

MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

2019 Media Impact Forum Breakout Session Notes

Morning Breakout Session #1

Facilitated by **Kaitlin Yarnall**, Vice President, Media Innovation, National Geographic Society, and MIF board member, who led a discussion on engaging the community through cultural content.

Short summary: Kaitlin Yarnall led a discussion primarily between Bill Johnson, General Manager, WRTI, and Roger LaMay, General Manager, WXPB, who discussed the changing dynamics of building community through radio. A key theme that emerged from the discussion was the difficulty of making sense of the vast quantities of data available to radio stations. Public radio stations have an overabundance of analytic data from many different systems, but these systems don't talk to each other, and stations often don't have the resources or capacity to begin to funnel them into more sophisticated systems, let alone use the data to inform business development decisions. The Wyncote Foundation helped WRTI in this capacity. A team of MBA students worked to help WRTI make sense of their data—and even they were overwhelmed. WXPB is in the midst of upgrading internal systems, but it is a costly and intensive process. Funders can help address this gap in the field by focusing more on infrastructure development in addition to, or lieu of, funding one-off programs. Another key theme is how public radio stations serve as hubs for community arts and culture, but they are often not seen as arts and cultural institutions. Funders often fund individual artists without considering how a public media partnership could elevate not only individual artists but also entire creative ecosystems within a city.

Notes:

- Kaitlin Yarnall: Is there a tension between scaling and being rooted in local community?
- Bill Johnson: Scale is at the core of radio, partnering, broadcasting live performances and go from audience of several hundred to tens of thousands. Recorded performances they could program next week, next month, a year from now. Long tail. Scale and reach are integrated into the definition of what we do.
- Roger LaMay: Scale is a bit of trap, double-edged sword. “Are we the minnow or the whale?” Collaborate with much bigger orgs, and also orgs without as much reach. Went through period of talking to foundations to convince them they are more than media, they are presenters, curators, they have a unique opportunity with big megaphone. Flip side is trap of trying to compete with digital media, social media, platforms. They partner with other stations around VuHaus, partnering with NPR. Not trying to be mass media. Some

artists use them as a springboard to elevate them to the next level. Need to be a curated, thoughtful space to develop artists.

- Bill: Works both ways, b/c of audience we can get people to show up. If you get caught in the game of trying to have millions of views on YouTube. More than enough capacity to serve community using existing business models
- Roger: Slingshot program is in collaboration with local communities—not only identifying artists that are important here but giving them national exposure. Secret sauce is ability to know and document music community the way no one else does; looking at breadth and depth of music scene
- David Haas: Can you talk about how many people are experiencing the more diverse spectrum of programming?
- Roger: Digital platforms change the game. They used to have to look at everything through the funnel of “Would we play this on the radio?” People can now self-select. Get some niche groups. They’re able to gather the data and say if you’re interested in this, here are some other things you might be interested in. They know where distinct communities are going to go.
- Kaitlin: It’s the same in magazines. This conversation is kind of medium-agnostic.
- Bill: We are in unique position of doing classical as well as jazz. We have a massive body of work looking backwards. We cannot be as adventurous as we would like to be. We’re jazz at night, can’t afford to sacrifice onboarding new fans. Challenge has been how to do it strategically. What do you invest in given there is so much you could be doing? For us, video has been one way to get there without undermining core business needs. We can now connect dots: if you like this on the radio, you might like this on digital. But figuring out how to do that as part of a world of living music all day long is a challenge. Average listener age is 59, slightly more women, 2/3 is 55+ (good news: they have money and time). “We can’t run screaming about the age of the audience.” Average age tends to stay pretty flat over time. Need strategies to get to younger people without having to shove radio down their throats, instead create content that’s relevant for them to share on the platforms they are using.
- Roger: Our average listener age around 52, getting younger audience who grew up in the back of their parents’ cars listening to XPN, especially Kids’ Corner. Distinct second generation. Also have people who discovered them digitally and then found radio station attached to it. Loyal older audience, small part of overall media audience. People looking for authenticity, trusted sources, looking to be part of community, good values, not driven by commercial interests.
- Roger: Ecosystem is overused word, but true. We try to cross-pollinate. Festival in Camden showcases popular bands, references all different project. This year: MS blues artist, gospel, Latin band, Zydeco, all referencing over projects and series they did, keeping the thread alive. Focused on bringing audience along. Builds loyalty.
- Kaitlin: How much of that are you doing in an organic way, how much using analytics?

