MEDIA
IMPACT
FUNDERS

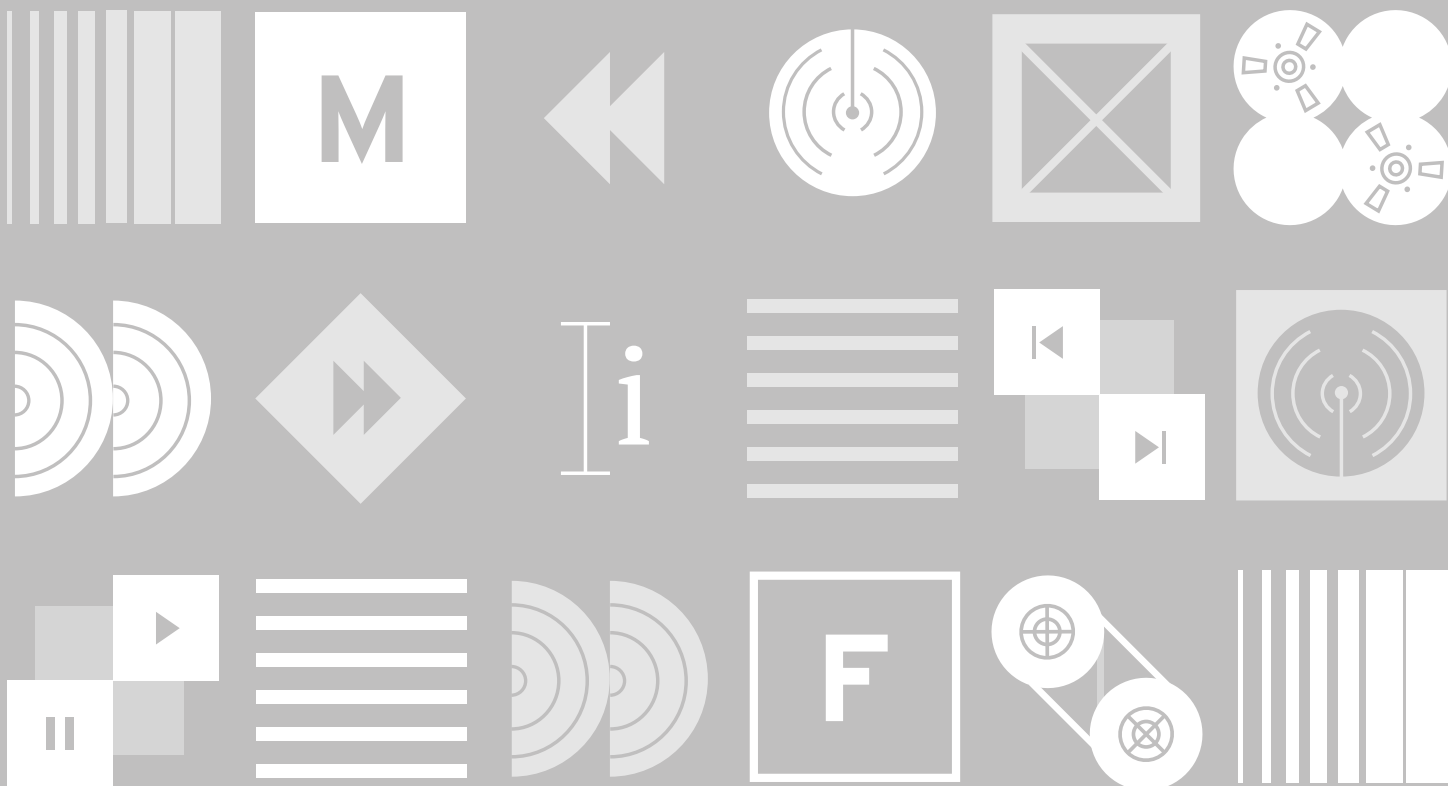# Decoding Media Impact:
Insights, Advice & Recommendations

We've been tracking media impact for 7 years. Here's what we've learned.

By Katie Donnelly, Research Consultant, Media Impact Funders

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Jessica Clark, Research Consultant, Media Impact Funders
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Insights

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an examination of the current state of the field of media impact assessment, which Media Impact Funders (MIF) has been tracking for seven years. It also draws on insights from a few leading experts engaged in media impact assessment.

MIF has played a key role in organizing the conversation around media impact since 2013. During that time, the field of media grantmaking was experiencing unprecedented growth, as funders were becoming more aware of the power of media to move the needle on important social issues. As such, we saw an increase in the number of new approaches to assess the impact of that media.

Since then, with support from the Rita Allen, Wyncote, and Knight foundations, MIF has been sending a monthly newsletter with original media impact analysis pieces and round-ups of the latest impact news and research. We also manage a curated collection of impact measurement tools for media makers and funders, as well as a research library. From 2014 to 2017, we hosted the Media Impact Festival, a juried competition of high-impact social documentaries, and published case studies of successful impact campaigns. We've also been instrumental in developing tools and research materials for understanding media impact, including our first report analyzing how funders are thinking about impact (2015), our guide to understanding metrics for nonprofit news (2015), published in collaboration with the Media Impact Project at the University of Southern California's Norman Lear Center, and the Impact Pack, a deck of cards created in collaboration with Jessica Clark, MIF research consultant and founder of Dot Connector Studio in 2016. In early 2019, a full-scale website redesign allowed us to showcase these resources in a more dynamic, organized way.

But after a yearlong strategic process to determine the needs of the fields of media and philanthropy, we've learned that funders who care deeply about measuring the impact of their investments are still looking for more clarity on how best to evaluate them. In various conversations, we've learned that many are still trying to get a better handle on how different frameworks are used. They want a pared-down list and explanation of resources, and need help navigating our robust selection of content.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This guide is meant to serve as a practical resource for funders who want to understand where to start. Informed by feedback from our network, it represents a synthesis of the past seven years of work we've done in the impact space, and includes examples of successful media impact evaluation, tools and frameworks for assessment, and the challenges of defining and measuring impact in a rapidly-shifting media landscape.

Our years of research have led us to four key insights:

1. There are many different frameworks for measuring media impact for different areas of practice.
2. Funders should be mindful of power dynamics, and thoughtful in determining appropriate impact strategies with their grantees.
3. Digital analytics tools provide a wealth of useful data, but grantees require financial and logistical support in implementing them.
4. There are opportunities for funders to collaborate with each other to share best practices and increase collective impact.

This report includes a deep dive into each of these insights, as well as companion guest essays from leaders in the field. We hope you will use this guide to inform your own practice, and to continue this critical conversation.

Media's impact has an element of mystery that is unique compared to other fields. We must leave some space to embrace the mystery. The real impact solution may not ever be a cutting-edge tool or formula that generates data and information, but may just be what's at the heart of what inspired all of us to work in this field in the first place: Storytelling.

DANIELA KON, Founder and Executive Director of SIMA

MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

TIMELINE

2013

Media Impact Funders convenes the first media impact assessment funder meeting, which explores various approaches to assessing and demonstrating impact.

2013-CURRENT

MIF launched a monthly impact newsletter to just a handful of interested subscribers. Today, the newsletter reaches more than 1,000 media makers and funders.

2015

MIF releases *Funder Perspectives: Assessing Media Investments*, which provides a baseline view of how funders are thinking about media impact assessment.

2015

MIF releases *Impact Assessment for Nonprofit News Projects and their Funders*, published in collaboration with the Media Impact Project at the University of Southern California's Norman Lear Center. The guide includes a framework for journalists and their funders to think through impact assessment strategies.

2019

MIF launches a new website with a curated collection of impact measurement tools for media makers and funders, original impact articles and an impact research library.

2014-2017

MIF hosts the annual Media Impact Festival, a juried competition of high-impact social documentaries and case studies of successful impact campaigns.

2016

MIF collaborates with Jessica Clark, MIF research consultant and founder of Dot Connector Studio, to release the Impact Pack, a deck of playing cards designed to help funders and media makers understand impact.

2020

MIF releases *Decoding Media Impact: Insights, Advice & Recommendations*, which synthesizes the past seven years of media impact assessment research.

