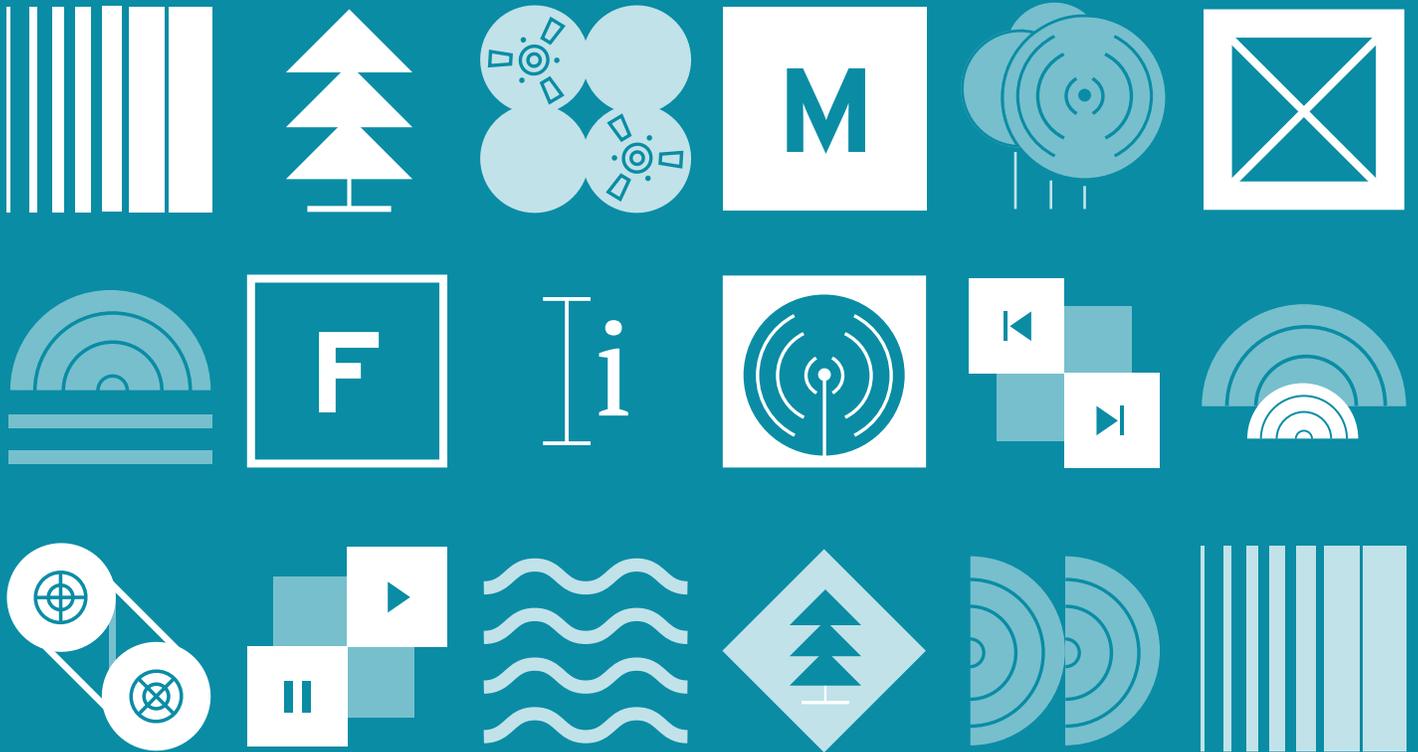


Environmental Media Grantmaking

How Funders Are Tipping the Scales Toward Change



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Executive Summary



As we continue to deal with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ever-present climate crisis, the time for philanthropic investment in excellent environmental media of all kinds is now. We are at a global tipping point for climate change, environmental destruction and human health. From species loss and arctic ice shelf collapse, to global pandemics and the burning Amazon, our planet is confirming what scientists have been saying for decades: We must change how and what we produce, buy, discard and eat, and the ways we live, travel and consume—and fast.

Funders, while measured in their responses for too long, are increasing their investments in environmental work broadly, and media focused on the environment, specifically. We know that robust and compelling media of all kinds—from journalism and documentary film to data mapping and narrative change—help grow public and political will to solve our environmental crises. Because without environmental media and information, there is no effective environmental movement.

To that end, and in response to our collective need to address global climate change, Media Impact Funders has spent the past year prioritizing programming around the environment, with the goal of helping funders engage in conversations around the narrative change needed to shift policy, behavior and culture.

This report—which complements MIF’s in-person and online convenings throughout the year—aims to highlight trends in environmental media grantmaking, impact studies and examples of promising media projects, and insights from funders in the space. This report focuses on U.S. funders who give in the U.S. and globally, with funding data covering 2009–2019. Some grantmakers are newer to the field of environmental media philanthropy, and other earlier funders have shifted priorities to non-environmental media work. The big picture shows that while some funders have changed focus, overall funding is going up.

We compiled graphics to highlight the top five media projects by four key environmental areas: wildlife, conservation, climate change and oceans.

According to our grants data map, between 2009 and 2019, U.S.-based funders have made:

- \$12 million in media grants for wildlife
- \$56 million in media grants for conservation
- \$81 million in media grants for climate change
- \$18 million in media grants for ocean-related efforts

The variety of media projects being supported—from geographic information systems to film and video—is significant, and targeted at a wide range of issues including land conservation, documenting and reporting on the impacts of climate change, wildlife protection and restoration of the ocean environment.

As funders increase their support for environmental media, we invite you to continue the conversation and share your insights. Examples of impact campaigns, film and video, interactive games, journalism and geographic mapping systems contribute to our shared understanding of the field, and help identify gaps in funding and opportunities for collaboration. There is no more urgent issue of our time.

Introduction

It will take some time to unpack the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis. But as the global community grapples with the health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic, one theme in particular—humans’ own impact on the environment—should be central to our collective reflections.

Indeed, if only one lesson prevails from the COVID-19 fallout, it should be that our future is entirely linked to our behaviors, and radically changing our behaviors can have a rapid and dramatically positive impact on our natural world. With pollution-causing smog lifted in many cities, cleaner lakes and rivers, and wildlife roaming freely in response to nearly universal stay-at-home orders, it is clear that we can reverse the collision course our planet is on, but only if human

“Yet the amount of global philanthropy aimed at putting the world on the path to a reasonable climate future is disgraceful—there’s no other word for it—with no more 3 percent of giving addressed to global warming.

This is profoundly, unfathomably, maddeningly shortsighted. Any grantmaker who just chugs along on the same issues without addressing climate is, truly, fiddling while the world burns—particularly given the certainty that whatever short-term progress is made through these efforts will be lost if climate change continues unchecked.”

- Larry Kramer, Hewlett Foundation President, in a recent [Chronicle of Philanthropy](#) opinion piece

behaviors come into balance with our natural world.

Our lack of balance with nature is all too evident. John Vidal, the environment editor of the *Guardian* for 27 years, [noted in a recent article](#) jointly published with Ensia (with support from funds raised through [NewsMatch](#)) that research indicates human destruction of biodiversity is driving the spread of new viruses such as COVID-19. In the article, Thomas Gillespie, associate professor in Emory University’s [department of environmental sciences](#), said, “Humans are creating the conditions for the spread of diseases by reducing the natural barriers between host animals—in which the virus is naturally circulating—and themselves.” (Read Vidal’s full article in the guest essay section on Page 29.)

We are at a global tipping point for climate change, environmental destruction and human health. From species loss and Arctic ice shelf collapse, to global pandemics and the burning Amazon, our planet is confirming what scientists have been saying for decades: We must change how and what we produce, buy, discard and eat, and the ways we live, travel and consume—and fast.

Funders, while measured in their responses for too long, are increasing their investments in environmental work broadly, and media focused on the environment, specifically. We know that robust and compelling media of all kinds—from journalism and documentary film to data mapping and narrative change—help grow public and political will to solve our environmental crises. Because without environmental media and information, there is no effective environmental movement.

A case in point: [A post highlighting the extraordinary reach of Covering Climate Now](#) (originally published in

Columbia Journalism Review) notes that, “When hundreds of newsrooms focus their attention on the climate crisis, all at the same time, the public conversation about the problem gets better: more prominent, more informative, more urgent.”

In September 2019, over 320 news outlets from across the United States and around the world collaborated to provide a week of high-profile coverage of the climate story, in the most extensive such project on record. The collaboration was organized by [Covering Climate Now](#), a project co-founded by the Columbia Journalism Review and The Nation. Participants included The Guardian, the project’s lead media partner, and some of the biggest newspapers, television and radio stations, and online news sites in the world. Representing 47 countries and much of the U.S., these 323 outlets reached a combined audience of well over 1 billion people.

The reach of projects like Covering Climate Now—made possible by grants from the Schumann Media Center and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation—is especially important because it addresses the environmental impact of climate change on local communities facing sea-level rise, severe weather, pollution and illness, declining food supplies and more.

As we continue to deal with the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the ever-present climate crisis, the time for philanthropic investment in excellent environmental media of all kinds is now.

To that end, and in response to our collective need to address global climate change, Media Impact Funders has spent the past year prioritizing programming around the environment, with the goal of helping funders engage in conversations around the narrative change needed to shift policy, behavior and culture.