- Bill: For us, digital landscape is massive—where do we invest in understanding digital, CRM, for-profit world has been leveraging this forever, but we are just getting going. Complex infrastructure. We have proliferation of systems: they don't talk to each other. The challenge of making them talk to be able to intelligently solicit people based on the relationships they already have. Wyncote helped try to build this gap -- learned they don't have enough data to necessarily reliably benchmark as an industry. Learned need significant capacity to invest in sophisticated analytics tools.
- Kaitlin: It's sexy to fund content, but you have to run a business.
- Roger: Trend in funding toward projects has enabled us to do some great projects, but infrastructure has become less attractive to funders over the years. We are about 2/3 of the way of converting to CRM. It used to be databases don't talk to each other, now the people in the process don't talk to each other. Will probably cost about half million to figure out how to organize content in artist-driven system. Massive conversion will allow you to put in an artist and pull up everything related. Massive project that is not necessarily going to drive a whole lot of revenue. How do we make sure what we do in digital space is aligned with mission and drives membership model?
- Bill Siemering: In buffalo in the 60s avant garde composer wanted live lines to come into the studio so people could be aware of sound; included live lines coming in from factories, main street, airport, etc. There was a revival of interest of this in West Philly. Fun thing to do because it made people aware of sounds that are musical in everyday environment.
- Roger: Ambient electronica program, same guy doing it for 35 years. Fundraises well, live artists, one of the few people like this in the country. Midnight to 8 am, people brought sleeping bags to listen
- Bill Siemering: Got a tape of that, you thought it might be dull, but wasn't because you never know what was going to come up next
- Kaitlin: People watch livestreams of eagles' nests for hours, there are small yet rabid audiences for this kind of thing. These audiences are loyal and build up.
- Bill Johnson: way of engaging people, they didn't know what was coming. Would be great to invite artists in to play continuously and see what happens: "Raw discovery"
- Question: data gathering should be more highly prioritized, partnerships with universities, students could come on board and help; partnerships with technology companies, using AI, audience is 59+ but video viewers are probably younger. Tech companies are on board.
- Roger: Biggest push right now: tech companies are engaged with younger audiences in significant ways. We made conscious decision to align more with local tech companies. After years of SXSW music week, this year went to interactive week instead and aligned with local tech companies, curated the music. One night was 8 artists from Philly, DJ Jazzy Jeff.

- Bill Johnson: Comes from tech background, started as engineer. Found when it comes to technical part is the investing in tech as it relates to content, then it's the data. Wyncote project helped them sort through data with a team of 8 MBA students, and they were overwhelmed. The trouble is it is like drinking from a firehouse. So much information is available to us, how do we make sense of it? We are incredibly challenged to make good business decisions. We know who's listening, where they are driving, what they are buying, but how do we take advantage of it with limited staff resources to make business decisions? Hit walls: can't get into backend of website, have limited windows to make modifications. Level of complexity requires positioning with all of the partners and constraints in each case that don't take into the account the others. How do we make it all come together and work together to get to stronger business operations?
- David Haas: What partnerships do you wish you had?
- Roger: 15 years ago, we moved into a new facility. Have separate for-profit entity where they do a lot of events. Venue space booking is controlled by two companies almost everywhere in the city. We work in close partnership with them, but it's not a healthy thing for the artists. Independent venues are few and far between and we want to make sure we treat them well as part of our ecosystem.
- Bill Johnson: In an ideal world, there is some entity out there that can facilitate venue, artist, education: all these things swirl together all day long. I guess we're the hub of the wheel. Group of orgs or institutions could come together and coordinate efforts and make all of it work better.
- David Haas: Some of us fund cultural orgs as well. Are there roles funders could play as advocates in community, with city government, to facilitate making things more attractive to larger institution?
- Bill Johnson: Yes. Believe we are exceptional partners. Funders fund individual artists but without public media partnership: we have studios, we have storytellers, we can curate content to serve the public. We are a superb barometer of success of funding efforts in communities. We are doing it anyway, just not at the appropriate scale. Need to change how we are thought of as institutions when we talk about arts and culture. Funders have said: "Why are you coming to us? You're not a music organization." Deeply ingrained in arts and culture community and arts economy.
- Roger: Important development about creative economy, ability of public radio to engage locally and elevate for national exposure, drives membership and loyalty and support. When music scene gets hot, it affects how people around the country see the city. Artists have moved to Philly because XPN is here, scene around it, interacting with other musicians. Low-hanging fruit around tourism. Matter of civic pride, sense of being part of something bigger, heart of our community. Cities are comparing notes. Has been scattershot in Philly over the year, cultural scene has flourished due to great foundations, big audiences for the arts. Look at how other cities—full picture of the ecosystem, stations, individual artists, funders.