2013
2014
2015
2016
2017
2018
2019
2020

DECODING MEDIA IMPACT:
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JANUARY 2020

Introduction

It's clear that media productions and publications can drive social impact—but how? That was the question we posed at our very first [impact convening](#), held at the Paley Center for Media, back in 2013. And, as we now know, there's no single answer, but many. Ultimately, though, we agreed on at least one takeaway: "Impact evaluation should be practical, affordable, relevant and actionable."

Our conversation at that first impact convening surfaced many nascent tools and approaches for assessing impact, but no consensus, which is why we chose a chalkboard—a work in progress, easily revised—to show the range of possibilities. The chalkboard represents our earliest attempt to show how we were thinking about impact back then.

WHAT'S YOUR "SO WHAT"?

If we _____ then _____ will happen

WHAT?	WHO?	HOW?	TO TRACK	IMPACT
Film	The public	Journalism	Reach	Awareness
TV	The press	Public Media	Engagement	Human connection
Web/social	A region	Documentary	Reception	Inspiration
Mobile	A constituency	Education	Income	Sustainability
Visualization	Stakeholders	Entertainment	Inclusion	Diversity
Game	Influentials	Advocacy	Coproduction	Empowerment
Newspaper	Partisans		Network building	Capacity building
Magazine			Innovation	Adoption
Installation			Discourse shift	Behavior change
Transmedia			Mobilization	Remedy
				Policy shift
				X (the black swan)

And a lot has happened since then. The field of impact assessment is much larger today, with even more approaches to assessing and demonstrating the impact of media across platforms. Much of that is due in part to advancements in technology, which have rapidly changed how media is produced, distributed and consumed.

Thankfully, with support from the Rita Allen, Wyncote, and John S. and James L. Knight foundations, we have been keeping up with the field by curating impact-related tools, original analyses on impact trends, and a monthly impact newsletter. We also convene media funders to discuss impact, and conduct research on how foundations are thinking about and assessing impact in the field.

Over the past seven years, we've learned a lot about impact, which we've synthesized into four broad insights:

1. There are many different frameworks for measuring media impact for different areas of practice.
2. Funders should be mindful of power dynamics, and thoughtful in determining appropriate impact strategies with their grantees.
3. Digital analytics tools provide a wealth of useful data, but grantees require financial and logistical support in implementing them.
4. There are opportunities for funders to collaborate with each other to share best practices and increase collective impact.

This handbook explores these insights in detail. But first: The basics.

What do we mean by "impact"?

People and organizations have long harbored hunches about the power of media to influence change. But our understanding about the degree of media's influence, and the triggers and pathways that lead to change, often remain somewhat mysterious.

The field of media impact assessment has emerged in order to shed light on the relationship between media and social outcomes. Drawing on a wide variety of sources, methods and tools, media impact assessment considers how content, messages and ideas contribute to shaping views, decisions and actions. This information helps media producers make informed decisions about editorial, distribution and engagement strategies for media projects with social change objectives, and to help stakeholders explain the social (vs. marketing/financial) returns on their investments.

By helping to elucidate media's potential to make positive differences in the world, the stories we tell through media impact assessment can also inspire new forms of—and growing investments in—change-making content.

Not long ago, funders, outlets and makers thought about media impact primarily in terms of print or broadcast audience metrics, which originated from the world of commercial media. In today's complex media ecosystem, funders and makers have realized that there is much more to impact than traditional metrics of reach—how many people watched, listened to or other otherwise experienced a story or production. High-impact media projects don't necessarily mean the projects with the biggest audiences. What's more, "engagement" is not always tantamount to impact. Depending on the project, impact assessment may involve tracking community engagement activities, media coverage, political or legal outcomes, increases in diversity and representation, attention from influentials, internal capacity building, and much more.

Funders take different approaches to measuring media impact, often based on an individual foundation's orientation and larger evaluation framework. But media projects require different measurement from other social good efforts: Media projects have a capacity for larger reach, they are not bound by specific geographical limitations, and they can be amplified

in unpredictable ways. Their impact is also often indirect—making a documentary film about hunger is not as easy to understand or measure as creating a food pantry. Not only do media projects differ from other kinds of social good interventions, but even within the world of nonprofit media, there are different areas of practice with different concerns, and the field is continuously evolving to address these needs.

Media impact assessment is useful for funders and media practitioners, but it can't do everything. Here is what media impact assessment is good for—and not so good for.

What is media impact assessment good for?

- *Synthesizing data*—Triangulating data across platforms to paint a richer picture of audience characteristics, and of changes in knowledge, perception, attitude, sentiment and discourse related to either discrete media interventions, or a suite of closely related media interventions

- *Creating buy-in for the "power of storytelling"*—Highlighting instances in which powerful media interventions have elevated a conversation, empowered audiences, and sparked actions that have resulted in social change

- *Extracting meaningful insights from big data*—Making sense of information related to audience and network characteristics; changes in knowledge, perception, attitudes, sentiment and influence on broader discourse; and the direction/extent to which messages, ideas, and content spread

- *Comparing like projects*—Showing the differences in audience uptake, engagement and reach among similar types of interventions

- *Assessing near-term responses*—Demonstrating reactions to content or changes in levels of knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, sentiment, discourse, and potential behavioral outcomes shortly following exposure to media interventions

- *Tracking outcomes resulting from discrete projects*—Following the paths through which specific, time-bound projects/campaigns (especially those that are branded and designed with "wrap-around" interventions) lead to change over time across impact categories, from awareness sometimes through to policy or structural change

- *Tracking long-term, contributional (vs. attrubutional) change resulting from iterative or longitudinal projects*—Presenting well-evidenced correlations between repeated, long-term media projects/campaigns (with ongoing, real-time monitoring) and changes in broader discourse/conversation; awareness, knowledge, attitude, sentiment, political will, and engagement among audiences; as well as actual policy, structural, and behavioral changes over time

- *Tracking short-term attributional (vs. contributional) change resulting from one-off projects*—Demonstrating close or direct influences of time-bound or one-off media interventions (e.g., a film, investigative report, series episode, event or screening, etc.) on *near-term changes* in audience knowledge, perception, sentiment, attitudes, engagement, as well as *intended* behavior changes or policy actions

What is media impact assessment *not* good for?

- *Demonstrating lasting change from short-term interventions/events—*Near-term analyses are designed to produce "snapshots," but aren't capable of meaningfully connecting one-off or short-term interventions with changes over time in awareness, knowledge, attitude, engagement, discourse, structures, etc.

- *Comparing not-like projects—*Comparing impact values between *dissimilar* projects (either between media types or between media other interventions), or those that use dissimilar data sources or analytical lenses

- *Drawing big conclusions from small data—*Extrapolating from small datasets to draw meaningful conclusions about social change impact in any category

- *Capturing outlier outcomes—*Identifying or understanding outcomes/reactions that are outside of the lens of impact analysis

- *Identifying the "secret ingredient"—*Producing solid conclusions about what characteristics or circumstances made a particular media intervention sticky or salient at a particular moment in a way that could allow for replication

Media Projects

There are many examples of high-impact foundation-funded media projects that have led to lasting social change.

Over the years, we've profiled numerous high-impact projects that take different approaches to using media to propel social change. Because projects are often complex and multiplatform, impact is often tracked through case studies, which can combine a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators. Media Impact Funders creates and curates collections of case studies as part of our impact assessment work. Over the years, we have hosted the Media Impact Festival, a juried competition that honors documentaries and immersive nonfiction projects with demonstrated social impact. Go to mediaimpactfunders.org/tag/mifestival/ to read our in-depth case studies for some of these selected projects.

Virunga, a documentary film whose many funders include Arcus Foundation, Bertha Foundation, BRITDOC Foundation, Fledgling Fund, the Howard G. Buffett Foundation, and more, tells the story of a group of park rangers fighting to protect Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) against the damaging incursion from unscrupulous oil company SOCO International. The film prompted several shareholders to act and engage with campaign goals and key SOCO shareholders were empowered to work with the company to deal with the numerous allegations of bribery, corruption and human rights abuses surrounding their operations in Virunga National Park.

ACLU of Michigan journalist Curt Guyette (right) with *Democracy Now!* co-host Amy Goodman at the 2016 Media Impact Forum.

In Flint, Mich., reports of unsafe drinking water were being ignored. The Ford Foundation responded by funding the hiring of an investigative reporter at the ACLU of Michigan. The result was the uncovering of a national scandal and the political upheaval that ensued.