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Grants information is drawn from our media grants data map, a project of Candid, which collects data reported directly by funders, and via tax filings, websites and other public information. The map is free to use and accessible at mediaimpactfunders.org, and more information about the data map, taxonomy and methodology are available in the report Appendix (Page 36).

The Data on 4 Key Environmental Issues: Wildlife, conservation, climate change & oceans

According to our grants data map, between 2009 and 2019, U.S.-based funders have made:

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Projects listed are for grants made by U.S. funders but often conducted globally, and many grants cover multiple subjects. For example, a grant aimed at ocean conservation will be listed under ‘ocean’ and ‘conservation.’ In addition, grants made to cover a range of approaches might only include a portion for media and information-based work, but there is no reasonable way to access specific project budget lines, so the total grant amount is counted in our data snapshot.

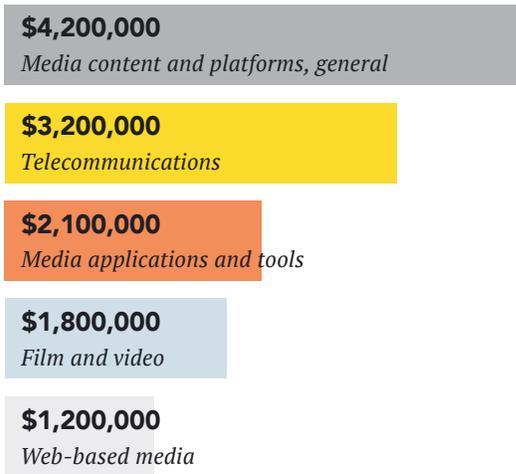
We compiled graphics to highlight the top five media projects by four key environmental areas: wildlife, conservation, climate change, and oceans.

Wildlife, for example, includes significant media content and platforms, general, as well as telecommunications for monitoring—though the latter is due to a single \$2 million grant—whereas climate change grants support a range of media platforms and content, including film and video, web-based media and media applications and tools to boost awareness and build public interest campaigns. Ocean-related work focuses most significantly on media content and platforms to inspire and inform, along with geographic information systems to map the oceans.

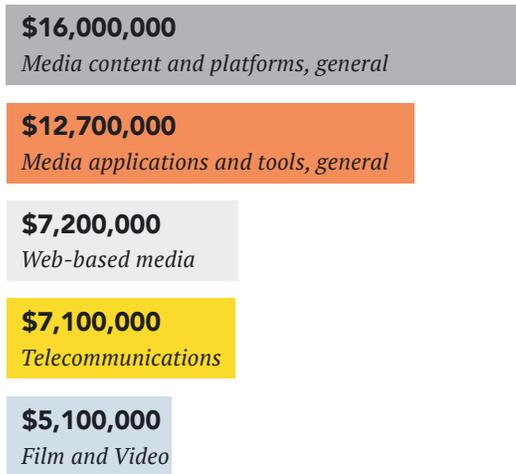
Top 5 types of Media Projects

2009-Present

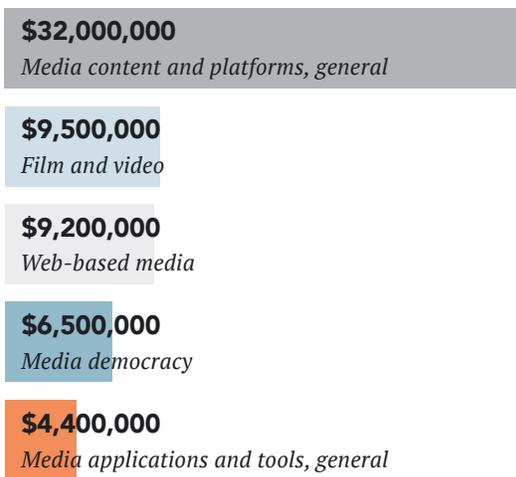
Focusing on Wildlife



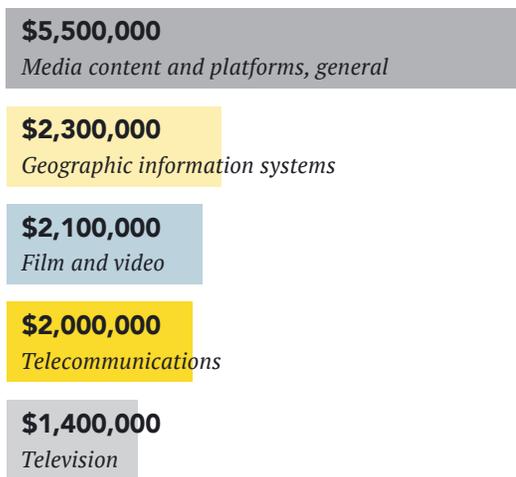
Focusing on Conservation



Focusing on Climate Change



Focusing on Oceans



*Totals may add up to more than 100% because grants can be assigned to more than one category

As the graphics above suggest, the scope of media projects created to address environmental concerns is broad, and approaches range from documentation to community conversation.

Recent documentary films and their associated impact campaigns highlight the power of these projects in changing minds, actions and votes.

In Emmy Award-winning *Chasing Ice*, director Jeff Orlowski captures the epic scale of climate change through breathtaking images of retreating glaciers. Orlowski explained that the point of the film—selected as a 2017 Media Impact Festival winner—was to overcome any lingering sense of doubt that climate change is destroying critical ecosystems that, when gone, have unfathomable

impacts on food, water and weather systems. With support from the Kendeda Fund and other donors, the *Chasing Ice* team organized an intensive [outreach campaign](#) to prove that you can have an impact on the public debate by reaching and persuading key decision makers about the urgent need to solve big problems.

In the spring 2017 issue of the [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#), University of Florida researchers Ann Christiano and Annie Neimand cite the Ohio campaign for Chasing Ice as a particularly effective effort:

“The campaign sought to shift the political conversation in two ways: First, it encouraged audience members to use their voice through social media to influence friends, family, and community. Second, the campaign sought to foster a national social media campaign targeted at the Ohio congressional district of Republican Rep. Pat Tiberi, who openly denied climate change, with the goal that he would change his position on the issue (which he eventually did).”

[50 Reefs](#), a project created by the Ocean Agency during filming of the Peabody and Emmy Award-winning Netflix documentary *Chasing Coral* (made by the same team as *Chasing Ice*) aims to save coral systems from extinction. Funded by the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, Tiffany & Co. Foundation, and Bloomberg Philanthropies, the initiative includes scientific studies to understand which reefs can be protected, along with communications and a clear impact campaign to convey the severity of the problem to new audiences and inspire a new generation of climate leaders.

The Game Changers—supported in part by the Avatar Alliance and Roddenberry, Quinn and Shared Earth Foundations—is directed by Academy Award winner Louie Psihoyos (*The Cove*) and executive produced by James Cameron and Arnold Schwarzenegger. By following elite vegan athletes who are deconstructing one of our most deeply held beliefs—that we cannot live or be physically strong without meat-based protein—the film aims to help audiences understand that our physical health, and that of our planet, depend on a radical change in how we think about food.

The film’s impact is significant. It is the best-selling documentary of all time on iTunes; one of Fathom Events’ top performing titles; is scheduled to be available on one of China’s largest streaming platforms; has been approved as an accredited education resource—allowing every doctor, nurse and dietitian in the United States to fulfill ongoing professional education requirements by viewing the film and passing a related test; and has 53 percent male followers on Instagram, which is unheard of in the plant-based food realm.



The Game Changers Impact Campaign in 3 Steps

- Put the film into the hands of as many people around the world as possible, especially in communities that have been resistant to this messaging;
- Provide communities with tools, resources and the support they need to incorporate plant-based eating into their lives in a long-term, sustainable way; and
- Serve as the tipping point in the cultural conversation around animal foods, and in doing so, permanently shape the food landscape and drive change from the “top down.”

While not specifically a film about climate change or the environment, it connects the meat industry with pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and endangered species loss due to land use for grazing. This tees up environmental conversations in a way that is disarming to those who might otherwise be polarized by traditional messaging. [For more about the film’s impact, read an interview with the film’s producers on the MIF website.](#)

Compelling media, along with impact campaigns that have clear goals and partners who are willing to support long-term campaign work are shifting awareness, beliefs and actions.

Documentary film is far from the only media successfully engaging diverse audiences on pressing environmental issues. As *Inside Philanthropy* highlighted in a 2018 article, “Mothers of Invention,” a podcast on feminist climate change solutions co-hosted by Mary Robinson, former president of Ireland, and Maeve Higgins, Irish comedian and writer, “is a great example of how even modest philanthropy can be a force for experimentation in the way we talk about climate change, and how we get people engaged in an issue that can be abstract and panic-inducing. It’s also a good case study of donors elevating marginalized voices that are maddeningly left out of mainstream storytelling and decision-making.”

Environmental-themed podcasts and audio are being used in new ways to tell unique stories and share perspectives from diverse communities—which has been lacking in the environmental movement. For example, the Seattle



A Closer Look: Assessing the Impact of Media

In January 2020, Media Impact Funders released “Decoding Media Impact: Insights, Advice & Recommendations,” a report that provides an examination of the current state of the field of media impact assessment, which MIF has been tracking for seven years.

