



FINAL REPORT

October 2023

JOURNALISM AND PHILANTHROPY: GROWTH, DIVERSITY, AND POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Presented by:

Jennifer Preston

Consultant, Media Impact Funders

Tom Rosenstiel

University of Maryland and NORC

Marjorie Connelly

NORC at the University of Chicago

Betsy Broaddus

NORC at the University of Chicago

Jennifer Benz

NORC at the University of Chicago

With research support from:

The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

Media Impact Funders

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur
Foundation

Arnold Ventures

CONTENTS

Section I. An Overview: Why Are Funders Investing in News and Media Organizations?	3
Charting the Growth of Philanthropic Support for News	4
Potential Conflicts of Interest on Donor Transparency and Donor Influence	8
Section II. The Survey of Funders Supporting Journalism and News Media	11
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	12
Why Do Funders Fund Journalism and What Are They Funding?	13
Transparency	16
Local Journalism	17
Possible Conflicts of Interest	18
The Overall Landscape of News and Media Funders	20
Section III. The Survey of Nonprofit Journalism Organizations	25
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	25
Philanthropic Funding	25
Transparency	31
Possible Conflicts of Interest	33
The Philanthropic Landscape for Nonprofit Journalism	38
Section IV. The Survey of For-Profit News Organizations	42
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	42
Philanthropic Funding	43
Transparency	49
Possible Conflicts of Interest	50
The Philanthropic Landscape for For-Profit News	53
Section V. Study Background	57
Methodology	57
Contributing Researchers	58
From NORC at the University of Chicago	58
From Media Impact Funders	59
From The Lenfest Institute for Journalism	59

About Media Impact Funders..... 59

About the Lenfest Institute of Journalism..... 59

About NORC at The University Of Chicago..... 59

A new study examining the role and influence of philanthropic funding of journalism in the United States finds evidence of substantial growth in the nonprofit journalism sector in the last five years, increased funding to for-profit newsrooms, and a growing focus on communities of color. At the same time, however, the survey reveals a need for more adoption of written policies to increase public disclosure of donors and to address potential conflicts of interest that put editorial independence and public trust at risk.

These are some of the major findings from a new survey of grantmaking institutions and newsrooms conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism. The study builds on the last comprehensive survey of funders and newsrooms in 2015 by the American Press Institute (API).

More than half of funders say their journalism grantmaking has increased in the last five years. A third report funding journalism for the first time during that same period. And most nonprofit and for-profit news outlets in the survey say they have seen increases in philanthropic funding.

Funders identify top priorities in their grantmaking. More than 70% say they currently make grants to increase local journalism or reporting on a specific topic. More than 50% say they make grants to help journalists increase community engagement, produce overall investigative reporting, or support news organizations with fundraising and business sustainability.

In a growing trend, 38% say they have provided philanthropic support to a for-profit news organization in the last five years.

The study also includes various signs of a focus on marginalized communities and communities of color. Nearly 6 in 10 funders, for instance, say they have made grants to news outlets primarily focused on serving communities of color, and 7 in 10 of them say those grants have grown. But just about half of nonprofit news outlets and for-profit news organizations that focus primarily on those communities say their funding has increased.

Nearly 80% of the journalism funders who participated in the survey say they consider the diversity of a grantee's team, board, and leadership before making a grant.

The new study also offers mixed signals about the ethics of philanthropic funding of news. Some progress has been made since 2015 on how funders and newsrooms address the public disclosure of donors. But questions remain about how funders and newsrooms navigate potential conflicts of interests. And written policies developed as a result of the 2015 survey for both funders and news organizations have not been widely adopted beyond nonprofit news organizations that belong to the Institute for Nonprofit News (INN), a network of more than 400 nonpartisan, independent, nonprofit news outlets.

Newspaper publishers historically have maintained firewalls between newsrooms and advertisers to protect editorial independence. Commercial, for-profit newsrooms have been further insulated by having so many different advertisers that no one source of funding could have undue influence. As most nonprofit news operations are relatively small, and philanthropic giving is a major revenue source, the ethics of this emerging landscape is critical. The risk increases when the reporting is focused on a single topic and the funder's other priorities include advocacy to change public policy or public behavior in that same area — or if there is not a mix of funders and revenue streams.

Nearly half of nonprofit news operations have written guidelines about what money they will accept. Seven in ten nonprofit news operations also have written policies about disclosing funders, up from half eight years ago when INN began making such disclosure a requirement for members. But 72% of for-profit news organizations say they do not have written policies, perhaps because most are new to philanthropic funding. Thirty-seven percent say they did not disclose donors on their websites.

Potential conflicts of interest, or public perceptions of conflicts, can arise when funders are supporting journalism in the policy or advocacy issue spaces where they work. The survey was designed to better understand the dynamics of these funding relationships and to use the data to continue advancing best practices to govern these vital funding relationships. More than half of funders say they finance journalism in areas where they also do policy work. And nearly 4 in 10 nonprofits have been offered funding to do specific stories or investigative reporting suggested by a funder, though that is down from more than half found in the survey eight years ago.

Among the study's key findings:

- Funders describe making grants in multiple areas, with 74% reporting they fund journalism that addresses a specific topic or problem and 71% saying they make investments to increase local journalism. And of those who fund local journalism, 52% say they have increased their investments in the last five years.
- When asked about the most important possible factors in their funding decisions, 81% say promoting “civic engagement with trusted news and information,” is extremely or very important. Sixty-nine percent say addressing the crisis in trusted local news is an extremely or very important factor in their funding decisions.
- Sixty-eight percent of funders say ensuring racial equity and inclusion in the production of news is extremely or very important. Seventy-three percent of funders who support journalism primarily focus on serving communities of color have increased that funding in the last five years.
- About half of both nonprofit and for-profit organizations that primarily serve communities of color have seen increases in philanthropic funding to address the news and information needs of those communities.
- Fifty-one percent of funders say ensuring coverage of important topics that align with “our mission, such as education, climate change, health inequities” is extremely or very important, while 35% say mission-driven funding is somewhat or not very important in their decision making.
- Sixty-seven percent of for-profit media say they provide free online access to reporting supported primarily with philanthropic support. Twenty-one percent do not.

These findings emerge from three separate online surveys: a survey designed for private foundations, community foundations, family foundations and other grantmaking institutions that support journalism and news media; a survey of mostly digital nonprofit news organizations and NPR-affiliated and PBS-affiliated public media stations; and a survey of for-profit news organizations, including legacy news organizations and online independent local outlets. Interviews were conducted between April 13 and July 21, 2023. The remainder of the report provides an in-depth review of the findings for each of these three groups.

The research team included Jennifer Preston, a consultant from Media Impact Funders, a former New York Times journalist, and former Vice President for Journalism at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and Tom Rosenstiel, the Eleanor Merrill Scholar on the Future of Journalism at the University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism and a senior fellow at NORC. Rosenstiel oversaw the 2015 survey as then-executive director of API. Additional research leadership and support was provided by Marjorie Connelly, Betsy Broadus, and

Jennifer Benz at NORC. Funding for the research project was provided by The Lenfest Institute, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Arnold Ventures, and Media Impact Funders.

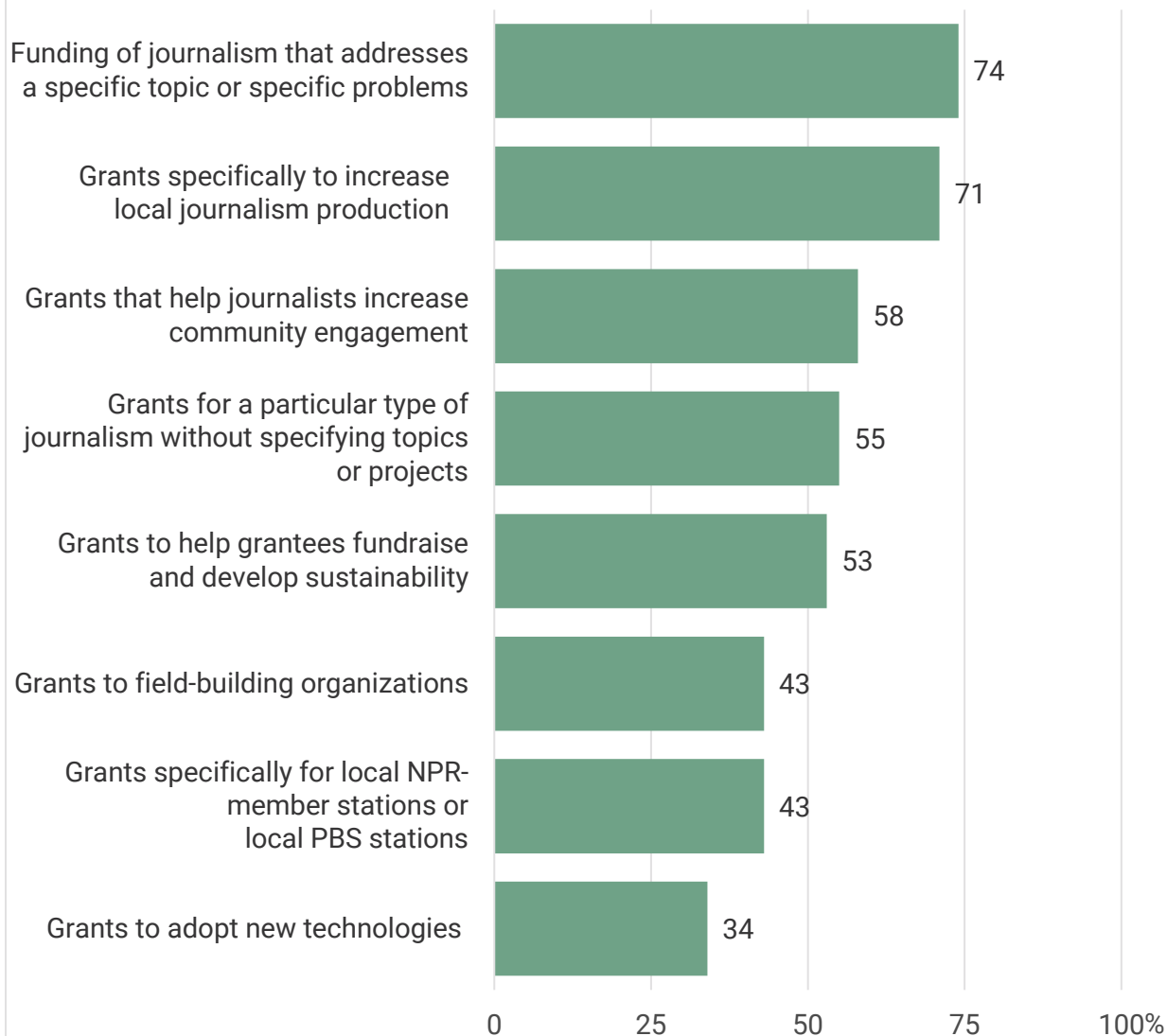
SECTION I. AN OVERVIEW: WHY ARE FUNDERS INVESTING IN NEWS AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS?

Funders offer varying reasons for their investments. Asked to choose between advancing their foundation's strategic agenda and strengthening a free press and reporting to educate the public, 45% say strengthening a free press and 20% say funding journalism to increase their foundation's impact and agenda. Twenty percent say both equally. When asked a similar question, 62% of nonprofit organizations and 72% of for-profit outlets say they believe funders are more likely motivated to support journalism to strengthen a free press and educate the public over other factors such as advancing another agenda.

When asked about possible types of grants, 74% of funders say they support journalism to address a specific topic or problem; 71% make grants specifically to increase local journalism production; 58% make grants to help increase community engagement; 55% fund investigative reporting in general, and 53% help grantees fundraise and develop sustainability.

Most funders are investing to benefit different aspects of journalism.

Percent of funders who make each of the following kinds of grants



Question: Does your organization currently make any of the following kinds of grants to journalism and news media organizations?

Source: NORC survey for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Charting the Growth of Philanthropic Support for News

The findings show the growing role of philanthropy in the production of nonpartisan, independent news, and information in the United States at both nonprofit news outlets, public media stations, and for-profit news organizations.

INN counts more than 400 publishers in its network, up from about 120 in 2015. While steadily growing, most nonprofit digital news outlets are small with more than half operating on annual budgets of less than \$1 million.

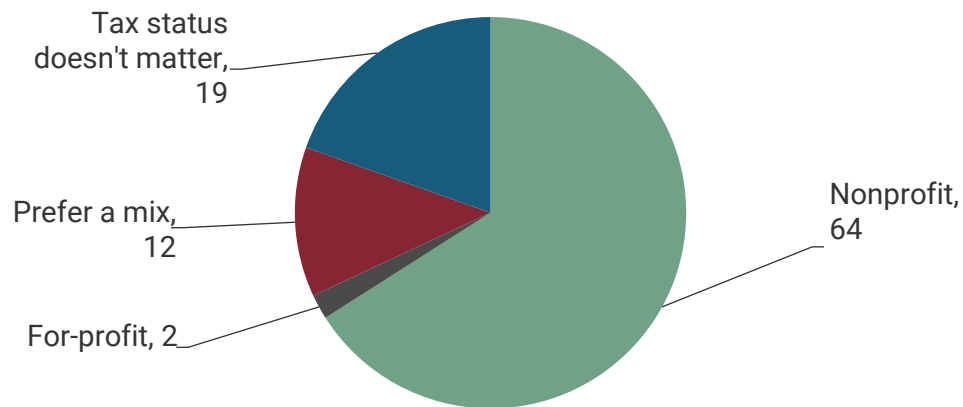
The survey of nonprofit organizations and public media stations finds that 67% deliver reporting on a local or regional area and 27% cover a statehouse or statewide issues. Thirty-seven percent focus their coverage on a single topic or related topics, such as education, criminal justice, or the environment. Sixteen percent report on a specific community of color, ethnicity, or religion.

The study also shows investments in organizations that help newsrooms achieve sustainable revenue growth as well as putting more journalists on the ground. Philanthropic giving has helped fuel new funding approaches and field-building work at organizations, such as Report for America, The News Revenue Hub, LION Publishers, The Pivot Fund, INN’s NewsMatch, the American Journalism Project, the Local Media Association, and the National Trust for Local News.

Sixty-four percent of funders say they prefer to fund nonprofit journalism, but 19% say tax status does not matter and 12% prefer a mix.

Most funders prefer to invest in nonprofit news organizations.

Percent of funders



Question: Does your organization prefer to fund nonprofit or for-profit journalism and news media?

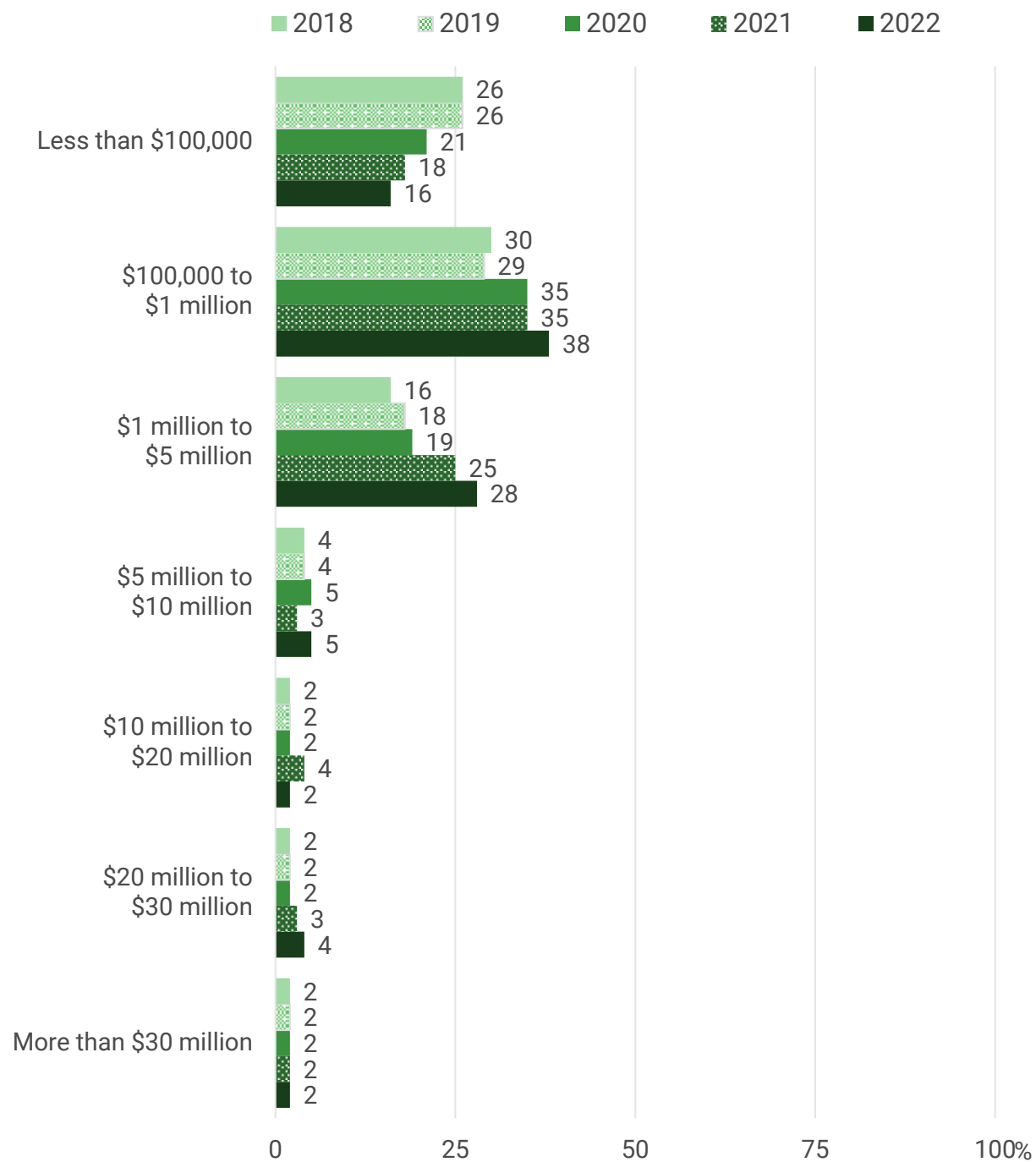
Source: NORC survey for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Although philanthropic giving for journalism is increasing, grants are mostly small and typically represent a small percentage of an overall foundation’s portfolio. While 12% of funders say that they spent more than half of their foundation’s giving on journalism and news media last year, 70% say such giving represents less than a tenth of their portfolio.

As the 2015 study first showed, journalism is a relatively new area for charitable giving in the United States. Still, there is an opportunity, the study suggests, for growth in grantmaking for journalism and news media. In what appears to be a hopeful trend, the number of grants exceeding \$100,000 has steadily increased in the last five years, according to the survey. But only a handful of funders invested more than \$5 million.

Many grants over \$100,000 have increased in the last five years.

Percent of funders



Question: What was the approximate amount of grants and direct charitable activity dollars allocated for journalism and news media grantmaking each of the following years?