*Exposure Labs, the team behind the climate change documentary **Chasing Ice**, organized an intensive [outreach campaign](#) that put pressure on one specific congressman: former U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi. At special screenings in churches, town halls, and other locations, audience members [shared messages](#) of concern with the congressman. Before the screenings were held, Tiberi, a Republican, had expressed doubt about the scientific consensus on climate change. But after the campaign, he acknowledged the problem, stating, "I would like to see us address climate change in a balanced manner, on as broad a front as possible." (While Tiberi is no longer in office, the public shift was* significant at the time.) A subsequent film and interactive experience from the same production team, **Chasing Coral**, has also had significant impact: It's central to [50 Reefs,](#) a project to save coral systems from extinction. It's funded by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, the Tiffany & Co. Foundation, and Bloomberg Philanthropies. Drawing from the learnings from social impact campaigns for these two films, Exposure Labs launched a campaign, [Unstoppable](#), which works to rally audiences at the local levels in order to garner attention from political leaders and promote change, especially around climate change and environmental issues.*

DEAR CONGRESSMAN TIBERI

Photo Credits: Exposure Labs

These examples, and many others, show the creative ways media funders and grantees are working together to achieve impact: through applying economic pressure, targeting influentials, raising awareness, and many other strategies. But media impact can be difficult to track within the confines of an individual media project and funder during a specific grant period, because the entire ecosystem around an issue or community works together in complicated ways over time. Sometimes media projects directly lead to social change, but in many cases, the story is much more complex, involving collaborations with nonprofit or advocacy organizations, other media projects addressing the same issue, and multiple funders over time. We have many existing case studies in the field showcasing the impact of individual media projects; a next step is examining related ecosystems as a whole.

INSIGHT #1

There are many different frameworks for measuring media impact for different areas of practice.

Over the years, we've found that there is no one way to measure media impact. While there is no master framework for measuring all social impact media projects, many of the questions and caveats remain the same across media projects with different goals.

Frameworks for measuring media impact tend to track similar things, including:

REACH—How many people read, hear, watch or interact with a media project

> *Often measured through: digital analytics such as downloads, page views and time spent onsite; social media analytics; event attendance; user demographics*

AWARENESS—How well a concept or issue is effectively introduced or reinforced

> *Often measured through: User surveys and polls, social analytics*

ENGAGEMENT—The degree to which people interact with a media project

> *Often measured through: digital analytics, user surveys, user comments and feedback, social analytics, social network analysis*

ATTITUDES—Perceptions, values, opinions and degrees of empathy related to an issue or media project

> *Often measured through surveys, qualitative interviews, sentiment analysis tools*

BEHAVIOR—Changes in actions or choices

> *Often measured through surveys, qualitative interviews, ethnographic research*

AMPLIFICATION—Broader public and media conversations about an issue

> *Often measured through partnerships; content analysis of press coverage; uptake from journalists, researchers, and other stakeholders; social network analysis*

INFLUENCE—Adoption of an issue/media project by influentials

> *Often measured through analysis of the volume and content of statements from influential stakeholders, social analytics, social network analysis*

CORPORATE PRACTICE—Changing norms and practices within the private sector

> *Often measured through analysis of the content of public statements from corporate leaders*

POLICY CHANGE— Moving toward enacting or altering public policy or regulations

> *Often measured through tracking movement towards changes in laws, such as bills introduced, statements from political leaders*

Other elements that are difficult to track within the confines of an individual media project or short timeline are changes in Movements and Social Structures. Changes at the level of grassroots movements and societal, economic or political institutions and systems are not generally part of existing frameworks due to the difficulty in tracking them. In fact, often frameworks focus on the things that are easiest to measure without extra investment: reach, engagement, awareness and attitudes. Unfortunately, while these things tell us how many people are learning about and how they may be perceiving it, they don't tell us whether anything actually changed on the ground.

Frameworks for measuring impact differ depending on the type of media project. The conversations around measuring impact for documentary film and for journalism projects evolved concurrently, with many overlapping parts. Now, other conversations are taking place for other forms of media, and increasingly, projects are not confined to one particular media form.

Measuring Media Impact for Documentary Film
Much of the conversation around funders' roles in assessing media impact originated in the world of documentary film. As far back as 2008, The Fledgling Fund identified five dimensions of impact for documentary film:

- Compelling story (measured by festival acceptances, awards, etc.)

- Awareness (measured by audience size and diversity, press coverage, etc.)

- Engagement (measured by participation in related action campaigns, op-ed letters, etc.)

- Stronger movement (measured by the number of advocacy organizations using the film, the film's use in policy discussions, the film's longevity, etc.), and

- Social change (measured by policy change, behavior change, and shifts in public dialogue).

Since that time, documentary filmmakers have been involved in the creation of many frameworks and resources for the field—notably, Doc Society's *Impact Field Guide & Toolkit*—as well as the development of a global network of impact producers, who lead film campaigns based on social issues.

IMPACT SPOTLIGHT: "GASLAND"

» The largest domestic natural gas drilling boom in history has swept across the United States. The Halliburton-developed drilling technology of "fracking" or hydraulic fracturing has unlocked a "Saudi Arabia of natural gas" just beneath us. But is fracking safe? When filmmaker Josh Fox is asked to lease his land for drilling, he embarks on a cross-country odyssey uncovering a trail of secrets, lies and contamination. A recently drilled nearby Pennsylvania town reports that residents are able to light their drinking water on fire. This is just one of the many absurd and astonishing revelations of a new country called Gasland.

» The 2010 Academy Award nominee documentary "Gasland" (and 2013 follow-up "Gasland II") significantly raised the profile of issues surrounding fracking across the globe, inspired the creation of hundreds of local anti-fracking groups, rallied celebrity activists, and played a key role in region, state, and country-based moratoria on oil drilling. The films influenced the writing of the national FRAC Act, and eight members of Congress and many environmental groups joined a campaign to force the EPA to reopen marquee cases demonstrating that fracking has contaminated groundwater.

Examples of frameworks for measuring the impact of documentary films:

- Doc Society's comprehensive *Impact Field Guide & Toolkit*, the result of "collaborations, conversations, agreements and disagreements with incredibly smart film teams, funders and partners from all over the world, includes an extensive library of case studies of social impact documentaries." The toolkit features modules to help filmmakers define their vision and strategy, budget for impact production, plan for impact distribution, and conduct impact evaluation. PDF versions of the toolkit are available in multiple languages.

- Active Voice's Horticulture framework uses garden tools as metaphors so media makers can think strategically about effective storytelling. For example, trowels represent stories that "dig in deeply and deliberately to plant a seed of advocacy" such as the documentary *Inequality for All,* which addresses growing income inequality in the United States. Shovels represent stories that are usually investigative in nature; they "dig for truth and expose alarming information." An example of a shovel is the Academy Award nominated documentary *Gasland*, which exposed the contamination of water and public health hazards caused by natural gas fracking. (In addition to Horticulture, Active Voice also offers additional evaluation resources and case studies to help guide media makers and funders.)

Measuring Media Impact for Journalism

As the world of documentary film began solidifying impact frameworks and professionalizing the roles of "impact producers," a parallel—and sometimes overlapping—conversation has been taking place in the journalism sphere.

Some funders have been supporting the movement toward "engaged journalism," in which journalists interact more directly with audiences to work towards solutions to pressing community issues, rather than serving as gatekeepers or neutral observers. However, there has been much debate in recent years as to the appropriate role of journalists in the public sphere: Should they even be trying to make an impact, or should they serve as neutral observers?

In 2015, Anya Schiffrin and Ethan Zuckerman outlined concerns for measuring journalism impact in a field scan published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. They wrote that "the task of 'proving impact' doesn't come naturally to most journalists. They reject a utilitarian view of their worth, preferring to believe that news is a public good that merits support for its own sake. They view themselves not as campaigners for a cause but as fair and impartial observers. At the same time, they like to think that they can change the world simply by 'getting the story out.'"

Schiffrin and Zuckerman also quote Aron Pilhofer—former executive editor of digital at *The Guardian* and now the James B. Steele Chair in Journalism Innovation at Temple University— who summarized the prevailing view in a much-quoted blog post: "The metrics newsrooms have traditionally used tended to be fairly imprecise: Did a law change? Did the bad guy go to jail? Were dangers revealed? Were lives saved? Or least significant of all, did it win an award?" In any event, journalists tend to be wary of adopting universal metrics. They know that each media organization has a different audience that it wants to reach and different ideas about what constitutes "impact."