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, MIF saw an increase in the number of new approaches to assess the impact of that media.

Informed by feedback from our network, this guide is meant to serve as a practical resource for funders who want to understand where to start. 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.

Go to mediainimpactfunders.org to read the full report.

Foundation and Leslie Fund have supported a new podcast, “Terrestrial,” which examines personal choices being made in the face of environmental change. Hip Hop Caucus, a live interview show featuring policymakers, advocates and artists, created “Think 100%: Coolest Show on Climate Change,” a radio program and podcast. Support from the Hewlett Foundation is helping *Hip Hop Caucus* turn its weekly radio show into a broader media platform, including a YouTube channel and live road shows.

[ISeeChange](#) is project of KVNF and Localore, which is funded in part by the Wyncote Foundations. Using media tools and platforms, ISeeChange helps communities document, engage with, understand and adapt to their changing environment. A network of global participants post to the platform, which is connected to weather and climate data. For the [Harlem Heat Map](#), ISeeChange collaborated with community members, WNYC, AdaptNY and WE ACT for Environmental Justice to examine how urban neighborhoods are impacted by, and addressing, increased temperatures.

And given the scope of the problem, it is especially exciting to see new journalism collaborations taking root to report on environmental concerns. As the [Poynter Institute explains in a July 2019 article](#), this type of collaboration in environmental reporting is gaining ground.

- The Pulitzer Center’s [Connected Coastlines](#) is a collaborative reporting effort on climate science in U.S. coastal states. The project is supported by the Howard Hughes Medical Institute’s Department of Science Education, and will create a group of independent newsrooms and journalists to cover climate change’s impact on coastal populations.
- A collaboration between The Texas Observer and Quartz “explores the complexities of border water in a hotter, drier world” through their nine-part series, “[Shallow Waters](#).” Part of the reporting for these stories was made possible by a Collaborative Reporting Grant by the Center for Cooperative Media (with grant support from the Rita Allen Foundation and Democracy Fund).

The well-being of our shared environment is undoubtedly the overarching social issue of our time—impacting health, migration, food security, transportation, urban planning, disaster mitigation and much, much more. As funders look to various media formats as a means of bolstering, or beginning, their environmental work, there are plenty of examples of environmental media grants and potential funding partners.



Grant Highlights

Examples are curated to reflect diversity in foundation and grant size, geography and approach. Our aim is to show that funders of all kinds have a key role to play in environmental media work. In addition, we include information about the top 10 funders in each area.

Wildlife

| <i>Funder</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>*Dollar Value of Grants</i> |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation | Palo Alto, CA | \$4,400,000 |
| The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation | Menlo Park, CA | \$1,900,000 |
| National Fish and Wildlife Foundation | Washington, DC | \$999,705 |
| Ford Foundation | New York, NY | \$500,000 |
| The Charles Engelhard Foundation | New York, NY | \$380,000 |
| The Tiffany & Co. Foundation | New York, NY | \$350,000 |
| Foundation to Promote Open Society | New York, NY | \$300,000 |
| John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation | Chicago, IL | \$285,000 |
| Arcus Foundation | New York, NY | \$260,048 |
| Mark Paul Terk Charitable Trust | Wilmington, DE | \$250,000 |

Funders based in United States; starting in year(s) 2009 - latest available; with text that includes wildlife

Funder: Goldhirsh Foundation

Grantee: Natural History Museum of Los Angeles

Amount: \$100,000

Year: 2019, over 1 year

Purpose: To encourage Angelenos to explore nature while contributing to open-sourced scientific research using the iNaturalist app to submit nature observations and provide scientists with wildlife data points.

Funder: The Tiffany & Co. Foundation

Grantee: Conservation International

Amount: \$350,000

Year: 2017, over 1 year

Purpose: Support for the production and distribution of a virtual reality film focused on wildlife conservation efforts in Africa and further distribution of Valents Reef.

Funder: Foundation to Promote Open Society

Grantee: Defenders of Wildlife Inc

Amount: \$100,000

Year: 2016, over 1 year

Purpose: To support the Judging the Environment project, a compendium of editorials, commentary, and articles that helps advocates and government officials understand the environmental record of judicial nominees in advance of confirmation hearings, and better understand the role of federal judges in environmental enforcement.

Funder: Arcus Foundation

Grantee: Mongabay

Amount: \$25,000

Year: 2016, over 8 months

Purpose: In May 2014, Mongabay launched the Mongabay Reporting Network (MRN), which provides opportunities for journalists around the world to report on key conservation stories. The grant supports reporting on threats to great apes and their habitat as well as illegal trade. Stories produced within the MRN are published under an open Creative Commons license that allows sharing and reposting.

Conservation

| <i>Funder</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>*Dollar Value of Grants</i> |
|--|------------------|--------------------------------|
| Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation | Seattle, WA | \$10,000,000 |
| Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation | Palo Alto, CA | \$8,400,000 |
| Charles Stewart Mott Foundation | Flint, MI | \$4,500,000 |
| John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation | Chicago, IL | \$3,700,000 |
| The William Penn Foundation | Philadelphia, PA | \$3,400,000 |
| The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation | Menlo Park, CA | \$3,000,000 |
| The David and Lucile Packard Foundation | Los Altos, CA | \$2,500,000 |
| Oceans 5 | New York, NY | \$1,500,000 |
| The Pew Charitable Trusts | Philadelphia, PA | \$1,200,000 |
| Alaska Conservation Foundation | Anchorage, AK | \$1,200,000 |

Funders based in United States; starting in year(s) 2009 - latest available; with text that includes conservation

Funder: Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

Grantee: Minnesota Environmental Partnership

Amount: \$300,000

Year: 2018, over 2 years

Purpose: With renewed support, the grantee will continue important work on invasive species, clean water, resource extraction and leading Minnesota groups to engage with the broader coalition of Great Lakes leaders. This grant includes a one-time increase to enable the group to complete strategic planning, including an emphasis on broadening engagement with tribes and expanding its communication expertise with state-wide polling on key issues.

Funder: The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation

Grantee: Yellowstone Ecological Research

Amount: \$50,000

Year: 2018, over 1 year

Purpose: To deploy RiverNET, a digital platform that provides the stakeholders of the Upper Yellowstone Watershed access to real-time monitoring data needed for evidence-based conservation success and smart management decisions.

Funder: The William Penn Foundation

Grantee: Stroud Water Research Center Inc.

Amount: \$1,594,000

Year: 2017, over 2 years

Purpose: Expand the Wikiwatershed web-based tool to enhance its use by conservation organizations in the Delaware River Watershed Initiative to identify scale and type of conservation projects needed to meet water quality goals.

Funder: Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Grantee: Conservation International

Amount: \$550,000

Year: 2017, over 1.5 years

Purpose: To design and pilot the first-ever global biodiversity data management platform that applies recent technological innovations and machine learning in alliance with Conservation International, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Google.

Climate Change

| <i>Funder</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>*Dollar Value of Grants</i> |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation | Menlo Park, CA | \$15,100,000 |
| Ford Foundation | New York, NY | \$9,400,000 |
| The Rockefeller Foundation | New York, NY | \$7,800,000 |
| Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation | Palo Alto, CA | \$5,900,000 |
| Bloomberg Philanthropies, Inc. | New York City, NY | \$4,600,000 |
| John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation | Chicago, IL | \$4,400,000 |
| Sea Change Foundation | San Francisco, CA | \$2,600,000 |
| The Schmidt Family Foundation | Palo Alto, CA | \$2,400,000 |
| The David and Lucile Packard Foundation | Los Altos, CA | \$2,000,000 |
| Doris Duke Charitable Foundation | New York, NY | \$1,900,000 |

Funders based in United States; starting in year(s) 2009 - latest available; with text that includes climate

Funder: The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Grantee: Internews

Amount: \$300,000

Year: 2019, over 2 years

Purpose: Internews' Earth Journalism Network (EJN) supports more than 9,000 journalists from 130 developing countries to cover the environment more effectively. This grant will support EJN's India team to carry out a series of journalism training workshops in Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka on local climate impacts and local climate solutions. The trainings will happen in Hindi language as well as major state languages.

Funder: Barr Foundation

Grantee: Years of Living Dangerously

Amount: \$150,000

Year: 2017, over 1.5 years

Purpose: To produce short videos on climate change solutions in support of Years of Living Dangerously, a television and internet project dedicated to climate action.

Funder: The Schmidt Family Foundation

Grantee: Climate Central

Amount: \$400,000

2017: 2017, over 1 year

Purpose: General operating support.

Funder: Fidelity Charitable

Grantee: Young Voices for the Planet

Amount: \$25,000

Year: 2016, over 1 year

Purpose: The mission of the Young Voices for the Planet film series is to limit the magnitude of climate change and its impacts by empowering children and youth, through uplifting and inspiring success stories, to take an essential role in informing their communities—and society at large, challenging decision-makers, and catalyzing change.