Source: NORC survey for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

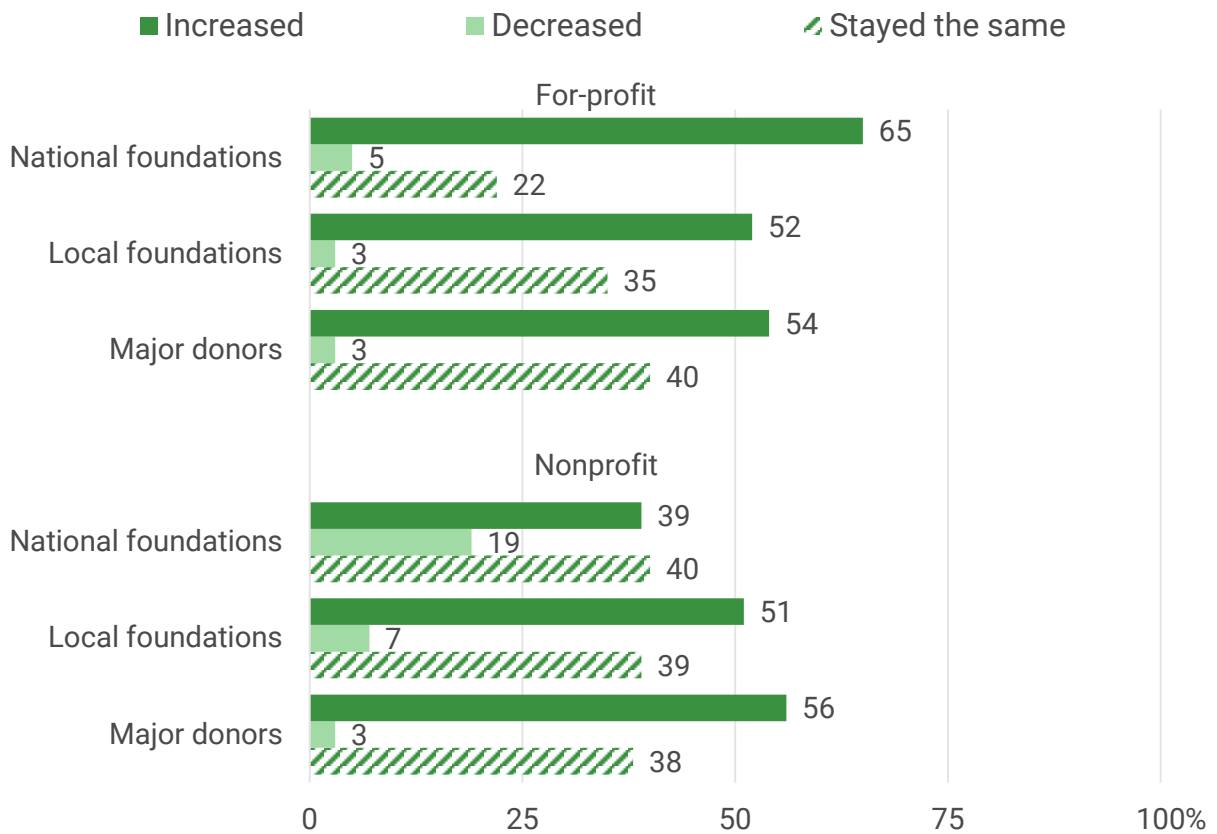
Eighty-four percent of the for-profit news organizations that responded to the survey say they have received direct philanthropic support or participated in training and leadership programs funded by philanthropy during the last five years. The respondents are mostly a mix of newspapers and local online news sites.

Of for-profit organizations that receive philanthropic funding, 52% say they received support from the Google News Initiative and 36% received funding from the Meta/Facebook Journalism Project. The Google News Initiative helps news organizations achieve long-term sustainability through training and resources. In 2022, Meta terminated its journalism project and both the funding and training resources that went with it.

But philanthropic giving is increasing from other sources. Sixty-five percent of for-profit organizations that receive funding from national foundations say the support has increased over the past five years. Likewise, 52% of for-profit organizations and 51% of nonprofit organizations funded by local foundations say that funding has increased.

Many news organizations report an increase in funding.

Percent of news organizations receiving donations or grants from...



Question: Over the last five years, has the percentage of your organization's budget coming from [national foundation grants/local foundations/major donors] increased, decreased, or stayed about the same?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Potential Conflicts of Interest on Donor Transparency and Donor Influence

This study revisits many of the same questions from the 2015 API surveys about ethics, donor influence, and donor transparency. That earlier study resulted in the creation of [written guidelines](#) for both funders and newsrooms and urged them to adopt their own versions.

For funders, the guidelines urge transparency with the public about their media funding and set expectations with their media partners to report their sources of funding. The guidelines also say funders should articulate their motivations for funding journalism and allow news organizations, not funders, to initiate conversations about the journalism they wish to produce.

The guidelines, co-designed by API with news and philanthropic leaders in 2016 (including representatives from Media Impact Funders) clearly state that news organizations should retain editorial control and not relinquish legal and ethical responsibilities to funders or to the public. They offer multiple ways to increase transparency about funding and tips on how to communicate the news organization's mission, as well as a strong preference of general support "on the principle that it best preserves independent journalism."

In this study, 92% of nonprofit news organizations and 83% of for-profit news outlets say funders never saw editorial content they helped underwrite prior to publication. About three-quarters of both nonprofit and for-profit organizations say that their funders' portfolio of interests is never a consideration in decision-making about news coverage.

Similarly, about 7 in 10 of both nonprofit and for-profit news organizations say they never make editorial changes in content based on funder input.

The new study shows that progress has been made on donor disclosure but more needs to be done to help both funders and newsrooms better navigate and set boundaries for editorial independence and public trust to avoid appearances of potential conflict.

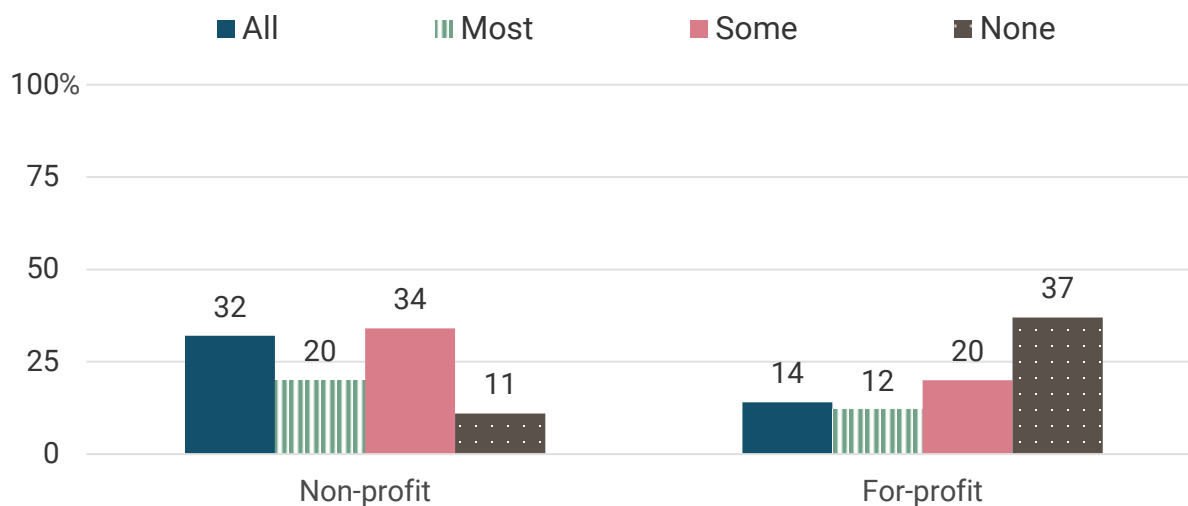
That becomes increasingly important for independent, nonpartisan newsrooms because the media landscape has become even more murky since 2015. Political operatives are spreading disinformation on social media and expanding what researchers call "pink slime" outlets that are highly partisan local media networks. They are attempting to fill the void in local news without full disclosure of the motivations of those underwriting them.

At first glance, these websites can appear to be local independent news. Instead, they are operating under the "guise of news" with "ties to political parties, special-interest groups, and lobbyists," and funded with "dark money" from political advocacy groups, according to a multi-year research project from [Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism](#).

To help differentiate the so-called "pink-slime" websites from independent nonpartisan news, INN provides community guidelines for its members on donor transparency. INN members, for example, are asked to publicly disclose all donations above \$5,000.

In this study, 86% of nonprofit organizations say they disclose at least some of their donors on their website or in their annual report. But 29% of NPR and PBS outlets say they do not list any donors. And only 46% of for-profit news outlets publicly list any of their donors.

Nonprofit news organizations are more likely to disclose at least some of their donors than for-profit organizations.



Question: On its website or annual report, does your organization publicly list all your donors, most of them, only some, or none?

Source: NORC survey for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Sixty-eight percent of nonprofit organizations have a written policy about disclosing contributors on their website or annual report, up from 50% eight years ago. But in a troubling finding, 72% of for-profit news organizations do not have a written policy on donor disclosure. That is perhaps a reflection of their recent engagement with philanthropy and offers an opportunity to update and adopt the written guidelines developed after the 2015 survey.

Meanwhile, 50% of funders say they do not have a specific policy about what their grantees should disclose about their funding beyond what is required by law. And 64% of funders do not have any written rules governing their organization’s participation in their grantee’s content decisions.

Not all funders publicly disclose who they fund in a way that is accessible to the general public. Fifty-seven percent say they publicly disclose the names and grant amounts of all grantees on their websites. Sixteen percent say they only disclose the grantees’ names, and another 16% disclose only what the law requires.

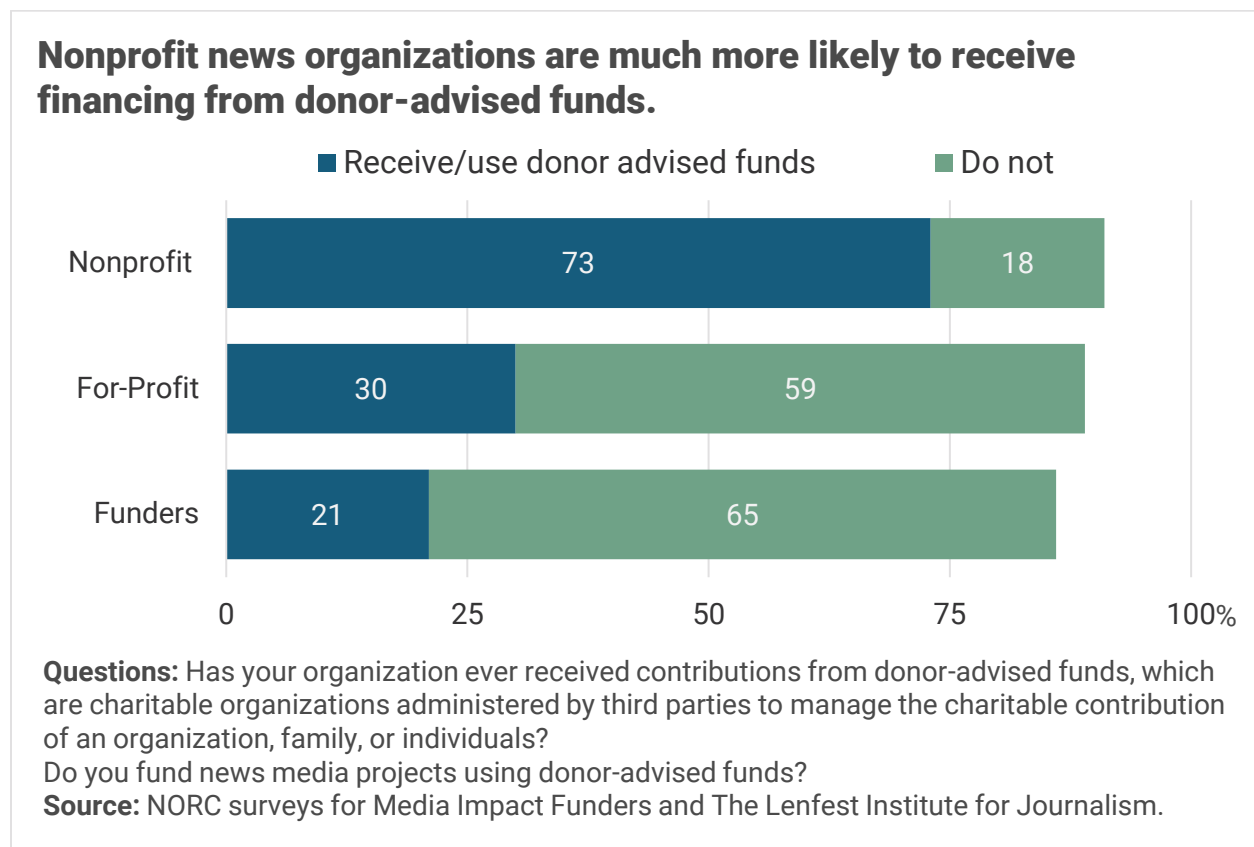
Adding to the challenges around donor transparency is the growing trend of donors using donor-advised funds or DAFs at community foundations and financial institutions to administer their charitable contributions. For many individual donors, this approach makes the transactions for their overall giving more efficient and effective. However, gifts from donor-advised funds can create a challenge for newsrooms to comply with their own policies on public disclosure. On occasion, the individual donor is not identified, only the entity making the distribution. To comply with INN’s guidelines on gifts over \$5,000 in one year, for example, news organizations need to take the extra step to learn the identity of the donor. Donor-advised funds are largely used for individual donors to conduct charitable giving transactions. In the world of politics, they can sometimes be used as funding vehicles to pour “dark money” anonymously into political organizations, advocacy groups, disinformation campaigns, and many of the networked hyper-partisan websites described above. They can be secretive and hide the identity of the

donors. This is yet another reason for newsrooms to provide public disclosure on donors to help ensure public trust in editorial independence and to avoid even a perception of donor influence and potential conflicts of interest.

Seventy-four percent of nonprofit news organizations say they have received contributions from donor-advised funds, up from 56% in 2015. Only 22% identify both the name of the contributor and the name of the fund, down from 40% in 2015.

Thirty percent of for-profit news organizations say they have received support from donor-advised funds. Donor-advised funds cannot support for-profit organizations unless they come through an intermediary or fiscal sponsor. Of the for-profit news organizations that say they receive funds from donor-advised accounts, only 10% identify the name of both the fund and contributors.

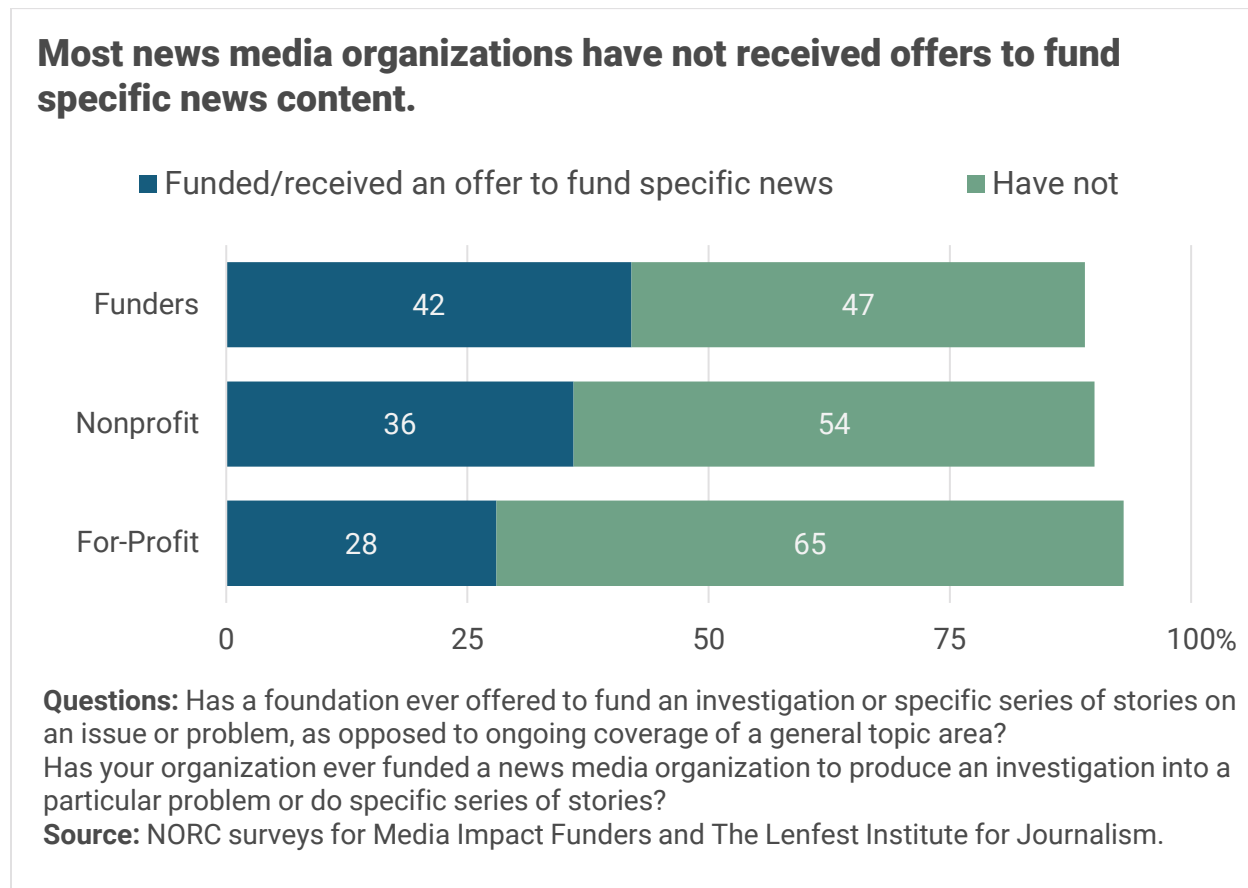
More than half of funders who support media with donor-advised funds identify the source of the money.



On the issue of donor influence, about three-quarters of news media organizations say they have never considered the “portfolio of interests of our funders in our decision making.”

A potential conflict of interest, as both the 2015 survey and this latest one show, occurs when funders provide funding for journalism on specific topics on which they seek to influence policy or change public behavior. Fifty-seven percent of funders say they have financed news in areas where they were working to influence policy or change public behavior.

Another area of possible concern is when funders express interest in financing a specific series of stories or an investigative reporting project.



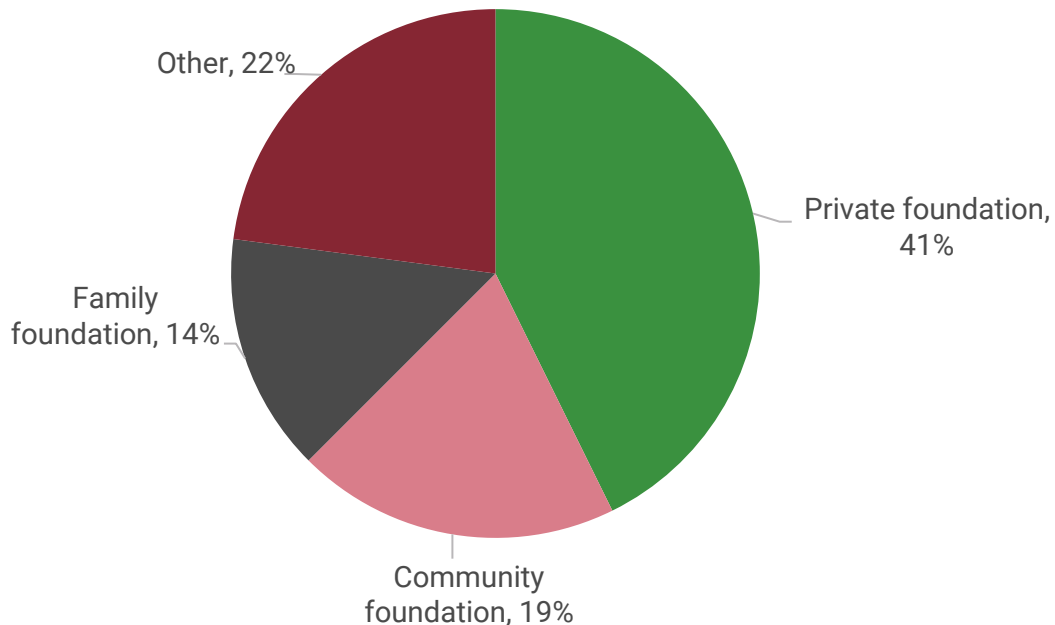
Fifty-four percent of nonprofit newsrooms and 65% of for-profit newsrooms say funders have not approached them about producing a specific series of stories or investigation. Of the nonprofit newsrooms who have received offers to fund an investigation or specific series of articles, 69% say they accepted the funding. Seventy-nine percent of for-profit newsrooms accepted the funding. When asked why they went forward with the project, most nonprofit news organizations and for-profit news organizations say the project was already on their list of things to do or struck them as worthwhile.

SECTION II. THE SURVEY OF FUNDERS SUPPORTING JOURNALISM AND NEWS MEDIA

The survey includes 156 funders, of which 129 (83%) make grants in support of journalism or news media. Nineteen percent of the funders supporting journalism represent community foundations or place-based foundations that are rooted in serving a local community or region. The survey also includes private foundations (41%) and family foundations (14%). Other types of funders that support journalism include nonprofit organizations that distribute grants (6%), pooled funds or venture philanthropy models (5%), public charities (3%), and corporate foundations (2%).

Most foundations that fund journalism are private, family, or community.

Percent of funders



Question: Which of the following best describes your organization?