Consider This! Important things to keep in mind: Despite the collective desire to place everything neatly into frameworks, impact is rarely linear or time-bound. Perhaps even more importantly, impact isn't always positive. As Johanna Blakley, managing director of the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, writes, "[M}edia interventions do not work for everyone. Backlash is a big, big problem. The conviction that an intervention will do some good, or at least no harm, is dangerously naïve."
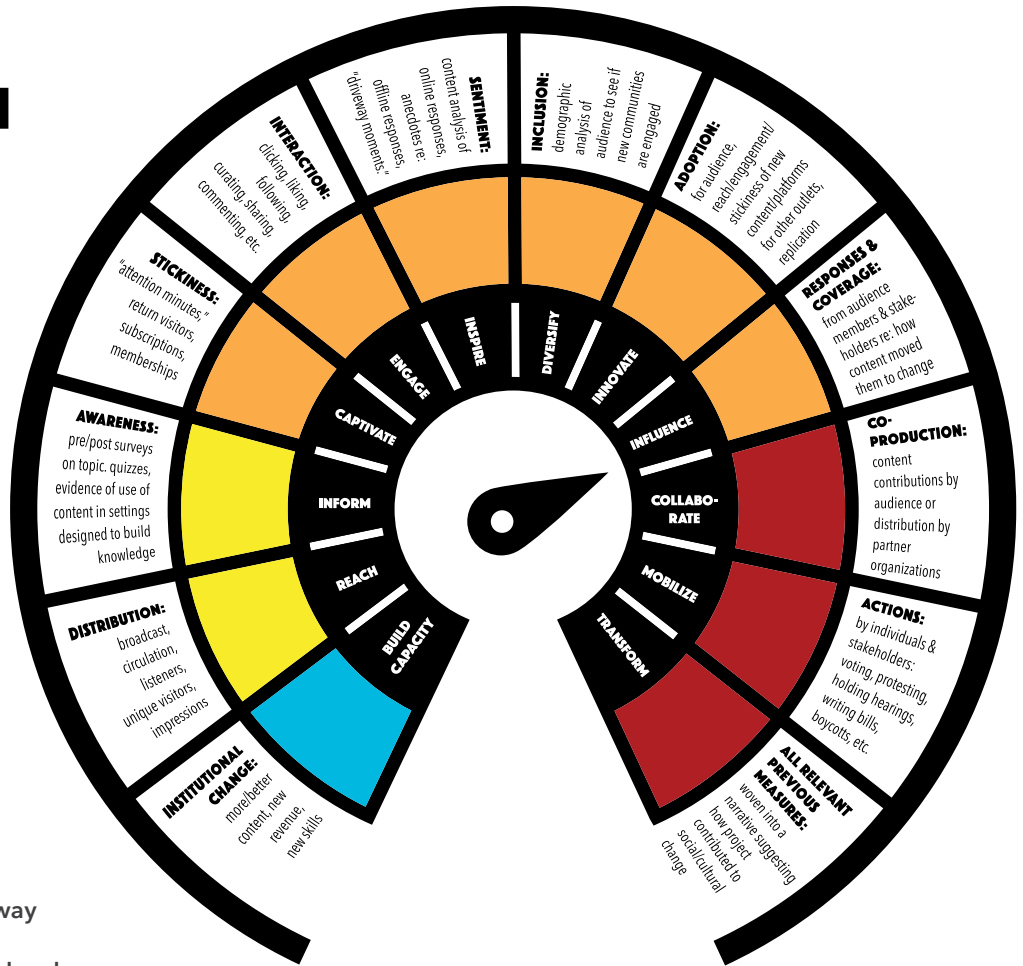
Over the years, many frameworks have been developed to assess nonprofit journalism endeavors.

In 2015, Media Impact Funders worked with the Media Impact Project at the University of Southern California's Norman Lear Center to develop a how-to guide for journalism funders and nonprofit news organizations looking to develop media assessment strategies. This includes a complex consideration of different impact elements to track in an impact planning gauge, which takes into account internal, one-way, two-way, and multi-level relationships between and among content, issues, stakeholders and institutions.

THE JOURNALISM IMPACT PLANNING GAUGE

The methods that funders and newsrooms use to assess the impact of journalism projects depend on the goals that they define. Some goals require that evaluators pay attention to the newsroom's internal dynamics, others focus mainly on one-way dynamics of audience reach and responses, and still others take into account two-way or multi-level relationships that define what we call "story-vectors" between content, issues, stakeholders and institutions.

- internal
- one-way
- two-way
- multi-level

INTERACTION: clicking, liking, following, curating, sharing, commenting, etc.

SENTIMENT: content analysis of online responses, anecdotes re: offline responses, "driveway moments."

INCLUSION: demographic analysis of audience to see if new communities are engaged

ADOPTION: for audience, reach/engagement/ stickiness of new content/platforms for other outlets, replication

STICKINESS: "attention minutes," return visitors, subscriptions, memberships

RESPONSES & COVERAGE: from audience members & stake-holders re: how content moved them to change

AWARENESS: pre/post surveys on topic, quizzes, evidence of use of content in settings designed to build knowledge

CO-PRODUCTION: content contributions by audience or distribution by partner organizations

DISTRIBUTION: broadcast, circulation, listeners, unique visitors, impressions

ACTIONS: by individuals & stakeholders: voting, protesting, holding hearings, writing bills, boycotts, etc.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: more/better content, new revenue, new skills

ALL RELEVANT PREVIOUS MEASURES: woven into a narrative suggesting how project contributed to social/cultural change

INSPIRE DIVERSIFY ENGAGE INNOVATE CAPTIVATE INFLUENCE INFORM COLLABO-RATE REACH MOBILIZE BUILD CAPACITY TRANSFORM

Since then, many conversations about the appropriate role for assessing journalism impact have taken place, and many more tools and frameworks specific to social impact journalism have been developed that address different approaches toward the role of journalism in society.

This conversation is further complicated by the fact that the overall journalism industry is in a time of great upheaval, and larger news organizations have their own business success metrics that may be different from what journalists consider success on the editorial side. (See Insight #3 for more on the opportunities and challenges of analytics.)

Examples of frameworks for measuring the impact of journalism:

- The American Press Institute's proprietary software, Metrics for News, is a paid analytics service that aligns journalism metrics and editorial values. Using data compiled from existing analytics tools and social media platforms, it is able to identify patterns beyond traditional audience reach metrics. Metrics for News provides a journalism-specific framework, as opposed to general digital content analytic tools, which some journalists find frustrating. For example, Metrics for News tracks "journalism characteristics," so publishers can determine what story elements are most engaging to readers. Metrics for News also has unique customization and analysis features, including "engagement scores," which combine many metrics into one measure of engagement, and "newsroom priorities," which allow users to assess content against larger organizational goals.

- Developed by the Center for Investigative Reporting, the Impact Tracker was created to streamline impact measurement and analysis for journalism projects. It serves as an interactive database for newsrooms to set and track impact priorities ranging from structural changes such as policy reform, to more nuanced changes such as when community groups use reporting to bolster their work, or audience members respond positively to content. The tracker can be used to analyze three levels of change: macro (structural changes, such as policy reform); meso (nuanced examples such as use of content by an advocacy organization) or micro (such as a user reporting something new).

- The Walton Family Foundation's Journalism Impact Primer and Toolkit, developed by strategy design firm Impact Architects (whose founder also spearheaded the development of CIR's Impact Tracker), provides a guide to understanding investment strategy in media projects, audience targeting and development, identifying appropriate outputs and strategies and defining outcome targets, baselines and indicators. This framework looks at how journalism touches individuals, networks, institutions, and is amplified through other media. Funders can use the primer and toolkit "to get from the decision to invest in media all the way to identifying the appropriate indicators, targets and baselines." While the information is tailored to the Walton Family Foundation, other funders can use the materials to inform their own strategies. (Read more about the Walton Family Foundation's journey from nonmedia funder to nontraditional media funder.)

Beyond Documentary Film and Journalism

Documentary film and journalism are the areas in which impact frameworks are the most developed, but other fields of media are developing resources and strategies as well. For example:

- We've written about the [challenges in impact measurement](#) for [podcasts](#)—which have the potential to bring social change messages to a larger number of people—but are complicated to measure because they are distributed across multiple digital distribution systems, each with its own system for tracking analytics.