Oceans

| <i>Funder</i> | <i>Location</i> | <i>*Dollar Value of Grants</i> |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation | Palo Alto, CA | \$7,000,000 |
| The David and Lucile Packard Foundation | Los Altos, CA | \$1,700,000 |
| Alfred P. Sloan Foundation | New York, NY | \$1,600,000 |
| Oceans 5 | New York, NY | \$1,500,000 |
| The Kendeda Fund | Wilmington, DE | \$1,000,000 |
| The Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment, Inc. | San Francisco, CA | \$631,500 |
| Grantham Foundation for the Protection of the Environment | Boston, MA | \$572,000 |
| International Community Foundation | National City, CA | \$390,929 |
| Ford Foundation | New York, NY | \$360,000 |
| The Rockefeller Foundation | New York, NY | \$343,000 |

Funders based in United States; starting in year(s) 2009 - latest available; with text that includes ocean

Funder: International Community Foundation

Grantee: Pronatura Noroeste-Mar de Cortes

Amount: \$15,000

Year: 2018, over 1 year

Purpose: To support the operation of the Cabo Pulmo National Park Visitor Center to provide fully equipped audiovisual systems and interpretation exhibits on the marine and terrestrial ecosystems of the East Cape region. Pronatura will design and implement a participatory public education and interpretation program to provide visitors, residents, students, researchers and journalists with vivid information on the natural features of that region and the importance to conserve it.

Funder: The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations

Grantee: South Florida PBS

Amount: \$250,000

Year: 2019, over 1 year

Purpose: For the 11th Season of *Changing Seas* that explores the work of scientists studying the ocean.

Funder: David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Grantee: Communications Inc Limited

Amount: \$40,000

Year: 2019, over 9 months

Purpose: To provide regional and international media based in Chile, Mexico and Peru with an overview of the major ocean issues ahead of and post COP25.

Funder: The Keith Campbell Foundation for the Environment

Grantee: University of Southern California

Amount: \$70,000

Year: 2015, over 1 year

Purpose: To support a collaboration between the Smithsonian's Ocean Portal website and filmmaker/author Randy Olson to facilitate the communication of success stories in ocean conservation, drawing on the past success of the #oceanoptimism initiative.



Insights from Funders

Media Impact Funders asked a number of funders who support media to inform, educate, hold power to account and inspire action about their media-focused environmental work. They offer key insights into the myriad ways funders can use media effectively, as well as lessons learned, questions raised, and much more. Media Impact Funders is grateful to the essay authors for their insights. Opinions offered by essay authors are their own.

Why Don't We Put the Frontlines in Front?

Crystal Hayling
Executive Director, The Libra Foundation



Stories have power. Especially in these times of struggle, loss, and upheaval.

Our world needs the stories of truth-tellers, of resilience and community power, and of remarkable innovation. For far too long, the mainstream environmental movement has largely excluded these voices, especially low-income people of color, which diminishes our collective ability to create equitable, sustainable and lasting transformation.

While conservation of pristine lands is important, that story has drowned out the voices of those fighting the human toll taken by extractive and polluting industries. It has emphasized the role of wealthy donors who save land while turning down the volume of voices working to save poor people's health.

We can advance climate justice by supporting organizations that uplift the stories of communities on the frontlines of climate change. That's why The Libra Foundation specifically funds organizations that partner with community leaders to tell their own stories and share their own solutions, stories rooted in justice and stories

that have the power to ignite us into action. More than ever, philanthropy must resource independent media and media-serving groups—cultural contributions change hearts and minds, give faces to those made invisible, and push governments and corporations towards greater accountability.

A few examples of this cutting edge work:

- [Grist](#), which partners with frontline community groups to ensure that they are represented in media coverage of the environment and identifies and convenes emerging leaders who are working toward a just and sustainable future. It brings us truth-tellers like Angela Adrar, Executive Director of the Climate Justice Alliance, to reveal the true community impact of proposed climate solutions like carbon offset provisions—since communities of color often

will often experience a net negative impact. “Our communities can no longer be used as sacrifice zones,” Adrar told Grist.

- [The Center for Cultural Power](#), which is changing the narrative around climate justice with campaigns like ClimateWoke, partnering with artists, storytellers and community leaders to tell intersectional stories about climate, gender, and racial justice. It focuses attention on the vital connection between climate and social justice with authentic narratives and calls to action. The Center is lifting up stories of incarcerated people fighting out-of-control wildfires, immigrants suffering from heat-induced illnesses while laboring on our farms and low-income communities that are fighting back against toxic waste dumping grounds.
- [Center for Story-Based Strategy](#), which trains organizers to build their movements and change the world by changing the stories that shape our collective future. Its approach links movement-building with narrative power, and puts storytelling at the center of social change. CSS is training frontline groups about how to challenge dominant mythologies and shift the narrative about their issues, centering the stories they tell on the lived experiences of those most impacted.
- [Indigenous Environmental Network](#), which strengthens its advocacy campaigns by creating its own media strategies. Just as artists, actors and musicians were foundational drivers of the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, so too are they participating in and driving change now. The Indigenous-led protest movement at Standing Rock was an incredible example of local activists building a narrative of interdependence and environmental justice with global reach.

As funders, it’s our duty to show up in tough times. The field of environmental media funding is in flux, and the pace of change all across philanthropy will only accelerate during the current health and economic crisis. It’s on us to push open some doors, break down barriers and bring new voices to the table. Especially in light of COVID-19, we need to listen to grantee partners like the great ones listed above, give them unrestricted grants with as much flexibility as possible, and organize our colleagues—the time is now.

Q&A

Andrew Simon

Director of Leadership Programming
Grist

Interviewed by Media Impact Funders



Media Impact Funders asked Grist's Andrew Simon about the nonprofit news outlet's work to connect climate information with action, and new efforts to support environmental journalists of color.

Media Impact Funders: Grist is described as “an independent, irreverent news outlet and network of innovators working toward a planet that doesn’t burn and a future that doesn’t suck.” The “future that doesn’t suck” seems especially important right now. Why is that central to Grist’s mission?

Andrew Simon: People are aware climate change is happening, but few believe positive change is possible. There’s a lot of gloom and doom in climate reporting. And for good reason! The latest news about carbon emissions, extreme weather, and frontline communities is dire. However, we’re actively trying to shift the media conversation toward progress and equitable solutions. If there’s any shot at overcoming climate change, we feel it’s imperative to tell this story of what’s possible. And from a

practical angle, solutions can’t scale without exposure. For us, that means understanding our platform as a means for spurring action rooted in excitement and desire (as opposed to rage and despair). It’s not about picking winners and losers; it’s about acknowledging the role media can play in shaping the space of the possible—and acting responsibly with this power. To us, “solutions journalism” doesn’t mean riding the hype cycle. It means identifying viable plans and giving them light.

MIF: Connected to that first question, there’s a growing body of social science research on the relationship between people’s emotions and their ability to compel us to act (or not). For example, research shows that negative emotions can prevent people from taking action. And there’s nothing more depressing right now

than the state of our planet. So how do we make people feel good about taking action on climate change?

AS: The good news is that there's no shortage of stories about people, communities and organizations showing the world how we can achieve this better future. Whether it's a teenage activist organizing protests or a biking advocate pushing for more equitable transit options or a scientist who's finding a way to recycle carbon emissions, there are plenty of examples of change in action. It's part of the reason we produce the [Grist 50](#), an annual list of emerging leaders and innovators, to help show what a diverse, vibrant sustainability movement looks like.

MIF: Grist is focused on environmental solutions from and for diverse people and communities. Tell us about your focus on being diverse, equitable and inclusive.

AS: We started one of the first environmental justice desks in the country. We leaned into this beat to cover communities that had traditionally been left out of the broader climate narrative. Today, our environmental justice desk is staffed with five full-time reporters—which we believe amounts to the nation's largest team.

Through reporting, we've also shown that frontline communities, often communities of color, are driving some of the most innovative and high-impact solutions—and always have been. We've done stories about indigenous tribes adapting farming practices, Latinx communities leading conservation efforts, and a black church taking on the fossil fuel lobby. These examples are a handful among many, many others.

MIF: Can you share some examples of special projects that are advancing Grist's DEI efforts even more? How did they evolve and who is supporting them?

AS: One recent example is a new effort Grist has helped pilot called the Environmental Journalists of Color network. It's an early-stage initiative, but the ambition is to create a transformative network of journalists that connects in person, supports one another's work, and over time builds up the talent pipeline. We went through a process of

interviewing about 25 environmental journalists of color to test the idea and see if there was a desire for such a network. We heard a lot of enthusiasm. In the time since, the network has held meetups, formed a steering committee of journalists (outside and inside Grist), and is beginning to define its mission.

We've been thankful to have a variety of seed-funding partners and future pledges—including the MacArthur Foundation, Solidaire Network, the Brainerd Foundation, the Seattle Foundation, the Libra Fund and the Bullitt Foundation. These organizations' support goes toward convening expenses and stipends for national steering committee members, who commit regular hours to the work.

MIF: What can funders learn from this work, and how can philanthropy better support efforts around the environment and environmental justice?