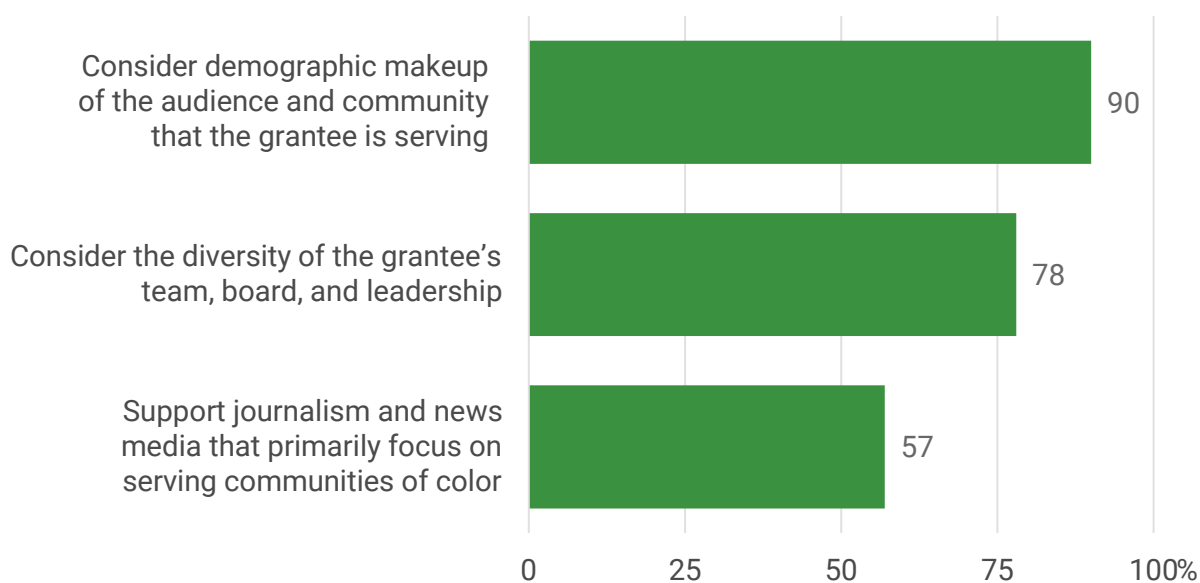
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Seventy-eight percent of funders say they consider the diversity of a journalism organization’s team, board, and leadership as part of their grantmaking. And 90% say they consider the demographics of the community being served in making grants. More than half (57%) say their grantmaking includes news organizations that primarily focus on serving communities of color. Seventy-three percent of them report their funding for this type of journalism has increased in the past five years.

Diversity and demographics are considerations for most funders.

Percent of funders who...



Question: Before making a grant, does your organization consider:

Does your organization support journalism and news media organizations that primarily focus on serving communities of color?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Of the funders that support journalism and news media organizations that primarily serve communities of color, 93% fund news that primarily serves Black communities and 84% serve Hispanic communities. Fewer foundations support journalism aimed at Native American and Indigenous People (44%), Asian Americans (41%), Middle Eastern or North Africans (18%), or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders (11%)

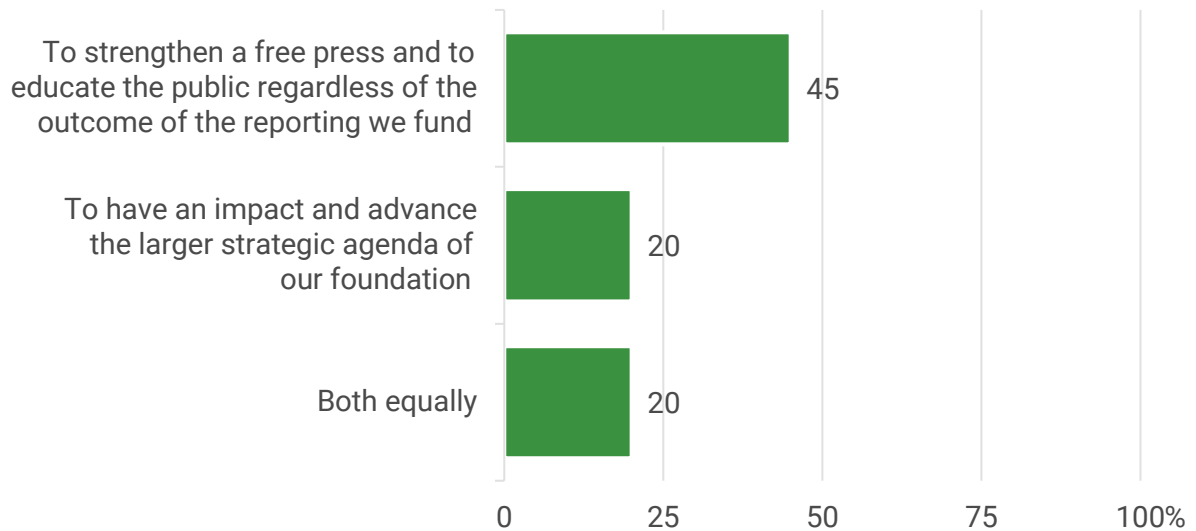
The survey also asks about marginalized communities more generally. More than half of funders (56%) say at least one of their journalism grantees primarily serve low-income communities. Nearly 4 in 10 say they support journalism outlets that mainly work in rural communities (38%) or focus on immigrants (36%). Twenty-nine percent provide grants to organizations that mostly serve women and 22% of funders have grantees with a primarily LGBTQIA+ audience.

Why Do funders Fund Journalism and What Are They Funding?

Journalism has evolved as a charitable sector in the last 15 years as more donors become aware of the crisis in local news and the critical gaps in robust reporting on specific beats that newspapers once provided. As noted in the overview section, the survey shows funders are making grants to increase local journalism production, support reporting on specific topics, help journalists increase community engagement and even help news organizations with their fundraising and developing sustainable revenue solutions.

Few funders say their sole objective in funding journalism is only to advance their agenda.

Percent of funders



Question: Recognizing there can be many factors in funding decisions, which of the following statements comes closer to describing the reason your organization funds media organizations?

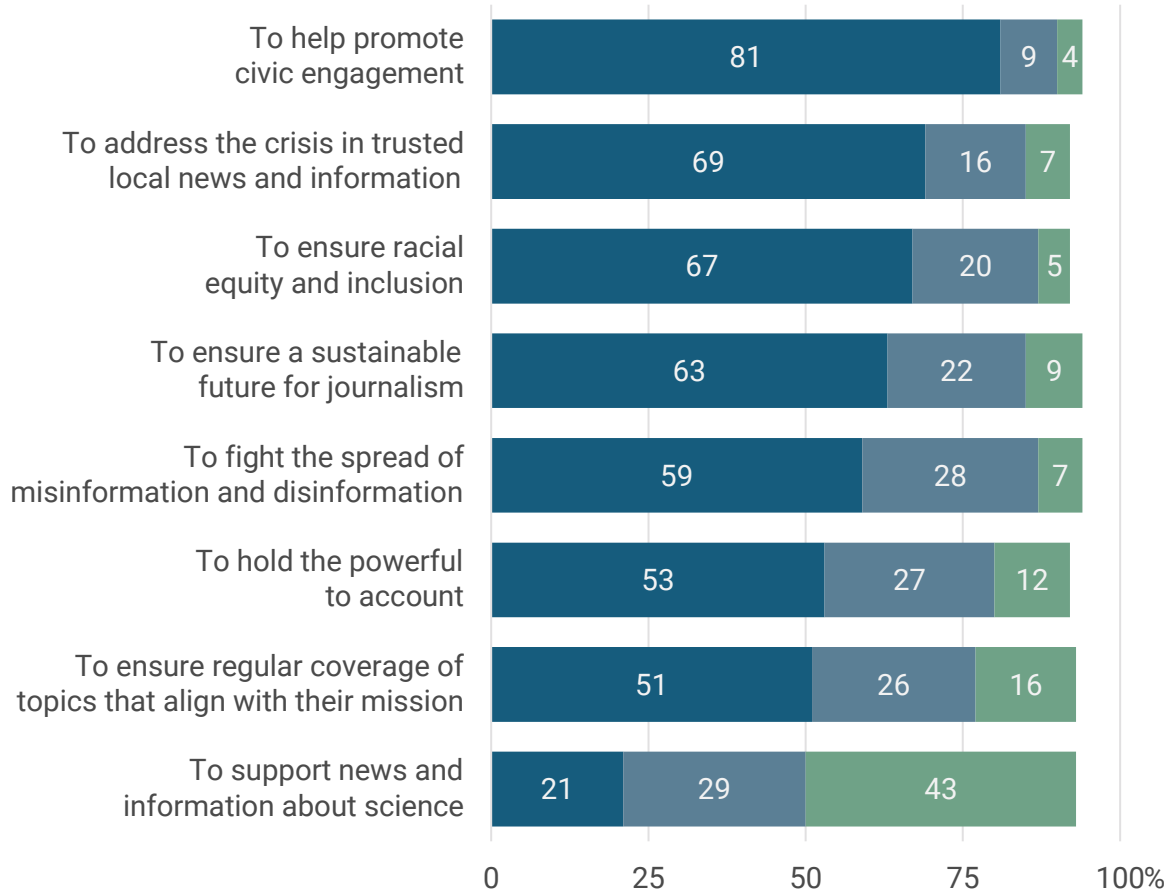
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

To better understand what inspires and motivates funders to support journalism, the survey offers a list of eight possible factors that funders could rank as important in their funding decisions. They range from addressing the crisis in local news to fighting the spread of misinformation and disinformation. More than 6 in 10 funders say helping local news, safeguarding journalism’s future, ensuring equity and inclusion in journalism, and promoting civic engagement are extremely or very important reasons for their decision to fund journalism. And 51% cite as a factor regular coverage of important topics that align with a funder’s mission, such as education, climate change, health inequities.

Why do foundations support journalism?

Percent of funders

■ Extremely/very important ■ Somewhat important ■ Not very/not at all important



Question: How important are each of the following possible factors in funding decisions?

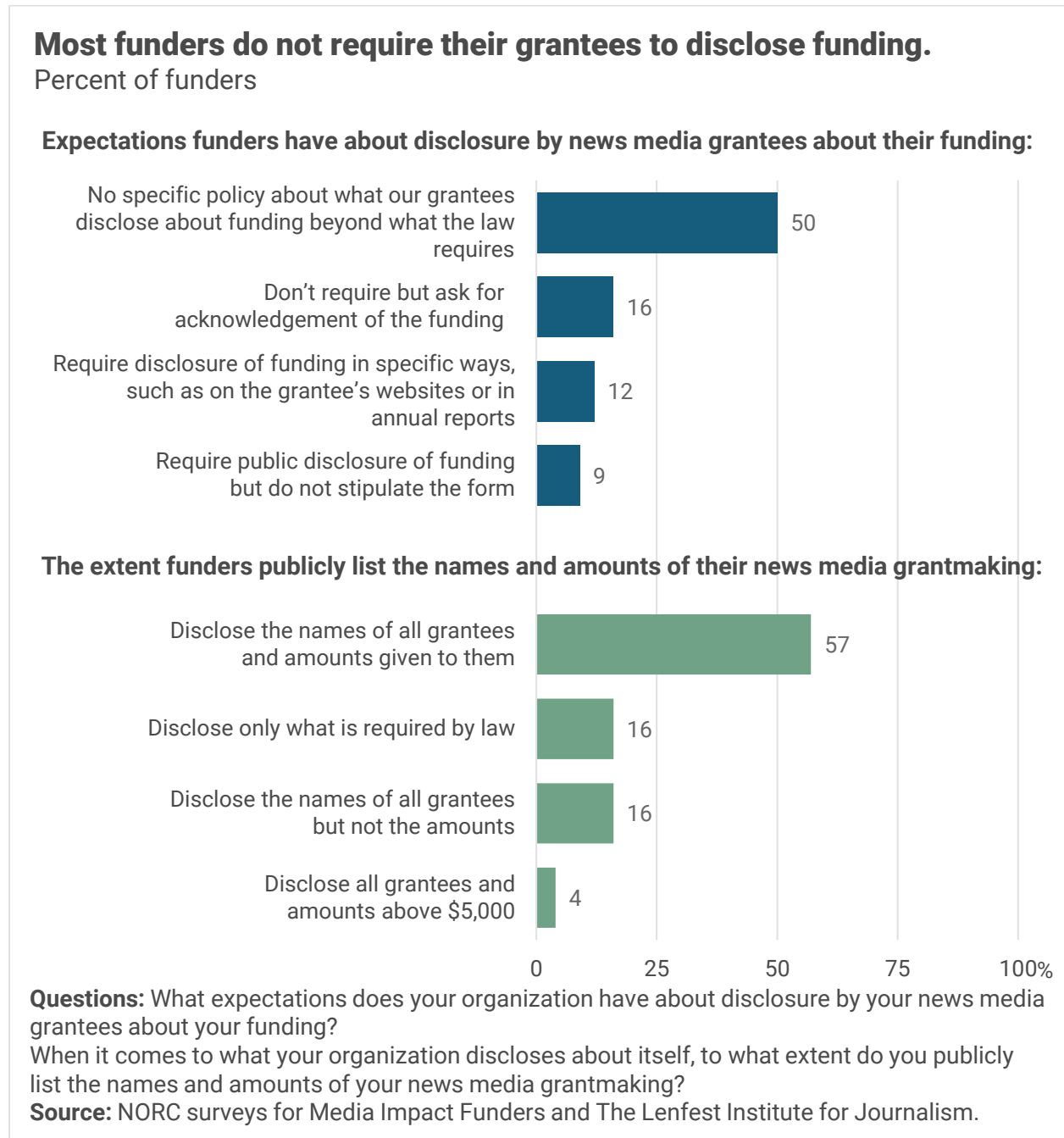
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

The survey provided funders with the opportunity to tell us, in their own words, why they fund journalism and how that funding aligns with their broader mission. In these responses, 36% of funders cited a desire to increase civic engagement, accountability reporting on government, and journalistic impact that produces changes in policy. One local funder said local journalism was important to the foundation’s success, adding “an informed public and an accountable public sector both depend on the presence of a robust local media scene.”

Another 20% of funders surveyed discussed the importance of increasing public awareness around specific issues. One funder cites the importance of “[creating] awareness and important dialogue around the issues we care about,” achieved through “direct grants to nonprofit media [organizations] that tie to our focus areas.” Additionally, 16% note they regard journalism as essential for a healthy community, with one community foundation leader describing making a commitment to “the long-term health and vibrancy of our community” with “local news and information [offering] some of the best hope for our stronger shared future.”

Transparency

As a result of the 2015 survey, many donors and newsrooms adopted written guidelines that encourage public disclosure of donors and transparency about the role of philanthropy, one of the most powerful ways for news organizations to address trust and perceptions of donor influence. The survey showed that many funders did not. The study finds that only about a fifth of foundations require grantees to disclose their support publicly.



The use of donor-advised funds is increasing in philanthropy. These are funds in which individual donors or foundations can contribute. These funds are usually housed at community foundations or financial institutions and the law does not require identifying the names of the individual donors to these funds.

In politics, similarly structured funds have been described as “dark money,” with a few donors using the structure to hide their enormous contributions. However, in the world of philanthropy they can operate quite differently. Individual donors might give to a donor-advised fund to help them allocate their money across different topics and issues over time.

The use of donor-advised funds is not yet a widespread practice for supporting journalism with just 21% of funders using them. About half of the donor-advised funds that funders use fully disclose the fund’s contributors.

Local Journalism

A major focus of the growing activity in philanthropy is addressing the crisis in local journalism, a trend that was not reflected in the 2015 survey. More than 70% of funders say they make grants to increase local journalism production, a finding that is underscored by the announcement on September 7, 2023 of Press Forward. It is a new philanthropic fund and coalition of more than 20 funders that has raised more than \$500 million in progress toward a \$1 billion five-year plan to revitalize local news.

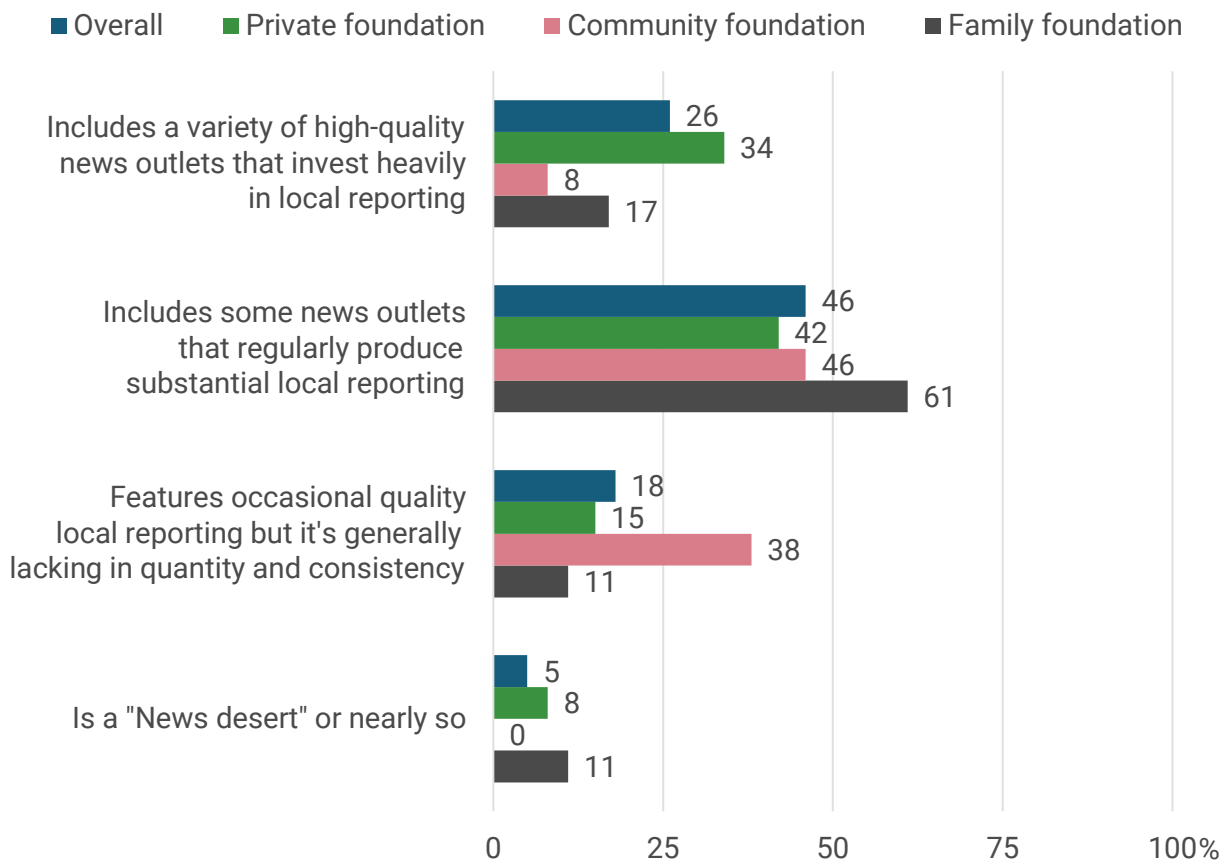
In all, 69% of funders say addressing the crisis in local journalism is extremely or very important in their funding decisions. Seventy-one percent make grants specifically to increase local journalism production. And 43% underwrite efforts of PBS and NPR stations to grow their local journalism.

One of the growth areas in philanthropy appears to be among community foundations and place-based foundations, especially in those communities hit hard by the loss of local news. When we asked these community foundations that support journalism about the news environment in their communities, half say the quality of local reporting and public affairs coverage has deteriorated in the last five years.

Community foundations are the least likely among the funders surveyed, to describe local news as high quality. In short, the closer a funder is to the community, the more concerned they appear to be about the impact of the decline in journalism.

Few foundations regard local reporting as high quality.