- Games also have their own impact challenges. In 2016, Games for Change published *Impact with Games: A Fragmented Field*, which argues that the field's definitions of impact are too narrow and current evaluation models inflexible, advocating for "a better way to talk about impact—a deeper conversation that is more fundamentally inclusive and multi-disciplinary, yet still evidence-based."

- Virtual reality is also a burgeoning area for impact measurement. In 2017, Harmony Labs published a toolkit, *Impact Design in VR*, highlighting the lessons learned from a pilot program that combined VR experiences with an anti-bullying curriculum.
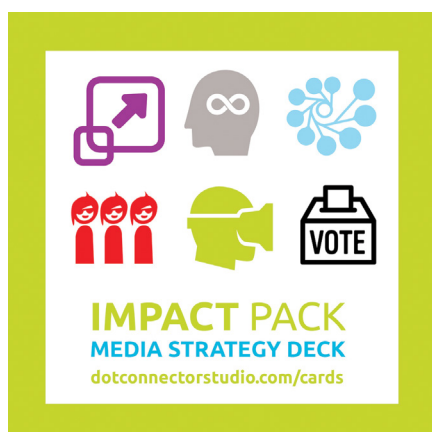
Each of these areas—and more—has its own approach to impact. And, more and more, projects are cross-platform and not limited by the conventions of a particular media type, requiring flexible impact measurement design.

A tool for evaluating media across platforms:

- **The Impact Pack:** In 2016, Media Impact Funders worked with Dot Connector Studio and the Media Impact Project at USC Annenberg's Norman Lear Center to develop the Impact Pack, a hands-on deck of cards designed to help media makers of all types and their funders map out and assess different strategies. Makers and funders can use the deck to brainstorm, strategize, and assess impact, think through goals, prototype media engagement strategy, define relationships with users, figure out funding strategies, and even map out revenue streams. (Read more about the development of the Impact Pack [here](#).)

While many useful tools and frameworks exist, there is no "magic impact tool" that's equally useful for every media funder and every media project. There is a limit to what static frameworks can do, especially when they require manual tracking and input. When employing particular frameworks, funders should still consider the appropriate strategies and metrics for their grantees.
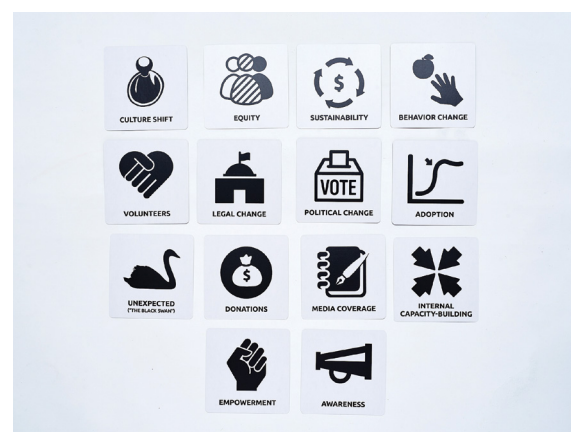
WHAT CAN FUNDERS DO?

FUND EVALUATION AND WORK WITH GRANTEES TO DETERMINE APPROPRIATE FRAMEWORKS.

It's important to understand that evaluation is another job that requires expertise, funding and time. Onerous reporting requirements take away from grantees' ability to do the actual work. Often the time and staff capacity involved in simply tracking data can be overwhelming for cash-strapped organizations. Funders can ease this burden by funding evaluation specifically and/or providing an external evaluator. Funders can also work directly with grantees to determine which frameworks, if any, are most useful to their specific program goals and foundation goals and modify them if needed. Sharing evaluation case studies widely can help the field continue to learn.

INSIGHT #2

Funders should be mindful of power dynamics, and thoughtful in determining appropriate impact strategies with their grantees.

In recent years, funders have become more and more invested in impact measurement for media projects. But there is a tension in how specific and how intensive to be in terms of requiring grantees to adhere to rigorous metrics collection, particularly when that could be at odds with innovation in the new media landscape. Especially for smaller media grantees with limited capacity, being beholden to many different funders' impact reporting requirements takes away from the actual work of making social impact. Perhaps most importantly, the power dynamic that exists between funders and grantees can make honest impact tracking difficult. Grantees are often hesitant to share stories of struggle and lessons learned, even when funders ask for them, if they think it could affect their chances of future funding.

There is also sometimes a lack of clarity as to what specific measurements tell us, especially since so many new media projects are now in uncharted waters. The rapid expansion and adoption of digital, social, mobile, streaming and now immersive content can create numerous complications when it comes to both strategy and assessment. Funders and grantees can work together to make sure that the impact tracking strategy is actually providing valuable information. (For example, tracking social media followers may not be relevant for a communications campaign designed to reach community members more likely to pick up physical flyers.) Data is now rampant—but not everything that can be counted counts, and vice versa. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are needed to understand and tell the story of a media project's impact.

In addition to considering the most appropriate metrics for a given media project, funders and grantees should both acknowledge that long-term social change takes time, and can be difficult to track. Expectations for impact may be too high for individual media projects. Tracking legislative change takes many years and is difficult to trace back to one particular media project. It's crucial to track outcomes, not just outputs, and there simply may not be enough time to enact a major outcome such as shifting the law during a typical grant period. If the goal is structural change, foundations and donors can be more explicit about evaluating collective impact, and/or using their position as funders to provide infrastructure and training for grantees to come together and understand their shared impact. Media impact analysis should not address simply effects on individual consumers, but on frames, systems, institutions, and in some cases, the field of media production itself. This type of evaluation is difficult for grantees to do on their own, and requires funders and trained evaluators to step in with a bird's eye view.

We emphasize what we call the "Impact Pathway": The idea that through collaboration, each stage of an initiative has the potential to create impact, from research and planning, to capacity building, through filming, outreach, engagement, all the way to evaluation.

ANDREW LOWENTHAL, Co-founder & Executive Director, EngageMedia

In general, summative evaluation frameworks (those that "sum up" what a particular project accomplished at the end of a designated time frame) are not well-suited to social impact media projects, which continue to find new life, new

EMERGING FRAMEWORKS

There are many new, dynamic frameworks for measuring media impact:

1. **Lean**—Adapted from the methodology laid out in *Lean Startup*, a movement among entrepreneurs around the world to get products to market faster, the goal of *Lean Impact* is to "find the most efficient path to deliver the greatest social benefit at the largest possible scale." Written by former USAID chief innovation officer Ann Mei Chang, its orientation is an adaptive one, centered on learning rather than compliance.

2. **Iterative**—Based on the idea that change sparks change in unpredictable ways, this longitudinal framework examines how media contribute to compounding "circuitries" of impact over time.

3. **Backwards**—Taking *actual (vs anticipated)* outcomes as its starting point, this framework performs a retrospective analysis of the phenomena that led to change.

4. **Matrix**—With an intervention at its center, this analysis traces the complicated relationships, pathways and outcomes that transpire.

5. **Skip**—By adopting a 1:1 relationship between intervention and outcomes, this concept passes over explanatory analyses of *how* and *why*, and zeroes-in on *whether* change occurred.

6. **Hybrid**—This "mix and match" approach allows for creating a bespoke framework drawn from elements of various other frameworks, based on the demands of the project.

audiences and new distribution channels, long after grant periods have ended. Developmental evaluation, an approach akin to research and development in the corporate world, uses responsive, user-friendly data collection methods to make sense of projects in complex and uncertain environments. Emergent approaches such as this are often better suited to teasing out impact for innovative media projects— but adopting such approaches requires a shift in funder perspective away from monitoring and compliance and adherence to predetermined criteria towards understanding impact as it unfolds. In such a model, funders and grantees are both learning together in real time, which is a change from traditional power dynamics. There are important lessons to be drawn from adjacent fields—including design thinking and agile development—about how to tie metrics to project strategy and development.

WHAT CAN FUNDERS DO?

BEWARE OF POWER DYNAMICS WHEN INTEGRATING INNOVATION METRICS AND ADAPTIVE EVALUATION APPROACHES.

Funders can work with grantees and learn alongside them using developmental evaluation, but they must acknowledge existing power dynamics that make grantees reluctant to share failures along with successes. Funders can also encourage grantees to consider innovation metrics: What's changing? What action is being taken? How can the project be continuously tested and improved through feedback and experimentation?