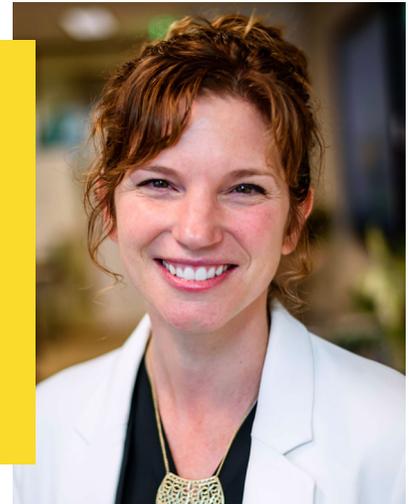
AS: When it comes to improving diversity, equity and inclusion practices, I'd like to see longer-term commitments to institutional change. At both media and environmental organizations, I find that well-intended efforts are often underfunded and short-lived. There's also a need for more people of color and journalists of color in hiring, management, and leadership positions. I'm also a fan of internal and external accountability structures. Without a reason to move, sometimes the movement doesn't happen. Funders can help cement these structures. As thought leaders, they can also showcase examples of success.

The exciting part is that a talent pipeline for environmental journalists of color exists! And it's growing.

Supporting Trusted, Local Storytellers for Ocean Health

Meaghan Calcari Campbell

Program Officer, Marine Conservation Initiative, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation



The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation’s ocean conservation goal in Canada is to achieve healthy and resilient marine ecosystems. The ocean is about more than fish and whales—it is a crossroads of people’s livelihoods and lived experiences, their special places and backyards, and a source of peace and awe. To achieve ocean health, we need to have a civically engaged and diverse group of people who are tapping into what makes the ocean compelling. Media content and journalism are some of the tools the foundation supports to take ocean issues from the abstract to the specific.

We understand that some of the most trusted storytellers are Indigenous spokespeople and other local community members like fishermen. They are seen as knowledgeable, with agency and intention to make positive change, and genuinely caring and respectful of the places they live. These messengers help activate our imaginations around a vision for what is possible.

This resonates with me. Even though I have lived in San Francisco for 16 years, I still get my hometown’s weekly

newspaper delivered to my doorstep, straight from rural southern Illinois. It features stories told by the people who live there—farmers, teachers, and small business owners – and their concerns about the small town’s everyday life.

Despite the importance of trusted, local storytellers, professional journalism has been stung by consolidations and cut budgets, greatly reducing the depth and breadth of coverage on environmental issues, oceans included.

We have lost key reporting from ocean communities and

a platform for diverse voices to tell their stories, which results in some voices or narratives being privileged and others being silenced.

Accordingly, the theory of change for targeted media grantmaking in our ocean conservation work is based on the following:

- media about ocean conservation remains largely scant or underreported;
- yet readers engage in and benefit from meaningful content and otherwise unheard stories from trusted messengers;
- a more informed audience is able to have improved public discourse, organize, and act on the solutions being explored; and
- through watchdog journalists whose stories have editorial independence, this engagement helps build in broader accountability in our democratic systems and affirmation for change from political leaders, decision-makers, and communities.

We have supported several media entities in our grant portfolio. [Green Fire Productions](#) has created media content via movies that feature voices on the water, like [The Great Bear Sea – Reflecting on the Past, Planning for the Future](#). Green Fire hosts packed film screenings in places that range from remote communities to aquaria in urban centers and the halls of Parliament, and screenings are often followed by an in-depth Q&A with the storytellers featured in the film.

Two other grant partners include the [Institute for Journalism and Natural Resources](#) (IJNR) and [Society of Environmental Journalists](#) (SEJ), where our support has helped both organizations deliver grants to freelance journalists for travel and independent reporting. By being in communities, meeting leaders and experiencing these places directly, journalists are better able to report stories accurately and compellingly, with solutions-oriented voices that would go otherwise unrepresented. Journalists are enabled to share

stories that address complex, abstract and often-contentious environmental issues through nuanced and diverse perspectives. Through this, journalists can better equip readers with the information needed to understand the issues and decide the best courses of accountable action for themselves, their communities and society. IJNR specifically supports journalism sub-grants that increase in-depth coverage of Indigenous Protected Areas, while SEJ supports sub-grants that increase ocean conservation reporting.

As the foundation works within a strategic philanthropy context, impact evaluation is important to us. For example, Green Fire Productions collects audience surveys during their film screenings, and these show that participants leave feeling inspired and activated, often listing ways they will become more involved in ocean conservation. IJNR and SEJ actively collect impact data on the stories that journalists produce. These metrics include distribution channels, story traffic summaries and results highlights (e.g., qualitative anecdotes of impact on decision-makers or shares by influencers).

Together, these grant partners are working to widen the lens, uncover untold stories and broaden the narrative—sharing stories that are more interesting, more complex and less polarizing. And, readers are responding, because the health of our oceans ultimately connects us all.

Communications & Media Capacity: Invest Early, Before the Crisis

Joya Banerjee
Program Director, S.D. Bechtel Foundation



“The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.”

-John F. Kennedy



California’s water past is defined by myth, complexity and hydrologic and ideological extremes. California’s water future can be defined by innovation, collaboration and leadership—but not without a shared understanding of solutions.

Background. California’s water system supports over 30 million people, the world’s fifth largest economy, diverse natural ecosystems and one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. Yet this critical system is under significant stress; Californians face increased water scarcity, declining water quality, greater flood risk, and the deteriorating health of ecosystems. Across the state new approaches to water management are addressing these challenges. Still, solutions are not always implemented at the necessary scale or pace—in part because [myths about water villains abound](#).

Water Program. As part of its plan to spend down by 2020, the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation launched a 10-year grantmaking

program focused on California water management. A significant part of the grant portfolio included strengthening the field’s capacity to convert data to information, information to knowledge, and knowledge to action.

Data to Information. With respect to water, California is data rich, and information poor. To address this challenge, the Foundation supported the launch of OpenET. [OpenET](#) combines Google’s computing power, data from a suite of NASA satellites, and decades of research by the scientific community to make data about agricultural water use widely accessible. This user-friendly platform—due to launch in early 2021—will fill one of the biggest information gaps in water and create a shared basis for decision making.

Information to Knowledge. California is home to world-recognized research institutions, but research is often confined within disciplines and targets scientific audiences. To address this challenge, the Foundation supported the launch of the PPIC Water Policy Center. By bridging the gap between rigorous scientific research and complex policy problems, the [PPIC Water Policy Center](#) offers timely, credible and actionable information on the state's major water challenges. PPIC's [briefing kits](#) and other publications are regularly used by a range of decision makers and advocates who engage in water policy.

Knowledge to Action. Data, information and knowledge are necessary, but insufficient, conditions for change. Leaders must share a vision so that data, information and knowledge end up in the right hands—and the right context—for action. The Foundation supported the launch of the [Water Foundation](#) in 2010 and the Water Hub in 2018. The Water Foundation brings together communities, business, academics, utilities, environmental and social justice advocates and others to turn policies once considered improbable into mainstream practices. The [Water Hub](#) supports underrepresented voices in media to provide perspectives that can expand the reach and resonance of media coverage. These two organizations coordinate closely with nonprofits and other partners to develop the strategy, narratives and spokespeople to support shared goals and turn knowledge into action.

Lessons Learned/Recommendations

Invest in multi-year capacity early, before moments of crisis. The Foundation provided these organizations with multi-year, flexible funding to support program work as well as organizational capacity. As a result, the **Water Foundation** was able to quickly respond to California's historic drought and support media strategies that contributed to the passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014. The same is now true for the **Water Hub**. COVID-19 has triggered a wave of media interest in water access and affordability, as well as a surge in advocacy. With flexible support, the Water Hub responded to this interest and connected reporters with groups on the frontlines of these issues, including the Navajo Nation.

Consider trust as an essential outcome. Given the prevalence of water myths and misinformation, the Foundation funded the slow and deliberate work to build trust. For example, when **PPIC** launched a project focused on water in the San Joaquin Valley, staff engaged in extensive local outreach and relationship-building activities. This engagement created the space for constructive conversation and collaboration. It also created an active audience for the release of publications like [Water and the Future of the San Joaquin Valley](#). Similarly, the **OpenET** team worked closely with agricultural stakeholders across California and the American West from the project's inception. The partnerships allowed the **OpenET** team to gather important input on the design of the tool, and in doing so, built trust within the agricultural community. And, for the first six months of the **Water Hub's** work, staff spent considerable time listening to the field and building relationships. This “quiet phase” was essential, and it is enabling the work that the Hub is doing to bring awareness and resources to COVID relief efforts.

Final Reflection

We face unprecedented environmental and social challenges, and we are justifiably impatient with the pace of change. This is one reason why the S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation decided to invest all of its assets sooner rather than later. At the same time, as funders, we must consider the long game, adopt a broader view of outcomes, and ultimately move away from the myth that philanthropy can support program work without considering core capacity. This is especially true for communications and media capacity. Philanthropy must invest in both, well before the moments of crisis.

Strategic Support for Climate-focused Journalism

Devon Terrill

Journalism and Media Program Officer, Stanley Center for Peace and Security



With a global challenge as immense as climate change, there is a need to match that scale with quality journalism and media covering the crisis in every country and community worldwide. Global journalism initiatives like [#CoveringClimateNow](#) have rightfully strived to increase reporting on climate issues to meet the urgency of the problem—to adequately inform the public of the impacts of climate change and efforts to address it, while also holding power to account.