Morning Breakout Session #2

Facilitated by **Jenny Choi**, Managing Director, News Integrity Initiative, who led a discussion on engaging the community through radio programming.

Sarah Lomax-Reese:

- Part of WURD business model was collaboration because it exists in a major media market with huge conglomerates like iHeart, RadioOne, etc. While WURD is talk, it's still a commercial station and competes for advertising. If they were going to compete at any level, partnership would be key.
 - Art institutions, schools, Resolve Philadelphia (re-entry project) focuses on one topic per year.
- WURD is one of few African American-owned media outlets and media is still segregated.
 - WURD brings unique perspectives to a larger audience, make sure your community is fully invited into all spaces. Two-way reciprocal relationship is essential. Substantive, and equal is mandatory.

Peter Buffett:

- Partnership and collaboration is baked into mission statement.
- We're community-based and can engage with pretty much everyone in a 23,000-person community.
- Block parties, mayor on Mondays. The station is only as good as collaborations.

Question: Both models are so unique (family ownership, funder). What parts are replicable?

Sarah Lomax-Reese:

- Collaboration is replicable. Example of working with two other African American stations in LA and Chicago, both run by black women. All struggling with similar things: Attract advertising, great content, outreach to younger audiences.
- Each station created contest for young black women – Level Up contest. Cross-promoted, tested out to work together and create a model for independent media.
 - Sharing resources, building relationships (also commiserate) are critical.

Peter Buffett:

- Trying to make a replicable community through food, land trusts, etc. of which radio is a voice. Partnering with United Way, telling wealthy donors to fund in community.
- If a community feels differently about how it views itself and takes care of itself, change will happen.

Question: (Referencing Peter Buffett's previous comment) In redefining what we mean by impact how should we measure community impact?

Peter Buffett:

- *Feeling* the impact, looking for who is not in the room. It takes *being* in the place and seeing homeownership going up, crime rates going down.

Sarah Lomax-Reese:

- We have to be sustainable. We have to pay people on what we make.
- Journalism philanthropy is burgeoning in Philadelphia – epicenter now. Creating an ecosystem that redefines how local journalism is funded and sustained. There's more energy now, and radio is in the mix today.
- Philanthropy is now understanding need to connect with commercial – otherwise you miss a lot of diverse media. It's not all nonprofit. Funding has to include both commercial and nonprofit. Most ownership of black and brown media are commercial.

Question: How do we replicate radio when there isn't a locally owned station? Find existing one to boost capacity or buy?

Peter Buffett:

- WKNY was family owned until 1980s, and then had lots of corporate owners.
- Peter approached them to buy.
- Philanthropy can step in to buy and support.
- In Milwaukee, group approached schools to sell to nonprofit and create community radio.

Sarah Lomax-Reese:

- FCC plays huge role in allocation, etc.
- But there are a lot of stations for sale. Connecting with brokers and understanding landscape.
- Funders can buy stations, support launch.

Doug Root (Pittsburgh):

- In Pittsburgh, radio station owned by Catholic university, was about to be sold to highest bidder.
- Area foundations (Heinz, Pittsburg Community Foundation, etc.) decided NPR news and info model was essential, needed to stay under that model. Bought station. Radio became higher level importance with demise of newspaper.
- Would be great to see more funders coming together to purchase stations. Collaboration is not just on operator side. Funders need to as well.

Question: Community engagement at local level. What are the models?

Julie Drizin, *Current*

- So many examples. StoryCorps mobile facility in communities; PubTv stations are highly localized with screenings, discussions, educational programs.

Question: (Christie George, New Media Ventures) Examples of other entities for funding? Outside normal grants?

Sarah Lomax-Reese

- Journalism philanthropies are granting to commercial, like the Lenfest Institute. Gotten other funder grants. For specific programs, not general operating. Also worked with corporations with philanthropies. Partner with a nonprofit to access the funds.

Barbara Raab, Jonathan Logan Family Foundation

- It's doable, there's no rule about funders only giving to nonprofits.

