



COLLABORATIVE
SUSTAINABILITY
GUIDE

HOW TO EARN REVENUE TO

GROW AND
THRIVE

Prepared by:

Center for Cooperative Media
The Lenfest Institute for Journalism
Solutions Journalism Network

SUMMER 2022

About this report

The field of collaborative journalism is growing not just in size, but also in scope. An increasing number of local news organizations are collaborating with one another to produce stories, test new technology, host events and better serve their communities' information needs. Many of these collaborative efforts are short-term, meant to cover a single topic or serve a specific need, and often are funded by participating organizations.

But some collaborative journalism projects seek to become sustainable entities in and of themselves. The Center for Cooperative Media has identified more than 40 of these permanent or semi-permanent collaborative journalism entities in the U.S., the majority of which began within the last five to seven years. They include both for-profit organizations and nonprofit ventures. Some are fiscally sponsored or at an in-between stage, housed within one of the collaborators. Non-news partners like libraries and universities also play an important role.

Today, most of these collaborative journalism efforts are funded by philanthropy, especially in the beginning. And we know that will continue to be a key pillar of support.

However, like many organizations, collaboratives that hope to continue long-term discover they must transition and diversify revenue streams. This means clearly understanding what audience or audiences a given collaborative serves. What jobs does it do for its audience, and how? What revenue streams align with that value proposition?

As this field matures, we wanted to know: What's working to generate revenue and sustain journalism collaborations, beyond philanthropy?

To answer this question, the Center for Cooperative Media, The Lenfest Institute for Journalism and the Solutions Journalism Network conducted a survey, interviewed collaborative project managers, funders and ecosystem support staff from around the country, and ultimately identified eight innovative examples of collaborative revenue experiments in progress to share with you. These experiments range from new reader revenue streams to newsletter sponsorships, monetizing events and sharing back-office services.

In this guide, we curate some of the top resources available to project managers and newsrooms today to help you put these ideas into action. Throughout, we share templates you can use in your own work.

We hope you find this toolkit useful in advancing your own collaborative journalism – both now and for the long haul.

Yours in collaboration,

Center for Cooperative Media
The Lenfest Institute for Journalism
Solutions Journalism Network



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Acknowledgements

The Collaborative Sustainability Guide was, as its name suggests, a truly collaborative process. The project team – SJN’s Leah Todd Lin, Alec Saelens, Liza Gross, and Allen Arthur; the Center for Cooperative Media’s Stefanie Murray and Joe Amditis; and The Lenfest Institute’s Joseph Lichterman, Kiara Santos, and Hayley Slusser – have many people to thank for their support and contributions to this guide.

Most importantly, we want to thank the leaders of the collaborations featured in the guide for sharing their insights and lessons to benefit the entire field. Thank you to Word in Black, Resolve Philly, the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative, Coast Alaska, the Chicago Independent Media Alliance, the Granite State News Collaborative, Report for America, the Blue Grass Community Foundation, URL Media, CoLAB/Colorado Media Project, and Changemakers Alliance.

We were lucky to work with Shana Black, Denise Clay Murray, Melba Newsome, Vignesh Ramachandran, and Alex Veeneman who each wrote detailed, insightful case studies for the guide. We’re grateful to Janet Piorko for her eagle-eyed copyediting. The PDF you are reading was designed by Joe Amditis. Hayley Slusser created the web version of the guide, which you can read at collaborativesustainability.news.

This research was made possible thanks to support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, the Solutions Journalism Network and the Center for Cooperative Media.



The Center for Cooperative Media is a grant-funded program within the School of Communication and Media at Montclair State University in New Jersey. Established in 2012, its mission is to grow and strengthen local journalism and support an informed society in New Jersey and beyond through collaboration.

Learn more at centerforcooperativemedia.org.



The Lenfest Institute for Journalism is a nonprofit organization whose sole mission is to develop sustainable solutions for local news. The Institute is the non-controlling parent organization of The Philadelphia Inquirer and Spotlight PA, and it supports journalists and news organizations serving local communities in Philadelphia and around the United States.

Learn more at lenfestinstitute.org.



The Solutions Journalism Network is leading a global shift in journalism, focused on what the news misses most often: how people are trying to solve problems and what we can learn from their successes or failures. Our mission is to transform journalism so that all people have access to news that helps them envision and build a more equitable and sustainable world.

Learn more at solutionsjournalism.org.

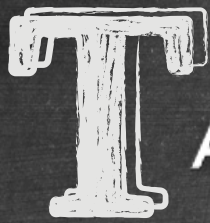
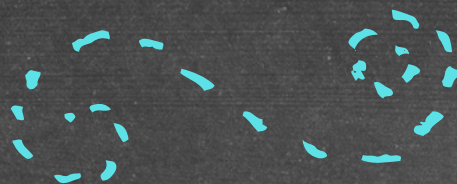


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Word in Black puts focus on money	5
Charlotte Journalism Collaborative events	10
NJ Ad Lab shares an advertising rep	14
CoastAlaska's shared back-office services	20
The growth of Resolve Philly	23
Philanthropy and collaboration	27
Experiments in progress	34
Appendix: Useful tools + resources	41



Word in Black puts focus on money

A national collaboration that has focused on generating value for partners

By Shana Black

Tags: Shared ad revenue, sponsorships, monetizing newsletters



Word In Black is a national collaboration of 10 Black-owned, Black-led legacy news publishers with a vision of becoming the most trusted news and information source for and about Black people.

The collaboration is managed by the Local Media Association and has raised over \$2 million since its launch in 2020, according to LMA.

As with many journalism collaborations, most of Word In Black's funding comes from major philanthropy. However, Word In Black has also experimented with other revenue streams, including reader revenue and monetizing its national newsletter audience through branded content partnerships. Partners share business development resources and content on a range of editorial topics.

How it started

In 2019, five Black publishers worked together as part of a Digital Transformation Lab project with LMA. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and then the murder of George Floyd in 2020, New York Amsterdam News Publisher Elinor Tatum thought it was time to revisit the project. Tatum was interested in creating a way for donors to fund media and journalism, similar to traditional donor-advised funds. Tatum reconnected with LMA CEO Nancy Lane for help.

LMA set up an online donation page through Givebutter that generated several thousand dollars in kick-start funding. That campaign later became the Fund for Black Journalism. The five original publishers invited five more to join them, bringing the total to 10. LMA manages the project and acts as fiscal sponsor.

"The relationship with us, Word In Black and to a larger extent, LMA, has been transformative," said Larry Lee, publisher of The Sacramento Observer. "We've been exposed to opportunities that we weren't before."

Operations and the role of Local Media Association

With money coming in through the donation site and 10 publishers on board, it was time to think about operations and infrastructure. As the managing partner, LMA handles day-to-day operations for Word In Black, which includes managing fundraising and editorial processes.



The ten publishers/advisers for Word in Black.

The 10 publishers serve as advisers. Partners sign a memorandum of understanding, and addenda to the original MOU are added as new funders come on board.

Today, Liz Dwyer is the full-time managing director overseeing the collaborative. Additionally, LMA has staffed Word In Black with an education data journalist and a health reporter.

As needed, Word In Black will hire support from a team of subject matter experts who work on the collaborative's branded content, website management, newsletter strategy and more.

Stories for national and local audiences

In the beginning, publishers shared stories on COVID-19 and K-12 education. Today, the collaborative produces one or two stories each month for its health vertical and two to four stories on education. Recently, Word In Black expanded its coverage to include politics, racial equity, social justice, LGBTQ news and sports.

Lee, publisher of The Sacramento Observer and a Word In Black member, says the group commits to submitting a total number of stories annually, but sometimes stories are shared more frequently. For instance, in a recent series about affirmative action during the Supreme Court confirmation hearings for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, Word In Black released a new story each day.

