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A GFMD IMPACT policy paper
National Funds for Journalism



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NATIONAL FUNDS FOR JOURNALISM

By Sameer Padania and Francesca Silvani

INTRODUCTION

This policy paper produced by GFMD's International Media Policy and Advisory Centre ([GFMD IMPACT](#)) looks at the emergence around the world of 'national funds for journalism' (NFJs) as a particular instrument for providing strategic, long-term financial support to independent public interest media and media sectors and ecosystems.

It builds on recent research and consultations undertaken by GFMD IMPACT which show that, in a wide range of places, different actors are exploring or actively advocating for NFJs as a key pillar in the use of public and private funds to respond to the widely-acknowledged financial crisis faced by independent public interest media.

While there have been examples of NFJs in the past, there are a range of important factors driving the current wave of interest, including:

- Growing international recognition that journalism and media represent a powerful and strategic sector that contributes to democracy, economy and community - and that, as a public good, should be subsidised by those that benefit from it, including in part by public funding
- Increasing clarity that past paradigms of media support and media markets are not sufficient to counteract or fix widespread market failure, and that broader-based interventions are needed
- Stronger demands across the Global South for more resources and more decision-making powers to be put directly in Global South hands, alongside mounting pressure on Global North actors to go through meaningful processes of decolonisation
- The need to create stable, long-term funding structures that can unlock funding and other kinds of financing at-scale from governments, ODA, philanthropies, investors and tech companies, while clearly demonstrating that these funding sources have no influence over how funds are spent or decisions are made

Few actors outside of governments, bilateral donors, Big Tech and international financial institutions have the scale of resources or influence necessary to help independent media ecosystems overcome this crisis. Calls for governments in particular to do more to support and sustain media financially have accelerated during the Covid-19 pandemic, at the height of which some governments acknowledged the public benefit provided by media by designating them an 'essential service', and journalists as 'key workers'¹.

¹ This is also of relevance to emerging proposals for reform to the international aid architecture, such as these [2022 Expert recommendations](#), & this [2023 international paper](#) on Global Public Investment.

Despite the need to unlock large-scale funding, many in the independent media sector are understandably wary of - or even opposed to - government-backed efforts to intervene in the journalism sector, however well-intentioned. While there are contexts in which it may be plausible to establish NFJs that can act independently and in the public interest, in many countries, governments are not good faith actors with regard to funding for independent media. For example, there is ample evidence of widespread abuse of government advertising budgets, the capture of regulatory bodies, the weaponisation of agencies like tax authorities, imposition of burdensome government and licensing fees, and myriad other repressive, regressive or even contradictory policies and practices aimed at weakening the media. In such contexts, a government-linked NFJ would likely be seen as politically compromised.

Does this mean, however, that NFJs should only be considered in the handful of rights-respecting places where there is no or little risk of political interference? The indications from GFMD's research and consultations show that, despite these risks, stakeholders in a wide variety of countries and contexts are actively exploring how such funds could work, often as part of holistic plans for media reform or multi-faceted attempts to introduce more progressive media policies.

While not a Practice Guide, this paper seeks to distil and crystallise some of these key questions, principles and approaches that stakeholders – media, funders, investors, civil society, policy makers and government – may need to consider as they contemplate if, how and with whom to develop such a fund.

What are National Funds for Journalism and how do they work?

The most salient characteristics of NFJs emerging from desk research and consultations are that such funds are, ideally:

- Strategic – with a vision and plan for the public interest media ecosystem
- Sectoral – designed to support the public interest media ecosystem as a sector
- Sovereign – locally-led, -governed, -staffed and -controlled, and representative of a cross-section of the sector and society.
- Independent - strategically, financially, operationally and editorially independent
- Long-term - set up to operate on a long-term (>10 years) or even permanent basis, and not according to project, programme or electoral cycles.

As such, a **National Fund for Journalism (NFJ)** is a dedicated structure that is designed with a strategic sectoral purpose to provide long-term funding and financing to an independent journalism ecosystem in a particular country, region or place. It can take different forms, but in essence is designed to redress shortcomings, barriers or imbalances in a particular media market, or to incentivise, catalyse or accelerate new entrants or transformative processes in that market².

