

## POLICY BRIEF

### Abstract

Global interest in funds to support journalism is on the rise, as governments and journalists seek ways to support quality information even as the business model has become more difficult. Some countries, including those in Northern Europe and the European Union, have been using these journalism funds for years, while others are just starting to consider how to set them up. In this policy brief, we examine government funds that support journalism in the funders' country (not development aid). We summarise the existing literature, describe how such funds are designed and allocated, provide examples from around the world, and close with recommendations on setting up journalism funds to support quality news.

### Introduction

Global interest in funds to support journalism is on the rise, as governments and journalists seek ways to support quality information even as the business model has become more difficult. Some countries, including those in Northern Europe and the European Union, have been using these journalism funds for years, while others are just starting to consider how to set them up.

A variety of funds exist, including commercial investment funds and overseas development aid; this paper focuses on funds that governments set up to support journalism within their own countries. Such structural support is needed, as there are limits to relying on the goodwill of philanthropists and tech companies. Governments not only have greater resources but have a role in supporting journalism as a pillar of democracy. (Marius Dragomir, founding director of the Media and Journalism Research Center at the University of Santiago de Compostela gives an overview of other available funding opportunities, including state and philanthropic, in Appendix 1, p. 12).

Despite the renewed interest in journalism funds supported by government, little public literature exists on how to establish them. Our research lays out a possible path forward. We have identified a common set of questions countries face when setting up such funds, including how to design them and ensure they are not captured, which established funds should be emulated, and why. This paper examines existing funds and provides recommendations for governments and journalism organisations looking to establish new funds. A [counterpart GFMD Policy Paper](#) by Sameer Padania and Francesca Silvani of Macroscopic looks at the landscape of National Funds for Journalism supported by a wider range of stakeholders, including governments, investors, philanthropies and corporations.

In this paper, we define journalism as a profession whose activity is “gathering, assessing, creating and presenting new information”. Our definition of media broadly covers both publication channels and publishing entities that support journalism.

# 6 ESSENTIAL STEPS FOR ESTABLISHING A GOVERNMENT-SUPPORTED JOURNALISM AND MEDIA FUND

Establishing a successful journalism fund requires a nuanced understanding of the environment in which it will operate. The context surrounding journalism grants varies from country to country and even community to community, shaped by factors such as journalists' needs, public discourse, newsroom culture, and the status of the media.

Despite these differences, several key elements apply generally to the establishment of journalism funds. For instance, it is necessary to address the question of how such funds can best serve particular communities and target groups, while also respecting editorial independence. By taking such issues into consideration, journalism funds can be established with the necessary nuance and sensitivity to succeed in their respective contexts. Our research indicates six areas of primary focus.

## 1. Identifying a need and building support for the idea of a fund

The first step in building a journalism fund is to identify an editorial or journalistic need and to ask how a fund would help meet it. Next, it is necessary to gather support for the fund.

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### Identifying a need

Identifying a need might involve addressing a shortage of local news, tackling inadequate coverage of specific topics, or promoting high-quality journalism in underserved communities including communities of colour. Some countries have a long track record of state support for media outlets, which indirectly supports journalism. Such support typically has a specific focus, such as aiding media in remote regions or funding innovation.

In the Nordic countries, news media outlets can apply for [direct subsidies from the state](#). (Harrie, 2022). This financial support helps a diverse range of news sources, allowing citizens access to a wide array of independent news outlets. By offering this funding, along with indirect forms of support, such as reduced VAT and public-service media financing, governments hope to strengthen democracy and protect freedom of expression.

[Denmark's Mediestøtte](#), for example, is allocated through the state budget, and supports media production, including journalism, innovation projects, and print and online distribution costs. Eligible media outlets can apply for funding each year, and grants can be adjusted every few years to accommodate changes in focus and beneficiaries.

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### Building support

Gathering support for a fund requires persuading governments (and potential additional donors) that such a fund would be useful and that it would address needs in a community. In doing this, it is helpful to bear in mind that a narrowly focused fund can be easier to establish than something broader and more ambitious. For example, some ten years ago the European Union launched grants (which today operate under the Creative Europe programme) to help investigative journalists cover the extra costs of producing investigative journalism and collaborating across intra-EU borders. This argument made sense from an editorial point of view and aligned with an overall aim to unite Europe. In other words, a need was identified and answered.