Percent of funders



Question: Which of the following statements best describes the local news environment in the community your organization primarily serves? The news environment we serve:

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

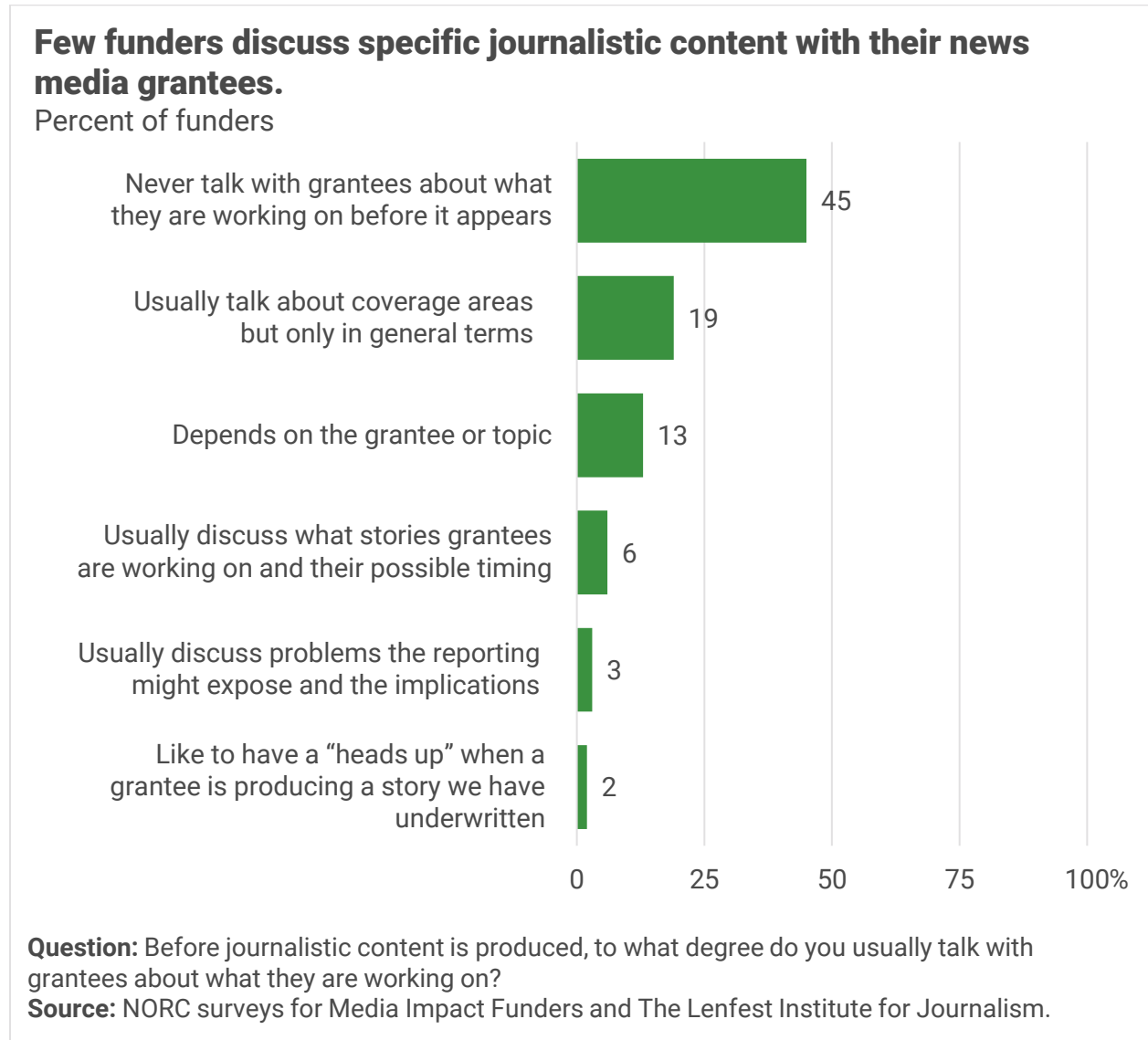
In an open-ended question, we asked foundations to tell us where and how major new philanthropic giving for journalism should be directed. The most common theme, mentioned by 29%, is to direct funding toward news deserts. The next most frequent responses were to combat misinformation (13%) and to increase diversity in newsrooms (10%).

Possible Conflicts of Interest

As philanthropic support for journalism grows, newsrooms need to ensure editorial independence and public trust in their work. The survey shows how funders and grantees are navigating potential concerns about donor influence and potential conflicts of interest.

On donor influence, the survey finds that most funders have little or no direct engagement with their grantees about the specific work they are doing. Nearly two-thirds, for instance, say they never see editorial content ahead of publication and 45% never discuss the journalism their grantees are working on at all prior to publication.

But how newsrooms and funders manage these questions is still largely based on relationships rather than written guidelines that can offer clarity and clear boundaries especially for those funders unfamiliar with the longstanding practice of journalistic ethics that have restricted influence over news coverage from advertisers and corporate sponsors. As an example, 64% of funders do not have written policies regarding participation in the journalistic decisions of grantees. In a similar vein, 65% of foundations do not require their grantees to have policies about sharing content with funders ahead of publication.



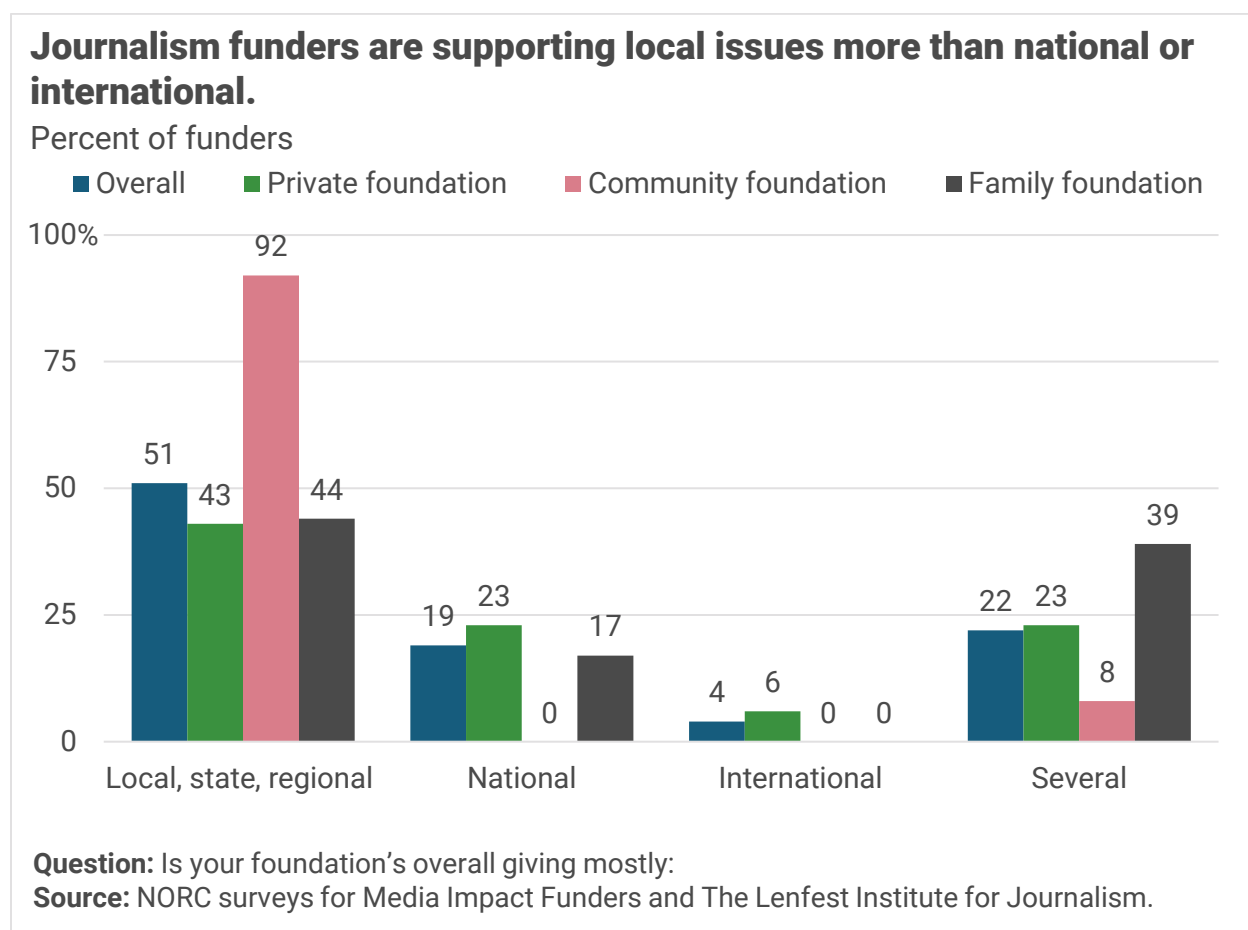
More than 70% of funders say they support journalism on a specific topic, such as education, criminal justice, health, or the environment. Fifty-seven percent say they fund independent journalism in areas where they also might do advocacy and or policy work. The survey does not show widespread evidence of funders seeking to influence or dictate coverage. What the survey does reveal are risks for newsrooms and funders around the perception of donor influence that could undermine public trust and journalistic impact.

For example, funders offering financial support for a specific series of stories or requesting a specific expose could be perceived as trying to engage in pay-to-play journalism. In the survey, 42% of foundations say they have offered funding for a specific series of stories or for an investigative project.

Philanthropy is increasingly seeing the importance of filling critical gaps in beat coverage on topics that were once regularly provided by newspapers. This can pose a risk for potential conflicts of interest in cases where the funder is also involved in policy or advocacy work in the same area. The survey found that most funders (57%) fund journalism on issues where they also try to move the needle to change policy or public perceptions. Three-quarters of the private foundations supporting journalism are doing so on topics where they also engage in policy work. It is slightly less common among community foundations (54%) and family foundations (33%).

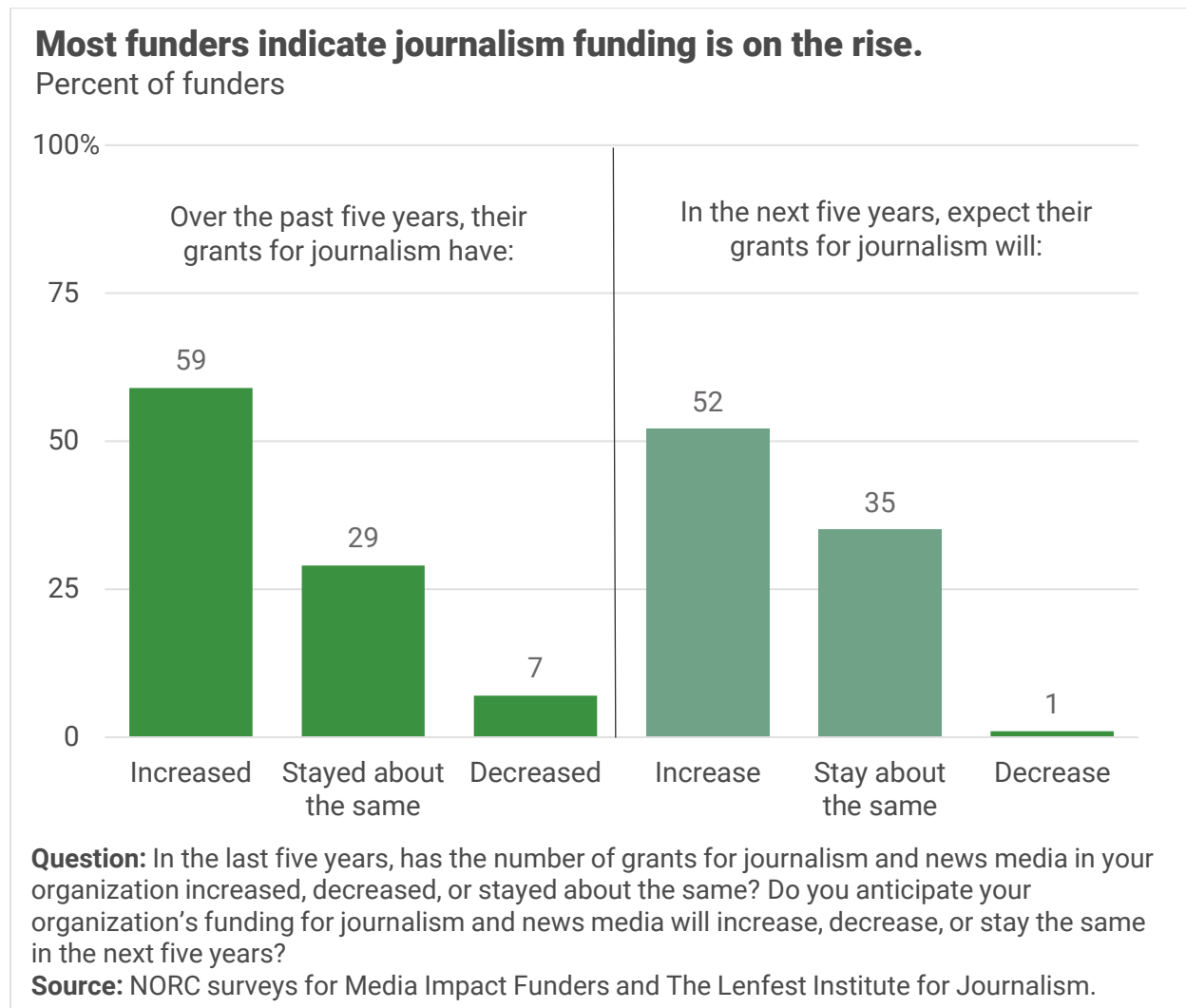
The Overall Landscape of News and Media Funders

About half of the funders that underwrite journalism focus on local, state, or regional issues in the United States. By the nature of their design, community foundations are particularly likely to support local issues.



Two-thirds (65%) of funders surveyed have been making grants in support of journalism for more than five years, and 45% of them have been supporting journalism for more than ten years. But the field continues to grow. A third of funders have initiated their journalism grantmaking in the last five years, including 5% who have started in the last year.

Six in ten funders have increased their journalism giving in the last five years, and about half anticipate increasing that funding over the next five years.



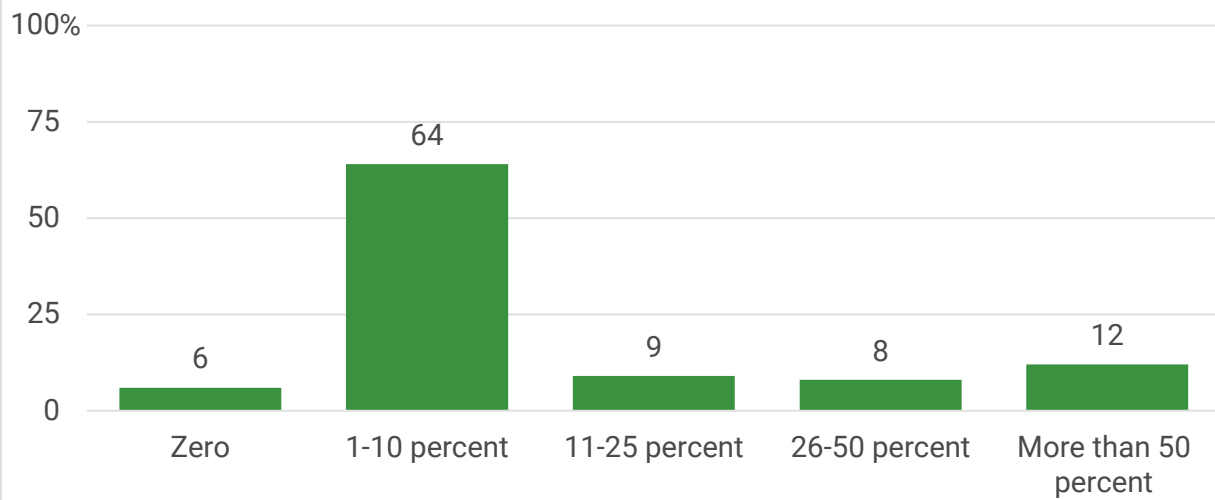
Sixty-four percent of funders prefer to support nonprofit journalism, while 12% would rather fund a mix of nonprofit and for-profit organizations, and 19% say it does not matter. Over the past five years, 38% have provided sponsorships, Report for America fellows, or other philanthropic giving at a for-profit newspaper, while 55% say they have not given that type of support.

Most journalism funders say their grantees have achieved some expectations. Thirty-one percent of funders say their grantees have exceeded expectations and 56% accomplished what the funders anticipated. Only 5% have fallen short. A finding that has resulted in long-term support of journalism grantees. Fifty-seven percent of funders say they have provided additional funding to more than half of their journalism grantees.

Although philanthropic support for journalism has increased in recent years, for most funders, journalism represents less than 10% of their overall giving.

Journalism is just a small portion of most funders' grantmaking.

Percent of funders



Question: Last year, approximately what percentage of your organization’s total funding went to journalism and news media grants?

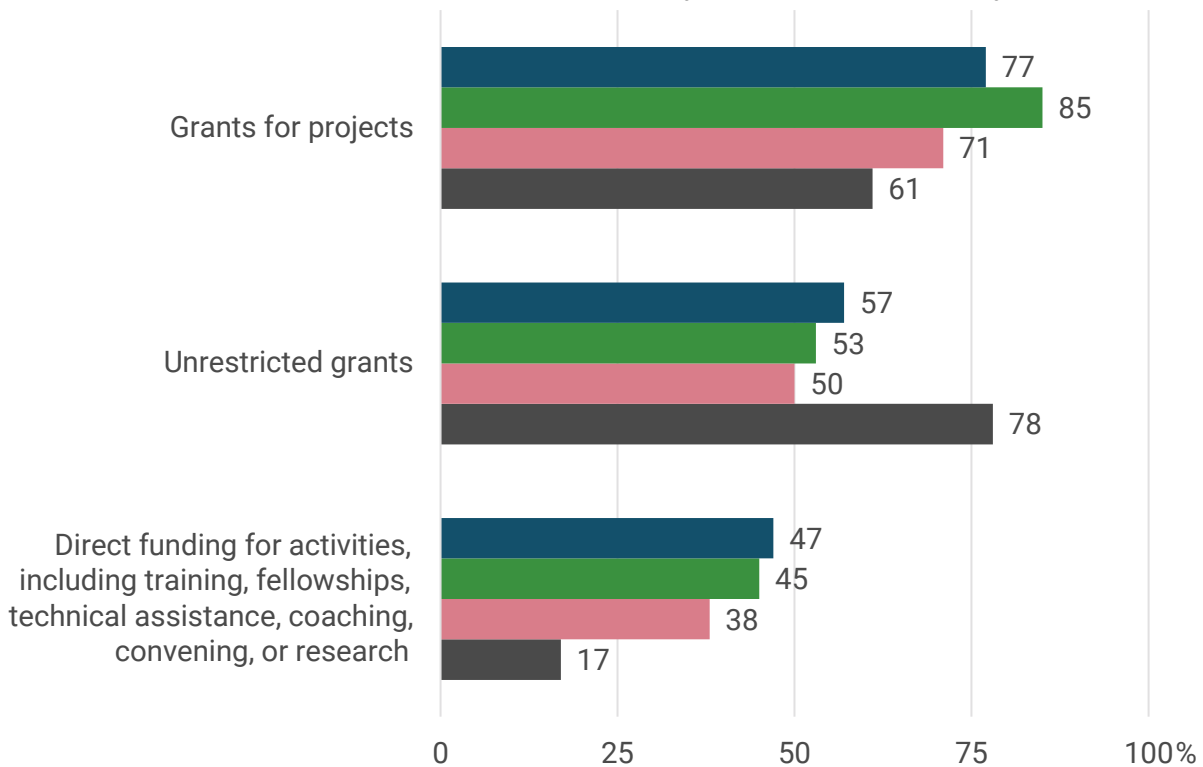
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Grantees often prefer money with the fewest possible restrictions, unsurprisingly. Such funding, naturally, raises the fewest questions about a funder’s influence on the journalism. Most foundations say they have given unrestricted grants to news and media organizations or grants for projects in the past year. Nearly half funded training, fellowships, technical assistance, coaching, convenings, or research.

Most media funders give unrestricted grants but more fund specific projects.

