles for journalism funding:

To uphold the highest standards of ethical support for journalism, Inspirit adheres to the following principles:

1. Transparency and donor recognition: Inspirit publicly names all funding partnerships with journalism organizations on our Grants webpage. As well, we require grantee partners to publicly name Inspirit as a supporter of their work on published materials and communications – print, digital, audio, and other media – as well as website, annual reports, and other public facing materials where appropriate. This is for transparency.
2. Editorial independence and integrity: Inspirit does not endorse, influence, edit, or vet content produced by journalist partners in advance of or following publication. Inspirit funding does not imply editorial involvement or endorsement of the content produced.
3. Journalistic ethics: Inspirit requires that grantee partners employ all ethical and/or journalistic standards applicable to the production and publication of content.

We encourage partners in the journalism and philanthropic sectors to develop and publicly share policies for upholding ethics and integrity in journalism-related activities.



## IV. Supporting more equitable journalism

- Factors to keep in mind to help build a more equitable journalism sector through your funding.

To make sense of the events and issues around us, we need [trustworthy](#) stories that include diverse perspectives. But journalism is not immune to practices that foster inequity. Editorial decisions have contributed to the spread of harmful narratives by excluding and misrepresenting the views and experiences of certain groups and disseminating negative stereotypes. [Newsroom staff and leadership](#) are notoriously lacking in diversity, as are many journalism school faculties. Accessing capital is often more difficult for news entrepreneurs from underrepresented communities.

All of these shortcomings have a disproportionate effect on groups that already experience a higher risk of exclusion and discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, geography, and other factors.

Consistent with best practices throughout the philanthropic sector, funders can champion [journalism that centers equity](#) by partnering with news organizations led by people from underrepresented or misrepresented groups who are committed to serving those communities. They can support culture change in mainstream newsrooms by funding initiatives that diversify staffing and strengthen coverage of groups and issues that have been ignored. They can build equity into their funding plans by ensuring grants provide for decent wages so that journalists who are not from affluent backgrounds can afford to build careers telling important community stories.

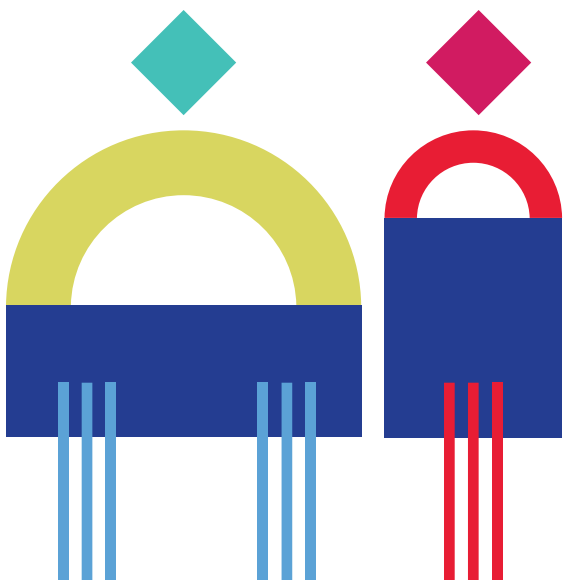


**“You can’t underestimate how important and vital it is to see yourself in stories, to see yourself in media, to see yourself respected,”**

**[says](#) Connie Walker, Pulitzer Prize-winning Cree journalist from the Okanese First Nation in Saskatchewan.**

**“In this new era, funders must invest in news and information outlets that are firmly centered in and on their communities – not ones pinpointed by philanthropists but identified by the people they serve,”**

**[says](#) Tracie Powell, founder of the Pivot Fund, a venture philanthropy organization dedicated to investing \$USD 500 million in independent BIPOC-led community news.**



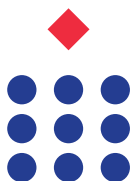


## Best practices



### Ask questions

Learn about the journalism organization's composition and governance. Understand who holds editorial control and how diverse communities' perspectives are considered in the work.



### Support underrepresented leadership

Invest in media leaders from underrepresented communities who bring more diverse perspectives to editorial decision making. This determines coverage and resource allocation in newsrooms.