Journalism grants were established by the European Parliament as pilot projects as early as 2010, and today (2023) such grants are an established feature on the EU's multi-year budget. Similarly, in the Netherlands, where government funding for media dates back to the 1970s, the government supported funds and made adjustments as new challenges that threatened the quality of journalism arose, such as digitalisation or the need for new skills.

But Europe is not the only place to ponder and practice such ideas. In Sierra Leone in late 2020, after repealing criminal defamation laws, President Julius Maada Bio called for an investment [conference](#) on the media with a view to supporting enhanced private sector investments in the media. The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), a membership-based organisation that comprises national media organisations, policy-making bodies, and academic institutions, received support from colleagues in Kenya as well as the BBC Media Action to develop the Fund. With support from the Independent Fund for Public Interest Media the pilot phase of the Fund will commence soon. According to University of Sierra Leone lecturer and MRCG head, Dr Francis Sowa, who has been key to efforts in Sierra Leone to support journalism, the MRCG through the local National Fund for Public Interest Media, which has been established, would award grants to news organisations in Sierra Leone to fund public-interest journalism.

Other initiatives with a specific focus have emerged in New Jersey and California in the US. The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium supports local journalism by providing grants (Davis, Kroin, & Rispoli, 2022). The California initiative is to support local news reporting in underserved areas.

## 2. Clarifying the purpose and design of the fund

A grant requires a clear purpose so that it can be distributed fairly. It needs a particular focus, as well as clear and transparent eligibility criteria. Such clarity leads to grant funding that stimulates a specific type of journalism or media operation, which, in turn, affects the kind of journalism carried out with the support (Ferrucci & Nelson, 2019).

The design of a fund plays a critical role in its success. Even minor adjustments in grantee assessment criteria allow grant givers to direct funds in a more precise direction towards the goal of this particular support programme. For example, all funders need to decide whether it is realistic to expect a journalist or media organisation to become financially self-sufficient after a few years of support. Should the funder consider the support as a stimulus that may lead to interesting professional outcomes (such as innovation or new content) for only as long as funding lasts? Or should the funding lead to lasting structures, whether by creating a new organisation or stabilising an existing one?

The question of whether to provide ongoing or short-term funding is often a philosophical one, notes Franz Krüger, a researcher at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. Some donors duck the question by opting to provide funding for only a time-limited project or only a few years (often three), expecting the grantee to become self-sufficient after that period. However, the reality of the journalism business model is that organisations that need funding today are likely still to need it in the future. While donors hope that a few years of funding will give their grantees the breathing space to develop a plan and become commercially sustainable, hopes for a "new business model" have rarely come true. Therefore, it is more realistic to assume that high-quality journalism and news outlets will continue to need help. However, while long-term endowments could solve the problem, few donors are willing to make such a commitment.

Funds can be targeted at a group based on geography, topic, or journalistic method. They can also be set aside for emergency situations, entrepreneurial efforts, or for journalists of specific demographic groups or with particular skill sets. Ultimately, a well-designed and transparent grant program can have a significant impact on the quality and sustainability of journalism.

### 3. Ensuring the independence of grantees and regranting bodies

In order to ensure impartiality and support truly independent and credible journalism, government funders should work with journalists to establish professional and representative management structures that protect editorial independence and avoid conflicts of interest, or partisan decision making. Many countries have a history of government funding for public service media and public-interest journalism, often with a sophisticated setup of checks and balances that achieve such independence.

As the needs of news media and public-interest journalism continue to evolve, so do the ways in which funding opportunities are made available. One such approach is the use of “arm’s-length” transactions through intermediary bodies responsible for regranting funds to newsrooms or individual journalists. Governments can set up these independent structures, or assign the regranting task to existing organisations or consortia in the field. This not only helps to streamline the process of distributing funds, but provides an added layer of independence between the funders and those receiving funds.