Percent of funders who selected each item

■ All funders ■ Private foundations ■ Community foundations ■ Family foundations



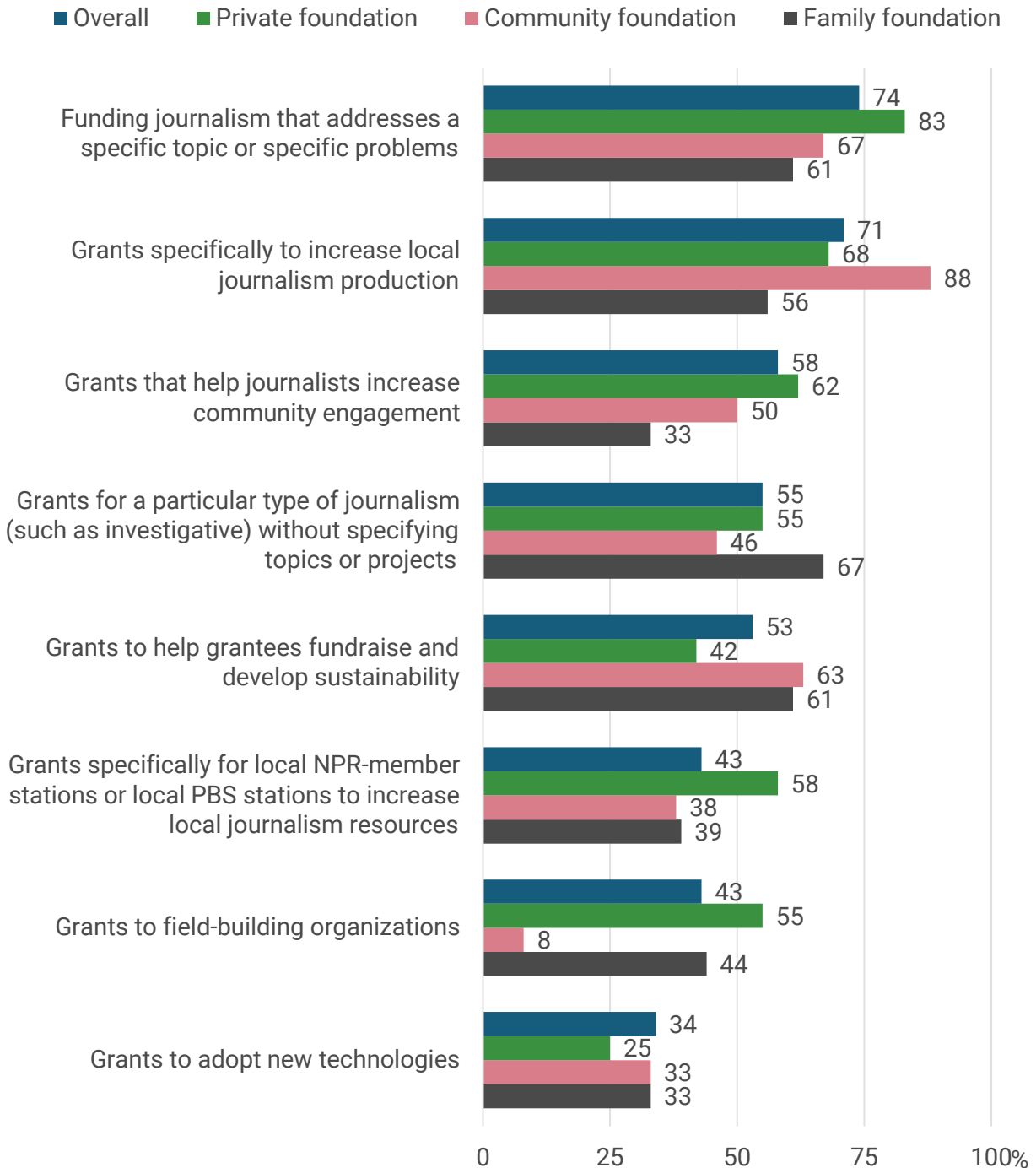
Question: Last year, what types of philanthropic support did your organization provide to journalism and news media grantees?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Funders are currently financing a range of activities. Funding journalism on particular issues and in support of local coverage are the most common activities, but half of funders also support sustainability and fundraising.

Funders make a variety of grants to journalism organizations.

Percent of funders



Question: Does your organization currently make any of the following kinds of grants to journalism and news media organizations? *Select all that apply.*

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

SECTION III. THE SURVEY OF NONPROFIT JOURNALISM ORGANIZATIONS

In the last decade, there has been a growing number of nonprofit news organizations filling critical gaps in local journalism and in overall reporting on topics in the United States that were once covered regularly by newspapers. In this survey, 293 nonprofit news leaders of emerging and established organizations participated. Of these, 19% included NPR-affiliated public radio or joint licensee stations with PBS-affiliated broadcast stations. Most of the participants were members of INN, the membership organization for nonprofits that meet INN's guidelines to the commitment of nonpartisan journalism and public disclosure of donors to promote transparency.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

One critical element in the growth of nonprofit news is addressing communities and groups that traditional commercial media has historically not served well. How much activity did the survey find around serving more diverse audiences?

Of the nonprofit news organizations surveyed, 16% primarily focus on communities of color. Twenty-nine percent of PBS and NPR stations have a primary focus on the news and information needs of communities of color, compared with 13% of other news organizations.

Half of the nonprofit news organizations that focus on communities of color say funding specifically to address the news needs of those communities has increased over the past five years. Six percent have seen a reduction in that type of funding, and it is about the same for 42%.

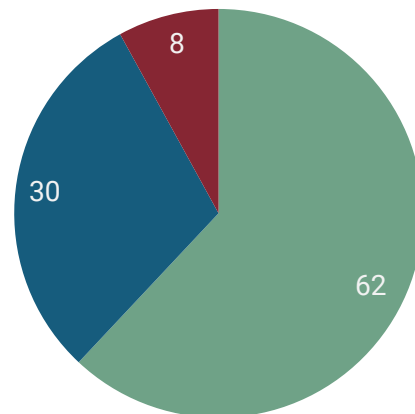
Philanthropic Funding

When asked why they believe funders support journalism, nonprofit media outlets say they think funders want to help strengthen journalism rather than advance their own cause. Sixty-two percent think funding of news media is driven by a desire on the part of funders to strengthen a free press rather than to advance their own agenda. Eight years ago, research by API found 51% of nonprofit news organizations thought funders were moved to support journalism to strengthen a free press and educate citizens.

Why do funders support news media?

Percent of nonprofit news organizations

- To strengthen a free press and to educate the citizens regardless of the outcome of the reporting they fund.
- To have a desired impact and advance the larger strategic agenda of the foundation.
- Don't know/skipped



Question: Recognizing there can be many factors in funding decisions, which of the following statements comes closer to describing the reason you think your funders make grants to news and media organizations?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

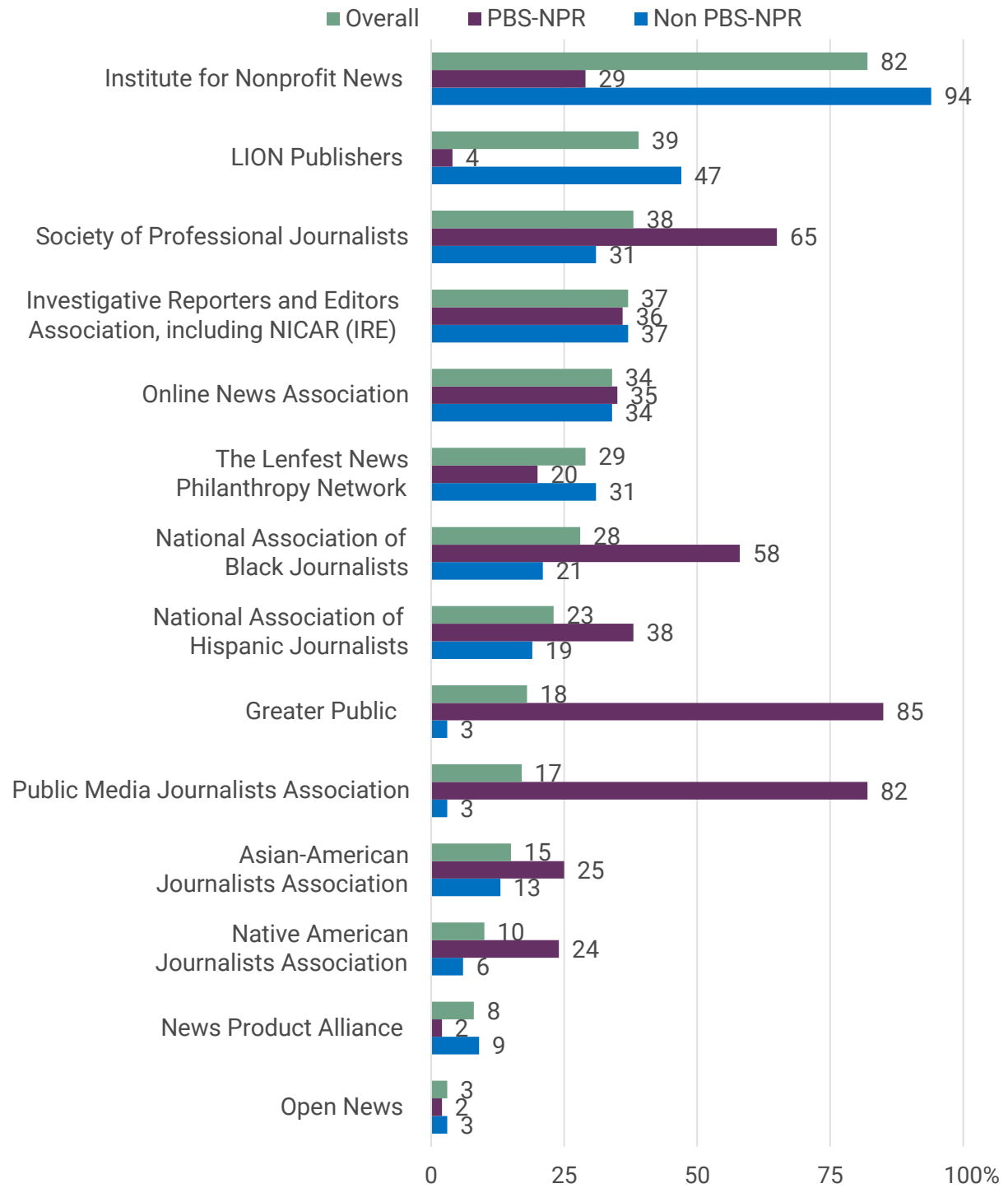
In recent years, as the advertising model for news has eroded, a number of new efforts have begun to try to strengthen philanthropic funding of news.

One of those is NewsMatch, an effort launched by INN to match funders with nonprofits. INN reports it has helped raise more than \$271 million since 2017. The survey suggests the impact of the program has been broad. Fully 73% of nonprofit news organizations who responded to the survey say they have participated in NewsMatch. Of the organizations that participate in NewsMatch, 41% say they have received a great deal or quite a bit of revenue or audience growth.

The survey also suggests other programs to boost philanthropic funding of news have been impactful. Over the past five years, almost all the news organizations surveyed have participated in at least one program, training, or resource course provided by various organizations.

Almost all nonprofit news organizations have received resources from at least one journalism association.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations that have participated in:



Question: Does your organization or staff belong or participate in programming, training and resources provided by any of the following? *Select all that apply.*

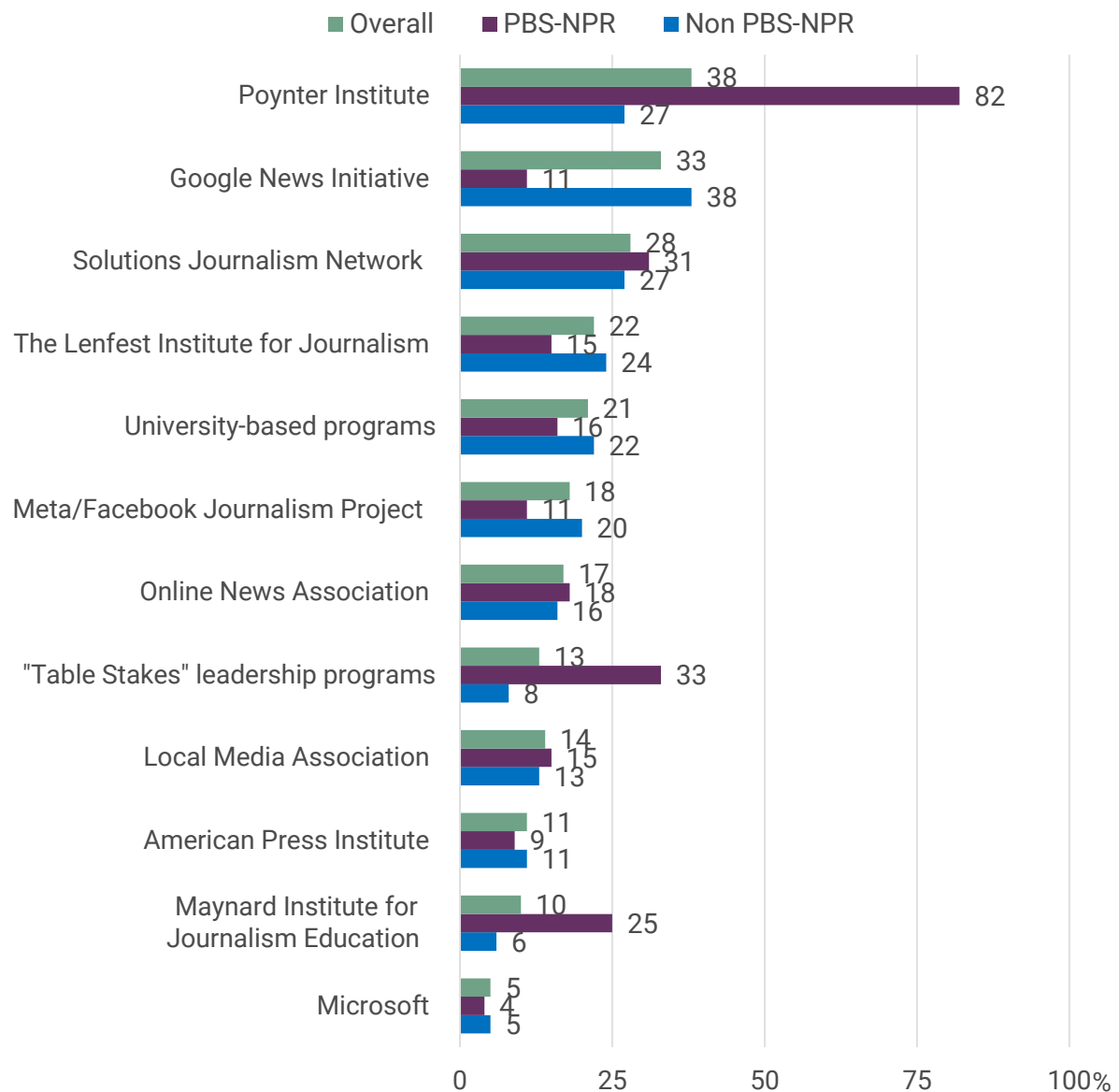
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

Asked about the magnitude of impact, 60% say INN has provided the most value for their news organization and 23% say the most value comes from LION. Seventeen percent mention IRE.

Again, most nonprofit news organizations have participated in at least one training, accelerator, fellowship, or leadership development program. Indeed, more than half have taken part in more than one program. However, 26% have not participated in any training program.

Most nonprofit news organizations participate in funded training and other programs.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations that have participated in:



Question: In the last five years, have you or members of your organization participated in training, accelerators, fellowships, or leadership development programs from any of the following? *Select all that apply.*

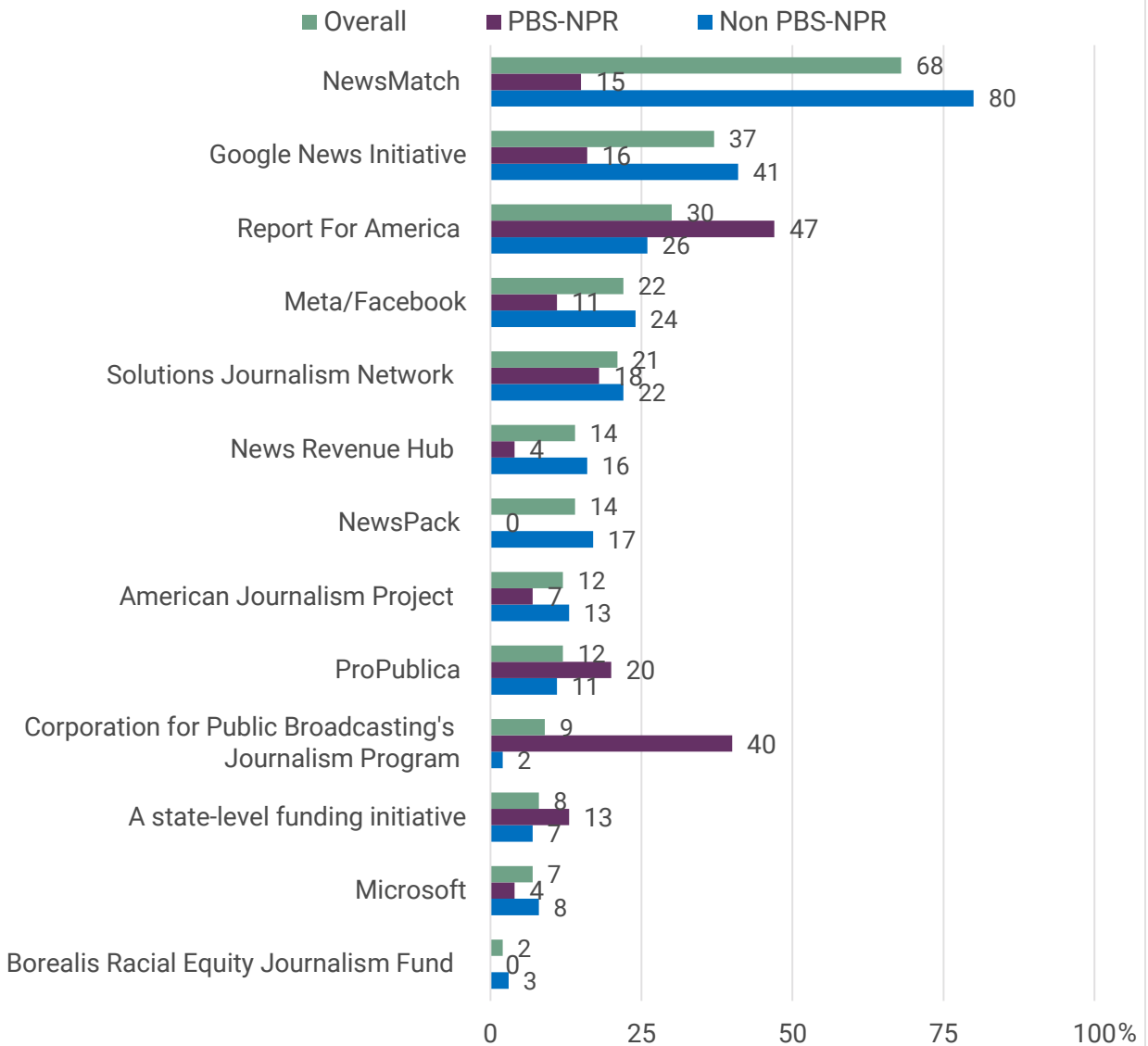
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Given the number of such programs, the survey also asks those receiving funds which programs they think has been most helpful to them. In response, 27% mention Poynter, 14% say The Lenfest Institute and another 14% say the Google News Initiative.

Over the past five years, most nonprofit organizations have also accessed direct funding, fellows, or resources from organizations that promote journalism. Eleven percent of the nonprofit organizations surveyed have not received any of this type of support from these organizations, but more than half have participated in more than one program.

Most for-profit news organizations have received direct funding, fellows, or resources from associations that promote journalism.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations that have participated in:



Question: In the last five years, have you or members of your organization accessed direct funding, fellows, or resources from any of these organizations? *Select all that apply.*

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

What more could be done? The survey also tries to probe this question. When asked in an open-ended question what further assistance they would like to receive from these groups, 23% note general operating support. Eight percent say they would like to receive capacity building support and another 8% mention access to networks of funders and other collaborators.

When it comes to networking and collaboration, 67% of nonprofit news organizations say their collaboration with other news organizations has increased over the past five years. Twenty-one percent say such partnerships have stayed about the same and 3% have fewer relationships with other news organizations. Seven percent say they do not collaborate with other news organizations. Among those news organizations who do collaborate, 26% of funders have offered financial incentives to increase the practice.