### Promote fair working conditions

Dig into news organizations' salary and employment practices for journalists, editors, and all contributors, including freelancers. Provide funding that will allow the organization to attract, retain and fairly compensate a diverse and talented pool of journalists.



### Simplify your grantmaking

Offer streamlined application, payment, and reporting processes that reduce the workload and costs for grantees. Guide prospective partners through your application system, especially those less experienced in navigating philanthropy.



### Do your research

Reach outside your usual circles to learn about and develop strategies that promote equity in news stories and newsrooms. Pay attention to the perspectives that are missing and the stereotypes that are perpetuated in stories.



## Examples

- Groups working to advance representation in media in Canada through the lens of race, gender, religion, geography, age, and other indicators of diversity include: [Canadian Association of Black Journalists](#), [Informed Opinions](#), [Muslim Sources](#), and the [Indigenous Journalists Association](#).
- In 2020, independent news outlet *The Discourse*, and the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) came together to propose a new model for independent, Indigenous-centred journalism. This resulted in [IndigiNews](#), an online digital outlet that centres Indigenous cultural values, teachings and needs.

## Tools and resources

- [CAJ Diversity Survey](#): This yearly survey by the Canadian Association of Journalists measures the level of diversity in newsrooms across Canada.
- [Decolonizing Journalism](#): This book by Anishnaabe journalist Duncan McCue offers guidance to journalists, students and individuals interested in journalism in Indigenous communities
- [Architects of Necessity](#): This research by Tracie M. Powell and Meredith D. Clark examines the unique challenges facing news startups led by Black, Indigenous and racialized leaders and the communities they serve. While it is U.S.-focused, the lessons highlighted are applicable in other jurisdictions.
- [Struggles and successes of BIPOC news leaders](#): LION Publishers shares an overview of the results of a listening survey with Black, Indigenous and racialized media leaders.

## V. Measuring impact

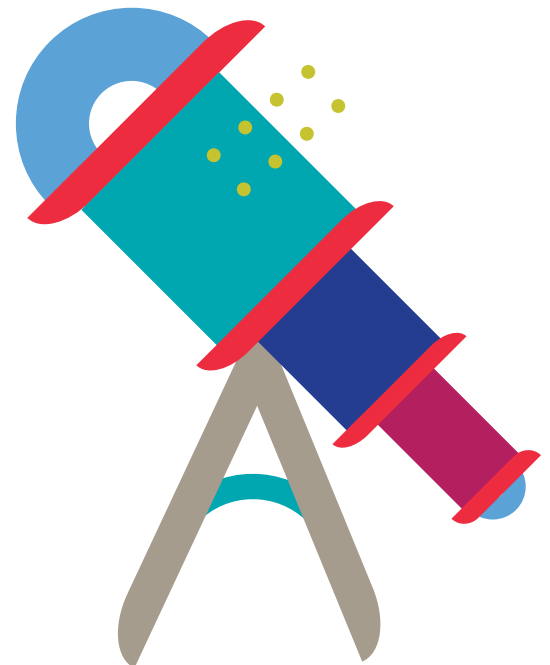
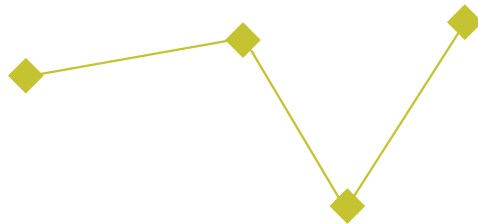
### ① Key considerations related to impact measurement when funding journalism

Measuring the impact of journalism funding can be challenging. The effects of reporting on an issue might be felt immediately or take years, even decades, to materialize. Many other social, political and economic factors also come into play, so connecting coverage of an issue to a specific output is not always possible.

Both funders and newsrooms often look to audience numbers as a measure of impact. While it's important to know how many people interact with content, identifying which people interact with the content and/or the actions or conversations that unfold as a result of stories can be a more meaningful assessment of engagement. Did the coverage shift public awareness or attitudes around an issue? Did it create opportunities for underrepresented groups to provide their perspective? Did decision-makers see the stories? Did a grant result in a change in newsroom reporting or business practices?