² During the development of this paper, GFMD has adopted this working definition of National Funds for Journalism, informed by the examples encountered worldwide, including both where they have been established and where they are currently under active discussion, e.g Armenia, Brazil, Sierra Leone and South Africa.

An NFJ can complement and reinforce other policy measures aimed at improving and strengthening the independent media ecosystem. NFJs are ideally nationally- or sometimes regionally-governed funding structures that are independent of the funders - including governments, bilaterals, multi-laterals, foundations, tech platforms and others - that provide them with financial resources.

Even if underpinned principally by public money - either from a domestic government or from international government donors or both - their transparency and independence reduces the risk of the funder being seen to be interfering in the media landscape/market or in individual grantees. This can also help to give confidence to other sources of funding, such as philanthropic, tech, corporate or individual donations, where such donors are wary of being seen to fund media directly.

Given these primary sources, NFJs need to operate with a high degree of accountability and transparency, and in general, NFJs are designed and administered by independent and professional bodies, with independent governance and transparent structures and processes. NFJs ideally include representation from diverse parts of the media sector, and potentially from citizens³. An NFJ may be centrally administered through a single body or may be a mechanism to decentralise funding through diverse bodies or sub-funds to particular regions or communities, to counteract spatial, racial or other inequalities.

As a sector-level intervention, an NFJ should have a longer horizon than project or programmatic funding schemes. In many locations, NFJs will need to address the need for long-term stable funding and therefore, if not established in perpetuity, could be designed to last for a minimum of ten years. NFJs should be established to exist beyond electoral or political cycles, emergencies or short-term project cycles. In many cases, for example, where funds are provided through regulatory mechanisms, they may be established in law.

The concept of national funds is not new and builds on other national funding models that have been tried in the past, both in journalism and in other sectors. However, in today's context of widespread market failure and fragmented sources of international funding for media, they represent a step-change as a national mechanism for bringing public and private funding together in a nationally sovereign, independent fund, which is administered in the public interest and with public 'buy-in' or even public participation.

³In 2023, the UK's Public Interest News Foundation released a guide, led by Dr Debs Grayson, to [building a national fund for journalism with participatory principles](#) at its heart.

What kinds of objectives do NFJs have?

NFJs are likely to have a public interest perspective and need to express their objectives clearly and transparently and explain how they plan to measure the public value (including social, economic, community or commercial value) and the public benefit they enable.

Funds and initiatives noted in this research and consultation process exhibit many commonalities in their objectives. The list below is not exhaustive or definitive but attempts to give a flavour of the range of objectives that such initiatives express.

Through their activities, NFJs may aim to:

- Ensure that the public has access to accurate and reliable information
- Support, stimulate and scale independent journalism to be able to hold those in power accountable at all levels of society
- Counteract and reduce fragmentation in funding, counterproductive incentives, and unhealthy competition in domestic funding ecosystems
- Provide risk capital for diverse future-oriented approaches to doing or supporting independent journalism
- Promote equity of opportunities for historically-excluded, -marginalised or -oppressed groups, communities or national regions with little or no access to media ownership or entrepreneurship
- Increase public trust by practising transparency of funding sources, governance and management structures, eligibility and selection criteria, financial awards, and assessment and evaluation, including through citizen participation
- Support the independent public interest media sector to develop or strengthen its collective voice and knowledge, and advance media freedom
- Strengthen the independent public interest sector as an economic sector
- Benefit diverse parts of the independent media ecosystem and adjacent sectors, creating spillover effects



What is driving increased interest in NFJs as a strategic solution?

The research and consultations have heard a range of important factors driving the current wave of interest in NFJs, including:

- The recognition that journalism and media represent a powerful and strategic sector that contributes to democracy, economy and community, and that independent and public interest media, in particular, are not only a public good, but also a significant sub-sector that needs strategic support
- The realisation that media markets are failing to deliver journalism in the public interest and that substantial interventions – both through scaled-up funding and financing and through public policy⁴ (most crucially reform of government advertising⁵) - at a national level are needed to level the playing field for diverse types of independent media, and to address information inequality
- The understanding that high-quality independent journalism and related activities can not only support the conditions for economic development and inward investment but can expose bad actors or avert potential crises
- The widespread frustration that the current international funding system is fragmented and insufficient, but larger resources need new dedicated, strategic structures to channel funding to media ecosystems, and these structures should be clearly independent of government and donors, able to evolve to respond to rapidly changing conditions and needs, and managed in line with international standards (including [data standards](#)) by local bodies according to local priorities.
- A growing recognition that current paradigms of media support are insufficient on their own to counteract or fix such widespread market failure and that systems-change approaches need systems-level actors, including those outside the journalism and media fields
- Increasing calls across the Global South for more sovereignty or control over the financing of its own media sectors, and for more resources to be put directly in the hands of Global South actors, in parallel with processes of decolonisation in Global North funders, intermediaries and media
- The need to find more equitable, strategic, transparent and accountable ways to extract and distribute resources from the major tech/platform/social media companies than relying on their private, ad hoc, opaque largesse to-date⁶ - and to support coordinated responses from independent media and civil society.