INSIGHT #3

Digital analytics provide a wealth of useful data, but grantees require financial and logistical support in implementing them.

One of the most rapidly-developing areas in impact measurement is the world of digital analytics tools and dashboards that track impact across many different areas. These range from tools that are specific to impact tracking for digital publishing, such as Chartbeat and API's Metrics for News, to more generalized web analytics, such as Google Analytics. These types of tools can provide valuable insights into user behavior that would have been impossible to track even just a few years ago.

But due to the proliferation of digital analytics tools, some organizations are awash in too much data—and they tend to be costly for grantees with smaller budgets. Smaller, nonprofit media makers and organizations often do not have the funds or capacity to learn how to effectively employ them or connect them to existing data-collection tools. In the absence of sophisticated analytic tools that collect data across many different platforms, there is limited grantee capacity to collect metrics across many existing digital systems—let alone make sense of them in context. Funders should be aware of this limitation and consider what kind of support they could offer, for example: funding analytics vendors or third-party services to connect existing digital analytics systems for cohorts of grantees; funding subscription costs for analytical services; providing discounted training and education on how to use such services for grantees.

Too often, media impact evaluation is focused on reach metrics instead of more nuanced measures... which require a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to understand how media can shift narrative frames, mindsets and group dynamics.

JOHANNA BLAKLEY, Managing Director of the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California

WHAT CAN FUNDERS DO?

FUND AND CREATE BEST PRACTICES FOR DIGITAL ANALYTICS.

Funders can help by pairing media makers with analytics vendors and developing "best practices" that can be applied to similar projects. Funders can also provide support for paid analytics tools.

INSIGHT #4

There are opportunities for funders to collaborate with each other to share best practices and increase collective impact.

Media impact is an area that is still evolving; funders can work together to discuss best practices and approaches and perhaps agree upon shared metrics for grantees who are reporting to many different funders. The process of developing collective understanding about impact among funders and grantees should not operate like a funnel, leading to a single method or equation. Instead, it should be a dynamic networked process, with various hubs testing and refining different methods tailored to specific processes. Open and transparent sharing of models, impact, successes and failures will help to clarify and build this field.

WHAT CAN FUNDERS DO?

COLLABORATE WITH OTHER FUNDERS AND FUND SHARED INFRASTRUCTURE FOR MEDIA GRANTEES.

Funders need to consider entire ecosystems and how individual media projects play into making social change. This is difficult within the prism of a single media project or grants portfolio or even a single foundation; collective effort is required. Funders can support the development of shared resources and leverage them across cohorts of grantees rather than encouraging grantees to reinvent the wheel. Funders can also work together to move towards shared evaluation metrics for media grantees.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Often left out of discussion around media impact assessment are ethical issues surrounding power dynamics and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Impact assessment initiatives need to ensure that the perspectives of stakeholders—including those who are often underrepresented—are meaningfully incorporated into project and impact assessment planning decisions and processes. To that end, funders should consider:

» How to best foster a more inclusive field of media impact assessment practitioners and stakeholders;

» How to adopt approaches that *anticipate and address* potential negative social justice implications;

» How to best address issues around power dynamics inherent in impact assessment, including whose view is positioned as "neutral" or objective; and

» How to develop protocols for transparency and privacy considerations.

Impact moving forward

If we've learned anything since 2013, it's that even in a rapidly and unpredictably changing landscape, media projects will continue to have the power to change the world. The question we must continually answer is how can we best track that impact and harness its potential for social good.

Media Impact Funders can help funders increase impact by serving as a convener and knowledge network for the field. We are committed to helping foundations and their grantees continue to comprehend the ever-evolving world of media impact, and better understand how to evaluate how their projects can make a difference. To stay plugged into the discussion, subscribe to our monthly impact newsletter and make sure to explore our collection of impact resources on mediaimpactfunders.org.

About Media Impact Funders

Media Impact Funders—formerly Grantmakers in Film, Video & Television—began on a volunteer basis in 1984 as an affinity group for funders interested in the power of film to highlight social issues. The group gained momentum in 1990, just as the word "Internet" was being introduced for the first time. Reflecting changes in technology and media behavior over the past decade, it was renamed Grantmakers in Film & Electronic Media (GFEM) and formally incorporated in 2008 to advance the field of media arts and public interest media funding. It had 45 members and was headed by former MacArthur Foundation Program Officer Alyce Myatt. GFEM was renamed Media Impact Funders in 2012 and has since expanded its strategy to include a broad range of media funding interests such as journalism, documentary film, immersive technologies, media policy and more. Since that time, MIF has grown to more than 80 organizational members representing some of the largest foundations, and holds more than 30 in-person and online events yearly.

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MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORKS FOR JOURNALISM

Hannah Eaves
CEO, Multiply Bureau

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Measuring the impact of journalism is a notoriously difficult endeavor. While there are occasional big wins, clearly attributable to a single piece of journalism (see NPR's [reporting on TEACH grants,](#) which led to the Education Department erasing the debts of teachers) this is generally a unicorn in the world of media impact. What's more, these kinds of wins are often the result of investigative reporting—it's even more difficult to understand the impact of high quality drumbeat coverage of key issues.

Take, for example, the field of global development, close to my heart as I've worked for years with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as a consultant helping measure the impact of their media grantmaking. Most flashpoint moments in this coverage are negative, involving the outbreak of scary diseases, famine, or scandal. In a news era crowded with a maelstrom of domestic crises, both in the US and Europe, is it possible to get people to care about health breakthroughs in the developing world that could impact the lives of millions?

It is in this climate that news organizations often receive funding to cover issues that might not always be central to an outlet's editorial strategy. Take for example, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative's funding of social issue reporting, Kendeda's Guns in America funding, and the California Healthcare Foundation's support of health reporting. These are difficult, serious topics, hard to interest audiences in, and determining if the coverage moves any needles is a major challenge.

Issue-based journalism varies from outlet to outlet in the kind of impact it hopes to have, but some common outcomes are increased awareness, knowledge, and issue salience among the audience (how much the audience cares about *this* issue in comparison to others). Behavior change goals such as moving audience members to take action on an issue, or directly influencing policy, are often considered by journalists

to cross the line of editorial impartiality, with some notable exceptions such as Pro Publica. This also sets newsrooms apart from issue-driven documentary filmmaking, which often includes aligned advocacy campaigns. However, foundations funding the coverage often consider awareness and salience as stepping stones to policy change. There are many occasions where media provides one pillar in a larger societal change, such as in the #MeToo movement, in which journalism worked in tandem with celebrity involvement, campaigns, and social media to accelerate a shift in norms.

If we consider that increased awareness, knowledge, and salience are typical goals of such coverage (acknowledging that every story really has its own unique impact goals and strategy) many measurement frameworks tend to center on a combination of the following three data types:

Digital consumption and engagement

Common digital metrics include page views, engaged or active time on page, audio listens, video views, audience demographics, and social media interactions. Of the most basic consumption metrics, *time* appears to have the closest relationship to increases in awareness. Chartbeat, Google, and Yahoo! have [all released studies](#) showing a relationship between active time spent on page and ad recall or click through, and Chartbeat expanded on this to show a relationship to [fact recall](#). Upworthy research funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation confirmed this relationship.

Issue salience is closely associated with agenda setting, and in the academic literature it is often indicated by the *volume* of coverage. Once you're able to collect these metrics, it's possible to do deeper analysis to start seeing the relationship between topics, story type (for example in the case of [Solutions Journalism,](#) on the ground reporting, longer in-depth coverage, multiple photographs) and increased time or social interactions, to infer that these kinds of reporting may be more likely to lead to increased awareness.

Our research has confirmed, for example, that longer stories lead to more time on page and often more page views. While it is no surprise to editors that in-depth reporting generates

this kind of engagement, this finding may be of interest to others who have held the assumption that audiences have little appetite for long articles. In this case, data both backs up the former assumption while disabusing journalists of the latter.