As a globally-oriented, private operating foundation focused on the most profound threats to human survival and well-being (including climate change), the [Stanley Center for Peace and Security](#)'s journalism and media programming team had to decide how to ensure that journalists can effectively cover a story that is unfolding at all levels of society—from the hyper-local to the global.

Drawing on our organizational strengths and priorities in the international policy space, we looked for opportunities to help journalists access and better understand the international policy process and global collective

action currently underway as part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). At the center of this process is the landmark Paris Agreement, and the commitment from nearly every nation in the world to lower carbon emissions and limit the increase in global average temperature to 1.5°C above pre industrial levels.

So, how does a small team leverage limited resources to enable quality journalism at the international climate policy level? Since the Stanley Center is not a grantmaker, but rather designs and implements its own programming to pursue its vision, mission and goals, our first step is to look

for outstanding partners who are open to working in close collaboration to meet shared objectives. We then bring our resources to that joint effort (sometimes with more than one partner) so that each organization benefits from pooled expertise, experience and capacity. Programming includes workshops, training, bringing journalists into policy conversations and international reporting fellowships.

As one example, starting in 2016, we began partnering with global journalism organizations to co-organize reporting fellowship programs that bring 10-20 journalists to the annual UN climate negotiations (the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties, or COP) hosted in a different country each year. Three of these fellowships were co-organized with Internews' Earth Journalism Network, a global network of around 9,000 environmental journalists from 130 countries, as part of a long-running initiative called the Climate Change Media Partnership.

Fellowships of this sort are geared to developing country-based journalists—who are often underrepresented in international policy venues—allowing them to attend and report from the UN climate talks and receive substantive and logistical support in the months leading up to the conference. The goal is to help journalists improve their understanding of the UNFCCC process, track negotiations, contextualize or scrutinize statements or commitments from world leaders and share developments with their national or local media audiences back home. Beyond these objectives, other outcomes include increasing numbers of published stories, evidence that journalism created greater accountability and specialized knowledge among journalists that elevates their professional profiles and bolsters their climate coverage for years to come.

In addition to our collaborations with Internews' Earth Journalism Network, we have done some exciting work with another global journalism organization, [Climate Tracker](#) (see Q&A on next page), which focuses its efforts on supporting early-career journalists covering international climate negotiations and running climate journalism trainings in Africa, Asia and Latin America. In 2019, we partnered with Climate Tracker to organize a youth climate journalism fellowship for eight young climate journalists covering the UN's first ever Youth Climate Summit, the UN Secretary General's Climate Action Summit and other key climate events (including a massive youth-led

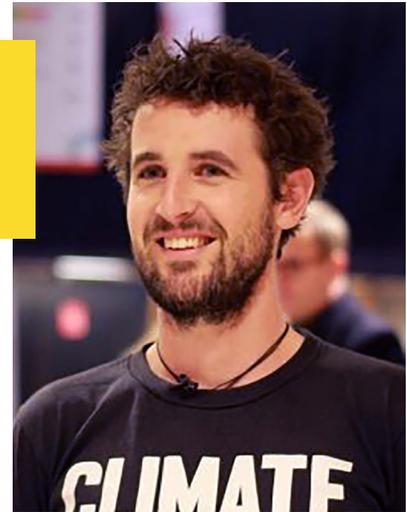
climate march). This led to exceptional reporting, while also introducing young journalists to key dimensions of climate action and diplomacy. Teaming up with Climate Tracker to carry out this fellowship ended up laying the groundwork for a newly launched collaboration between our organizations to assist journalists covering coal phase-out and the transition to clean energy in Southeast Asia.

Importantly, even as we work closely with partner organizations and journalists in our programming, we are careful to respect editorial independence and principles of ethical journalism. As reflected in our organizational [core values](#), the Stanley Center believes that independent, accurate journalism plays a critical role building better-informed societies, more-accountable institutions and effective global governance. Equipping journalists to better report the facts is the starting point for any programming idea we pursue.

For a global challenge as serious as climate change, we believe that strategic support for climate-focused journalism is critical. As climate impacts increase and as policymakers and individuals make choices about how to respond, equipping journalists with resources, skills and opportunities to cover this story effectively from a variety of angles—from local to international—contributes positively to the collective action needed to slow the dangerous warming of our planet.

Q&A

Chris Wright

Managing Director
Climate Tracker

Interviewed by Devon Terrill, Journalism and Media Program Officer at the Stanley Center for Peace and Security



The Stanley Center's Devon Terrill chatted with Climate Tracker's Chris Wright about the evolution of the organization and why supporting local, early-career journalists from around the world is so important.

Devon Terrill: Why did you start Climate Tracker in 2015 and how has it evolved?

Chris Wright: Climate Tracker was a project that evolved through my experience in UN climate negotiations. I joined my first UN meeting as a researcher in 2011, but had been a freelancer back in Australia.

There I met lots of NGOs that were all trying to “get more media attention” at the level of UN climate diplomacy. When they thought of “the media” back then, they meant “the Guardian, The Times, Reuters and AP.” It was 2011, so Twitter as a reporting tool was still relatively new, and well-curated blogs were becoming powerful.

Within 18 months, I began working for one of these NGOs, managing a project to bring young bloggers to the UN meetings. Still, however, they were thinking through the lens of the media and political powerhouses, and I felt we had the biggest potential in underserved markets.

After a few years, I began plotting with my manager to take this project independent, and focus on using the UN space as a launching pad to get young journalists around the world to write more about climate change. This was in the lead-up to the UN climate talks in Paris in 2015.

That’s when Climate Tracker was born. We published 400 articles during that conference, and hit front pages in Madagascar, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Spain, and even got some stories in the Guardian.

DT: What would you say is your organization's unique contribution to climate-focused journalism?

CW: I think our model of supporting young climate journalists to publish within their national media has enabled a lot of media organizations and markets to improve their climate coverage at no extra cost.

We want the journalists we support to become domestic "media shapers" for years to come, not just during our program timelines.

I think a lot of organizations' well-intentioned journalism initiatives unfortunately end up moving great local journalists out of their national media debates; either by hiring them to work in their NGOs, or by supporting them to step out of their local market to write primarily for higher-paying international publications.

When this happens to one of our stars, that's great. But the vast majority of the reporters we have supported continue their work in-house, now with more skills, networks and story angles to bring to their work. And in many cases, they become either the sole, or premiere climate reporter in their outlet, and sometimes, country.

DT: How do you fund your organization's work?

CW: The media is in a tough financial moment. COVID-19 has made things worse, but perhaps only sped up a process that was already spiraling in many countries. One of the models that relatively few news organizations have tried is the nonprofit news model. This is effectively how we have funded our organization since late 2015.

Our focus has been slightly different from audience-targeted content, and most of our funding has come from larger NGOs or European foundations.

Most of these partnerships revolve around improving the reporting of specific climate or environmental themes in specific media markets. This is when we have utilized one of our training or competitive mentoring programs.

This makes our work incredibly diverse. However, this model is not for the light-hearted. We've yet to receive funding for our operations, and it can be grueling trying to juggle a series of projects in different geographies.

DT: What is your favorite Climate Tracker success story?

CW: After close to 15,000 journalists have gone through our programs, it's hard to choose the best success story. But with a bias for most recent successes, the phenomenal transformation of Manka Behl's reporting at the Times of India is definitely up there. Manka applied to our programs in mid-2018, as a regional beat reporter with the Times. She came into her first UN conference competing with a wall of older, senior Indian reporters from Delhi and Mumbai. Those first few days in Poland in December were really challenging.

But soon she found herself breaking stories, reframing narratives and publishing her reports nationally, to an audience of one billion readers.

She then joined us again in New York for a 2019 fellowship co-organized with the Stanley Center, to cover the UN Secretary General's Global Climate Action Summit. By this time, she'd made a transition to becoming one of the most sought-out reporters in India covering air pollution, coal expansion and climate impacts and the work that came out of that fellowship was both prolific and highly influential.

Environmental Media Funding: Strategies for Impact

Diane Ives
Fund Advisor, Kendeda Fund



Quick, can you name one film that had the greatest impact on your worldview? A movie that, when the credits rolled, you realized that you would never be the same again?

For me, it was “[The Deer Hunter](#)”, a story about men from a small town going to fight in Vietnam. When the film came out in 1978, I was 17 years old. I had grown up ignorant of the devastation of the war that raged for most of my childhood. After seeing the film, I promised myself that I would always be aware of and engaged in the world around me.

When “The Deer Hunter” was released, the world was not as saturated with compelling media. Today’s media landscape is significantly different and filmmakers and storytellers need to break through the noise to make sure their stories resonate. One way to do that is to develop an impact strategy that identifies key audiences, actions and opportunities.

Since 2016 the Kendeda Fund has partnered with the [Sundance Institute](#) to help guide our documentary film and impact grants. Working with them offers us the opportunity to witness the increasingly sophisticated ways that filmmakers are developing and implementing impact campaigns.

Here are three integrated trends that I am seeing in many of the environmental documentary films the Kendeda Fund supports.