⁴ Only ~10% of the Global South think tanks in the [On Think Tanks Directory](#) are tagged as working on 'Media/Culture/Sport', which may be of concern to the journalism & media development field.

⁵ Even where detailed proposals for reform of government advertising have been made, such as in [India](#), governments - and sometimes incumbent media - may be reluctant to support reform.

⁶ Since Google and Meta/Facebook do not release open data (e.g. to the [360Giving standard](#)) on their funding, increasing efforts are being made by researchers to piece together what funding in particular have provided, e.g. Papaevangelou, C. (2023). Funding Intermediaries: Google and Facebook's Strategy to Capture Journalism. Digital Journalism. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2155206>

What systemic challenges can NFJs address?

Each media market around the world will face particular systemic challenges - such as information inequality - that a National Fund can be a key part of seeking to address (alongside media policy reform, fiscal or financial measures, investment incentives, or other forms of intervention). In some places, this can be as part of a formal wider national plan, and in others, it may be less formally coordinated.

Those cited include:

- Limited availability of multi-year core funding for independent public interest media (including investigative journalism organisations)
- Fragmented funding environment, with incentives and priorities often not locally set or owned, dominated by short-term project or programme funding, resulting in competition driven by scarcity rather than innovation
- Lack of access to startup capital, R&D or innovation funding
- Donor assumptions that investment approaches can be applied in all media markets whereas in reality many markets require considerable support to become investment-ready
- Exclusion or marginalisation of groups or communities from the media sector, e.g. women, minorities, and younger people (in ownership, management, governance, editorial, as sources)
- Media market concentration, or concentration of media ownership, limiting debate about diversity, development of or dynamism in the media sector
- Spatial inequality within countries, including poor media, technical, communications, financial or governance infrastructure outside major cities or in particular regions, creating disparities between haves and have-nots⁷
- Interference in, or distortion or capture of the media system from political, economic, religious or other interests in society, including from foreign-based actors
- Lack of independent quality data about the media market - including audience and circulation figures, advertising numbers, the number of outlets, cold spots or news deserts, diversity in the industry, and grants made
- Expectations of linear impact, rather than of unpredictable nonlinear processes of change in volatile commercial markets

⁷ Broader open data initiatives such as the [global OD4D coalition](#), backed by IDRC, Hewlett Foundation and Global Affairs Canada, may have valuable insights to share.

Which approaches are being used to establish NFJs?

There is no single or best practice approach and no single stakeholder that is best suited to developing the concept for or leading the establishment of a National Fund for Journalism. Across the varied contexts encountered in the research and consultations for this policy paper, a range of different scenarios and approaches can be observed showing different pathways through which a National Fund for Journalism could be established, depending on who might be the most appropriate stakeholder in a particular country or context.

These include:

Government-initiated:

In some cases, governments⁸ have led or called for the establishment of journalism funds, but have devolved management and decision-making to an independent body such as a charitable foundation, or an intermediary organisation. Most stakeholders agree that, while government funds can be part of the core capital of a fund, governments (domestic or international) should not set the terms of, host or run a national fund for journalism, and that other methods, with independent governance and management, and robust safeguards, are preferable. In some cases, the fund may need to be established in law, though even this may not be sufficient to fireproof a fund from political attacks. In places where any form of government funding is seen as inherently problematic, government-backed funds may be perceived or opposed as a threat to press freedom. In some places, governments may commit to participate, and then reverse or delay their decision - depending on the size or importance of the commitment, it may still be possible to move forward.