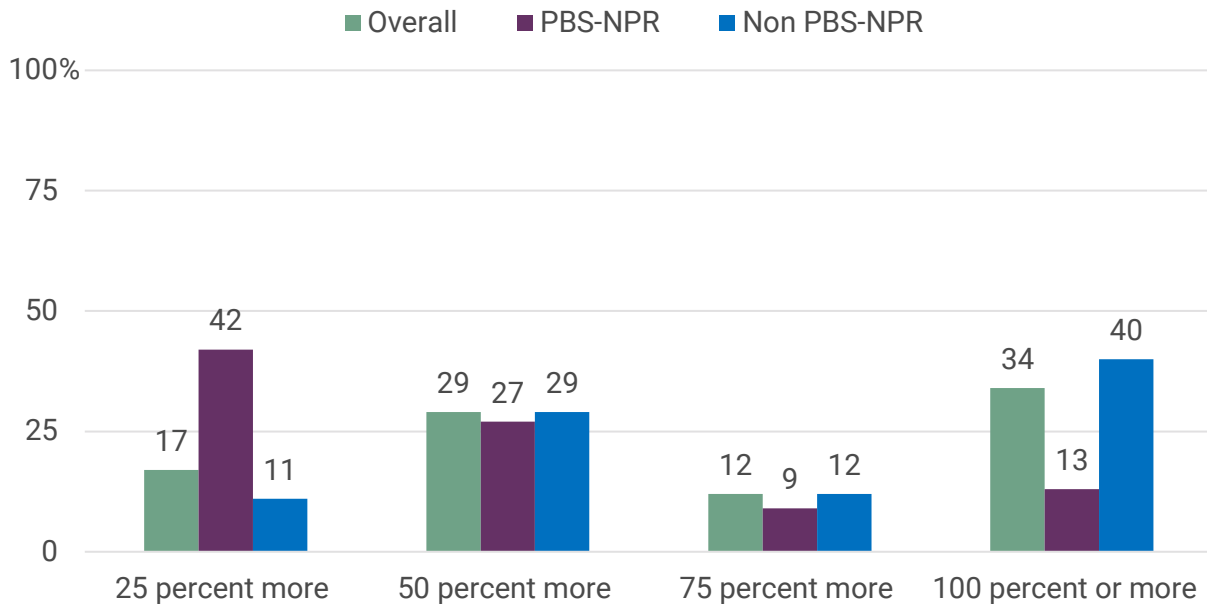
The survey also tries to probe what nonprofits would do if they experienced a significant boost in funding by asking how they would spend \$1 million in unrestricted funding, the freest possible kind of support. The answers are more complex than simply adding reporters. Indeed, 31% say they would hire more reporters and 23% would hire more tech support. Eleven percent would invest in new forms of storytelling and community engagement. A third offer other responses that include combinations of adding reporters, editors, and tech staff as well as investing in audience development, fundraising, and tech support. Several organizations say they would use additional funding to increase the salaries of their current staff.

Nonprofit news organizations were given an opportunity on the survey to say about how much additional annual funding they would need to increase the quality and volume of reporting to better serve the news and information needs of their community or audience. Just 17% say that a more modest 25% increase in their budget would help. But fully a third of nonprofit news organizations say they would need to double their budget to meet their community's needs.

When asked about government involvement in funding journalism, 41% of these organizations agree with the goals of the Rebuild Local News coalition, which would increase government funding of media. Only 9% disagree with this initiative, but 50% are unsure.

Most nonprofit news organizations would need more than 75% additional annual funding to improve their news reporting.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



Question: About how much additional annual funding would your organization need to increase the quality and volume of reporting to better serve the news and information needs of your community or audience?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

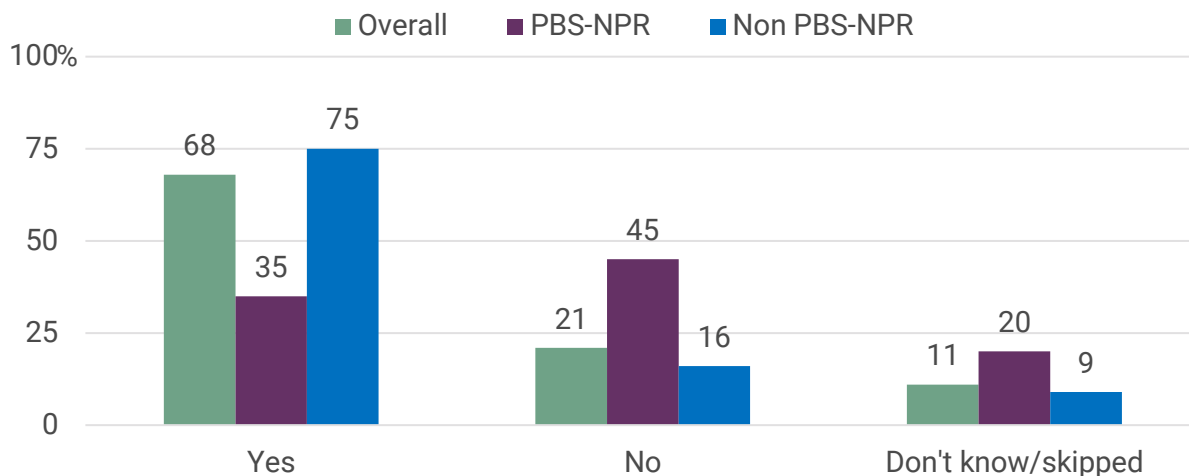
Transparency

In addition to policies nonprofit news organizations have in place about what funding they will accept, another question is what information they disclose publicly about funding. Nearly 9 in 10 nonprofit news organizations publicly disclose at least some of their donors, including a third who release the names of all funders. Forty-four percent of nonprofit news organizations who disclose some but not all donors report the names of funders that provide \$5,000 or more. INN guidelines for members say all donations of at least \$5,000 annually should be publicly disclosed.

There is a much greater tendency in the newer realm of nonprofit news, much of which is online, toward having publicly available written policies about funding and disclosure than there is in the older realm of public radio and television. In all, two-thirds of nonprofit news organizations have a written policy about the disclosure of their funders that they share publicly on their website or through their annual report, including fully 75% of non-PBS/NPR nonprofits, but only a third of PBS/NPR organizations.

Most nonprofit news organizations have policies about disclosing funders.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



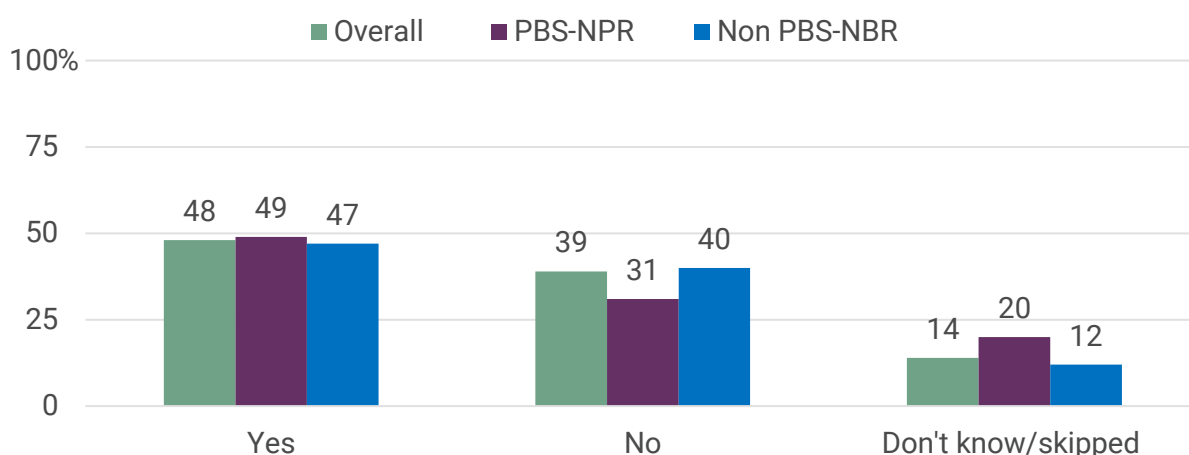
Question: Does your organization have a written policy about disclosing contributors that is posted on your website or annual report?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Less than half of nonprofit news organizations have policies regarding what types of funders they will accept support from.

Nearly half nonprofit news organizations have rules regarding from whom to accept funding.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



Question: Does your organization have written guidelines regarding who they will and will not accept money from?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

As noted in Section II (the Journalism Funders section) another potential issue in philanthropic funding of news when it comes to transparency and disclosure involves the role of donor-advised funds, or DAFs. In politics, donor-advised funds have been used to shield a handful of large donors who want to back a political candidate or issue without identifying themselves.

In the new world of philanthropic funding of journalism, however, a lot of activity involving donor-advised funds has taken on a different character. Local community foundations use the same structure to gather small contributions and donations to help raise funds for journalism.

The survey reveals that 74% of nonprofit media organizations receive contributions from donor-advised funds. Of these, 22% identify the fund and its contributors, while 19% identify the donor-advised fund but not its constituent contributors and 21% don't disclose information about the donor-advised funds that support their work. Another quarter report using some other form of reporting and 12% were not sure what they do or do not disclose publicly.

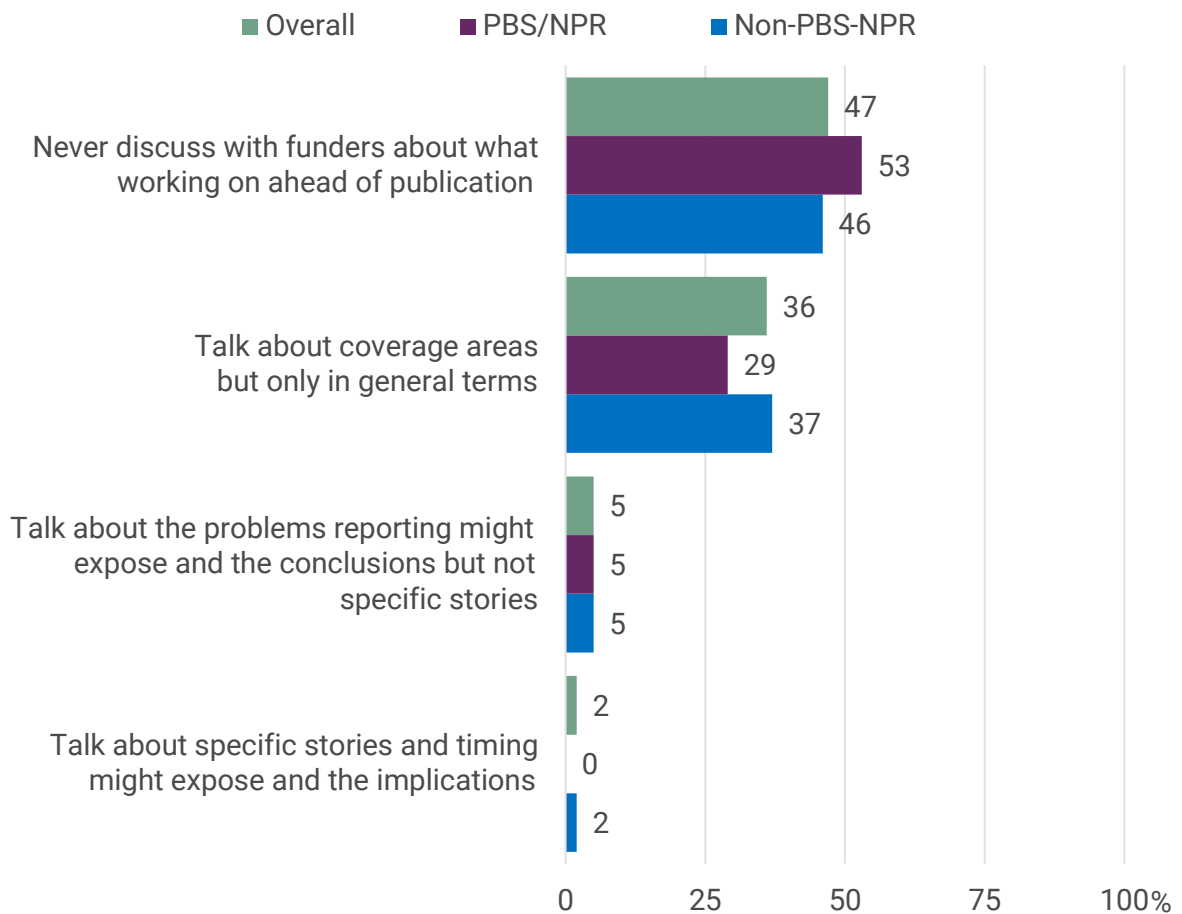
Possible Conflicts of Interest

Most nonprofit organizations have little or no contact with their funders regarding the specifics of their reporting, a key finding about a practice that strengthens editorial independence. And more than 9 in 10 say funders never see editorial content ahead of publication.

Nearly 4 in 10 nonprofit news organizations (36%) say they talk about coverage with funders, though only in general terms. In the survey, 7% say they have more specific discussions with funders about content. Making changes to editorial content in the wake of funder feedback is exceptionally rare - fully 70% say they have never done so and 23% of the nonprofit news organizations surveyed say they have never received a request from a funder to make editorial changes.

Few organizations discuss editorial content with their funders.

Percent of nonprofit organizations



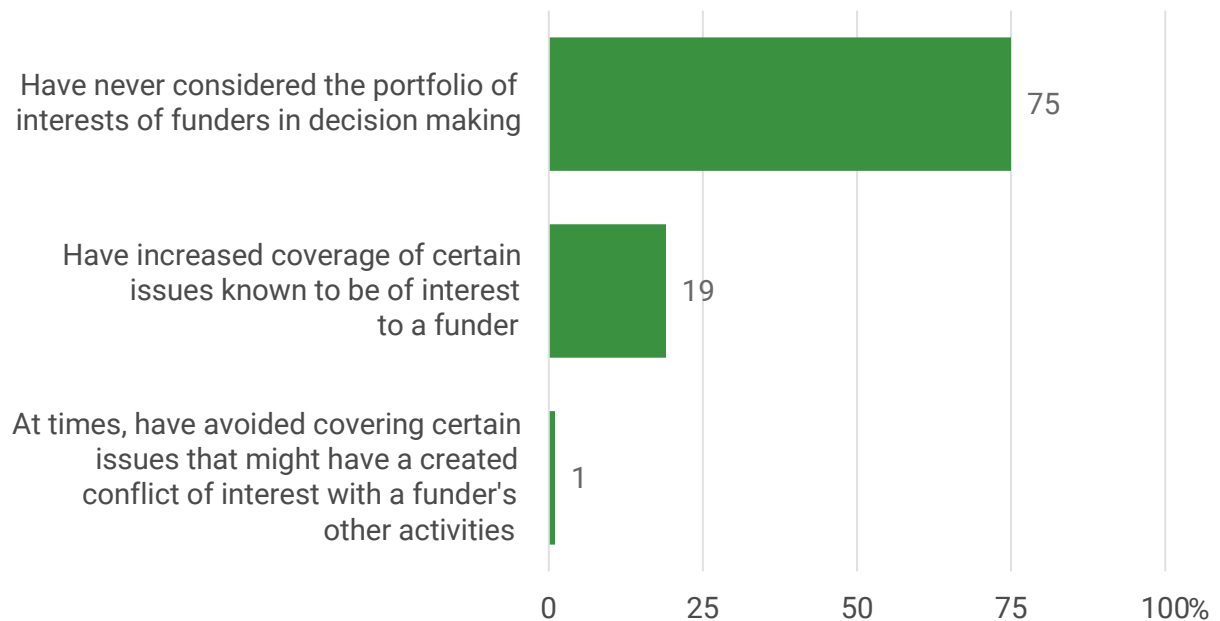
Question: To what degree does your organization usually communicate with funders about what you are working on prior to publication?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

Although three-quarters of nonprofit media organizations do not take into account the interests of their funders when deciding what issues to cover, about 1 in 5 say they have increased their coverage of topics known to be important to a funder.

Most nonprofit media do not consider funders' interests in their editorial decisions.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



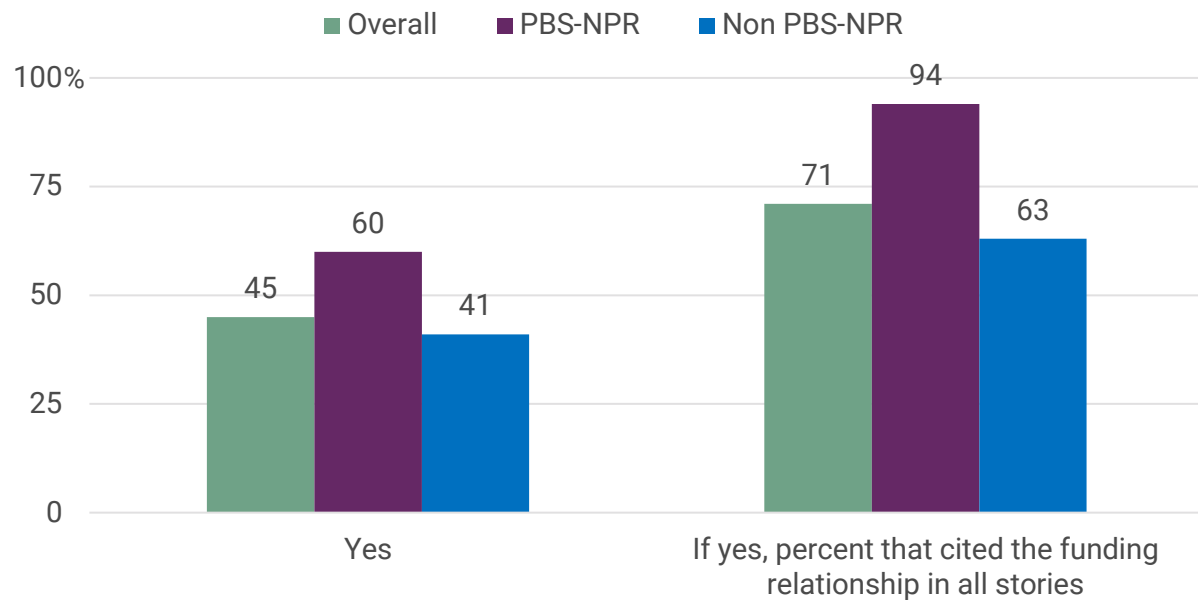
Question: Even without any explicit conversations taking place, would you say your organization's relationship with a funder has ever influenced coverage in any of the following ways? *Select all that apply.*

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

One issue that all media face is what to do if a person or entity with whom you have a financial arrangement becomes a focus of news themselves – whether they are an advertiser in the commercial arena of journalism or a funder. With funders, this issue can be even more sensitive, given that many nonprofit news organizations have only a handful of major contributors. As it turns out, close to half of nonprofit news organizations (45%) report they have encountered situations in which a partner or funder has become a subject of one of their news articles. When this occurred, 94% of PBS/NPR stations and 63% of other nonprofit news organizations revealed in every article on the issue that they received financial support from the entity.

Public news media are more likely cover their funders in their news reports.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



Question: Has a partner or funder your organization has worked with ever subsequently been a subject of one of your organization's own news stories? If yes: Did you mention the funding in that story?

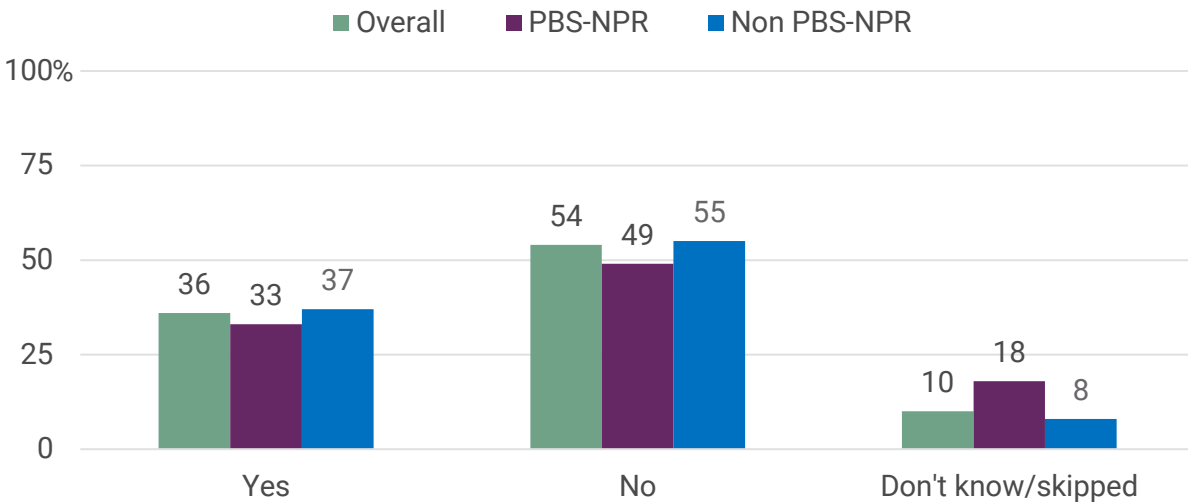
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

The most sensitive and potentially controversial area of philanthropic funding of news occurs when a funder requests a specific article, series of articles, or an investigative series to be produced. How common are such requests, and what do nonprofit newsrooms do when they occur?

Most nonprofit news organizations report they have not received any requests from funders to produce a specific series of articles or conduct a particular investigation. Overall, roughly a third (36%) say they have had such requests. Of those who have, more than two thirds (69%) have accepted the funding. Two-thirds of those, in turn, say they did so because the project had already been on their list.

About a third of nonprofit news organizations receive offers for specific articles or reporting projects.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



Question: Has a foundation ever offered to fund an investigation or specific series of stories on an issue or problem, as opposed to ongoing coverage of a general topic area?