The Relationship: There is a growing understanding among filmmakers that in order for a film to be of highest and best use, the filmmakers should cultivate an equitable relationship with the communities that are the subject or backdrop of the story. Some communities are positioning themselves as “producers” of their own stories in collaboration with filmmakers. In collaboration with community, these artists are able to identify and target select audiences whose worldview and actions could become better aligned with communities seeking equity and justice. ([Working Films](#) has a simple document that outlines the [Story Shift](#) taking place.) One example is the work of virtual

reality artist Lynette Wallworth. Her recent piece, [Awavena](#), was created in collaboration with the Yawanawa, an Amazonian people who share their shamanistic worldview of a people ascending from the edge of extinction. The VR has been shown at the Davos Economic Forum, the Global Climate Action Summit and other gatherings of decision makers, evoking empathy and providing opportunities for decision-makers to walk in another’s shoes before making decisions that could impact marginalized communities.

The Audience: As a movie project nears completion, filmmakers are often focused on securing a distribution deal. An “impact-first” strategy, by contrast, starts with a much different priority. It puts the audience—not the deal—first, asking fundamental questions like “Who do we want to reach and why?” and “To what effect?” The short film “[Water Warriors](#),” which was made in 2017 and chronicles the successful efforts of a rural community in New Brunswick, Canada to stop gas fracking, continues to be used by communities organizing against dirty energy projects. Filmmaker Michael Premo’s goal has been to give hope and inspiration to communities on the frontlines of energy extraction projects. The film aired on public television’s POV in the fall of 2019 – two years after it was completed.

For filmmaker Kalyanee Mam, the completion of “[A River Changes Course](#)” was the beginning of a robust impact campaign with Cambodian audiences, engaging them, often for the first time, in a conversation about the environmental impacts of a globalized economy. For her next project, Mam is planning an impact campaign that draws from the cultural and oral storytelling values of Cambodian communities. Mam, and her protagonists, will undertake a “Journey to the Heart of Cambodia”—a cross-Cambodia trek to share the film in local communities using a solar-cinema pop-up. The Journey will link different forms of narrative to demonstrate a shared understanding of how Cambodia’s traditional past can help heal the wounds of war, oppression and the country’s selfish desire for power and material wealth. In this new model of distribution, the film is first given to the community it is about, and then shared more broadly by the community with their sensibilities for how to distribute the film.

The Ecosystem: There is a nascent field that I call the “impact ecosystem,” where multiple storytellers, activists and experts engage in shared narrative and strategies. [Exposure Labs](#) and the [Doc Society](#) are building an impact ecosystem around climate change storytelling. To-date, the groups have hosted [Climate Story Labs](#) in New York and London. In each lab, a dozen storytellers (filmmakers, podcasters, comedians, virtual reality artists, etc.) engage with one another for a week on their works in-production. They hear from leading scientists and climate activists, they share their projects, they get feedback and offers for help and connections. The storytellers explore how their collective works will make an impact on the climate change narrative—mutually reinforcing stories that weave together a stronger and bigger fabric that will enable audiences to feel connected as they gain new understanding about climate action.

For the Kendeda Fund, supporting storytelling and, in particular, film, is core to our environmental grantmaking. Focusing on impact is our way to unleash the power of media to inspire, to agitate, to build empathy, and to change hearts and minds on big, intractable issues. I was forever changed by seeing “The Deer Hunter” when I was a teenager. And like many of us in this field, my lifelong commitment to social change and environmental justice is formed by the stories that broaden my worldview and affirm just how much our actions and our voices matter. That’s the kind of impact that lasts.

We Are Creating Conditions for Diseases Like Covid-19 to Emerge

John Vidal

Former Environment Editor, The Guardian



Mayibout 2 is not a healthy place. The 150 or so people who live in the village, which sits on the south bank of the Ivindo River, deep in the great Minkebe forest in northern Gabon, are used to occasional bouts of diseases such as malaria, dengue, yellow fever and sleeping sickness. Mostly they shrug them off.

But in January 1996, Ebola, a deadly virus then barely known to humans, unexpectedly [spilled out of the forest](#) in a wave of small epidemics. The disease killed 21 of 37 villagers who were reported to have been infected, including a number who had carried, skinned, chopped or eaten a chimpanzee from the nearby forest.

I traveled to Mayibout 2 in 2004 to investigate why deadly diseases new to humans were emerging from biodiversity “hot spots” like tropical rainforests and bushmeat markets in African and Asian cities.

It took a day by canoe and then many hours down degraded forest logging roads passing Baka villages and a small gold mine to reach the village. There, I found traumatized people still fearful that the deadly virus, [which kills up to 90% of the people it infects](#), would return.

Villagers [told me](#) how children had gone into the forest with dogs that had killed a chimp. They said that everyone who cooked or ate it got a terrible fever within a few hours. Some died immediately, while others were taken down the river to hospital. A few, like Nesto Bematsick, recovered. “We used to love the forest, now we fear it,” he told me. Many of Bematsick’s family members died.

Only a decade or two ago it was widely thought that tropical forests and intact natural environments teeming with exotic wildlife threatened humans by harboring the viruses and pathogens that lead to new diseases in humans like Ebola, HIV and dengue.

But a number of researchers today think that it is actually humanity’s destruction of biodiversity that creates the conditions for new viruses and diseases like COVID-19, the

viral disease that emerged in China in December 2019, to arise—with profound health and economic impacts in rich and poor countries alike. In fact, a new discipline, planetary health, is emerging that focuses on the increasingly visible connections among the well-being of humans, other living things and entire ecosystems.

Is it possible, then, that it was human activity, such as road building, mining, hunting and logging, that triggered the Ebola epidemics in Mayibout 2 and elsewhere in the 1990s and that is unleashing new terrors today?

“We invade tropical forests and other wild landscapes, which harbor so many species of animals and plants—and within those creatures, so many unknown viruses,” David Quammen, author of *Spillover: Animal Infections and the Next Pandemic*, [recently wrote](#) in the New York Times. “We cut the trees; we kill the animals or cage them and send them to markets. We disrupt ecosystems, and we shake viruses loose from their natural hosts. When that happens, they need a new host. Often, we are it.”

Increasing Threat

[Research suggests](#) that outbreaks of animal-borne and other infectious diseases like Ebola, SARS, bird flu and now COVID-19, caused by a novel coronavirus, are on the rise. Pathogens are [crossing from animals to humans](#), and many are now able to spread quickly to new places. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that three-quarters of “new or emerging” diseases that infect humans originate in nonhuman animals.

Some, like rabies and plague, crossed from animals centuries ago. Others, like Marburg, which is thought to be transmitted by bats, are still rare. A few, like COVID-19, which emerged last year in Wuhan, China, and MERS, which is linked to camels in the Middle East, are new to humans and spreading globally.

Other diseases [that have crossed into humans](#) include [Lassa fever](#), which was first identified in 1969 in Nigeria; Nipah from Malaysia; and SARS from China, which killed more than 700 people and traveled to 30 countries in 2002–03. Some, like Zika and West Nile virus, which emerged in Africa, have mutated and become established on other continents.

Kate Jones, chair of ecology and biodiversity at UCL, calls emerging animal-borne infectious diseases an “increasing and very significant threat to global health,

security and economies.”

Amplification Effect

In 2008, Jones and a team of researchers [identified](#) 335 diseases that emerged between 1960 and 2004, at least 60 percent of which came from non-human animals.

Increasingly, says Jones, these zoonotic diseases are linked to environmental change and human behavior. The disruption of pristine forests driven by logging, mining, [road building through remote places](#), rapid urbanization and population growth is bringing people into closer contact with animal species they may never have been near before, she says.

The resulting transmission of disease from wildlife to humans, she says, is now “a hidden cost of human economic development. There are just so many more of us, in every environment. We are going into largely undisturbed places and being exposed more and more. We are creating habitats where viruses are transmitted more easily, and then we are surprised that we have new ones.”

Jones studies how land use change contributes to the risk. “We are researching how species in degraded habitats are likely to carry more viruses which can infect humans,” she says. “Simpler systems get an amplification effect. Destroy landscapes, and the species you are left with are the ones humans get the diseases from.”

“There are countless pathogens out there continuing to evolve which at some point could pose a threat to humans,” says Eric Fevre, chair of veterinary infectious diseases at the University of Liverpool’s [Institute of Infection and Global Health](#). “The risk [of pathogens jumping from animals to humans] has always been there.”

The difference between now and a few decades ago, Fevre says, is that diseases are likely to spring up in both urban and natural environments. “We have created densely packed populations where alongside us are bats and rodents and birds, pets and other living things. That creates intense interaction and opportunities for things to move from species to species,” he says.

Tip of the Iceberg

“Pathogens do not respect species boundaries,” says disease ecologist Thomas Gillespie, an associate professor in Emory University’s [Department of Environmental Sciences](#)

who studies how shrinking natural habitats and changing behavior add to the risks of diseases spilling over from animals to humans.

“I am not at all surprised about the coronavirus outbreak,” he says. “The majority of pathogens are still to be discovered. We are at the very tip of the iceberg.”

Humans, says Gillespie, are creating the conditions for the spread of diseases by reducing the natural barriers between virus host animals—in which the virus is naturally circulating—and themselves. “We fully expect the arrival of pandemic influenza; we can expect large-scale human mortalities; we can expect other pathogens with other impacts. A disease like Ebola is not easily spread. But something with a mortality rate of Ebola spread by something like measles would be catastrophic,” Gillespie says.