Examples: [Tanzania Media Fund](#), funded but not run by several international donors (see 'Hosted approach' below); in 2019, the Armenian government asked Internews to help develop a concept for a national fund - this process was delayed in part as a result of the pandemic, but has now restarted; The Commission for Non-profit Media ([Povjerenstvo za neprofitne medije](#)) was funded in 2013 by the Ministry of Culture in Croatia, and abolished in 2016 by the next government; The [UK Future News Pilot Fund](#), which the UK government funded in 2019 through independent foundation Nesta, but then cut after one round.

National funds initiated or funded by governments are explored in more detail in a [policy brief](#) authored by Anya Schiffrin and Brigitte Alfter. It describes how government supported funds are designed and allocated, and provides examples of 6 recommendations on setting up journalism funds backed by governments to support quality news.

⁸ A number of recent studies have examined the role of public subsidy in supporting the journalism and media sector, including this [Working Paper](#) by James Deane, this analysis of [public funding for private media in MENA](#) by Sarah Zaarour, and the Forum on Information and Democracy's call to governments and other stakeholders for [a New Deal for Journalism](#).

Public-private partnership:

A joint approach between government and private sector stakeholders, ideally with diverse sources for funding, and responding to the needs of the media sector. In most settings, this would also need to include representatives from independent media and civil society, for a whole-of-society approach.

Example: South Africa's [Media Development and Diversity Agency](#), a statutory body established by the government in partnership with private media, in order to support the development of small and community media in underserved communities; the Google-funded [Taiwan News Digital Co-Prosperity Fund](#), a three-year US\$10m initiative co-developed with the government and industry bodies, which [many analysts](#) judge to be motivated primarily by Google's desire to blunt or avoid regulation (and which may be a template for similar proposals in other jurisdictions)

Hosted approach:

An approach where a regional or international intermediary acts as host for the fund until a new host can take over local ownership, or the fund is spun out into its own entity. This may be an effective strategy for countries with authoritarian regimes, rapidly backsliding democracies or places where civic space (including for funders) is closing. One challenge would be how to maintain continuity between the original and spun-out funds.

Example: [Tanzania Media Fund](#), initially hosted by Hivos-Tanzania, and funded by several international donors (DfID, Danida, SDC, Trocaire), and incorporated as an independent Tanzanian organisation in 2015.

Foundation approach:

An approach where the fund is established as a standalone entity, or within an existing charitable foundation, which accepts and manages the funds and sets up the fund infrastructure. Funds may be donated from other foundations, governments, corporations or the public. This carries the benefit of a high degree of independence, but an allied risk of exposure to reliance on an unpredictable donor environment.

Example: [Arab Fund for Arts and Culture](#) - while not a journalism fund, the MENA-wide AFAC ([US\\$4.3m in 2022](#)) was mentioned as a potential model for [diverse local and international funders](#) to provide support in regions where establishing national funds may not be feasible. In the USA, a consortium of 20 foundations has come together as the [Press Forward coalition](#) to provide \$500m over 5 years to local media across the country.

Trust/endowment approach:

In this approach, governments, philanthropies, HNWIs and other sources would contribute funds to a lump sum endowment that would be managed by an independent trust, the interest from which would fund the budget of the National Fund. This might raise the required sum at the beginning, or over a longer period. If successful, this could provide a very long-term, even permanent solution.

Example: the concept for the Armenian fund mentioned above proposed an endowment model; the Ford Foundation recently proposed an [independent endowment for civil society in Indonesia](#) (the Indonesian government has also set up its own endowment funds, though the independence of these is questioned); the UK's [National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts](#) (Nesta) received a £250m endowment from the National Lottery, eventually becoming an independent foundation. In Czechia, a number of local business people concerned at the state of Czech independent media started the [Endowment Fund for Independent Journalism](#) (NFNZ). A similar concept exists in Islamic law - a waqf (وَقْفٌ) or ḥabs (حَبْسٌ).

Federated approach

This approach involves bringing together a patchwork of different organisations and bodies operating in diverse contexts and helping them develop a common agenda and approach to establishing a fund or coordinating multiple parallel funds. They might develop a new collectively-owned body, and seek to fundraise for it from central government or other funders. This could also be a viable approach in places where there is already strong local-level funding infrastructure - e.g. where there are community or place-based foundations.