Word In Black produces original stories for both national and local audiences, including this recent story by Alexa Spencer, a Word In Black reporter: “‘I Can’t Breathe’: Black People Among Those Most Affected By Dirty Air.” Word In Black also republishes partner stories focused on a local audience, like this recent piece by Michigan Chronicle reporter Megan Kirk: “Decriminalizing Cannabis – the Fight to End Stigmas.”

Andrew Ramsammy, chief content and collaboration officer for LMA, said voices of local Black publishers too often get lost when a local Black story goes national – a problem that became clear after the murder of George Floyd. Word In Black is helping to solve that problem.

“By creating Word In Black, our publishers can maintain their role in reflecting a narrative of Black America that often gets misreported in the news and engaging with audiences and funders who might not know of the Black press to become supporters of it,” Ramsammy said.

How nationwide representation leads to revenue

With the expanded coverage areas and representation from Black publishers across the country, Word In Black publishers combine their audiences to reach larger brands and negotiate bigger advertising and branded content buys. Currently, the collaboration has secured content partnerships with AARP and JPMorgan Chase & Co.

Much of the content for these campaigns comes from Meta’s Branded Content Project, but the publishers are able to add stories to these specialized sections.

This sponsored content allows Word In Black to maximize what would traditionally be advertising dollars. Instead of running a single ad on one site, brands sponsor a series of stories that are displayed on multiple publishers’ homepages. For Word In Black publishers, this also allows for longer commitments from advertisers, which translates to new net revenue.

A national newsletter list of roughly 40,000 subscribers also contributes to Word In Black’s revenue streams. Like many news outlets, Word In Black initially focused on expanding its email list as a way of growing community and keeping people informed. As the list grew, it added calls to donate in each of its weekly emails.

Committed to covering news that matters to the Black community.

The 10 publishers who are a part of Word In Black know we couldn't report on important stories without you. Make a tax-deductible* donation today.

I support Word In Black

*LMF is a 501 (c)(3) organization focused on helping local media companies reinvent business models for news. LMF serves as the manager and fiscal sponsor of Word In Black.

Calls for donations, like this one, are embedded within stories on Word In Black's website and prompt readers to support Word In Black's work. (Photo: wordinblack.com)

Readers are prompted to give while reading stories, too: Calls to action are included in nearly all Word In Black stories.

Word In Black has also received funding from major philanthropy, including the Walton Family Foundation, Google News Initiative, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, and the Meta Journalism Project. In its first year, Word in Black raised \$1.3 million. Publishers share approximately 50 percent of the revenue equally, with the rest going toward operations and a management fee to LMA.

Challenges and the road ahead for Word In Black


As with many collaborative projects, the Word In Black team has some challenges. For one, publishers say it can be difficult to find time for Word In Black. In addition to the normal duties of running a newsroom, publishers commit to regular workshops and strategic planning sessions for Word In Black.

Another challenge publishers faced was deciding how to share revenue. One option was to allocate the revenue proportionally based on the size of each individual news outlet. For now, publishers have agreed to divide revenue equally.


The long-term goal is for Word In Black to move toward independence from LMA, and become a stand-alone national brand that the publishers own together. To do this, they will need to determine how they want to incorporate, how to manage current staff and the day-to-day operations, and how to navigate an uncertain future based on the commitment of

the philanthropic community to fund initiatives and journalism by communities of color.


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■ THE CAREGIVERS



Tips for building a business in your 60s
Cynthia Stewart, a 64-year-old "serial entrepreneur," offers tips for starting a business.
by Word In Black



Respite Care: Create a Plan to Give Yourself a Caregiving Break
Exhaustion, both emotional and physical, can put a caregiver in the danger zone.
by AARP



Resources, Gadgets and Tools to Care for an Older Adult at Home
Address safety issues to allow for independence as long as possible.
by AARP

One way Word In Black has monetized its newsletter audience is through branded sponsorships with orgs like AARP, for example, on Alzheimer's awareness.

Meanwhile, LMA is looking to recreate Word In Black's success. Word In Black publishers are the initial cohort of the new Knight x LMA BloomLab, a three-year initiative for Black publishers supported by \$3.2 million from the Knight Foundation that will award \$50,000 technology grants to each participant.

And publishers, like Lee, continue to see value in working together.

"The best part about being in Word In Black is growing relationships with the other members and the alignment with the others who are all committed to becoming better," Lee said.

What are donor-advised funds?

Donor-advised funds are private investment funds for philanthropy. Such funds aggregate charitable contributions from multiple donors, and can accept cash and non-cash assets, such as stocks, mutual funds and bonds. For donors, there are immediate tax benefits. For philanthropic organizations, such funds are another vehicle for donors to contribute to charitable causes.

Charlotte Journalism Collaborative

Experimenting with revenue from events, and planning to diversify for the future

By Melba Newsome

Tags: Sponsorships, monetizing events

In 2018, leaders from seven Charlotte-area media organizations started kicking around ideas about the best way to deliver impactful reporting on the city's most pressing issues, particularly the affordable housing crisis.

Looking at Resolve Philly's success in bringing attention and policy change to the issue of post-incarceration reentry, they believed pooling their resources would allow them to make the kind of impact they could not achieve as individual outlets.

A year later, seven news organizations (The Charlotte Observer, Free Press, La Noticia, QCity Metro, Q Notes, WCNC-TV and WFAE 90.7 FM) and two communication and information resources (the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library and the James L. Knight School of Communication at Queens University of Charlotte) formed the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative (CJC) with support from the Solutions Journalism Network. The following year, Carolina Public Press replaced Free Press as a partner.

The group established a revenue generation and fundraising plan around three primary objectives: subject matter (affordable housing); public good (civic investment and access to information); and delivery (arts connection and engagement).

La Noticia founder and publisher Hilda Gurdian was all in from the start. "I believe collaboration is the best way to serve our community and to expand and amplify our voices," Gurdian said. "We want to reach as many Latinos as possible, as well as those members of the community who are interested in Latino issues or interested in issues related to Charlotte, because we are all in this together."

When Chris Rudisill came on board as part-time collaborative director and project manager one month into the coronavirus lockdown, there was a clear consensus that the collaborative should focus on delivering reliable information about the pandemic, particularly to the city's most vulnerable population. But the CJC didn't just produce content; it found new ways to bring information to people.

The CJC initiated conversations with the community to find out what information people needed to better understand the COVID-19 crisis and how to respond. The collaborative published features in both English and Spanish, conducted audience research and held virtual town halls. Its efforts demonstrated its relevance and importance to the Charlotte community and created more opportunities to succeed in another essential area: fundraising.

“Because of their innovations and engagement activities, and because they were so dang effective during the pandemic, they now have this really solid reputation and a proof of concept they can point to when they’re trying to attract support,” said Michael Davis, south region manager of the Solutions Journalism Network.

Funding a media collaborative start-up

The collaborative currently operates on a \$100,000 annual budget, the bulk of which comes through a two-year grant from the Solutions Journalism Network with support from the Knight Foundation.

“As a project of SJN, all of our finances are maintained through them, with decisions and budget planning done by the collaborative’s partners,” said Rudisill. “I manage that process and oversee strategic budget planning for the future.”

Rudisill’s extensive background in nonprofit fundraising and connections to the Charlotte philanthropic community are instrumental in securing the financial resources the collaborative needs. After evaluating what it would take to initiate more expansive reporting projects, fund two full-time staff positions and produce more community engagement events, the CJC set an ambitious goal of raising \$1.5 million for operating expenses through 2026.

“The initial \$100,000 budget was based on the funding we received from the Solutions Journalism Network and served almost as an incubator to test this and see if it will work in Charlotte,” said Rudisill. “We now have a proven model that I think is even more fundable.”