In 2005, Morocco<sup>1</sup> established a fund to provide support for press organisations and thus indirectly to journalism. Between 2005 and 2016, the fund granted more than US\$65 million to beneficiaries, with varying amounts allocated each year. Whereas the fund originally prioritised printed media, since 2016 the government has shifted its focus mainly towards electronic media companies. The commission responsible for distributing the aid allocates funds according to specific criteria with the aim of covering operating expenses, such as paper, rent, transport, and telephone/internet access. According to a July 2019 [government communication](#), 76 written and electronic press organisations benefited from funding in 2018. A lack of more detailed reporting has made it difficult to report on and evaluate the fund’s effectiveness accurately.

The South African government has designated the Media Development & Diversity Agency (MDDA) as the statutory organisation responsible for developing media projects. The legislation governing the MDDA enables the agency to provide support community media, which is defined as [“any media project that is owned and controlled by a community where any financial surplus is reinvested in the media project”](#).

Several European countries have established their own journalism funds to support the media industry, while others are in the process of doing so. Two bodies in the Netherlands have been designated as regranting entities: [the Dutch Fund for In-Depth Journalism](#) (Fonds Bijzondere Journalistieke Projecten) established by experienced journalists in 1990, and [the Dutch Journalism Fund](#) (Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek), which was founded in 1974 to support struggling media organisations. Over time, the latter has stepped in to support media digitalisation, and is today primarily focused on regranting government money to journalists. [The Pascal Decroos Fund](#) in neighbouring Belgium, established in 1998 and later enlarged and renamed [Journalismfund Europe](#), operates in a similar way to stimulate investigative journalism through regranting funds from the Flanders government and others such as the EU.

In the United States, several new funds are being established at the state level and administered by educational institutions. The New Jersey Civic Information Consortium, supporting local news and information initiatives throughout the state, was launched in 2018 and is governed by a board that includes representatives from six public state universities. Similarly, Berkeley’s Graduate School for Journalism, California, in 2023 launched a US\$25 million fund, [California Local News Project](#), to support a journalism fellowship program in the state. The multi-year funding was included in the state’s considerable annual budget. Inspired by the New Jersey model, the fund has a far larger budget and a unique structure, which means the university no longer carries the responsibility for regranting.

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<sup>1</sup> Imane Mabrouk carried out research for this section.

The fellowship will match early-career journalists with local newsrooms and those which provide coverage of otherwise underrepresented communities. The Graduate School of Journalism has put together a core staff to coordinate the program's logistics and provide considerable support to the fellows and newsrooms. In an interview,<sup>2</sup> program director Christa Scharfenberg said the Project has also established an advisory board of 18 journalism educators and professionals who “represent and reflect California's communities” to participate in selection of fellows and newsroom candidates to host them. The fellowships thus created will be awarded to up to 40 journalists annually, for a minimum of two years, with an annual salary of \$60,000 to \$65,000 (and benefits), to support their work at local newsrooms, many of which cover underrepresented communities. The hope is that the early-career journalists mentored in this way will transition to fulltime jobs funded by newsrooms.

A common thread uniting all regrating models is the desire to create an intermediary body between government funders and journalism organisations and journalists. The risk of capture within these regrating bodies is limited since they typically are part of or close to the journalism and media community. This community prioritises professionalism and values its reputation and independence, preserving them by means of transparency and other accountability mechanisms.

A new global fund, [the International Fund for Public Interest Media](#) (IFPIM) was launched in 2021 with startup money from the Luminate Foundation to support public interest media and thus indirectly journalism, particularly in the global south. The founders, including James Deane from BBC Media Action and Nishant Lalwani from Luminate, spent more than a year carefully designing the governance structure. “Government should finance during a market failure, but government funders should not be involved in decisions about which organisations get support. Governance mechanisms need to be designed with this in mind,” said Amelie Baudot, the Chief Operating Officer, in an interview. Since its inception, IFPIM has raised close to US\$50 million from a mix of governments, corporations, and foundations. In 2022, IFPIM created a pot of approximately US\$3 million and put out an initial call for proposals, receiving over 200 of “high-quality”. Winners include Bush Radio and Daraj, who will receive support over two years. IFPIM is focusing on national and regional efforts and hopes that the organisations they support will not remain dependent on grant funding (IFPIM, 2023).

#### 4. Funding the funds

Support for journalism from government or government-regulated funds is usually allocated through budget votes. In such cases, it is important to make sure the funds have an explicit “[budget line](#)” so that the funds are earmarked for journalism. If, say, journalism is lumped under an arts and culture budget line, it may be more likely to be cut in the future if representatives decide to make spending cuts to that line item.