Wildlife everywhere is being put under more stress, he says. “Major landscape changes are causing animals to lose habitats, which means species become crowded together and also come into greater contact with humans. Species that survive change are now moving and mixing with different animals and with humans.”

Gillespie sees this in the U.S., where suburbs fragmenting forests raise the risk of humans contracting Lyme disease. “Altering the ecosystem affects the complex cycle of the Lyme pathogen. People living close by are more likely to get bitten by a tick carrying Lyme bacteria,” he says.

Yet human health research seldom considers the surrounding natural ecosystems, says Richard Ostfeld, distinguished senior scientist at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook, New York. He and others are developing the emerging discipline of planetary health, which looks at the links between human and ecosystem health.

“There’s misapprehension among scientists and the public that natural ecosystems are the source of threats to ourselves. It’s a mistake. Nature poses threats, it is true, but it’s human activities that do the real damage. The health risks in a natural environment can be made much worse when we interfere with it,” he says.

Ostfeld points to [rats](#) and [bats](#), which are strongly linked with the direct and indirect spread of zoonotic diseases. “Rodents and some bats thrive when we disrupt natural habitats. They are the most likely to promote transmissions [of pathogens]. The more we disturb the forests and habitats the more danger we are in,” he says.

Felicia Keesing, professor of biology at Bard College, New York, studies how environmental changes influence the probability that humans will be exposed to infectious diseases. “When we erode biodiversity, we see a proliferation of the species most likely to transmit new diseases to us, but there’s also good evidence that those same species are the best hosts for existing diseases,” she wrote in an email to Ensia.

The Market Connection

Disease ecologists argue that viruses and other pathogens are also likely to move from animals to humans in the many informal markets that have sprung up to provide fresh meat to fast-growing urban populations around the world. Here animals are slaughtered, cut up and sold on the spot.

The “wet market” (one that sells fresh produce and meat) in Wuhan, thought by the Chinese government to be the starting point of the current COVID-19 pandemic, was known to sell [numerous wild animals](#), including live wolf pups, salamanders, crocodiles, scorpions, rats, squirrels, foxes, civets and turtles.

Equally, urban markets in west and central Africa see monkeys, bats, rats and dozens of species of bird, mammal, insect and rodent slaughtered and sold close to open refuse dumps and with no drainage.

“Wet markets make a perfect storm for cross-species transmission of pathogens,” says Gillespie. “Whenever you have novel interactions with a range of species in one place, whether that is in a natural environment like a forest or a wet market, you can have a spillover event.”

The Wuhan market, along with others that sell live animals, has been shut by the Chinese authorities, and the government in February [outlawed trading and eating wild animals](#) except for fish and seafood. But bans on live animals being sold in urban areas or informal markets are not the answer, say some scientists.

“The wet market in Lagos is notorious. It’s like a nuclear bomb waiting to happen. But it’s not fair to demonize places which do not have fridges. These traditional markets provide much of the food for Africa and Asia,” says Jones.

“These markets are essential sources of food for hundreds of millions of poor people, and getting rid of them is impossible,” says Delia Grace, a senior epidemiologist and veterinarian with the International Livestock Research

Institute, which is based in Nairobi, Kenya. She argues that bans force traders underground, where they may pay less attention to hygiene.

Fevre and Cecilia Tacoli, principal researcher in the human settlements research group at the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), [argue in a blog post](#) that “rather than pointing the finger at wet markets,” we should look at the burgeoning trade in wild animals.

“[I]t is wild animals rather than farmed animals that are the natural hosts of many viruses,” they write. “Wet markets are considered part of the informal food trade that is often blamed for contributing to spreading disease. But ... evidence shows the link between informal markets and disease [is not always so clear cut](#).”

Changing Behavior

So what, if anything, can we do about all of this?

Jones says that change must come from both rich and poor societies. Demand for wood, minerals and resources from the Global North leads to the degraded landscapes and ecological disruption that drives disease, she says. “We must think about global biosecurity, find the weak points and bolster the provision of health care in developing countries. Otherwise we can expect more of the same,” she says.

“The risks are greater now. They were always present and have been there for generations. It is our interactions with that risk which must be changed,” says Brian Bird, a research virologist at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine One Health Institute, where he leads Ebola-related surveillance activities in Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

“We are in an era now of chronic emergency,” Bird says. “Diseases are more likely to travel further and faster than before, which means we must be faster in our responses. It needs investments, change in human behavior, and it means we must listen to people at community levels.”

Getting the message about pathogens and disease to hunters, loggers, market traders and consumers is key, Bird says. “These spillovers start with one or two people. The solutions start with education and awareness. We must make people aware things are different now. I have learned from working in Sierra Leone with Ebola-affected people

that local communities have the hunger and desire to have information,” he says. “They want to know what to do. They want to learn.”

Fevre and Tacoli advocate rethinking urban infrastructure, particularly within low-income and informal settlements. “Short-term efforts are focused on containing the spread of infection,” [they write](#). “The longer term—given that new infectious diseases will likely continue to spread rapidly into and within cities—calls for an overhaul of current approaches to urban planning and development.”

The bottom line, Bird says, is to be prepared. “We can’t predict where the next pandemic will come from, so we need mitigation plans to take into account the worst possible scenarios,” he says. “The only certain thing is that the next one will certainly come.”

This piece was originally jointly published with the Guardian and Ensia (with support from funds raised through [NewsMatch](#)).

Conclusion



There can be no doubt that funders must support and sustain media that advances environmental health, before it is too late. The urgency of the issue is impossible to overstate, and the opportunity to go all in is fleeting. As we look toward a different future than the one we lived only a few months ago, funders have a chance to do more and better environmental work that sets our global community on a path toward resilience and health—for people and the planet.

As our guest authors outlined, the environmental movement is deeply tied to storytelling, data mapping and access, and advocacy communications. But other clear themes surfaced, which are tremendously important.

- We have to rethink our systems—food, water, transportation, and economic. Returning to the status quo when COVID-19 (hopefully) settles down will waste the global reset that this virus has created.
- We must include many more voices in our work, and ensure the stories being told are by those most impacted by climate change and environmental destruction. They are the people creating innovative ways to move forward with equity, biodiversity and resilience in mind.
- Building trust—as a journalist, filmmaker, radio producer or data analyst—ensures the media being made and shared provides the most value to communities at the center of stories and information.

- Coverage matters, and supporting high quality, local journalism is critical to wide-ranging efforts that hold power to account, especially related to complex and global issues like climate change and water rights.

As funders increase their support for environmental media, we invite you to continue the conversation and share your insights. Examples of impact campaigns, film and video, interactive games, journalism and geographic mapping systems contribute to our shared understanding of the field, and help identify gaps in funding, and opportunities for collaboration. There is no more urgent issue of our time.

Be sure to visit mediainpactfunders.org for upcoming programming around environmental media, interviews, case studies and more.

Appendix

Since 2013, Media Impact Funders (MIF) has been tracking grantmaking in the growing fields of media and philanthropy with our media grants data map, developed in partnership with Candid. In 2016, we released a report on trends in media grantmaking, which revealed the field is growing rapidly and is far larger than previously expected. Following that research, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, we examined the international funding picture in our 2019 report, [Global Media Philanthropy: What Funders Need to Know About Data, Trends and Pressing Issues Facing the Field](#). Having focused on broad national and international trends and data, MIF is creating a series of smaller reports to identify trends, questions and examples of innovation around key issues of interest to our members and supporters. In spring 2019, we published [Radio & Audio Grantmaking: Reaching New Audiences Through Old Platforms](#) and in fall 2019 we published [Journalism Grantmaking: New Funding, Models and Partnerships to Sustain and Grow the Field](#).

Information about the data and methodology

Data for this report relied on keyword searching, such as ‘conservation’ and ‘climate change’ and was then reviewed for relevance. For example, grants with the word ‘conservation’ in the grant description that were related to conservation of books or art were removed from the totals cited. We recognize the data is complex and that grant descriptions, and therefore coding, are not as consistent or robust as we would like. **Consequently, there is likely more funding for environmentally-focused media than the map shows, but this data offer the best available snapshot and serves as an important baseline around environmental media philanthropy.**

The data map only shows grantmaking investments, not other financial instruments such as loans or equity stakes.

Data is collected in several ways. Funders submit their giving data directly to Candid (formerly Foundation Center) and Candid also reviews 990 tax forms and other public information. Data is then coded according to grant description and other details. As noted above, grants included in the media map include a wide range of approaches that some funders don’t consider part of their media work. For example, a funder supporting development of web content for educational use might consider that an education grant, rather than a media grant for an educational outcome.

Recognizing that the scope of the taxonomy developed in partnership with Candid includes media-related grants outside of some funders’ portfolios, readers are encouraged to explore the map themselves using search parameters that fit their funding guidelines.

The top-level taxonomy includes:

- Media Content and Platforms
- Telecommunications Infrastructure
- Media Applications and Tools
- Media Access and Policy
- Journalism, News and Information

Within these wider categories of funding there are 25 sub-categories, including radio, film and video, mobile media, media justice, internet access, freedom of expression, investigative journalism, etc. [More information about the definitions and coding methods are available on the data map.](#)