Determining the right mix of funding is a combination of art and science. After relying on one source for up to 90 percent of its funding, the CJC wants a more diverse funding stream going forward. Rudisill’s ideal would be: 10 percent from major donors, 40 percent from grants and foundations, 30 percent from corporate philanthropy and 20 percent from consulting and programming.

Be creative without straying from your mission

Rudisill said CJC, when seeking funding, never loses sight of its overall mission to impact the community and revitalize local news. The grant or foundation must share its vision, not the other way around. However, he said, thinking creatively and reimagining the plan can bring more opportunities.

The collaborative has taken on projects that allowed it to attract support from organizations that don't typically fund journalism. For example, a partnership with local artists and BOOM Charlotte to translate published coronavirus stories into "PANDEMIC," a graphic novel, was funded by a cultural vision grant from the Arts & Science Council of the city of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.

"We are continuing to explore ways that we can expand collaboration beyond journalism, including with local artists and our community nonprofit partners," Rudisill said.

Events and consulting

Perhaps the CJC's most innovative measure to date was the [Local News Impact Summit on affordable housing](#) on May 12 and 13, 2022, to spotlight the city's affordable housing crisis and relevant responses to it.

The free event included an evening Community Housing Information Fair and brought together community members, city and county leadership, housing advocates and local news organizations.

Between 25 and 30 people attended on Day 1 at a branch of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. Participants included Housing & Neighborhood Services, Community Link, DreamKey Partners, Housing Justice Coalition CLT and Home Again Foundation. WCNC Charlotte produced a "what home means" video. About 100 people attended the Day 2 hybrid event where sessions and panel discussions were moderated by reporters from CJC's media partners.

The event allowed corporations to support the CJC through sponsorship and community programming. It brought in \$19,000 from sponsors including Wells Fargo, Foundation for the Carolinas, North Carolina Local News Lab Fund and DreamKey Partners. In addition, several panelists donated their honorariums, generating over \$2,000 in additional individual support.

Post-summit survey responses showed the event was well received by participants and increased awareness of the CJC and its coverage of affordable housing. It also led to productive conversations with housing advocates and meetings with Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles and the city's leader in Housing & Neighborhood Services. Rudisill said the city is planning a future summit on affordable housing and economic mobility, and has involved the CJC as a planning partner.

CJC's success in investigating and reporting news through a solutions lens has also opened the door to consulting as a new earned revenue stream. The group is devising a plan to offer its expertise and monetize the data research gathered for solutions journalism projects with other North Carolina news markets looking to start a collaboration.

Rudisill is also developing a plan to bring in local philanthropic support, a model that has been successful in other news collaborations across the country. But getting philanthropic support off the ground requires changing the belief that supporting journalism begins and ends with subscriptions and advertising. Davis said that can be a heavy lift.

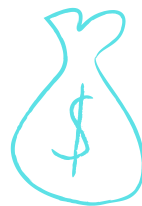
"The idea of a community, private or family foundation supporting journalism is still fairly new," said Davis. "So we have to explain ourselves. Your local news collaborative is all the stronger if it's supported by local philanthropy."

Funders also want to see concrete metrics measuring the impact of their support. While it is more difficult to draw a direct link between reporting and outcomes, Rudisill points to community engagement events that attracted more than 150 people and reporting about the right to counsel during evictions that led the county to reconsider the eviction policy. He also argues that providing financial support for a vibrant local news ecosystem is a worthwhile investment in the community.

"We all want a city that is thriving and equitable for everyone," Rudisill said. "Local news is a very important part of that."

As the CJC begins its third year, Gurdian says the collaborative has exceeded her already high expectations.

"We are expanding our audience and reaching people that we normally would not reach," she said. "I think there will be more collaborations in the future because you can see the benefits. Having the opportunity to work hand-in-hand with organizations like WFAE, WCNC, QCity Metro, Q Notes and The Observer just agrees with us."



The New Jersey Ad Lab

How Broadstreet worked with local media to sell ads collaboratively

By Vignesh Ramachandran

Tags: Shared ad revenue



As local newsrooms seek ways to sustain themselves economically, a number of organizations across New Jersey have taken a new approach to a familiar revenue stream: advertising.

Instead of each newsroom spending scarce resources selling digital ads for its website, this approach involved collaboration via a shared sales representative.

The New Jersey Ad Lab was an initiative of the Center for Cooperative Media at Montclair State University, which works to strengthen local journalism across New Jersey. The Center houses the NJ News Commons, a cooperative of more than 300 news organizations across the state, many of which are startups and hyperlocals.

“Many times they’re journalists who are starting their own news organizations, [but] they don’t have those business skills or they don’t like selling advertising,” said Stefanie Murray, the Center for Cooperative Media’s director.

For small newsrooms strapped for resources, the shared advertising model could be a win-win, allowing them to use the collaborative’s resources to sell ads and generate advertising revenue with minimal investment.

Creating this revenue approach

For many years now, shared advertising initiatives have been on the wish list for news organizations in the NJ News Commons. In 2014 and 2015, the Center hosted a sales academy where sales professionals coached members on how to effectively bring in revenue through advertising sales. In recent years, members wanted a shared sales representative who could help get digital advertisements for the local news websites.

In 2018, the Center for Cooperative Media raised \$30,000 in seed funding for a shared ad network initiative from the [New Jersey Local News Lab Fund](#). (The fund is a partnership of Democracy Fund, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Community Foundation of New Jersey and other local stakeholders.)

In 2019, the Center started holding conversations to more concretely plan how a shared sales network model could work. By February 2020, the Center had presented a plan about this pilot program to News Commons members. But as the coronavirus pandemic swept the nation that spring, the idea was put on hold.

By 2021, the Center was ready to resume work on the project. One key factor was finding a neutral, third-party host organization with advertising expertise that could launch this revenue stream. The Center vetted a few potential candidates and chose Broadstreet, a New Jersey-based advertising management company that works with news and magazine publishers. Years before, Broadstreet had tried a regional sales network approach on its own, so knew what was likely to work and not work with this model.

Among the lessons: Pricing should be uniform across the network – Broadstreet would determine the CPM (cost per thousand impressions) to land between \$7 and \$15; ad positions would need to be dedicated in the top halves of publishers' websites; and campaigns could not be vetoed. Reaching agreement on the structure of the project, called Ad Lab, took multiple Zoom calls and one in-person meeting with participants to hash out the details. At least one organization opted out because it didn't want to follow the CPM sales model.

The Center's seed funding supported a pilot program for three months. Approximately \$10,000 was spent on training to get participating News Commons members on the same page about ad sales, about \$10,000 for the independent contractor sales representative's labor and about \$10,000 for administrative costs, including legal fees.

The key to making the shared model work, according to Broadstreet CEO Kenny Katzgrau, comes down to hiring the right sales representative.

"You need someone with local relationships in any place that you're going to set this up in," Katzgrau said. "I have a hard time thinking you could basically parachute somebody into a new city who's unfamiliar with it and make a model like that work."

That's why Katzgrau hired Annette Batson, a digital ad sales consultant who is well-connected in local New Jersey communities. Batson worked with the team on a part-time basis and was already known to most of the hyperlocal news organizations because she had served as a sales academy trainer in the past.

How it worked

The Center for Cooperative Media and Broadstreet launched the Ad Lab initiative in June 2021.

Efforts began with Broadstreet hosting an onboarding session with members. Getting the project off the ground required cooperation from each of the 16 participating newsrooms. They had to be members of the NJ News Commons, agree to the CPM sales model and share audience traffic information, as well as implement a piece of code on their websites in order for the digital ads to display – a technical challenge for some of the members. For publishers that needed help, Broadstreet added the code for them or provided detailed instructions on how to do it.

After this setup process, Batson started selling digital advertisements in the fourth quarter of 2021. A single email thread kept everyone in the loop and generated excitement after each sale was made, Murray said.