Offline impact tracking

While tracking digital consumption and engagement tells you a little about content's impact, it misses an incredible amount. Many journalists already keep an informal log of the impact of their reporting, but more and more this practice is being formalised in tools such as CIR/Reveal's Offline Impact Tracker. The scale of impacts a journalist, editor, or engagement editor might log varies from relatively minor, such as being contacted by an audience member, syndication, mentions in other media, emails or calls from decision-makers, or being invited to participate on a committee or panel, to larger scale, such as directly influencing policy change at organizations or in government which may be evidenced by being publicly cited. This anecdotal information can be incredibly powerful in telling the impact story of an outlet.

Other Research Methods

Surveys have long been the bedrock of media impact evaluation. They can compare the awareness, knowledge, interest, and behavior of audiences exposed to content to those not exposed, or measure changes over time based on exposure to the content. While many institutions conduct private research for foundations, some of the most striking public examples are often around documentary content, such as USC's work on "Food Inc." and other films, although CIR/Reveal has also published important work in the space.

Surveys can also address bigger questions that might impact the effectiveness of content. For example:

- Does including a media's brand change audience perceptions of its content (compared to an unbranded version)?
- Do certain types of stories (for example those that evoke strong emotions, a sense of self efficacy, or have a reporter on the ground) impact the audience in different ways?

In addition to survey work, researchers might analyse a media outlet's share of voice on a given topic, conduct social network mapping to understand who is engaging with content, analyse issue framing and whether it has changed over time (for example coverage of fracking), among other things.

Doing all this work is expensive, and often newsrooms do not even have the resources to leverage tools they already have. But engagement editors and audience analysts are becoming key staff members at more and more media organizations. There is a strong overlap between all these impact measurement strategies and deepening audience relationships, which very likely leads to greater revenue.

I urge media organizations and funders to get smarter about testing the relationship between engaged journalism and ROI specifically through metrics, and for those who have done private research to share those findings more publicly. Even excellent early research by Impact Architects, the Tow Center for Digital Journalism and others, tend to be somewhat short on metrics-centered case studies. Given the trend toward this type of journalism, and increased support for tools such as Metrics for News, I'm hopeful we'll see more insights in the near future.

UNDERSTANDING MEDIA IMPACT BEYOND "BIG DOCUMENTARY"

By Andrew Lowenthal
Co-founder & Executive Director, EngageMedia

Social change must by necessity be *social*. However, the *auteur* documentary impact model is one where creators often work behind the scenes for years, waiting to release their product with a big bang of impact. Such models have focused on impact as something you do at the end of the process and have predominantly focused on the media's effect on audiences.

However, new technologies and cultural shifts are constantly changing what social impact is and how different media and actors can contribute to it.

While there have always been alternative impact models to those of "big documentary," changes in the patterns of production and consumption of video (as opposed to film) are pushing such alternatives further into the spotlight.

Video is becoming more and more ubiquitous. As an event, it is more modes than film; however, the unrelenting nudges of video in the daily swarm of information mean the medium's collective long tail may cumulatively create more social impact than big documentary.

The Video for Change Approach

With this in mind, EngageMedia, in partnership with the Video4Change Network, created the Video for Change Impact Toolkit. The Video for Change model is founded on co-creation, focusing on short-form digital video made with limited budgets by filmmakers primarily working in what's being called the Global South.

We emphasize what we call the "Impact Pathway" – the idea that through collaboration, particularly with affected stakeholders, each stage of an initiative has the potential to create impact -- from research and planning, to capacity building, through filming, outreach, engagement, all the way to evaluation.

The model draws on methods of open source software production—thinking iteratively, collaboratively, and in networks. This means thinking of evaluation as something done throughout the process rather than something that is only done at the end.

The call to co-creation and participation is both practical and ethical. It shifts the model of representation, generating ownership and building champions for an initiative who will propel its distribution and engagement. Such ownership ensures that the content is more likely to be used as a tool by those who most need it. These ethical models are explored more comprehensively in our paper on Video for Change and impact.

Changing social relationships is rarely done through abstract calls for change. It is done through action itself, and thus the filmmaking process is an opportunity to experiment with and modify the power structures these relationships rest on.

None of this is to say that long form is lost—the sustained concentration it demands is a welcome opportunity to stop and think more deeply. Still, other opportunities need to be considered more broadly, and short-form video is tugging in other directions, changing how we think about impact and other emerging opportunities.

The "always on'" information circus has its limitations, and the approach EngageMedia proposes also seeks something deeper than mindless compliance with default social media engagement models. Rather, much of the Video for Change approach is a call towards the offline world.

Beyond the Internet

While we don't make a distinction between "real'" and "virtual" worlds, the Video for Change Impact model does include significant emphasis on offline engagement, designing for and evaluating change on the ground.

There are a variety of ways we do this, perhaps best expressed through the example of the documentary film, "Love Letter to a Soldier." The film is about Maria Goretti and her child who were abandoned by an Indonesian soldier, and how they were subsequently shunned by their community in the conflict ridden provinces of West Papua. The production value was quite low, but the personal story and diary-like storytelling approach captured audiences' attention.

The film had a wide variety of offline impacts, including:

- Re-acceptance of Maria into her community.

- The establishment of a co-operative traditional medicine business by Maria and friends using prize money the film won at a festival.

- The first time filmmaker (Wenda) increased her skills and was able to secure further filmmaking work as a result of the film and the prize she had won.

- The film was used by many women's organizations to highlight the impacts of the Indonesian army in Papua, including at the UN periodic review.

- More than 30 independent screenings occurred, which we were able to track, and likely many more.

- The film was translated and subtitled independently into eight languages by our Amara subtitling community.

Cumulatively, this contributed to building a more resilient movement for human rights and social justice in West Papua. Almost all of these outcomes were the result of offline work. The breadth of impact from the personal to top level advocacy, as well as the large number of independent activities (screenings, subtitling, etc.) went beyond the scope of the original initiative.

While it is not possible to point to a specific policy change, we believe this is not a realistic expectation for a short film. Here, the objective was more about supporting advocates to do their work more effectively. Read the full case study to learn more.

Such impact isn't as visible as data on viewership, clicks, and shares. Intensive follow-up over a long period of time is often required. Tracking these changes was difficult and was mostly the result of strong ongoing relationships in West Papua. EngageMedia, who produced the film, is still supporting West Papuan filmmakers today, eight years after the film was released.

This support takes the form of very personal relationship management, surveys, focus group discussions, and simply sitting down for a long time to understand, in an informal setting, what has been going on, who is now doing what, how

these relate to the initiative, etc.

Such qualitative assessment is, of course, resource-intensive; however, if you are looking for significant impact, then your engagement is going to be long-term by necessity. Activities such as these need to be built into the design.

The Video for Change approach suggests developing an Impact Statement at the start of your initiative – essentially the proposed set of outcomes and outputs you are aiming for, later serving as a baseline for monitoring and evaluating your success (or otherwise).

The model is built around the Types of Change that we identify in the toolkit, and we produce different indicators based on which stage of the initiative you are working on (e.g., capacity building, filming and production, engagement and distribution, etc.).

We specifically suggest that people look for the following:

- Participants can clearly define the impact the Video for Change initiative has had on their lives

- Participants can identify offline impacts in their community

- Collaborations that the film or production and post-production process sparked can be demonstrated—further collaborations that occur independently are highly prized

- Real-world skills changes and subsequent opportunities can be identified—e.g., someone who was training in the initiative and assisted with filming went on to get a job or secure contracts with their new skill

The examples noted here have very little relationship to the number of eyeballs that see the video or related aspects of the initiative, which isn't to suggest that audience size isn't also important. However, they seek to highlight the fact that the closer to the initiative someone is, the stronger the impact.

We also encourage people to document intended and unintended impacts—often, assessment focuses only on measuring what was planned; the biggest impacts are often serendipitous. Similarly, both positive and negative impacts should be documented. Often impact is thought of as a

positive outcome from an intervention. But it should actually comprise all the outcomes, including the negative ones. These might consist of the following:

- a participant or community in the initiative being placed in danger, such as becoming subject to violence or intimidation

- the creation of unnecessary division, including the disruption of alliances, breakdown of personal relationships, reduction of trust, etc.

- a backlash against the specific campaign that reduced overall support for the broader movement

We refer to the final result as an "Impact Story," a summary of everything that has happened as a result of the initiative. We emphasize the "story" aspect, as this assessment is also an opportunity for outreach and engagement with various stakeholders.