Kerri Hoffman, PRX

- How do we reframe public and private partnerships? WURD is clearly in the public interest even though commercial.
- PRX has to be creative about financing.

Question: Most creators are nonprofit. In podcast world, creators are individual people. How do we change metrics when we measure success? Language we use to chart our path forward?

Peter

- 8 full time employees, 40 paid hosts. Looking for anyone interested in bringing voice to station. Podcast studio.
- We don't own anything they create. Free with time talent and materials. Business model is open.

Sarah

- Talent is key. That's the product for WURD.
- There are dollars around experimentation. WURD is struggling with same things *Inquirer* is. Need dollars to experiment with what works. Those experimental projects often go to larger orgs.

Question: (Norris West, Annie E. Casey Foundation) How do you measure? Looking at shifting public sentiment? Policy change?

Peter

- We're so small Arbitron doesn't measure Kingston.
- It's more about seeing the community shift.

Sarah

- Measurement is bane of existence.

- Nielsen and rating systems don't accurately measure communities of color. Very expensive and inaccurate.
- Caller volume, event attendance, social followers, google analytics around traffic.
- Most powerful is feeling connected and hearing audience listening to it, mentioning.
- Membership program. Surveys at events.
- Volunteering is a great way to gauge engagement.

Laura Flanders

- Measure by impact on voting, local business when there's a community station. Also epidemiological data, health researchers shows need for community too.
- Lots of different ways to track. Funders should look beyond media outlets for that data

Afternoon Breakout Session #1

Facilitated by **Lauren Pabst**, Senior Program Officer, Journalism & Media, MacArthur Foundation, who led a discussion around bringing local news to global cities.

Short summary: Lauren Pabst led a discussion primarily between Cristi Hegranes, CEO & publisher, Global Press, and Deborah Ensor, senior vice president, Technical Leadership, Internews, primarily around the challenges independent news organizations face in terms funding, editorial independence and transparency. Hegranes discussed how Global Press generates revenue through curriculum development partnerships, while Ensor discussed the challenges of digital advertising, including the fraud that is rampant in that arena and the concern that ads will appear next to content that is not brand-aligned. Hegranes discussed Global Press's gift acceptance policy, which ensures journalists can stay independent through a variety of measures, such as by prohibiting site visits from funders. The group discussed the need for funders to cover core costs over longer terms, rather than just programming (which can end up overly negative if only focused on funders' priorities). The group discussed a general need for increased transparency in nonprofit news and for more public education around terminology (sponsored content, supported content, etc.). Global Press is working on a variety of public facing resources including a [style guide](#) that fills in gaps from the AP style guide, as well as corrects information when reporters on the ground have provided more precise terminology.

Notes:

- LP: Challenges around independent organizations in terms of accepting advertising and sponsorships
- CH: Favorite partnership right now is with org called StudySync curriculum development org out of Chicago. Do StudySync blast on iPads with versions for different grades. Changes the way students understand who journalists are and where they are from. Drive a lot of revenue from that partnership, also trying to change the way students read and comprehend media. Also partner with college newsrooms. Zero percent had institutionalized fact-checking. GP over the last 13 years has well-honed verification

process, worked with curriculum developers to create module around how to implement fact checking. Will generate revenue from each of these 100 college campuses while helping students learn about verification. Thinking increasingly of philanthropy as r & d around what could later become revenue-generating processes.