In the US, perhaps the best-known effort in this direction is [the New Jersey Civic Information Consortium](#) (NJCIC). The consortium was formed after journalism support organisations such as the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, the non-profit advocacy organisation Free Press, and local journalists began (in 2015) to discuss how New Jersey could create a fund to support local journalism. Academic studies, e.g., Stonbely, Weber, & Satullo, (2020) and Davis, Kroin, & Rispoli (2022), describe how the fund transformed from an idea into a functioning body, due in part to a vibrant grassroots initiative that navigated a labyrinth of institutional resistance. By 2023, the consortium will have distributed nearly US\$7 million in grants to [more than 40 organisations across the state](#).

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<sup>2</sup> Anya Schiffrin conducted an interview with Christa Scharfenberg, project director of the California Local News Fellowship at Berkeley Journalism, on 1 February 2023.

In Europe, on the transnational European Union level, journalism funding is allocated via budget votes, with a seven-year framework detailed in annual budget outlines every year. The income of these EU institutions is secured through diverse streams, including custom duties and sugar levies, through contributions from member states based on value-added tax (VAT) and gross national income (GNI) percentages, and fees for non-recycled plastic packaging waste. Of this budget, the EU allocates - as part of its budget negotiations - roughly €41 million per year to support media and journalism. Around half of this allocation is designated for a European broadcaster, while the remainder funds journalism directly.

On a national level in Europe, funds are also allocated via budget votes, as may be seen in our case study of the Netherlands. In France (as in some other European countries), where the license fee supporting public service broadcasters has been scrapped in recent years, academics in the field of journalism and media funding argue in favour of an [“earmarked and fair”](#) funding of public service media, based on “progressive income-based tax” license fees allocated to public service broadcasters (Cagé, 2023).

In other parts of the world, however, alternative income streams are tapped and allocated to fund access to information, thus indirectly supporting journalism. Most prominently, [the News Media Bargaining Code](#) (NMBC) in Australia obliges Big Tech platforms to compensate news producers for their journalism. Additionally, in several Latin American countries, telecom operators pay a mandatory fee, part of which is then used to support access to telecom services for remote or otherwise underserved communities (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2021). In 2009, Argentina passed a law establishing the Competitive Development Fund for Audiovisual Media (FOMECA), designed so that audio visual media would receive a share of taxes on advertising.

On the African continent, South Africa provides an interesting example. The government and major print and broadcasting companies in the country have created a partnership to assist, amongst others, developing communities and small commercial media. The program is [“funded by government grants and the Universal Service and Access Agency \(USAF\) levies paid by broadcasters”](#).

## 5. Establishing eligibility and editorial standards.

The determination of eligibility for funding varies among government funders and regranters, and criteria may overlap with the those that inform a fund’s design. The criteria for eligibility typically include the status of potential grantees (as individuals or organisations), and the design focus of the grant. In many cases, certain editorial standards are also cited as requirements for eligibility.

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### Legal set-up and eligibility

As previously discussed, a number of journalism funding and support programmes are not administered directly by governments, but rather by intermediary regranting bodies. This model presents a possible point of tension between a government’s legal and democratic responsibilities in spending public money, and a regranting body’s role in protecting editorial independence. For example, regranting bodies may be unwilling to share information or editorial material relating to planned projects in order to protect the editorial independence of the grantees, while government administration would demand transparency. Consequently, both governments providing funds to intermediaries, and the regranters providing funding to journalism organisations, must adhere to similar eligibility criteria and comply with specific guidelines to ensure that money is spent as intended, and is accounted for.

Such eligibility criteria are crucial in determining the recipients of support and grant schemes. For instance, if the funding is targeted towards a specific community or small commercial media outlet (as is the case in South Africa), then only outlets that meet the specified criteria are deemed eligible to receive the funds. In the same way, if funds are designated for individual journalists or teams of individual journalists, then companies and organisations would not be eligible.