“When they saw some good names coming through, that really made people think, ‘Whoa, I think this is actually possibly going to work,’ ” Murray said.

Throughout the pilot program, Batson worked approximately five to eight hours per week and signed on six ad campaigns, including a travel agency, the Hoboken Arts & Music Festival, the Montclair Film Festival, The Newark Museum of Art, and the Mayo Performing Arts Center – all advertisers with a statewide or regional target audience. The revenue across 16 publishers amounted to \$9,000.



One of the ads sold as part of the NJ Ad Lab appears on the Baristanet homepage.

The key, according to Katzgrau, was to make a solid case to businesses: While these hyperlocal publishers don't necessarily have scale for reaching people, they are highly visible to niche audiences.

"What we could do is deliver fewer impressions that were really highly visible," Katzgrau said. State or regional advertisers are ideal to approach, he added, because they need niche audiences they can't necessarily reach as effectively via traditional advertising channels. Something like a statewide film festival, for example, could be a good fit.

"Given that we only had three months and advertiser budgets are typically set at the start of the year, we still managed a lot of great sales conversations and worked our way in with some wins," Katzgrau said. "The initial startup phase is always the slowest moving, because you're a virtual unknown to advertisers. It was a definite success, although without context, it probably wouldn't be clear from the final numbers."

On average during this fourth-quarter period, the 16 newsrooms generated an average of \$562.50 per website, but individual results varied based on digital traffic. Four sites received \$1,000 or more out of the \$9,000 total. One newsroom made only about \$20 because it was late in adding the code to make the ads display on its site. The digital ads as a whole got 1.4 million impressions online, with a 0.1 percent click-through rate.

Murray said after newsrooms got over the initial hiccups, the partners mostly felt it was very easy to participate in this program. Any revenue they generated from such a light lift was a win for them, she said.

The road forward

While the Center considers the short-term pilot for this shared advertising network successful, the way forward is dependent on external funding.

"Some of these hyperlocals serve affluent communities, some of them serve low-wealth communities, some of them serve communities that speak different languages or immigrant communities in the state," Murray said. "These are not big sites – they don't all have the budget to pay in and support a shared sales rep."

The \$30,000 seed funding was a good proof of concept, but Murray hopes to raise upward of \$100,000 to provide at least a year of

operations. After that, Katzgrau believes the Ad Lab could be sustainable on its own. Broadstreet estimates the Ad Lab network could turn a profit of more than 10 to 15 percent a year.

Murray said she is actively seeking and pitching external funders to support the Ad Lab. But while the New Jersey model worked, she said many funders are apprehensive about supporting advertising projects.

While most of the participating newsrooms found it relatively simple to join the program, Katzgrau said there are certainly challenges working with some newsrooms, including limited technical knowledge and occasional resistance to going all-in with advertising opportunities. For example, in the past, one publisher Broadstreet worked with said it would never display ads from major chain businesses and preferred only mom-and-pop-type ads. That wasn't an issue this time, however, because the publishers set the ground rules from the start, Katzgrau said. Another challenge: Many hyperlocal publishers are sustained by one or two people on a daily basis, who must divide their attention among the many demands of running a local news operation.

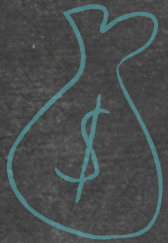
Given the limited budget and tight timeline of the New Jersey Ad Lab pilot, Katzgrau believes it worked out pretty well. In the future, he thinks it will be important for publishers to make themselves known before advertisers draw up their marketing budgets. If the Ad Lab had a longer duration, Katzgrau believes it would have had a greater return on investment. He would also recommend paying the salesperson a base salary and commission, instead of an hourly wage.

Whether this model could translate to other regions or states around the country would depend on hiring the right salesperson who has business relationships in the area, according to Katzgrau. In this case, Batson was effective in New Jersey because of her local expertise and connections.

The New Jersey Ad Lab's initial efforts to take a fresh approach to advertising provided an additional source of revenue for local newsrooms that are urgently seeking more streams to stay afloat.

"Something that we're talking about is how to promote sustainability for local newsrooms and help them to find new revenue streams," said Cassandra Etienne, the Center for Cooperative Media's assistant director for programming and membership. "So it seems to have worked out for everyone who took part."

COMMON REVENUE THEMES AND RELEVANT CASE STUDIES



(CJC, Changemakers Alliance)

Monetizing events

(Word in Black)

Monetizing newsletters



(New Jersey, Word in Black, URL Media)

Shared advertising revenue

(CJC, Word in Black, Changemakers, URL Media)

Sponsorships

Consulting

(Resolve Philly, URL Media)

Consolidating backend services

(Coast Alaska)

Major donor pipeline

(Resolve Philly)

Collaborative crowdfunding

(CoLAB/Colorado Media Project)



Shared back-office services

How sharing behind-the-scenes infrastructure helps sustain Alaska radio stations

By Alex Veeneman

Tags: Consolidated backend services

In the world of 21st-century public radio, collaborations have become commonplace – from statewide partnerships in California, Texas and the Gulf States to networks focused on issues, such as Harvest Public Media, based in Kansas City, Missouri, and devoted to food and agriculture topics in the Midwest.

Yet among the growing number of collaborations in public radio, one stands out for its track record of more than two decades and for the creative way it funds its operations.

Since 1994, CoastAlaska has grown from an informal alliance of six Alaska public radio stations into a full-fledged nonprofit organization with an annual budget of about \$4.3 million. Its mission is bringing communities in Alaska together through access to quality news and information. CoastAlaska offers back-office support to six public radio stations for a fraction of what local options would cost, and a shared editor coordinates editorial projects across member stations. Funding comes from fees paid by member stations, underwriting and grants, especially from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Mollie Kabler, CoastAlaska’s executive director, says CoastAlaska is both a collaborative and a service bureau.

“We work on the budget together and share our stories,” Kabler said. “We are definitely collaborative. It is the root of where we began.”

Sharing core services to cut costs

In addition to the editorial services it provides to the core six stations in the southeast and Aleutian parts of the state, CoastAlaska also offers business services to stations on an a la carte basis. This includes membership services, like sending personalized letters to donors and maintaining donor databases, and accounting services, such as compiling annual financial reports and processing invoices.

CoastAlaska also helps its members develop underwriting services, coordinating with potential advertisers across all six stations, and applies for grants that can be shared with all.

“In small public media stations, each employee may wear many hats,” Kabler said.

"At this point in the CoastAlaska collaboration, the stations get significant expertise and service from the shared regional staff."

For instance, Kabler worked with CoastAlaska's station managers to secure grants for personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic. These funds came from the Alaska Center for Excellence in Journalism, the Alaska Community Foundation and other community-based grants through the federal CARES Act.

All these services have helped some CoastAlaska member stations achieve more financial sustainability than they would have had on their own. That's the case with one of CoastAlaska's newest members, KUCB, in Unalaska.

"Before we joined CoastAlaska I was concerned about how the station would run if we lost key employees," said Lauren Adams, KUCB's general manager. "Now a lot of our important administrative and engineering tasks are done in tandem with Coast staff members, which means there are a lot more people able to fix issues and maintain stability."

The same applies to member station KSTK in Wrangell. Cindy Sweat, KSTK's general manager, says its involvement with CoastAlaska is key to its ability to keep broadcasting.

"Our station shares news, engineering, finance, business office, membership, underwriting and other services at a fraction of the cost of paying for those services individually," Sweat said. "KSTK does not have the funding to hire employees to fill all of the services CoastAlaska provides; therefore, the station would not be able to serve our community without CoastAlaska services."

Public funding for collaborative public radio

Revenue for CoastAlaska also comes from grants through other governmental bodies beyond CPB. However, this has not proven to be a reliable revenue stream. In 2019, Alaska's governor vetoed funding for the state's Public Broadcasting Commission, which distributed grants to the state's public TV and radio stations.