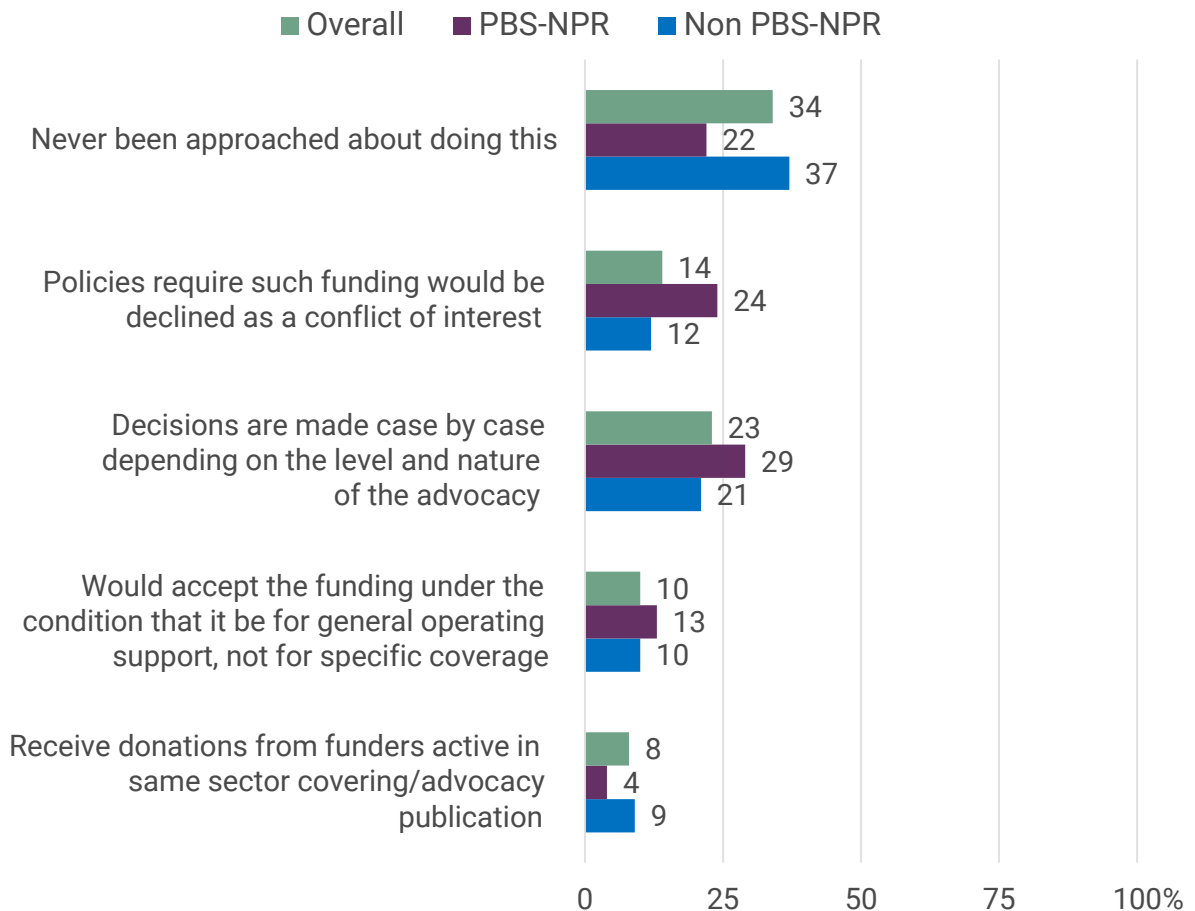
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

Another issue surrounding philanthropic funding of news involves the fact that many funders are engaged in policy advocacy as well as media funding, an issue that will only grow as philanthropic funding of news increases. How common are such situations? How do news organizations decide whether to accept such funding? If they do, how do they create a firewall between their coverage and the advocacy side of the same funder or assure the public there is no real or even apparent conflict of interest? The survey probed all these questions.

Many nonprofit news organizations say they would accept financial support to cover a topic where the donor is interested in changing policy or influencing the public. About a quarter say they decide on a case-by-case basis whether to accept the funding depending on the level of advocacy. A third say they have never been approached about such funding. Another 14% say they have policies in place that require them to refuse such funding.

Few nonprofit organizations accept funding to report on a funder's priority without additional consideration

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



Question: Does your organization ever accept grants to cover issues on which the funder is also engaged in work such as trying to change policy, or influence public behavior on that issue?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

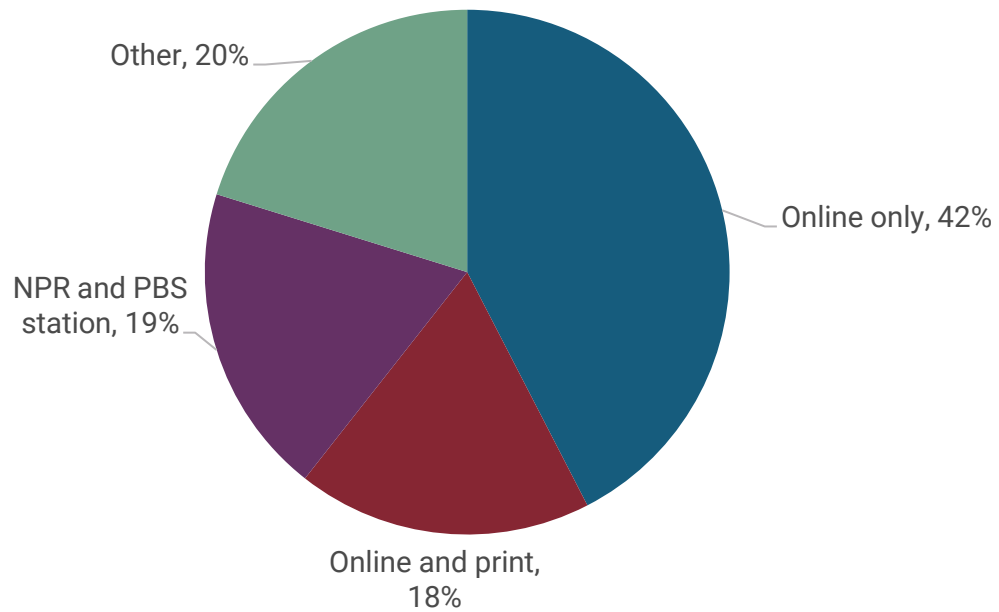
For most, it has not been an issue that raised many questions. Few nonprofit organizations have needed to defend themselves against critiques of their funding. Overall, 81% say they have never been criticized for any accepted funding.

The Philanthropic Landscape for Nonprofit Journalism

The survey includes 293 nonprofit news and media organizations. Most report their primary distribution channel was either online only (42%) or online and print (18%) -- and about a fifth were PBS or NPR stations. Other types of primary distribution channels for these nonprofit organizations include email newsletters (4%), podcasts, social media or SMS platform based (2%), or capacity building to provide services and resources to the field (2%).

Most nonprofit news organizations have an online presence

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



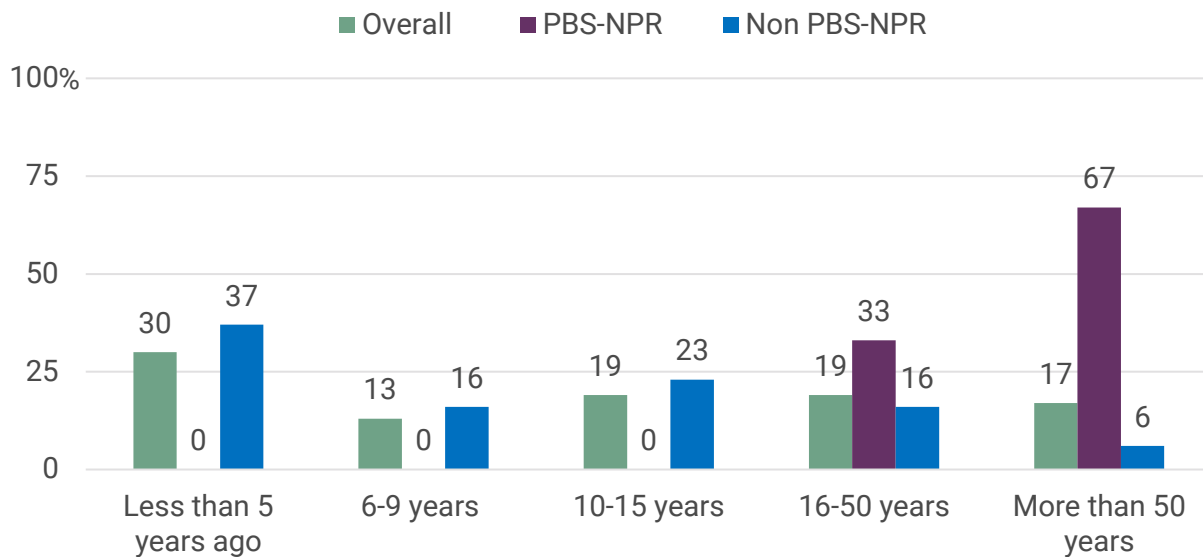
Question: Which of the following best describes your organization?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Outside of the PBS/NPR model, nonprofit business models are relatively new. Most nonprofit news organizations have been in existence for 15 years or less. Digital-only organizations tend to be younger: 40% were founded less than five years ago. However, two-thirds of PBS/NPR stations have been around for more than 50 years.

While PBS and NPR stations have been established for many years, other nonprofit news organizations tend to be newer.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



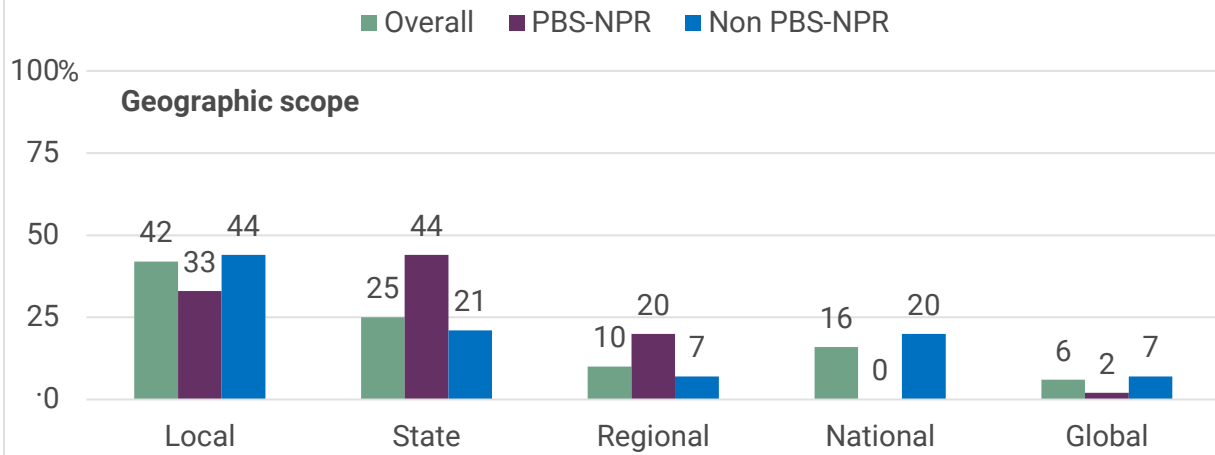
Question: What year was your organization founded? How many years has your foundation or funding organization been in existence?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

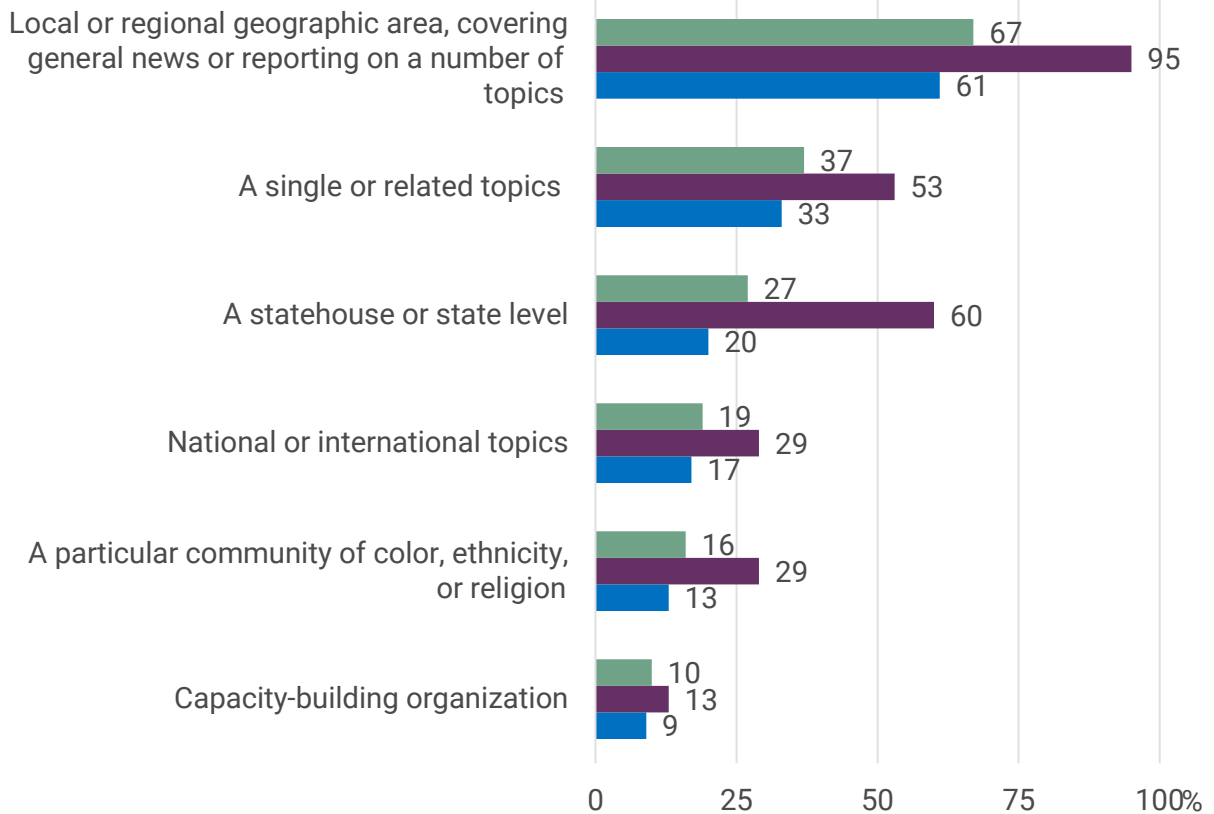
Many of these nonprofit news organizations seem to be filling gaps in local coverage as commercial outlets close. Nonprofit news organizations primarily cover local and state geographic areas with fewer noting a regional, national, or international coverage area, or regional news. In terms of their focus areas, two-thirds say they cover the general news of a local geographic area and another 27% have a state or statehouse reporting focus.

Nonprofit news organizations mostly cover local or regional news.

Percent of nonprofit news organizations



Organization's focus



Questions: What is the primary geographic scope of your organization's coverage?

What is the focus of your organization? *Select all that apply.*

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

SECTION IV. THE SURVEY OF FOR-PROFIT NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

For-profit news organizations traditionally have been financed by advertising. For many of them, accepting philanthropic contributions is a relatively new phenomenon. Demonstrating the growth in this type of funding, the survey reveals that philanthropic funding is going to a wide range of for-profit newsrooms – from small start-ups to long-established and better-funded operations. And these for-profit news operations are leveraging philanthropic giving for everything from direct grants to training and development programs to resources to better serve the news and informational needs of historically marginalized communities.

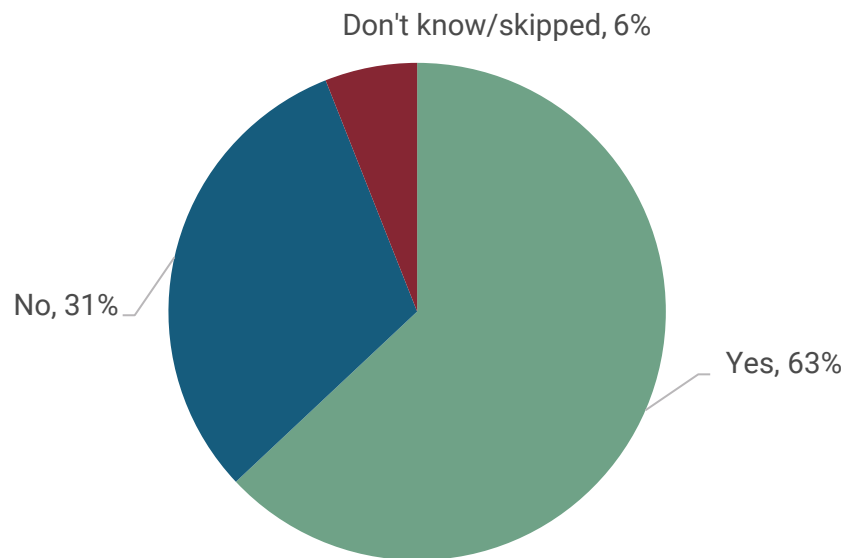
The following sections provide insights from the survey to understand the current landscape: How much do for-profit news organizations rely on philanthropic funding? How are they managing this new funding source in terms of their standards and practices? What barriers do for-profit newsrooms face to accessing philanthropic funding?

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Most for-profit news organizations (63%) surveyed say the racial and ethnic make-up of their newsroom reflects the community they serve. But less than a quarter say they primarily serve communities of color. Half say there has been a great deal or moderate amount of increased diversity in their newsrooms, better reflecting the community they serve.

Most say their newsroom reflects the diversity of the community they serve.

Percent of for-profit newsrooms



Question: Does the racial and ethnic diversity of your newsroom reflect the community you serve?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

Of the for-profit news organizations that focus on serving communities of color, 66% predominantly focus on Black communities and 19% concentrate on Hispanic communities. Fifty-six percent of them say the funding they receive

specifically to serve communities of color has increased over the past five years, 34% report it has remained about the same, and 6% have seen a decrease.

Philanthropic Funding

It is impossible from the survey to get a firm number of how many for-profit news operations are now receiving philanthropic dollars, but various signals in the data show that the space is growing – and significantly.

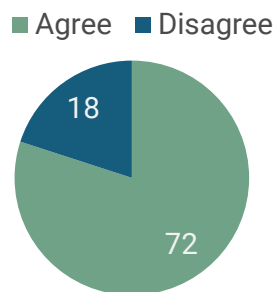
For instance, of the 164 for-profit news organizations interviewed, 138 (84%) have received donations or other philanthropic giving in the last five years or have participated in philanthropic-funded training and leadership programs that assist in growing subscriptions and transitioning outlets from print to digital.

Seventy-two percent agree that philanthropy should support all forms of for-profit news. Of those who do not agree, just 31% think philanthropic organizations should only fund a select group of for-profit newsrooms that are family-owned, independent, or local organizations, or not fund-for-profit newsrooms at all.

Two-thirds of for-profit news organizations have free access on their website to articles primarily supported by philanthropy.

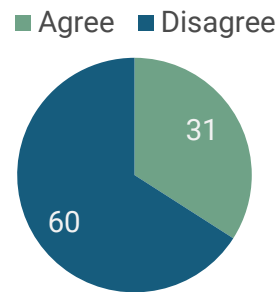
Most agree that funding should support all types of for-profit news. Just 31% of those who disagree think only select groups should be supported.

Percent of for-profit news



Question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Philanthropy should play a role in supporting all types of for-profit news organizations.