In some cases, journalistic organisations must be authorised or registered as a legitimate entity, referred to as a “registered journalism organisation” (RJO) to receive government funds, philanthropic donations, or gifts, and to issue donation receipts for tax purposes. In Canada, for example, non-profit news organisations must first become a “qualified Canadian journalism organisation” (QCJO) via the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to qualify as an RJO. Additionally, they must fulfil a list of eligibility requirements that are specific to RJOs, such as being primarily engaged in producing original news content, having trustees or a board of directors operating at arm’s length, and ensuring that no single source of donation/gifts represents more than 20 percent of the organisation’s revenue per taxation year (with exceptions being evaluated on a case-by-case basis). Operating as non-profit entities that issue official donation receipts, RJOs must also maintain specific records and books to demonstrate their ongoing compliance.

In the European Union, grantees face geographical eligibility requirements. They must be from EU member states or EU candidate countries. Colleagues from non-EU countries can only be team members, and not main applicants.

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### Eligibility criteria and the focus of grants

The eligibility criteria for journalism grants are often linked to the purpose or focus of the grant. For example, grants that aim to stimulate investigative, cross-border, or data-centred journalism are typically restricted to journalists or organisations that specialise in those areas. Such requirements may be expressed as eligibility criteria, as exemplified by the IJ4EU grant, which stipulates that proposed projects “[must focus on a topic of cross-border relevance](#)”. Other grants may require that the journalism produced has a particular focus, such as investigative journalism on the environment (Norway), or public interest journalism (Sierra Leone).

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### Requirement of editorial standards

In addition to the legal and design aspects of awarding funds, adherence to an agreed set of editorial principles may be required. The EU, for example, upholds a set of editorial standards which include accuracy, impartiality, and plurality of viewpoints, among others.

In the case of the small grants regranting scheme in Norway, eligibility criteria include classic journalistic skills and experience, such as a track record as a journalist with established media organisations, investigative experience, and the ability to meet deadlines and deliver material according to agreed deadlines.

## 6. Avoiding capture and other pitfalls

The potential risks associated with government funding cannot be overlooked, as journalists' worries about editorial independence, capture, and undue influence are genuine. Funders, for their part, when dealing at arm's length with intermediary bodies, may have concerns regarding critical reporting or accounting regulations. Our examples suggest ways to mitigate such challenges.

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### Biting the hand that feeds you: conflicts of interest, editorial interference, and media capture

[Media Capture](#) refers to a situation where a government or other powerful entity exerts influence over the media in a way that undermines their independence and objectivity. This can happen through a variety of mechanisms, such as the appointment of friendly editors or journalists, the withdrawal of advertising revenue from critical media outlets, or the direct allocation of funding to media organisations aligned with the government's interests.

Journalists seek to preserve their editorial independence and avoid any direct or perceived influence on their reporting, which could potentially damage their reputation. Their fear of media capture is particularly acute in countries with weak democratic institutions or a history of government corruption. In these contexts, there is a concern that government funding for journalism may be used as a tool to silence critical voices or promote a particular political agenda. There have been many instances around the world where media outlets receiving government funding have been accused of bias or censorship, leading to a loss of public trust in the media and a further erosion of democracy. Journalists also feel the need to 'future-proof' journalism funds, protecting them against a shift in government towards undemocratic parties. In such scenarios, funds may end up supporting low-quality, extremist, or even fake news sources.

In certain regions of Latin America and Africa as well as in the US and parts of Europe, journalists reject the very idea of government support, because they feel the risks of interference and capture are too high. In other parts of the world, particularly in the current age of populism, there is a growing apprehension that a government could 'turn bad' and misuse a fund that had previously functioned effectively. Designing a successful fund is complex enough; considering how to future-proof it is even more challenging. According to Franz Krüger, who recently completed a study of support structures in Argentina, Norway, and Sweden: "No system is completely secure against manipulation. Of course, you have to make use of all the mechanisms possible to ensure independence, but ultimately there are no absolute guarantees."

To counter the risk of media capture, safeguards such as transparency requirements, reporting obligations, and audit mechanisms can be put in place to ensure that government funds are distributed only to legitimate, nonpartisan media organisations that adhere to strict ethical and professional standards. Ultimately, the key to preventing media capture is to promote a culture of independent journalism and to build strong democratic institutions that are resilient to external pressures.