The total of these grants, \$2.7 million, was not life-threatening, Kabler said, but it was devastating.

According to recent financial documents, most funding for CoastAlaska comes from membership revenue, followed by CPB grants and revenue from underwriting.

CoastAlaska's future – lessons for other collaboratives

Kabler credits some key factors for CoastAlaska's longevity. One is a dedicated leader who can nurture the collaboration without the competing demands or affiliation of another job. The value of the collaboration also needs to be made clear.

"If it's just what is in it for me, that will be a hard road," Kabler said. "It has to benefit everyone."

Value can come from a variety of places, Kabler said. It can happen when a collaborative coalesces around a specific beat, an idea for coverage, or a type of funding that supports it. Once you work with people and organizations that are willing and supportive of the collaborative, trust will build, Kabler said.

Successful collaboration takes time and energy to keep up communication and sort out problems or changes, she said.

"You need to bring your problems forward and put them on the table," Kabler said. "If you can put them there and work together, that's how you can move forward."

Sweat, general manager of KSTK in Wrangell, said CoastAlaska continues to fine-tune how it communicates with member stations as it grows.

Collaborative organizations like CoastAlaska that aim to persist in the long run must also plan for staff turnover, she said – a reality for many small news organizations and for CoastAlaska, too.

When CoastAlaska works best, Kabler said, it helps stations grow capacity, not just create efficiencies and save money. Ultimately, the mission is about robust support for local news not just in Alaska's cities, but in the communities in between and far away.



The growth of Resolve Philly

A focus on consulting and developing major donors is helping diversify revenue

By Denise Clay-Murray

Tags: Consulting, major donors



Philadelphia is a city of neighborhoods, and their stories often go untold.

They are the stories of traditionally marginalized groups such as the formerly incarcerated, the impoverished and others whose voices aren't always heard, and one place they are told is Resolve Philly. Through such projects as Broke in Philly and Equally Informed Philly, Resolve partners with more than 25 news organizations, including WHYY, Love Now Media and WURD Radio.

Resolve Philly has its roots in a Solutions Journalism Network-sponsored collaborative called The Reentry Project, a 15-newsroom group that produced 200 stories focused on people returning to their communities after being incarcerated and the issues they faced in readjusting. The Reentry Project was so successful in 2017 that it evolved into a standalone nonprofit organization, Resolve Philly, in 2018.

Resolve is often cited as one of the most successful collaboratives in the United States. While it remains a hub for collaborative reporting, that is no longer its sole function. The organization's main goals are to improve journalism, equity and communication in Philadelphia. It's branched out to include projects such as Shake the Table, a long-term initiative to hold elected officials accountable, and Reframe, an effort to help journalists better report on misrepresented and underrepresented communities.

Resolve is also known for its revenue success to date. Over the last four years, it has brought in enough money to grow into a team of 18 people managing a half-dozen projects.

Money from Philanthropy

Resolve was initially funded through foundation grants designated for the work of the collaborative. Foundation funders today include the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, The Lenfest Institute for Journalism, the Independence Public Media Foundation and the Ford Foundation. In the past, Resolve has also received money from the News Integrity Initiative and The Philadelphia Foundation. Grant amounts have ranged from \$20,000 to \$1 million.

Resolve still relies heavily on foundation grants, said Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, who co-directs the organization with Cassie Haynes.

But it is trying to expand its funding sources, because it recognizes that foundations go through funding cycles, and what is popular now might not be popular in a couple years.

“It’s important to know that they will sometimes shift priorities, and if you move outside of their priorities, they may no longer want to sustain your work,” she said.

Major gifts make up another philanthropic revenue stream. Friedman-Rudovsky and Haynes work to connect with donors through their professional and personal networks and through those of Resolve’s board members.

Potential and current donors are invited to events, both those hosted by Resolve and others targeted specifically toward donors. The organization also keeps in touch with donors throughout the year. Revenue from this source is currently a small part of Resolve’s funding formula, but it has the potential to grow.

“Building a major gifts program is a real commitment; it takes a tremendous amount of time, and the fundraising potential isn’t always immediate,” Haynes said. “That said, individual giving can be a mechanism for collective healing. Creating this stream of revenue has been really rewarding for us as fundraisers, and for our donors as well.”



In total, about 85% of Resolve’s revenue comes from philanthropic fundraising. Friedman-Rudovsky said that when journalists enter the fundraising realm, they should remember the skills they use every day. When seeking money from funders for the collaborative’s general upkeep and maintenance, they have to tell the story of why they need it.

There are few storytellers better than journalists.

“I think, as journalists, fundraising can feel very, very overwhelming or can feel like some kind of unknown new space or field,” Friedman-Rudovsky said. “But I would say that the skills that you use as a journalist are very transferable to fundraising, because it’s all about telling a good story. It’s about telling a good story of why the work that your organization does matters. It’s telling a good story of why you are paying the salaries that are, hopefully, life- or family-sustaining wages. It’s about telling a good story about why you need multi-year support. It’s important to not be scared of that.”

Consulting marks a growing source of revenue

To expand its revenue beyond philanthropy, Resolve has grown its consulting practice, working mainly with other news organizations. Its current clients include Capital B (a Black-led nonprofit news organization focused on local and national news for Black communities), the Dallas Media Collaborative and Spotlight PA. Past clients include The Trace, the Southwest Michigan Journalism Collaborative and The Lenfest Local Lab at The Philadelphia Inquirer.

“We offer such things as leadership coaching, collaborative journalism guidance, community engagement training and consulting, source tracking, as well as workshops on language and framing,” Friedman-Rudovsky said. She said Resolve has focused on creating more digital resources, such as toolkits, webinars and e-courses, so that it can also offer things that require less of its staff’s personal time and add value when organizations can’t commit to the cost or the intensity of a direct relationship with Resolve.

Friedman-Rudovsky and Haynes are also beginning to build a consulting client base of non-media leaders and organizations. “We believe that our perspective and expertise would be valuable to mission-based organizations that aren’t connected to journalism,” Friedman-Rudovsky said.

This year, approximately 15% of Resolve’s budgeted revenue is from the consulting practice, a percentage that the organization hopes will be closer to 20% in 2023.

Resolve will sometimes charge a flat fee for a workshop or to facilitate a training, but it aims to structure its larger contracts around a monthly retainer.



Revenue ideas that haven't worked yet

There's no charge to be a member of Broke in Philly, the core journalism collaborative that is a key program of Resolve, and no money is paid to collaborative members simply for being part of the group. Broke in Philly members have access to a central pot of money to help fund work related to the program, including reporting and engagement.

One revenue experiment Resolve tried involved the Broke in Philly members, in which it sold sponsorships for story collections as a way of generating funds. While that sponsored content provided some money to each member, only a very small amount was distributed in the end.

Friedman-Rudovsky said some of the technology needed for the sponsorship program to be most effective was challenging for the collaborative's smaller newsrooms to access. Also, the way the system was set up didn't allow Resolve to create the collections and put them in the places where they would be most beneficial to the collaborative's work. So, while the project was a useful experiment, it wasn't worth continuing, she said.

Resolve's directors see it as their mission to find alternative funding streams to finance the collaborative, which leaves members free to produce content and not worry about financing, Friedman-Rudovsky said.

"We haven't needed to try to draw their attention away from the work to say, 'How can we make money together?' or 'We need you guys to think of ways or to enact ways we can make money together,'" Friedman-Rudovsky said. "We've been taking on that responsibility."

Philanthropy and collaboration

Publishers and collaboratives are working hard to introduce collaborative journalism to new funders

By Joseph Lichterman

As news organizations have increasingly turned to collaboration over the past decade or so, philanthropic funding has emerged as the primary revenue source for collaborative projects.