- DE: Distinction between product of what journalists make versus how do you keep a media outlet sustainable. One thing they are trying to pilot is around digital advertising. As soon as they have a single ad, have entered into digital inventory space. Very complex platform advertising route that uses algorithms to place it. Don't know if it will be brand safe, will it appear next to an ad about guns, next to sexual content? Not just a safety issue, but also is it going to a site that people are actually looking at? Create a whitelist of set of criteria for what a quality media site is like and then score the market in any given country around these criteria. Some criteria: is it clear who the ownership is? Quality of the news content. "Brands have the biggest role to play in saving local media." talking billions of dollars—lots of money wasted in advertising world
- LP: In MIF global philanthropy report, we see that sometimes US-based funders have a heavy hand in supporting media in other countries without understanding local needs.
- CH: Donor education is important. Independent media funding has to be done in a certain way. Developed a gift acceptance policy to make sure journalism would remain independent. People don't like this aspect: they don't allow donor visits. Non-assignment policy. Noticed that when donors came in contact with reporters, people would say "I've been to X country. You should write about XYZ." Put journalists in an awkward position. Creating real boundaries around development arm and editorial arm. Don't accept any government funding. Ask funders to sign their gift acceptance policy so they understand. It's a lot to swallow for funders who don't have experience funding journalism. What does it mean for a foundation that has a particular perspective around a topic fund journalism that might show an opposing view? They produce balanced media that creates conversations and gives people opportunities to come to the information differently
- DE: Donor education: want donors to consider core costs. Everyone wants to fund content. People want a variety of news and information, not just what funders are willing to pay for. Funders want to pay for serious topics, also important to fund music, fun, joy. "People in a war zone want to hear about something else besides how much their life sucks."
- Real News Network: problem with appealing for money around a general issue. One of the reasons for live radio is to get community but news is relentlessly negative.
- CH: Most local news orgs have mandate around comprehensive coverage. 97 percent of international stories in the US center on four topics: war, poverty, disaster, disease.
- DE: Donor education is crucial. Small pockets of funding helpful as engine fuel to test things out without specific outcomes, but to put a great idea into action. For larger funders, need longer support. Can't expect sustainability in a year, maybe not in 10 years.

- PF: digging into policy of not taking anonymous donations. In some cases, the anonymity is to protect the recipient.
- CH: Difference between anonymous funding and the way that funding is broadcast. Intention behind anonymous donations at odds with core value of transparency. Don't put funder logos on content website. Challenges in being a US-based media organization. Can be backlash, but ultimately being based in the US provides legal opportunity
- DE: Branding issue is interesting. We don't brand anything.
- CH: nonprofit journalism needs to reconcile with trust and transparency. There is a vocabulary issue, definition issue, transparency issue. Does it mean general operating support? Prior review and source control? Clarifications on supported content, sponsored content
- Various questions: Industry has very public standards. Why is there still confusion?
- How about media literacy work with younger audiences? Younger audiences already have better sense of sponsored content
- Globalpress.co: see values page, transparency section. 5 ½ years ago, she turned down a half million dollar grant because the strings attached were so values-misaligned. "I didn't give my whole life for this to sell my soul for half a million dollars." We want to create a partnership: "Are your values aligned with our dollars?"
- Diane with NPR: NPR has public facing code of ethics, whole chapter on editorial independence. Working with funders to help everyone understand what that means. Continuing education for everyone.
- CH: Global Press has been developing style guide to fill in where AP style guide is lacking (too US-centric). Their guide fills in AP's gaps and corrects AP where local reporters have provided them with other options
- DE: Check out Internews website to see what else they are doing

Afternoon Breakout Session #2

Facilitated by **Christie George**, President, New Media Ventures, and MIF Board Member, who led a discussion around podcasting.

Question: From the funding aspect, how do we think about reach or cultural expression?

- Barr Foundation was more interested in amplifying story and message, documenting characters, next generation storytelling.
- Barr Foundation allowed fast formalization of training, added another \$3.5 million on that first investment. Scaffolding to create modules online, curriculum, etc. so they could tell others.

Question: What's the importance of spaces?

- Podcast garage creates community. People love the personal connection, it's more diverse, etc.

Question: What's being picked up internationally?

- 95% produced in English.
- Eye opening to see rest of the world but unclear what that picture really looks like.
- Huge Brazilian scene, people want to tell their stories.
- Don't yet know how to support international interest.
- Community building, paying for transportation and sharing notes, resources.
- Ingredients: Young people, tradition of oral storytelling, stable internet, smart phone use.
- For international training program 12 spots offered, 10,000 applicants!

Question: Can you discuss nuts and bolts of successful podcasting?

- Determine format. Length, frequency and topic – helps you understand your minimum viable product.
- Use microphone!
- Ask 'Who (literally) is this for'? Why is podcasting a unique and good way to give them this?

Question: Engagement measurement—how do we measure?

- Need to define based on who shows up to events, who donates, who volunteers.
- People come to tapings because they love the characters. Live events are wonderful ways to connect.

Question: Are offline events engagement or monetization?

- Definitely engagement.
- Gratitude for donors, etc.

Question about monetization:

- It's a 3-legged stool:
 - Sponsorship
 - Licensing / fees for distribution
 - Listener / funder support

Question: We were all so excited about the content but didn't realize distributors were more important. How do we address that with podcasts?

- Next fight is openness.
- Podcasting is more like the internet than broadcasting.
- Values of openness of web that's free and accessible is key.