Our [case studies](#) indicate that different communities show varying levels of concern about government funding for journalism. In many parts of Europe, a long-standing tradition of publicly regulated support for broadcasters and media outlets exists, either through license fees or direct government funding. This has resulted in a range of different models, none of which - Krüger observes - is perfect. However, the tradition also has led to a high level of awareness and the ability to engage in ongoing discussions, negotiations, and renegotiations over the years. Christian S. Nissen, former director of the Danish public service broadcaster, and so at the centre of many such negotiations, said in an interview (Nissen, 2016): "Disagreements on programme policy and even about particular programmes between a government and a PSM institution are neither unusual nor unhealthy in constitutional terms."



Taking a global perspective, it may be valuable to compare models of editorial independence, perceptions of editorial independence, and the nature of disagreements between governments and government-funded media institutions. The culture of negotiation is important to the focus of this paper, and - with regranting models, especially - our research revealed recurring features.

Regranting bodies are a commonly employed approach to government funding of journalism, as previously outlined. These intermediary bodies are typically embedded within or associated with journalism and media communities and, as a result, are expected to establish a level of credibility that enables acceptance by journalists and media outlets to whom funding may be granted.

Several government donors have suggested time-limited programmes as a potential solution to address concerns about interference and capture. For example, the EU gives money to regranting bodies for a two-year period, subject to renewal and thus to renewed scrutiny; in the EU case with public calls for proposals to provide such regranting programmes. Implementing structures such as regranting bodies, time limits on funding, and other safeguards to independence can aid in managing funding or regranting programmes, and ensure that they align with the original purpose and rules. However, these models cannot guarantee editorial independence if an entire government or administration moves away from democracy. Further mitigation models are outlined in the box on “Models to Safeguard Editorial Independence” on page 10.

Aside from interference, capture, and politicisation of funds, other pitfalls need to be addressed, including the concept of competing structures, the idea of “donor darlings”, and governments’ need for accountability.

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### **The danger of creating competing structures**

Donors may sometimes eagerly provide grants without fully considering wider professional media and journalism ecosystems. When professional structures grow organically, driven by a professional need - be that for professional knowledge-sharing, training, conferences, or indeed regranting - those structures can play an important role in a community. However, when funders, including government organisations, provide financial support, questions arise about what to support, and how to do so fairly, without disrupting existing professional ecosystems. Public grants can result in multiple organisations vying for limited funds, and may create new structures that compete with existing ones.

Multiple attempts at donor coordination over decades have led to some collaborative grant-making, but arguably not enough. Too often, funders start new structures without fully considering what already exists (Schiffrin, 2017), leading to a ‘shiny new’ program that dwarfs something that had been functioning well. While philanthropic funders are free to choose their partners, government support is often subject to clear, and sometimes rigid, public tender, or public calls for proposal structures. This may make it difficult to enforce due diligence, and requires even greater care in designing the support to ensure that public funding for journalism goes to the intended activities without jeopardising existing professional structures.

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## The ‘donor darling’ trap

In a volatile environment, long-term support for journalism is often necessary and desirable. However, along with funding comes the responsibility to select grantees for their professional skills, rather than application-writing competence. Philanthropic donors may sometimes follow a trend, and can end up all funding the same individuals and organisations. This gives rise to the phenomenon of ‘donor darlings’ - a small group of journalists or organisations who all attend the same conferences, and receive funding from the same donors. The issue is compounded by complex application processes, which favour people who are skilled at writing applications and are proficient in English, but may not be the most respected or have the largest audience in their community (Schiffrin, 2017). As government funding can fall into the same trap, we recommend a deeper analysis of donor darlings and potential preventive mechanisms.

It is important to note that funding models are based on individual sets of regulations and are implemented in different contexts. For instance, a regranteeing body with a permanent presence in a small country, which has a limited number of professional journalists, will inevitably encounter a small group of potential grantees repeatedly, and will need to take appropriate procedural measures to deal with this. Conversely, complex application structures in wider contexts (such as the EU, where the target group spans an entire continent) may discourage smaller organisations from applying. Such a situation may attract groups that specialise in writing applications, but may not be rooted very strongly in the professional community.