While a core group of national journalism funders has driven support for much of this activity, publishers and collaboratives have worked hard to introduce collaborative journalism to new funders at both the local and national levels.

This guide is primarily focused on revenue streams beyond philanthropy. However, that doesn't mean philanthropic funding for collaborations – and journalism more broadly – is going away. Philanthropy, from both institutional funders and individuals, can and should be part of a healthy revenue mix.

Within this section we've collected resources aimed at three key requests for guidance that we've heard from collaborative journalism leaders:

- How to run a collaborative fundraising campaign;
- How to approach funders new to journalism and explain the value proposition of how collaborative journalism;
- How to steward long-term donor relationships.

We've also included samples of successful collaborative funding requests for your reference.



Ever consider running a joint fundraising campaign with other news outlets? Here's how the Chicago Independent Media Alliance collaborated with more than 40 partners:

The Chicago Independent Media Alliance raised \$332,500 for 43 participating news organizations during two collaborative fundraising campaigns, in 2020 and 2021.

CIMA is a collaboration of 69 independent Chicago media outlets representing more than 80 titles, led by the Reader Institute for Community Journalism, publishers of the Chicago Reader. (Some members publish more than one title.)

It was launched in 2019 to attempt to address the revenue challenges facing local publishers, and in spring 2020 – during the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic – it created an emergency joint fundraising campaign. CIMA encompasses publishers with an array of business models and tax statuses, and not all of them wanted to take part in the fundraiser.

That year, nearly 1,000 individuals contributed to the campaign, raising more than \$160,000 for participating CIMA members, which included \$60,000 in matching funds from local foundations. In 2021, CIMA raised \$172,795 – including \$77,500 in matching funds and contributions from more than 900 donors.

For the 2021 campaign, the CIMA team organized a fundraising committee made up of participating members to help plan the campaign. They created shared marketing materials – featuring #SaveChicagoMedia – that the partners could use across their platforms. CIMA also provided peer-to-peer fundraising training to participants, having learned a lesson from 2020, when many members said they felt unprepared. The campaign was initially an emergency fundraiser created in a month, and some smaller outlets that signed up had never raised funds before.

The CIMA collaborative fundraiser was unique because donors could choose to donate to a particular organization, to give money to multiple outlets, or to have their donation divided among the participating outlets. During the 2021 campaign, two-thirds of donors chose to have their donations shared among all the partners. CIMA's shared messaging focused on the value of independent local media and how outlets are serving communities across the city. It helped Chicagoans learn about the breadth and diversity of the city's media.

Still, it could be challenging to balance the collective donations and the individual donations; the matching funds provided by the funders supported only donations to individual outlets, so at times there were competing interests at play, even though CIMA capped the match amounts. One participant said in anonymous feedback shared with CIMA: "I haven't found a good way to say, 'Give to us and not to everyone else.' I hope we can find a way to get matching funds without putting CIMA members against one another." The CIMA team advised partner organizations to create an "echo chamber" on social media by shouting out other organizations to highlight the collective while encouraging the use of their own products – websites, newsletters, etc. – to try and strike the balance between promoting the individual and collective fundraisers.

CIMA built a shared website – SaveChicagoMedia.org – to support donations. Each participating outlet also created a Stripe account, which was connected to its bank account, allowing donations to be transferred directly; for the 2021 campaign, outlets could view real-time reports on the fundraising. Those reports helped publishers make decisions about how to frame their asks. The Crossroads Fund hosted all matching dollars and distributed those funds after the campaign ended.

The collaborative is planning another campaign from Oct. 3 - 17, 2022.

LEARN MORE:

- CIMA created detailed reports on its [2021](#) and [2020 campaigns](#); both feature specific data points and details on how CIMA executed the campaigns and the key lessons it learned.
- For more on CIMA's other activities, including creating a Chicago Media Directory and the launch of a FOIA project, which are featured in its 2021 Annual Report, [click here](#).
- You can follow CIMA across social media at [@IndieMediaChi](#).



he Granite State News Collaborative held a community event to engage new funders. This is how you can hold your own gathering

In May 2022, more than 50 journalists, funders and local leaders gathered in New Hampshire to discuss how local communities could come together to support local journalism that enhances civic engagement and provides trustworthy news and information.

The inaugural New Hampshire News Philanthropy Summit was organized by the Granite State News Collaborative, a statewide partnership among nearly 20 New Hampshire news outlets.

“This is about recreating a piece of the fabric of democracy and community,” said Laura Simoes, executive director of the Nackey S. Loeb School of Communications, which co-sponsored the event with the Concord Monitor and the Granite State News Collaborative, according to a report on the event produced by the Collaborative. “We get to chart a new course and find fixes to problems that involve all of us.”

The gathering showcased successful local journalism initiatives that have

benefited from philanthropic support, and featured a keynote address by Lauren McKown, senior vice president of development for the GroundTruth Project, Report for America's parent organization. Speakers emphasized that news organizations and collaborations should frame journalistic support as a way for foundations and donors to raise awareness and illustrate solutions for the challenges they're trying to solve – from health and educational inequities to climate change and more.

For example, one of the key program areas of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation is to promote community health. The foundation views local journalism as an important platform for promoting that mission to the broader community.

"It's a natural extension of the way we work in [the] community. ... None of us has the scale to fix all these problems. Journalism is high leverage because it gives people information and understanding to act and act now," said Katie Merrow, vice president of community impact at the foundation. "It's relevant for any issue. It drives engagement, because people need information and a way into the issue to address it."

She continued: "To get everyone to rally around journalism? That's still going to be a small subsector [of people] ... It's what journalism brings. I would skip over that word, [journalism,] and rally people around making sure you have the information you need about what's going on in your community, and that your decision makers are hearing your voices."

In many cases, funders appreciate the added scale and reach that collaborations can bring, ensuring that the journalism reaches as wide an audience as possible. Since 2019, the Granite State News Collaborative has raised more than \$140,000 for its work, and many of its major funders have said that the group's solutions-focused approach to coverage with partners around the state is a primary reason for their support. This can make a compelling case to funders interested in supporting local news.

LEARN MORE:

- Granite State News Collaborative reporter Roberta Baker [wrote a detailed story](#) about the New Hampshire News Philanthropy Summit.
- Here's [a full recording](#) of the Summit.
- "[A most positive sign: In New Hampshire, two foundations have invested in solutions-focused reporting](#)" (Solutions Journalism Network blog, The Whole Story, Jan. 19, 2021)



ets take a look inside the Community News Fund movement.

Peter Baniak, the editor and general manager of the Lexington Herald-Leader, and Lisa Adkins, president and CEO of Blue Grass Community Foundation, have known each other for years.

So when Baniak first approached Adkins about support for a Report for America journalist, the conversations quickly evolved into a deeper partnership: The Bluegrass Civic Journalism Fund.

Housed at Blue Grass Community Foundation, the Fund has served not only as a fiscal sponsor for the Herald-Leader's fundraising activities, but also as a catalyst for additional fundraising.

It has connected the paper with groups, such as CivicLex, a nonprofit focused on civic engagement, to launch collaborative journalism projects.

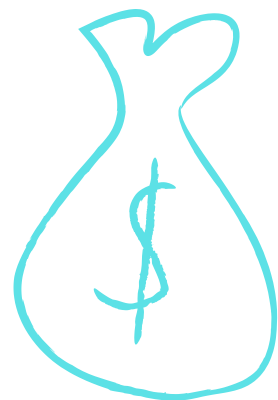
Similar structures have popped up across the United States, as community foundations have partnered with local news leaders to create community news funds, centralized funds that attract donations from multiple sources to support local journalism on a permanent, ongoing basis.

In a report published in February 2022, Report for America identified at least seven communities that collectively raised \$15 million using the model.

Community news funds involve a deeper partnership than a traditional funding relationship, and they often evolve to support collaborations or entire ecosystems.