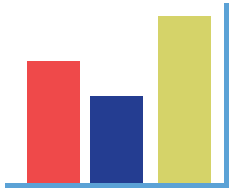
Impact measurement is important to foundations – they need to know if their money is being put to good use and learn from current work to inform future funding decisions. But measuring impact can also benefit journalism organizations. Erin Millar, the co-founder of digital news organization *Discourse Media* and CEO of Indiegraf, has observed that the systematic gathering of information on impact can help news outlets in day-to-day operations:

"It's not just to serve funders, by any means. It helps us to do our work better," Millar said. "It also helps us to figure out how we're marketing, how the community sees the value of this work, and helps us tell that story to community members who financially support us."



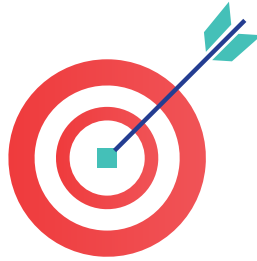


## Best practices



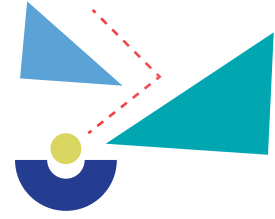
### Be reasonable

Avoid demanding measurement for the sake of measurement. Your process should serve a specific purpose and be commensurate with the funding provided. Consider how you can lighten your reporting requirements and be flexible with journalists' shifting timelines and news cycles.



### Set realistic expectations

Have conversations with news organizations early on about what they can reasonably measure, the timeframes involved and the tools they will use.



### Stay away from predetermined outcomes as an impact metric

Identifying in advance what a story should say or what impact it is expected to have is unrealistic and risks infringing on editorial independence.



### Budget for impact measurement

Tracking and reporting back on impact requires time and money that many resource-constrained journalism organizations don't have. If you require substantial impact reporting, discuss this up front with prospective grantees and include funding for this within your grants.



### Review your understanding of impact

The impact of journalism funding may be different at the organizational, audience, and institutional level. Likes and shares are not always the best metrics. Similarly, while philanthropic dollars can be key to the scaling of a journalism organization, especially for startups, expecting funding to lead sustained revenue growth is unrealistic.





## Examples

- The Vancouver Foundation supported *Spotlight: Child Welfare*, a collaborative journalism project that aims to improve media coverage of the child welfare system. Kevin McCort, president and CEO, said the foundation's support for journalism that focused on Indigenous families and British Columbia's [care system](#) had widespread engagement as it was published. "We were seeing conversations that were being picked up by others. They were being raised in the legislature, the Question Period, so we could see that there was activity and conversations being started around that work. And so that was, for us, a measure of success."
- Ontario's auditor general Bonnie Lysyk [praised journalists](#) for their investigative reporting following the release of her report on the provincial government's decision to greenlight housing development on sections of the protected Greenbelt around the Greater Toronto Area. Lysyk's audit in August 2023 concluded that some developers stood to earn billions as a result of the government's decision. After 11 months of dogged reporting by journalists at *The Narwhal* and *Toronto Star*, Premier Doug Ford caved to public pressure in September 2023 and restored [the lands](#) to the Greenbelt.
- In 2021, *The Local's* pandemic coverage shone the spotlight on the inequitable access to vaccines faced by residents in Peel Region, home to many immigrant and front-line workers. Two weeks after its first story appeared, the Ontario government announced a policy allocating 50 per cent of all vaccines to COVID-19 hotspots including Peel. The Toronto-based digital magazine is a registered journalism organization supported by [multiple foundations](#).

## Tools and resources

- The [IA Impact Tracker](#) tool designed by U.S.-based Impact Architects helps news organizations, funders, and other stakeholders understand the impact of journalism by defining, measuring, and tracking real world change.
- [The Case for Media Impact: A Case Study of ICIJ's Radical Collaboration Strategy](#): This report uses a major investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists to explore journalism impact from various perspectives.

## Section III

# Funding models to consider



If you are new to funding journalism or curious about how to leverage it to advance your philanthropic priorities, this list of funding models will feed your imagination.

### 1. General operating costs

Unrestricted funding gives news organizations the flexibility to experiment and innovate, expand coverage, attract and retain talent, and invest in essential behind-the-scenes infrastructure such as marketing and accounting.