Example: The [Lebanese Media Recovery Fund](#) was developed by the Samir Kassir Foundation - but, while an emergency fund rather than a full NFJ, has led to stronger coordination among local actors. A federated approach might also be a sensible strategy in places where investing in a single body would create the risk of a single point-of-failure (as occurred in Uganda with the [suspension](#) of the [Democratic Governance Facility](#).) A recent proposal released in the UK to develop a [fund for journalism in line with participatory principles](#) includes potential for a federated structure.

GFMD IMPACT is gathering examples and literature on national journalism funds in this evolving spreadsheet: [“Examples of National Journalism Funds”](#).

Please help us keep it up to date.

What practical steps and lessons learned about good practice can be observed from existing or proposed NFJs?

The concept of an NJF may be initiated - as examples raised in GFMD's research and consultations show - by a government department, an independent inquiry, industry bodies, bilateral or philanthropic funders, civil society groups, private citizens, or another party, but across all these types of fund, there are certain steps and approaches that they have in common and that others considering establishing a fund could also learn from. These include:

Feasibility or scoping study:

a public or semi-public written report, based on diverse stakeholder input, which defines the problem the fund is seeking to address, and lays out potential pathways and processes towards the design and establishment of a fund.

Stakeholder engagement:

hearing and responding to diverse perspectives and needs from different parts of the sector (including both potential advocates and adversaries), including working journalists, media owners, industry analysts, local and national government officials, existing funders and investors, civil society, advertisers and businesses, and citizens.

Objective-setting:

each country will have its own set of challenges in its media market and how it delivers for the public interest and will need to consult on, define and set its objectives accordingly. These may address specific parts of the sector, such as local or investigative journalism, or address systemic challenges such as a lack of innovation funding, and the fund's focus, approaches and methods may need to be reviewed and evolved periodically in line with changes in the market, and the fund's own effects.

Transparent, representative governance:

A trustworthy fund will consult on, establish and review clear governance structures to ensure transparency and accountability. This might include a board of directors (with appropriately diverse representation and rotation) or an advisory committee (with a clear and defined remit) or citizen involvement (e.g. through a citizen deliberation body), as well as mechanisms for independently monitoring and evaluating the fund's performance. Some funds 'work out loud', meaning they share their learnings transparently and openly as they progress.

Sandbox period:

depending on the process followed, and the funds committed, it may make sense to sandbox the funds for a defined period of time, and for defined purposes or for a particular region, community or part of the sector, in order to have a more concerted impact on the most urgent challenges, and in order to roadtest the functioning of the fund and its structures and processes. This may also be a way for private funders to prototype a fund with the medium- to long-term aim of attracting support from other, larger sources such as companies or governments.

Subsidiarity:

decide how much of the funding and decision-making can be decentralised to those closest to the intended beneficiaries, such as poorer regions, or underserved or excluded populations, social movements or even passed to sector bodies to distribute in a participatory way. This may require a network of partner institutions such as community foundations, civil society groups, participatory grantmaking funds or other intermediaries.

Diverse funding mechanisms into the fund:

while governments are the institutions that can most easily mobilise large-scale amounts of funding domestically and internationally, ensuring that other sources of funding are included helps to dilute concerns over undue influence. This could include funds stemming from e.g. news bargaining code-style competition settlements from tech companies⁹, donations from philanthropies, corporations or HNWIs, investments from media industry market leaders, a portion of dormant assets funds, citizen-driven crowdfunding, legacies/bequests, or other means (such as digital taxes).

Equity, diversity and inclusion throughout the fund:

A fund underpinned with public money will need to ensure that it is not just meeting but also setting standards for ED&I. It should examine its hiring practices, where it is located, how it is structured, its decision-making processes, its eligibility criteria, outreach and promotion of funding opportunities, accessibility practices (related to gender, language, disability or other factors), feedback from applicants, citizen participation, and myriad other factors.

⁹ As outlined in the Global Principles emerging from the [Big Tech and Journalism – Building a Sustainable Future for the Global South conference](#) in Johannesburg, South Africa in July 2023.

What design questions do those setting up an NFJ need to ask?