In addition to providing funds, the foundations leverage their civic connections to solicit additional donations and also support publishers by offering back-office support.

They also work hand-in-hand with staff at the news organizations to build a philanthropic plan and help their communities understand the importance of supporting local news.



The RFA report outlined the following best practices for launching and growing a community news fund:

- Encompass multiple funders of varied giving levels
- Pursue multi-year contributions with a fund goal of 6- and 7-figures depending on the community size
- Demonstrate and articulate that the community (not merely the newsroom) is the beneficiary of improved local news
- Direct funding support to more than one newsroom, where feasible, to better serve an entire community
- Create a steering committee of civic leaders that eventually grows to become a board of governance for fund expansions and dispersals
- Ensure with local news partners that the community benefits from a wide range of types of reporting (investigative, hyperlocal, features, etc.) and targets of coverage (ie., health, education, environment, criminal justice, economic development).

The highlighted case studies included a number of collaborative journalism projects, including a project in Lexington, Kentucky; statewide collaborations in California and Pennsylvania; and more.

LEARN MORE:

- [Read the full RFA Community News Funds report](#) and its toolkit for more best practices and case studies. (And if you're short on time, here's RFA's summary.)



A blockbuster panel of local news leaders from North Carolina, New Mexico and New Hampshire came together at the 2021 News Philanthropy Summit, a global gathering of news fundraising professionals supported by the Lenfest News Philanthropy Network, to share key lessons from their experiences fundraising for collaborative reporting.

The Lenfest Institute's Kyra Miller compiled some of the best practices, including:

- Collaborative funding isn't *the* solution; it is *one* of the solutions
- Not every funder will be a good fit

Collaborative funding isn't *the* solution; it is *one* of the solutions

Collaboration can transform and sustain a fragile media ecosystem. We are facing many challenges in journalism right now, including the erosion of confidence and trust in the news and the financial challenges of supporting a viable newsroom.

The guiding principle of the Local Media Project, led by Liza Gross, Solutions Journalism Network's vice president of practice change and supported by the Knight Foundation, is to reinforce existing media ecosystems. Collaboration among existing news organizations can reinforce and strengthen the existing local media ecosystem during a period of great change and uncertainty.

"How do we create a collaboration that is representative of the community it serves, and can generate content that is equitable, diverse, and captures the complexities of that community?" said Gross.

Not every funder will be a good fit.

Not all funders are ready or willing to invest in news, and that is OK. In the long run, it is much better to create relationships with funders who are ready, willing and able to invest in you and see the true value of a collaborative journalism project.

"We make a big effort to stick to what we promise and be really specific about what we can do," said Gross. "But we also want to make sure that when we expand our pool of funders, we remember that perhaps not every potential funder is suitable."

What media outlets can do is work with funders of their collaborative to help craft each funder's strategic plan. Gross spends a lot of time reaching out to funders to do this, while keeping in mind that outlets can still fundraise individually.

LEARN MORE:

- You can [watch a full recording of the News Philanthropy Summit session](#) on collaborative fundraising.
- Check out the [detailed recap](#) for more lessons from around the country on collaborative fundraising best practices.

Experiments in progress

Here are some promising revenue models and experiments to watch

By Leah Todd Lin



Changemakers Alliance

[Minnesota Women's Press](#), which started in 1985, is a print and digital platform serving 25,000 monthly readers, launched Changemakers Alliance, a collaborative media spinoff for its most engaged audience members, in January 2022.

“We want to highlight the women who are working on transformational solutions,” said Mikki Morrisette, Minnesota Women’s Press publisher and editor. “The question was, how do we get more people involved in what we’re covering, and how we’re covering it?”

How does it work?

Changemakers Alliance hosts monthly Zoom conversations connecting women statewide involved in solving problems in their communities. Conversations so far in 2022 have focused on statewide housing needs, the issues of stigma and addiction, northern Minnesota environmental politics, and Indigenous speakers sharing [insights about healing from the trauma of gender-based violence](#).

Other conversations in progress include a series about the general strengths of women’s political leadership, LGBTQ+ health, a Values and Vision book discussion group, and immigration and family identity. A future collaboration will focus on defusing toxic masculinity. Conversations lead to multimedia stories.

How does this collaboration generate revenue?

A small membership program will launch this fall seeking 1,000 members paying \$5 a month. Several \$250 gifts currently subsidize memberships for people who otherwise couldn’t afford to participate. Changemakers Alliance secured its first \$20,000

sponsorship from the only female Valvoline franchise owner – who has locations in northern Minnesota – as well as underwriting from Vote Run Lead, Rainbow Health and University of Minnesota Press.

An early donation campaign among existing Minnesota Women’s Press readers raised \$6,000. Changemakers Alliance plans to seek grants from foundations interested in sponsoring conversations and multimedia projects on certain topics.



Badass women were celebrated at an April 2022 Changemakers Alliance/Minnesota Women’s Press event: (top l-r) Angela Dawson, Rande Hanson, Chris Stark, Patti Tototzintle, Robin Wonsley, Beth Peterson (bottom l-r) Nelima Sitati Munene, Ellie Krug, Shannon Gibney, Alla Hassan, Lucina Kayee.

Why is Changemakers Alliance an experiment worth watching?

The effort benefited from strong brand awareness among existing audience members, who knew and trusted Minnesota Women’s Press. The collaboration is also piloting a unique relationship between traditional media and community storytellers and advocates.

Coming up, Morrisette hopes to offer members-only conversations, paired with multimedia storytelling, to incentivize participants to donate. In April 2022, Changemakers Alliance hosted its first in-person event with members, “Celebrating Badass Minnesota Women,” featuring talks with 11 women from around the state talking about their passions.



Colorado Media Project 2021 Grantees.

The Colorado Media Project and the Colorado News Collaborative

The [Colorado Media Project](#) is a nonpartisan philanthropic initiative that supports people, projects and organizations working to build a healthier, more equitable, solutions-focused local news and information ecosystem for all Coloradans.

How does it work?

CMP is one of the core sponsors for the Colorado News Collaborative, or COLab, a statewide hub for journalism resources and ideas in Colorado. Since 2020, COLab has led editorial collaborations on mental health, equity and water, sponsored diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and managed a year-end matching grant program for local Colorado newsrooms.

How does this collaboration generate revenue?

The Colorado News Collaborative's revenue model itself is collaborative. "From the beginning, we were looking for a three-part revenue model," said Melissa Milios Davis, CMP's director and the vice president for strategic communications and informed communities at the Colorado-based Gates Family Foundation, one of the founding funders of the Colorado Media Project. "A key question from the beginning was: How can philanthropic funding be just one of the revenue sources of COLab?"

While Gates Family Foundation and other Colorado and national foundations provided the largest share of funding to launch COLab, individual donations and support from Colorado newsrooms themselves also play an important role. The Colorado Press Association contributes to COLab from its own membership fund, Milios Davis said, and The Colorado Independent, a nonprofit news outlet, provided funds raised through individual donations.

In addition to playing a role in launching COLab, Colorado Media Project has helped local newsrooms test several new revenue streams since 2018, including [an experiment with shared membership revenue](#)

supported by the Membership Puzzle Project. In 2019, CMP recruited local funders to support [Colorado Public Radio's acquisition](#) of the digital news site Denverite. In 2020, Colorado Media Project, COLab and The Colorado Sun worked with the National Trust for Local News [to support the purchase of 24 weekly and monthly newspapers, keeping them in local hands](#).

Why is Colorado Media Project an experiment worth watching?

One revenue experiment has stood out for its scope and sustainability among partner newsrooms: the annual “#newsCOnneeds” crowdfunding campaign. Each year, CMP provides matching grants to nonprofit and locally owned for-profit newsrooms, along with funding one-on-one coaching in fundraising.