Online Issues

The Video for Change approach is not solely offline; we design for and evaluate online impact as well. However, we want to promote a more holistic model and point out the pitfalls of the heady rush towards techno-utopian approaches. We want to approach understanding impact in a way that isn't designed around the mechanisms that produce the highest quantity and most easily accessible data.

We should be particularly cautious of these types of approaches, as manipulation and misinformation in social media has become increasingly apparent, from deepfakes, to threats to privacy, and beyond. The 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal was the last straw that finally broke civil society's mostly uncritical engagement with corporate social media, capturing a game-changing level of public attention. Still, the way that the impact field is approaching these issues hasn't fully caught up, and too much emphasis remains on the use of tools and platforms we should instead be criticizing and relying on less.

With this in mind, EngageMedia is also beginning impact and engagement experiments with alternatives to corporate social media. We want to see what possibilities exist when more ethical, privacy-respecting platforms and technologies are used. Can we find a way out of the knee-jerk media engagement practices to which companies like Facebook and Twitter have accustomed us?

These more iterative, collaborative, networked, and social approaches to impact require methods of evaluation that are still emerging. Ones that temper the reliance on data and machine learning as an oracle explaining the past and future, ensuring a more critical approach similar to Tricia Wang's theory on "thick data."

In the Video for Change Impact Toolkit, we have explored a range of indicators that might be helpful towards the end. But much more can be done to develop something truly hybrid that also doesn't reproduce social media surveillance models.

We hope we might find some answers (or at least map the dead ends) in our forthcoming experiments.

BREAKTHROUGHS AND INNOVATIONS IN MEDIA IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Johanna Blakley

Managing director of the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism

In August, I attended a meeting that MIF convened on media impact assessment where I was asked to provide some examples of breakthroughs and innovations that I've seen in the field. I'm happy to say, I had no problem coming up with a list that was way too long for my time slot. I appreciate the opportunity to share them here with a wider audience.

Breakthroughs

Perhaps the most important breakthrough I've witnessed is a much broader acknowledgement that pop culture and entertainment narratives play a powerful role in setting social norms. Researchers at the Lear Center have been providing evidence of the social impact of entertainment for 18 years now (you'll find examples on our Media Impact Project site and our Hollywood, Health & Society site) and so it is gratifying to witness this shift, which has generated a greater appetite among advocacy organizations, media funders and media makers for narrative change strategies.

When the Media Impact Project was founded in 2012, we focused on conducting media impact assessments and monitoring engagement with media. This wasn't a crazy thing to do—it was desperately needed—but, as most of you know very well, there was a lot of anxiety among funders and grantees about the efficacy of this work and its cost. Media impact measurement is a fairly complex endeavor when it's done well, and the various social science and computational methods it employs can be off-putting to people who prefer to judge the impact of their work by film festival awards or box office. In the end, most preferred plowing more money into the media product, presuming that the higher the quality,

the more likely it will have social impact.

For us, the breakthrough has been our success at situating media impact assessment within the context of cultural audits, which help media strategists understand what cultural content their audience is already consuming and the messages embedded in that content. Lately, we've had the opportunity to situate media impact assessment in larger multi-methods projects that include things like content analysis, social media monitoring, and a range of survey research, including our most recent work for the Pop Culture Collaborative, which allowed us to collect longitudinal data about entertainment and media preferences, values and beliefs, and psychographics and demographics. The huge benefit to this approach is that the cultural audit research provides exactly the kind of data that media makers and distributors need to improve the likelihood that their media will reach priority audiences and have a positive impact.

That leads me to another breakthrough I've seen in the field: an increased acknowledgement that media interventions do not work for everyone. Backlash is a big, big problem. The conviction that an intervention will do some good, or at least no harm, is dangerously naïve.

Breakthrough number three (if you're keeping count): ever since I attended the National Endowment for the Arts' Measuring Cultural Engagement conference, I've also been working to apply our media impact assessment tools to arts and culture programming—including live music, dance and theatrical events, as well as museum exhibitions (here's a chapter I co-authored on the topic). As an academic trained in the humanities, I've been frustrated by the small evidence base for the social impact of the performing and fine arts. They rarely get the impact assessments they deserve, the kind that will convince bean counters that artistic work can have a profound impact on individuals, communities, and society at large. So I was delighted to discover that Americans for the Arts has embraced the Continuum of Impact guide developed by Animating Democracy, which contains all kinds of great ideas about what to measure and how.

I remain skeptical about any linear models that presume to explain social impact (humans just aren't that simple),

but there are lots of interesting social and civic indicators in this guide that are applicable to a wide variety of interventions, including those focused on media storytelling. I especially liked some of the outcomes they suggest tracking for movement building. A media impact assessment could monitor the following:

- Are people in the movement using new forms of storytelling? (E.g., not just "naming and shaming")
- Are advocates getting funding from new or more diverse sources?
- Are they bringing new people into the movement? What do the resulting social networks look like?
- Among people within the movement, have levels of optimism or pessimism shifted? Have aspirations shifted?

Too often, media impact evaluation is focused on reach metrics instead of more nuanced measures such as these, which require a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to understand how media can shift narrative frames, mindsets and group dynamics.

Innovations

I attended a terrific Mission & Metrics workshop this summer, hosted by Human Rights Watch and the Columbia University Data Institute and sponsored by the Open Society Foundation, whose goal is to "build a new community of practice rooted in the science of social change communications and measurement." I was excited by the rigor of the work presented (these people are not messing around) and I learned about some new, innovative tools that can improve the quality of media impact assessment.

Survey Tools

- Swayable: I haven't had the opportunity to try it yet, but I'm dying to. They measure the impact of advocacy and storytelling on public opinion using hyper-efficient randomized control trials. You receive results for 3-4K respondents in 24 hours. This tool can be used for many

purposes, but maybe the most valuable, in my mind, is finding out very quickly whether your media will be met by a backlash among audience segments you might not understand well.

- Survey 160 uses P2P SMS survey dissemination (i.e., sharing via basic cell phones)—excellent for engaging hard-to-reach audiences such as diasporic communities, immigrants, or young males. The platform supports branching surveys and quotas—I can't wait to try this out.

- Biometric Research: Our physical and emotional responses to media messages play a huge role in how we process those messages and whether we do anything about them. The Media Impact Project team is working with Heidi Boisvert on a biometric study that builds on a recent survey we conducted and a content analysis we completed of popular TV content. For the first time at the Norman Lear Center, we will be able to see how people physically respond to storytelling elements and we can compare self-reported taste preferences with biometric data. Stay tuned.

- I'm also eager to continue my conversation with Laura Ligouri at Mindbridge, which uses quantitative and qualitative research to understand the psychological drivers behind people's behavior and beliefs. Implicit bias is a chronic problem in survey research and so I would love to work with Laura to better account for this in future research.

Overall, I think the field is changing quickly and our growing prowess at extracting insights from big data will no doubt fuel further change and, I hope, stronger commitment to understanding the role that media plays in human lives.

Additional Resources

Here are some foundational resources to help you understand the building blocks of impact.
Go to mediaimpactfunders.org/our-work/impact/ to find a comprehensive collection of resources.

Designing for Impact: Social Justice Documentary
Published in 2011, this impact report includes an early model for understanding media impact and case studies of foundation-funded documentaries that successfully integrated strategic design and evaluation.

Doc Society's Impact Field Guide & Toolkit
Doc Society's *Impact Field Guide & Toolkit* is the result of "collaborations, conversations, agreements and disagreements with incredibly smart film teams, funders and partners from all over the world." The toolkit—which includes a library of case studies for social issue documentarians—features modules to help filmmakers define their vision and strategy, among others.

Fledgling Fund Case Studies and Resources
Fledgling publishes white papers, case studies and impact stories in order to share lessons learned with the documentary funding field. These case studies show early models of impact, which have been adopted by other media makers and funders outside of documentary.

Funder Perspectives: Assessing Media Investments
This original MIF report highlights foundations' varied approaches to assessing the impact of media projects.

Impact Assessment for Nonprofit News Projects and their Funders
This is a how-to guide produced by MIF in collaboration with the Media Impact Project at the Norman Lear Center for journalism funders and nonprofit news organizations looking to develop media assessment strategies.

Media Impact Project
The Media Impact Project at the Norman Lear Center at the University of Southern California works with funders and makers to conduct research on social impact productions, and publishes research reports and guides with a particular focus on media impact as it pertains to film, TV and journalism.

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