While each fund is created in a specific context in which arrangements vary hugely, there are some key questions that need to be considered in the design and set-up of a fund:

- **Who will establish the fund?**
Who has the mandate and legitimacy to lead the development of the fund? A cross-sectoral working group, an industry body, an existing funding body, researchers, civil servants? How will the need and demand for the fund be evidenced? What will happen if formal evidence is unavailable or weak?
- **What will be the scope and mandate of the fund?**
What specific challenges is the fund being designed to confront? Will it have a scope that evolves over time or one that is set and fixed?
- **What size of the fund is required, and what is feasible?**
How much money can be raised, and over what timeframe? Will the fund be commensurate with the need, and will it be worth the effort and cost required to establish its infrastructure and processes?
- **How will the fund be prototyped?**
Will the fund start with a formal sandbox period where it experiments and learns before fixing its strategies and purpose, or will it have the latitude to adapt and learn as it progresses?
- **What will the mandate and longevity of the fund be?**
Will the fund have an overarching long-term purpose of developing the sector or a more specific and targeted short- or fixed-term purpose within that? Should it have a fixed-term limit (e.g. a 10-year horizon), indefinite, or even permanent?
- **What organisational form will the fund take?**
Will it be a public body, an NGO, a foundation, or some other structure?
- **Where will the resources for the fund come from?**
Will the fund seek or raise funds from any/all sources, domestic and international, or will it prioritise or exclude certain types of funds? If the government is involved, will the funds come directly from the government, from a hypothecated tax arrangement, or another policy measure (such as competition regulation settlement)? What other sources – the media industry, advertisers, philanthropies, and the public - can contribute? If a cornerstone funder - such as a government - does not or cannot follow through, do other stakeholders pause, or move ahead, and under what circumstances?
- **Where will the resources for the fund be held?**
Is it safe and secure to hold them in the country in question, or in the region, or should they be held somewhere else?
- **What will the long-term financial model be?**
Will it be a sinking fund that spends down, a fund that is regularly replenished, or a managed endowment that grows over time?
- **How will the independence of the fund, its governance and decision-making be guaranteed?**
How will the fund engage with the media industry? How will the fund provide clear, meaningful and permanent independence of governance from government and other funding sources? How can this be representative of the sector and wider society? If established by law, how is this accountable to e.g. parliament?

- **How will the fund establish trust with the public?**
The fund will need to be as transparent and accountable as possible in its strategy, budget and operations.
- **How will the fund decide what to focus on, and what and how to fund?**
Will it just give grants, or will it also provide loans, investments and other kinds of financial instruments (and will it be permitted to take equity stakes)? What types of grants and of what size? Will it consider funding emerging models like Universal Basic Income/direct cash transfers to eligible media?
- **Will the fund support content, products, projects, staff, infrastructure, collaboration, organisational development, technologies, intermediaries, research, policy?**
Should there be sub-funds for different purposes, e.g. local journalism, investigative journalism, EDI, rural reporting, youth media, accountability reporting, innovation/R&D funding, investments, buybacks?
- **How will the fund be ‘national’?**
Will the fund operate at all levels of the market, from hyperlocal to nationwide, or only for particular priority locations or regions? Will it support international actors working at the national or local level, or only groups that are primarily national/local?
- **Who will be eligible to apply?**
Should the fund be open to all, to specific membership groups, to specific entities or communities? For example, will the fund support only organisations, only registered charities, only for-profit businesses, only members of approved professional networks, or will it have a wider funnel, including individuals, networks, social movements?
- **How will the fund be led, staffed and advised? How will it review and evolve its strategy?**
How will the fund represent different perspectives, regions, experience of different parts of the sector? How will it complement staff expertise with outside expertise, e.g. with external application assessors? Should staff be employed on a fixed-term basis, to avoid excessive identification with individuals?
- **How will the fund integrate or partner with, or stimulate, other funding sources for the ecosystem?**
To what extent will the fund have or seek a mandate to act as a centre of gravity or coordination mechanism for funding in the national ecosystem?
- **How will the fund know whether it is achieving its purpose?**
How will the fund approach monitoring, evaluation and learning, and how will it understand the public value and public benefit it brings?

GFMD IMPACT is gathering examples and literature on national journalism funds in this evolving spreadsheet: [“Examples of National Journalism Funds”](#).

Please help us keep it up to date.