### 2. Journalism training and professional development

Fund capacity-building initiatives for journalists, editors, and media leaders. Ensure these initiatives create opportunities for individuals from underrepresented communities and provide financial compensation and cultural supports. An example of this is the [Northern Journalism Training Initiative](#), a program that draws from Indigenous and northern knowledge to prepare Indigenous and northern residents for employment in media.

### 3. Beat funding

Fund a reporter position focused on an issue important to your mission. The Atkinson Foundation, for example, has over the last decade, funded a work-and-wealth beat reporter and a democracy renewal reporter at the *Toronto Star*. The [Fonds québécois en journalisme international](#) (FQJI) is a nonprofit organization that provides direct funding to Québec-based journalists working on international reporting projects.

### 4. Newsroom collaborations

Encourage collaborative reporting and investigative projects by multiple newsrooms that improve and deepen reporting around issues of public interest. The non-profit [Investigative Journalism Foundation](#), for example, partners with [media outlets](#), [post-secondary institutions](#), and other organizations to produce news stories and publish freely available, user-friendly public interest [databases](#).

### 5. College and university initiatives

Fund post-secondary initiatives that support journalism students, generate journalism research specific to Canada, or produce news coverage to fill national and local news gaps.

## 6. Help advance a free press

Fund the development of shared legal resources, information and support systems for news organizations and journalists to advance press freedom. Examples of this work in Canada include the Canadian Association of Journalists' [legal advocacy work](#) and J-Source.ca's [Canada Press Freedom Project](#).

## 7. Matching funds

Match donations that individual donors make to a journalism organization. You can learn from the [NewsMatch](#) program in the U.S., which uses matching campaigns to help grow funding and fundraising capacity for media outlets.

## 8. Pooled funds

Create a pooled fund at a community foundation or at a foundation that offers donor-advised funds to strengthen news coverage in a specific community or around a subject. A [recent report](#) presents examples of funds created by U.S. foundations and newsrooms to provide long-term support for local news ecosystems.

## 9. Partnerships between qualified and non-qualified donees

Expand the reach and audience of public interest journalism by supporting arrangements where registered journalism organizations (RJOs) share editorial control and stories with a for-profit news outlet. A Winnipeg Foundation [agreement](#) with *The Narwhal* and *The Winnipeg Free Press*, for instance, provides funding for a Manitoba environment beat reporter who produces content for both publications.

## 10. Think outside the box

Look beyond traditional news outlets and journalistic approaches when making funding choices. Foundations, for instance, have funded:

- **Community listening initiatives**

Help bring together journalists and citizens to identify stories that need telling. For example, [The Green Line](#), a hyperlocal Toronto-based news outlet, convenes story circles to consult with communities about stories and issues that matter to them.

- **Unconventional reporting tools**

Support non-traditional approaches that can help reach communities that do not typically engage with journalism. For example, [Outlier Media](#), a nonprofit newsroom in Detroit, has set up a texting service that automatically delivers housing, utility and other information to residents. It can also be used to talk directly to an *Outlier* reporter.

- **Citizen journalism**

Created by *City Bureau* in 2018, the U.S.-based [Documenters Network](#) is a non-profit civic journalism lab that trains and pays citizens to attend under-reported public meetings and publish the results. Its reporting resources are available to the wider public.



## Section IV

# Bringing it all together

## A Roadmap

### 1 Assess

Examine the journalism available to the communities you serve and coverage of the issues you work on. Ask your colleagues and community members for their perspectives.

### 2 Identify opportunities

Look for journalism funding models that could help advance your mission as a funder. Be open to emerging and innovative approaches by a range of journalism organizations and groups.

### 3 Talk to peers

Explore who else is funding journalism projects that align with your mission. You don't need to start from scratch.

### 4 Make the case

Engage your board or staff. Use this resource to guide them through the rationale for supporting journalism and mechanisms for funding journalism organizations.

### 5 Outreach

Connect with journalism organizations in your community to learn more about their work, with a view to potentially supporting projects that align with your mission.

### 6 Go!

Refer to this guide as you develop your support for journalism. Connect with your peers, share what you learn, and help build a community of practice for journalism funders in Canada.



#### Any questions?

Do you have questions or insights about philanthropic funding for journalism in Canada? Are you interested in collaborating? Please reach out to the authors and stay tuned for upcoming resources.

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