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## MODELS TO SAFEGUARD EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

Safeguarding independence and protecting funds from influence or capture is a challenging task, and it is impossible to account for every imaginable scenario. Nevertheless, various measures have been attempted to maintain independence. The overarching principle of these measures is to ensure that granting is done at arm’s length. This can be achieved by different means, including:

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**FIREWALLS** between funders and grantees, whereby grant-making is carried out by intermediary bodies or regrantees. Government donors can outsource decision-making about grants to consultancy groups or selection committees. Firewalls can be created between funding and editorial arms of an organisation, especially when dealing with larger entities, but may be difficult to implement for small organisations where the editor is often tasked with multiple roles, including fundraising. Creating a firewall between newsrooms and boards of directors so that the board does not see editorial content before it is published, offers another essential safeguard.

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**INCORPORATING ANONYMOUS AND INDEPENDENT** jurors into the selection processes to prevent external pressure. These jurors would typically be respected members of the professional community, whose identity is revealed later to enhance the jury’s status. Independence of juries should be ensured by prohibiting funders or jurors from participating in areas where they have a conflict of interest, such as regarding region, topic, or affiliation.

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**INSTITUTING PEER-REVIEW COMMITTEES**, whereby journalists decide which journalists or organisations receive funding, creates added value, since journalists know the professional community and have personal reputations to maintain, making it less likely for them to engage in nepotism or similar activities.

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In addition to these measures, **GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS** include transparency, standardised disclosure practices, and avoiding bureaucratic and other preventive burdens. Providing general support can also help prevent editorial interference.

## CONCLUSION

Government funds for journalism and media outlets play a critical role in bolstering public-interest journalism. These funds cannot single-handedly solve the financial and credibility issues that plague journalism globally, but they play a key role in addressing gaps in access, coverage, and professional development. Regardless of the diversity of contexts, all practitioners who wish to set up such funds must contend with the factors and challenges outlined in this paper.

Our objective has been to assist these practitioners by providing a comprehensive examination of successful cases and an overview of challenges, as well as ample practical advice on how to structure government funds. Academic research still has much to accomplish, including the mapping of public-funding mechanisms; deeper study of the effectiveness of different public-funding models; a comparison of the efficiency of direct funding to journalists versus funding to media outlets; and the assessment of the costs of creating intermediary bodies compared with the added value of funding intermediary bodies.

Over the past few decades, we have observed a number of trends, including changes to funding of public-service broadcasters; a growing interest in funds targeted at boosting support for high-quality journalism; and a rise in the number of regranteeing organisations. Our research indicates that many funds run well, or have improved after tackling the issues we mention, and we remain optimistic that government funding can be effective.

Above all, Franz Krüger reminds us that funds have life cycles and change over time, citing Argentina as an example of a fund that improved through “a conscious decision by people to make it work. These institutions have trajectories and lives and ups and downs.”

## APPENDIX 1: TYPES OF JOURNALISM FUNDS

by Marius Dragomir

While the present paper focuses specifically on state funds for journalism, a range of other ways of funding journalism and media outlets exists. Marius Dragomir, founding director of the Media and Journalism Research Center at the University of Santiago de Compostela gives an overview of available funding opportunities (GIJN, 2022). This taxonomy is based on ongoing research being conducting to put the typology in context.

### Topic driven funds

Under such funds donors pool resources to cover one focus area.

Such funds include:

- Pulitzer Center's [Rainforest Reporting Grant](#) on protecting the rainforests;
- Journalismfund.eu's [Modern Slavery Unveiled Grant](#) on labour trafficking;
- [Earth Journalism Network](#)'s grants on environmental topics, and
- the European Journalism Centre's [Global Health Journalism Grants](#).

### Sustainability-focused funds

These funds emphasise core funding to help media outlets become more sustainable.

Such funds include:

- Civitates' [Independent Public Interest Journalism](#) Grants;
- backing given by the EU to the International Press Institute in 2022 to support their [Transition Accelerator](#), a six-month programme for media outlets that want to innovate in some way to become more "resilient". Support offered by the programme may include training, coaching, and networking over six months to help the participating independent newsrooms design and deliver new products, features, and revenue streams that put their audiences first, and
- a group of public-interest journalism philanthropists and investors, who in 2021 set up Pluralis to step in and prevent hostile takeover and capture of media through investments.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pluralis invests in successful news companies that provide independent, quality reporting in countries in Europe where a plural media is at risk <https://www.pluralis.media/>

### News-desert-focused funds

These funds are usually created and endowed by one organisation, run for several years, and aimed at financially supporting media outlets and initiatives to provide high-quality content that local audiences do not have access to.