Considerations for the media development community

The journalism sector is no longer fully in control of its own destiny and trajectory. Caught between polarised hostile politics, broken economics, media capture, platform dominance, and a brutally competitive media and entertainment environment, journalism sectors worldwide are struggling to survive while preserving their key public interest function. The weakening of the media is in some places a by-product of other forces and in others part of a deliberate strategy by governments or allied interests. This increases information inequality and undermines confidence in democracy and the economy.

But there are a number of countries where funders, including governments, bilaterals, foundations and Big Tech could – with the right strategies, support, partnerships and safeguards – undertake interventions to bolster and strengthen the independence of the journalism ecosystem. As part of this, with the right levels of financial support, independence from political, industrial or other interests, a commitment to the public interest above all, and an outlook that is genuinely strategic and structural, national funds for journalism could be part of a breakthrough solution for countries or regions worldwide looking to develop sustainable homegrown independent media.

There are areas, in addition to the issues outlined above, where concrete follow-up from funders, intermediaries and other actors could help, including:

- **Further exchange or community of practice:**
GFMD's research and consultations have shown both that there are widespread examples of funds that conform to most or all of the working definition of NFJs, and that there is wider interest internationally in exploring funds with a similar systemic purpose. This seems to be the case not only at the national level, but at the regional and sub-national levels too. It would seem to make sense to encourage further exchange between practitioners on this, perhaps through a community of practice.
- **Research and data on current and emerging examples:**
There is still little evidence and learning about the factors that impact on NFJs' success - and as such, not only do NFJs not have a fixed set of characteristics, but it is also not possible or desirable to develop a single authoritative template for NFJs. As a number of such funds are currently under active discussion and development, funders and supporters of NFJs should ensure that more systematic learning is being conducted - including funders who are specifically focused on systems change strategies and processes.
- **NFJs as distinct from media development:**
NFJs have a wide range of objectives, which both include and overlap with objectives of the media development sector - but they should not be conflated with media development programmes or projects, and should not be expected to provide evidence of the efficacy of media development strategies, such as a focus on media viability.

ABOUT THIS PAPER

- This policy paper was produced for GFMD IMPACT by [Sameer Padania](#) and [Francesca Silvani](#) of independent consultancy [Macroscope](#), which works with journalists, funders, investors, researchers, policy-makers and others, at the global level, and in different regions and countries around the world, to help defend, transform and grow the public interest journalism and information ecosystem.
- It is the result of a consultation – “[State of the field - National Journalism Funds](#)” – convened by GFMD IMPACT and moderated by Sameer Padania on July, 5 2023.
- This GFMD IMPACT consultation in July 2023 was informed by a policy brief -- [Creating National Funds to Support Journalism and Public-Interest Media](#) -- authored by Anya Schiffrin and Brigitte Alfter.

NEXT STEPS

The first draft of this policy paper was open for feedback and suggestions during August and September 2023. This version incorporates additional feedback and suggestions.

GFMD IMPACT and our partners will present the findings and recommendations from this paper at a number of fora in order to further inform processes and consultations underway globally.

GFMD IMPACT hopes that this process will:

1. **Inform the creation of planned National Funds for Journalism**
2. **Support the further development of or advocacy for existing funds.**
3. **Encourage those considering National Funds for Journalism** – as part of a broader national policy portfolio towards providing strategic, long-term financial support to independent public interest media and media sectors and ecosystems – to consider the pros and cons of the various models and mechanisms that are outlined in the paper and which would be best suited to their context.

If you would like to support GFMD to translate this policy paper into other languages, use this paper or to invite GFMD IMPACT or one of our partners to take part in discussions, working groups, or conferences related to national journalism funds please contact the GFMD IMPACT help desk: helpdesk-impact@gfmd.info

For more information about the GFMD IMPACT and the help desk:

- Read our [explainer](#)
- Look at the [examples](#) of how media development and journalism support donors, policymakers, and practitioners use our services.

About the Global Forum for Media Development - GFMD

Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) is the largest global community for media development, media freedom, and journalism support. Through collaboration, coordination, and collective action the GFMD network of member organisations — as well as our dozens of partners — creates, promotes, and delivers policies and programmes to sustain journalism as a public good.

GFMD's International Media Policy and Advisory Centre (GFMD IMPACT) is a learning and knowledge-sharing destination for the international journalism support and media development community that brings together media development and journalism support groups, donors and funding organisations, academic and research institutions, as well as technology, media, and governance experts.



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