COLab organizes the program, which includes a series of trainings with the News Revenue Hub to help newsrooms plan and execute their campaigns. This program is modeled on the Institute for Nonprofit News’ national [NewsMatch](#) campaign, with a few tweaks to fit the local Colorado landscape.

The initiative began in 2018, when CMP [convened seven Colorado news organizations to discuss an idea that seemed implausible at the time](#): a joint fundraising effort that would require coordination across their previously competing news organizations.

The vision was big: “What could we do to make this not just an individual fundraiser for your newsroom, but make a statement that we care about journalism and we care about each other?” Milios Davis said.

The news partners created a co-signed letter and a one-day campaign to test the message. Gates provided a \$2,500 grant in matching funds to each newsroom. That first year, they raised nearly \$50,000 from about 300 people in a single day.

The next year, the project grew to include more partners and larger, \$5,000 matching grants from CMP, which pooled funds from three Colorado philanthropic institutions – Bohemian Foundation, Gates Family Foundation and Rose Community Foundation. Today, the #newsCOnneeds campaign lasts an entire month, features a shared website, and in 2021 helped bring in more than \$700,000 for 25 news partners.

“I hope a lot of foundations or place-based donors will think about doing this, and creating a program that can accommodate small, locally owned for-profit newsrooms,” Milios Davis said. “The program is really tailored for local ownership. The message really has to be true, and help them in saying: Your local dollars are going to sustain this local business, this local newsroom.”



URL Media

URL Media is a network of 12 Black- and Brown-owned media outlets. URL was founded in 2021 by WURD Radio President and CEO Sara Lomax-Reese and Epicenter NYC Publisher S. Mitra Kalita.

It's a network of BIPOC-owned and -led media organizations with a goal of promoting publications serving communities of color.

The 12 participating organizations, located around the United States, share reporting and distribute one another's work, and URL Media sells advertising and sponsorships across the network.

URL Media's partners include:

- WURD Radio
- The Haitian Times
- Sahan Journal
- Epicenter NYC
- TBN 24
- Native News Online
- Documented
- ScrollStack
- Black Voice News
- Scalawag
- Palabra.
- Our Body Politic

How does it work?

URL Media distributes content through platforms including Apple News, social media, newsletters and mutual promotion by the 12 partner outlets.

It is a for-profit company that generates revenue through sponsorships, advertising, syndication and partnerships externally and internally. Revenue is shared with the 12 partner organizations.

for-profit organization, which prioritizes sustainability for its member publications.

“[We] ... believe in wealth creation for our communities, our staff, ourselves,” Kalita said.

Lomax-Reese said, “We do not believe Black and Brown people should only be affiliated with charity, hardship and news about struggle.” She added: “We also want to approach storytelling and community building from a place of joy, triumph, even laughter. Finally, we are realists: In order to make a difference in a capitalistic world, it takes a lot of money to create a large impact.”



“The advertising revenue is distributed to the partners based on participation in advertising deals,” Kalita said in an email. “However, philanthropic funding has been vital to getting its operations up and running.”

URL is currently recruiting additional BIPOC-led organizations to join the network, and it’s looking to form partnerships with mainstream media outlets.

How does this collaboration generate revenue?

URL Media launched with significant philanthropic support, including \$250,000 from the Knight Foundation, \$100,000 from Democracy Fund and \$100,000 from the Knight-Lenfest Local News Transformation Fund. It also garnered additional funding from the Archewell Foundation, the Center for Cooperative Media and the International Women’s Media Foundation.

Unlike other journalism collaborations, URL Media chose a business development role, not an editor, for its first hire. It recently brought on board its first vice president of ad sales and a director of operations to build out its revenue streams. In addition to advertising, URL Media runs a recruiting and coaching service that focuses on “diverse talent and excellence.”

There are currently six employees working for URL Media in roles focusing on “advertising and sponsorship, business development, operations, administration and executive leadership,” Kalita said.

“We initially focused on business-side hires, as our model is based on amplifying the content of our partners and connecting them to earned media and advertising opportunities,” Kalita said. “We have also been overwhelmingly successful in our efforts to center diversity in mainstream media through executive recruiting and coaching. We are currently in the process of expanding our team in editorial- and audience-focused roles to amplify the great work of our members and to create original URL content.”

Why is URL Media an experiment worth watching?

URL Media is centering publications that serve communities of color. Through collaboration, it’s helping them access resources and scale that they would not be able to reach on their own. Notably, URL Media is a

Appendix: Useful tools + resources

A list of tools to help you generate revenue for your journalism collaboration

Toolkit: [Budget and finance for journalism collaborations](#) by Shady Grove Oliver for the Center for Cooperative Media.

Themes: General budget guidance for all kinds of journalism collaboratives, including short-term and long-term. Focus on philanthropy.

Toolkit: [Project manager playbook](#) by Caroline Porter for the Center for Cooperative Media.

Themes: New roles necessary to maintain successful ongoing journalism collaborations.

Toolkit: [Revenue Playbook](#) by Alec Saelens for Solutions Journalism Network

Themes: How solutions-oriented journalism can help journalism organizations become more sustainable. Focus on aligning editorial, product, engagement, development and communication strategies.

Toolkit: [Membership guide](#) by Membership Puzzle Project and The Lenfest Institute

Themes: How-to guide for launching an audience revenue program.

Toolkit: [Better News](#) by American Press Institute

Themes: Live events, subscriptions and membership, advertising, foundation and major donor support

Toolkit: [Google News Initiative Startups Playbook](#) by Google News Initiative

Themes: Identifying target audiences, defining the problem you're trying to solve, testing a product idea, building budgets and business plans, defining success

Toolkit: [Strategies for Tracking Impact: A toolkit for collaborative journalism](#) by Amy Maestas and Leah Todd Lin for Solutions Journalism Network

Themes: Defining success, tracking impact, selecting relevant metrics

Toolkit: [Newsletterguide.org: A 201 guide for taking your newsletters to the next level – growing the lists, making money, and more](#) by Harvard Kennedy School's

Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy and Lenfest Institute

Themes: Newsletter templates, monetizing newsletters, evaluating success

Toolkit: [The menu of collaboration: What we've learned from launching and managing nine industry collaboratives](#) by Local Media Association

Themes: Technology partnerships, sponsorships, branded content, philanthropy

Database: [A look at how 40 U.S. news collaboratives are currently funded](#) by Stefanie Murray for the Center for Cooperative Media
Themes: Major philanthropy

Research: [Funder perspectives: Assessing media investments](#) by Media Impact Funders
Themes: Major philanthropy, defining success,

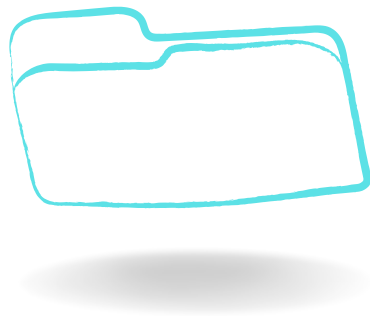
Research: [Community News Funds: Local foundations lead the way with a pivotal new strategy for community journalism](#) by Amy Bonn and Todd Franko for Report for America
Themes: Major philanthropy, cultivating new funders, collaborative fundraising

Research: [Forging a path from solutions journalism to reader revenue](#) by Ned Burke and Alec Saelens for Solutions Journalism Network
Themes: Audience revenue, monetizing newsletters

Blog post: [Strategies for collaborative fundraising that can strengthen local media](#) by Kyra Miller for the Lenfest Institute
Themes: Collaborative fundraising

Newsletter: [3 Tips for Monetizing your Email Newsletter](#) by Local Independent Online News (LION) Publishers
Themes: Monetizing newsletters, sponsorships, audience revenue

Toolkit: [Introduction to Grant writing for News Organizations](#) by The Lenfest News Philanthropy Network
Themes: Grant writing





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