Such funds include:

- Media Program in Ukraine, a USAID-funded program, run for a period of five years, whose aim is to empower local media to give Ukrainian citizens more access to high-quality news and information;
- Central Asia Media Program, a USAID-funded program, implemented by Internews, aimed to develop a more balanced news environment in Central Asia, and
- PRIMED, a consortium of media development groups that uses funding from the British government development agency to support media in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone.

### Methods-driven funds

These are funds that intentionally support a specific journalistic method, for example data journalism, cross-border collaboration, audio journalism, or documentary journalism. In this set-up, editorial independence remains untouched, although one recent study noted the perception of donor interference (Ferrucci & Nelson, 2019).

Such funds include:

- Crossborder collaboration grants such as offered by Journalismfund.eu, [Investigative Journalism for Europe \(IJ4EU\)](#) or the [Network for Reporting on Eastern Europe \(N-Ost\)](#);
- local journalism collaboration such as offered by [Journalismfund.eu](#), [Berkeley University fellowships](#), and New Jersey Civic Information Initiative, or local media resilience by [JournalismusLab](#);
- data journalism grants - the largest and most discussed perhaps being the Google Digital News Initiative (later [Google Digital News Innovation Fund](#)), and
- constructive journalism grants.<sup>4</sup>

### Emergency funds

Emergency funds are usually ad hoc attempts to mitigate threats to journalism in a given country or community following external developments such as war, civil tension, or weather crises. In some situations, the funds address any tendencies towards autocracy or media capture.

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<sup>4</sup> One of several support programmes to constructive journalism was run by the Stars4Media programme by Euractiv <https://stars4media.eu/news/bringing-constructive-journalism-further-through-stars4media/>

Such funds include:

- the [International Women’s Media Foundation Emergency Fund](#), established in 2013, which provides women journalists with small grants “for psychological and medical care for incidents directly related to threats and crises caused by one’s work as a journalist”.

### **Embedded funds**

Some donors - be they philanthropic foundations or government - choose to connect their dedicated spending on journalism to the overall goals of their spending. Often this relates foreign aid to a particular place or support for a theme.

Such funds include:

- the US government supporting democratic transition in a particular country, and then supporting local journalism as part of the strategy, as they did in Iraq and Afghanistan (and as other countries also do);
- the development section of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, DANIDA, offering support to journalists and media to cover DANIDA’s focus countries;<sup>5</sup> and
- China including journalism infrastructure in its overall support strategy for Africa by, for example, making loans to pay for new buildings or equipment, or providing scholarships to African journalists for Chinese universities.

### **Media collaboration**

This is support for journalists and media outlets working in coordination with each other, including funds that encourage journalists in different countries to collaborate.

Such support includes:

- [The International Journalists’ Programmes](#), and various bilateral exchange programmes.

### **Philanthro-corporate funds**

These are funds established by commercial companies, such as global tech companies, to support independent journalism as part of their social responsibility mission. Such funds in recent years have included programmes for journalism support financed by companies such as Facebook, Google, and other global tech companies.

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<sup>5</sup> DANIDA provided grants to journalists until 2021, since then it has continued to fund its own media projects with the purpose of informing about “developing countries, Danish development cooperation and the UN Sustainable Development Goals”.

<https://um.dk/danida/oplysning-og-engagement>

## ABOUT THIS PAPER

- This policy briefing was produced for GFMD IMPACT by Anya Schiffrin and Brigitte Alfter to inform a consultation on the “[State of the field - National Journalism Funds](#)” convened by GFMD IMPACT in July 2023.
- The [two case studies](#) that were produced to complement this policy briefing. The Netherlands and its Funds: a long tradition and the Tanzania Media Foundation are available on the [GFMD IMPACT resource centre](#).
- The July 2023 consultation resulted in a discussion paper -- [NATIONAL JOURNALISM FUNDS](#) -- produced for GFMD IMPACT by Sameer Padania and Francesca Silvani of independent consultancy Macroscopic.
- In addition to the literature review and case studies in this briefing, further resources are available on the [GFMD IMPACT resource centre](#) and this evolving spreadsheet: “[Examples of National Journalism Funds](#)”

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