Percent of for-profit news



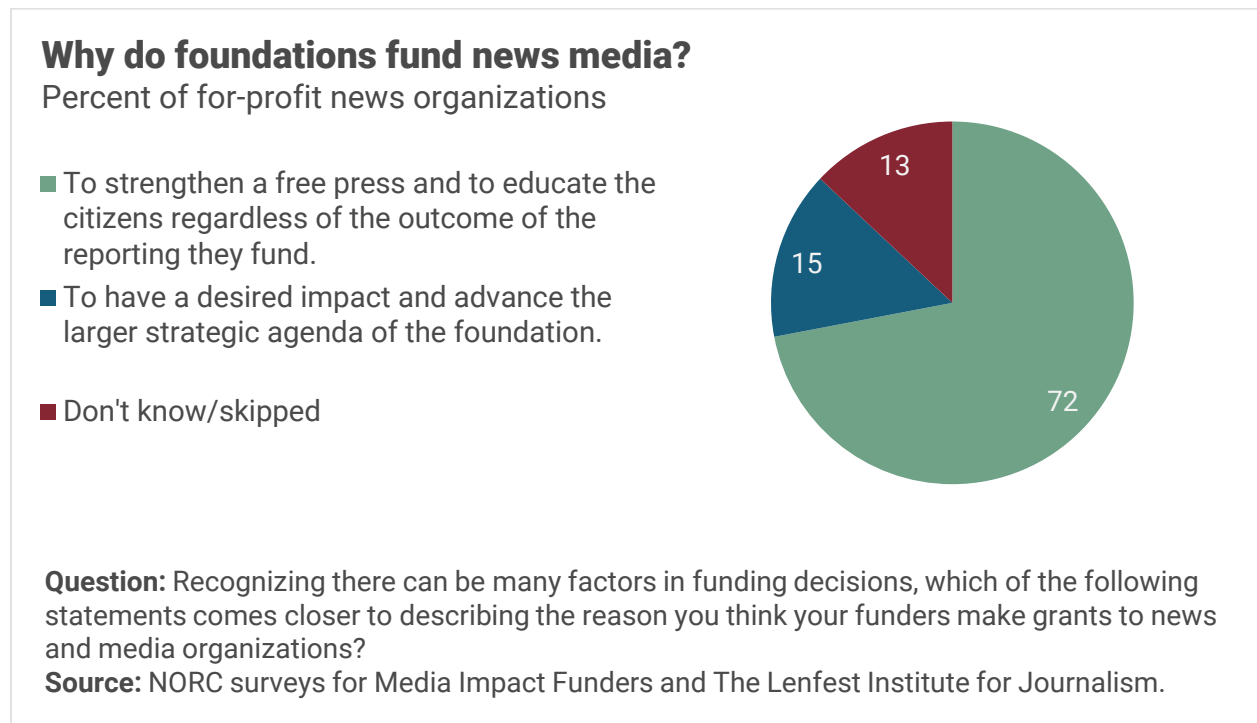
Question: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Philanthropy should play a role in supporting only a select group of for-profit organizations that are family owned, independently owned, or locally owned?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

When asked about government involvement in funding journalism, 41% of these organizations agree with the goals of the Rebuild Local News coalition, which would increase government funding of media. Fourteen percent disagree with this initiative and 45% are unsure.

When these organizations are asked what would help them access more philanthropic funding, 22% mention more openness on the part of funders to support for-profit news organizations rather than just nonprofit news, with one respondent noting, “many other organizations are still stuck on ‘Why would we support a for-profit business?’” Seventeen percent would like to see a simplified and more transparent process for requesting funding, with one remarking, “I rarely have time to focus on researching grants and completing applications. A few times when I have done so, I've been told we weren't awarded the funding either because we're doing ‘too well’ on our own or because we are too small to be helped. It's frustrating to fall through the cracks like that.”

What do for-profit news organizations think is motivating foundations’ support of media? Most think foundation funding of news media is driven by a desire on the part of foundations to strengthen a free press rather than to advance their own agenda.



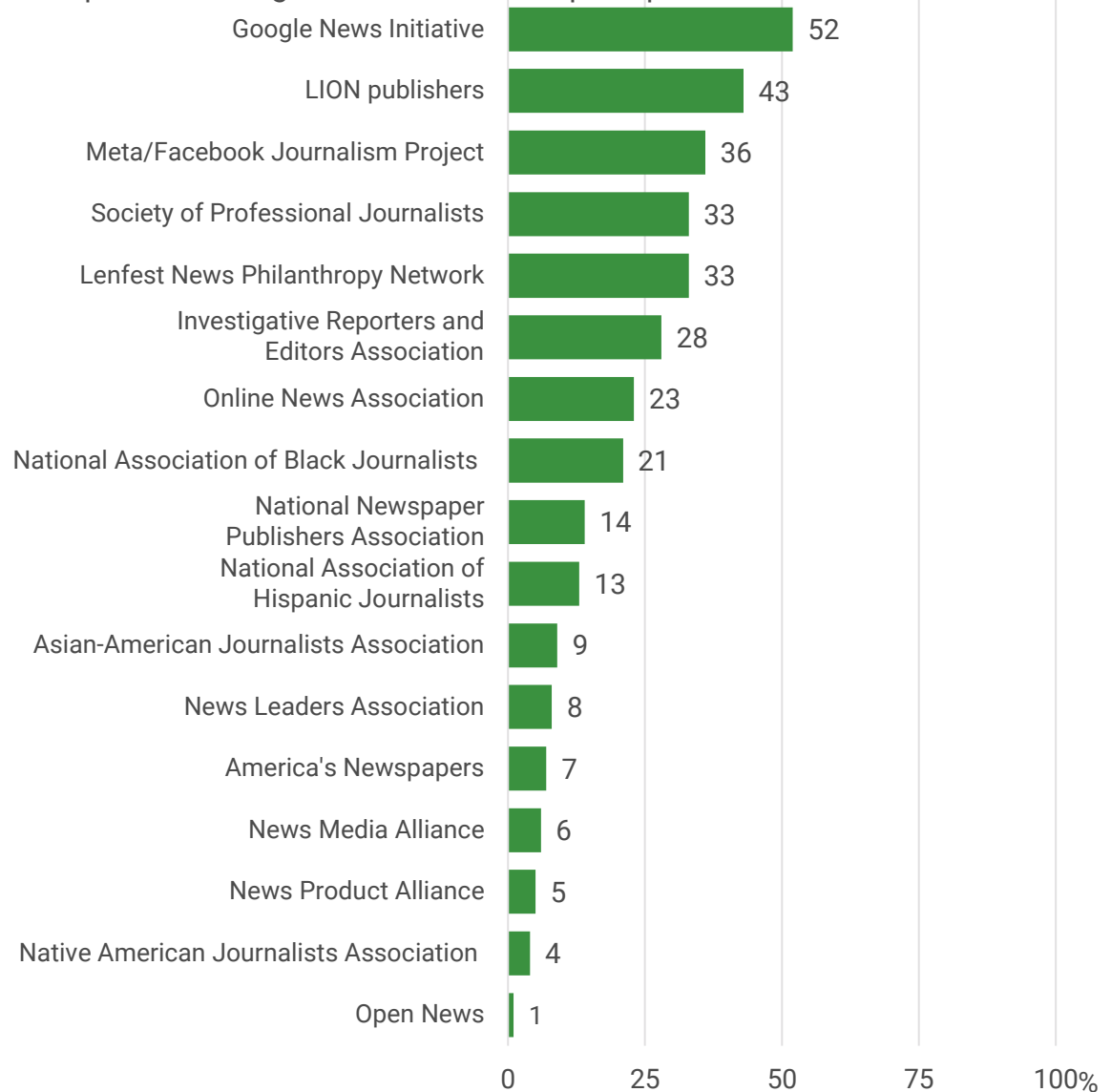
If there has been substantial growth in philanthropic dollars flowing to for-profit media – not just nonprofit – where is that money coming from?

Fifty-two percent of for-profit news operations say they have received direct funding or training from the Google News Initiative during the past five years. Of those, 21% have received at least \$100,000. Thirty-six percent have received direct funding or training from the Meta/Facebook Journalism Project, and 28% of them have received at least \$100,000. The Meta Journalism Project, which provided direct funding for local media organizations, was discontinued in 2022.

Twenty-nine percent of for-profit news organizations have participated in programing, training or resources provided by minority journalist organizations, including the National Association of Black Journalists (21%), National Association of Hispanic Journalists (13%), Asian-American Journalists Association (9%) and Native American Journalists Association (now known as the Indigenous Journalists Association) (4%).

Most for-profit news organizations have received resources from at least one journalism project or association.

Percent of for-profit news organizations that have participated in:



Questions: In the last five years, has your organization received direct funding or participated in accelerator or other training programs from the Meta/Facebook Journalism Project? In the last five years, has your organization received direct funding, accelerator, or other training from the Google News Initiative? Does your organization or staff belong or participate in programming, training and resources provided by any of the following? *Select all that apply.*

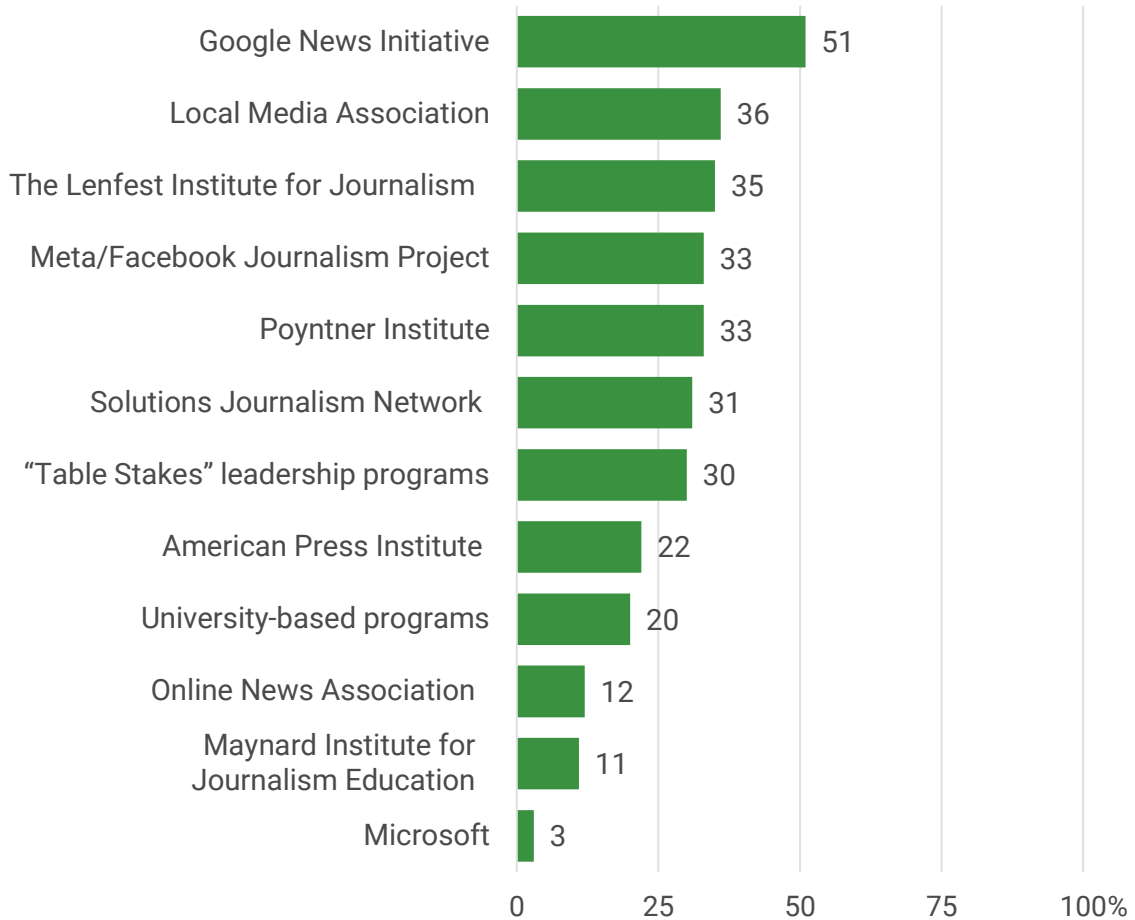
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Of the for-profit news organizations that have received support from any of these journalism projects or associations, 33% say LION has provided the most value for their news organization. Thirteen percent mention The Lenfest News Philanthropy Network as a source from which they received the most value.

Over the past five years, most for-profit news organizations have participated in various training, accelerators, fellowships, or leadership development programs. In fact, 60% have participated in more than one program. Only 17% have not taken part in any of these programs.

Most for-profit news organizations have participated in development programs.

Percent of for-profit news organizations that have participated in:



Question: In the last five years, have you or members of your organization participated in training, accelerators, fellowships, or leadership development programs from any of the following? *Select all that apply.*

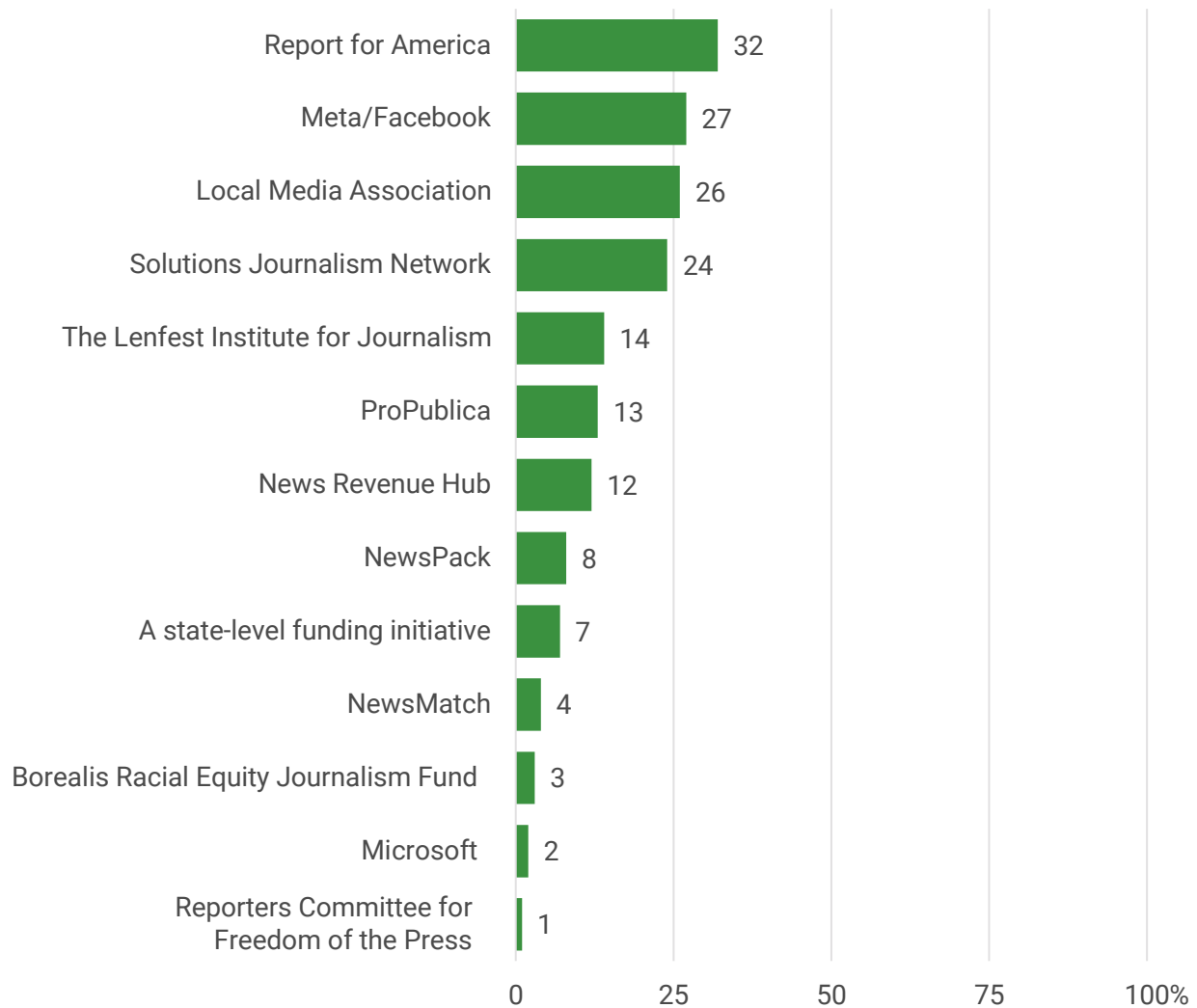
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Given the number of these programs from support groups, the survey also asks those participants which ones have been most helpful. In response, 25% mention the Google News Initiative and 20% say the Local Media Association. Fourteen percent cite The Lenfest Institute and 14% mention the Meta/Facebook Journalism Project.

Over the past five years, most for-profit organizations have accessed direct funding, fellows, or resources from organizations that promote journalism. Twenty percent of the for-profit organizations surveyed have not received any support from these organizations.

Most for-profit news organizations have received direct funding, fellows, or resources from associations that promote journalism.

Percent of for-profit news organizations that have accessed resources from:



Question: In the last five years, have you or members of your organization accessed direct funding, fellows, or resources from any of these organizations? *Select all that apply.*

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

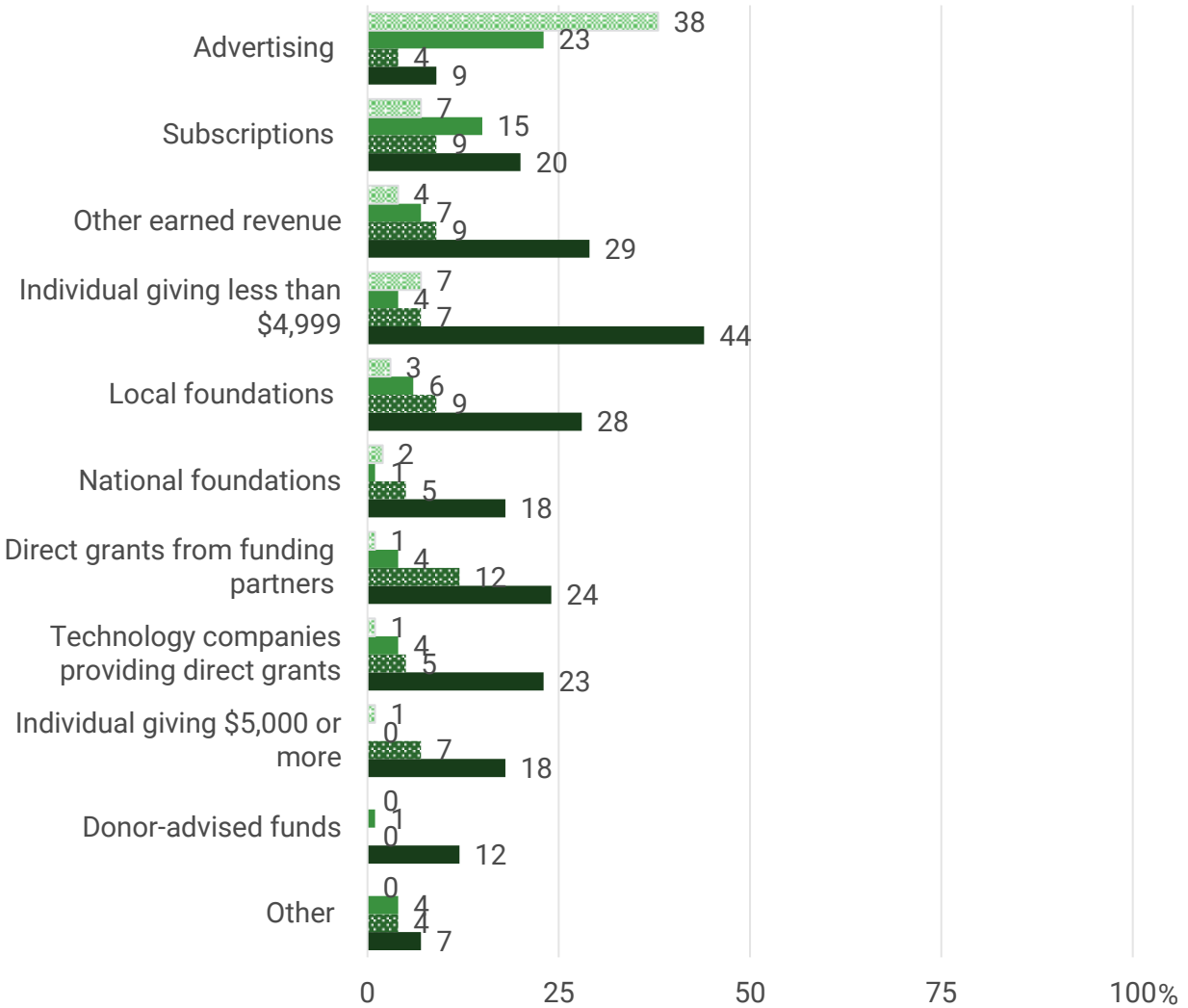
When asked in an open-ended question what further assistance they would like to receive from these groups, 30% cite financial support. Nine percent say they would like to receive sustainability training or resources and another 9% mention access to networks of funders and other collaborators.

Even among for-profit news organizations that receive philanthropic funding, advertising still makes up the largest proportion of their budgets. Although individual giving, corporate grants, and foundation funding are part of the funding structure, they generally make up a smaller proportion of the budgets. For example, 28% of these for-profit news operations report that less than 10% of their budget is from local foundations.

For-profit media organizations still heavily rely on advertising revenue.

Percent of for-profit news organizations

■ More than 50 percent
 ■ 25 to 50 percent
 ■ 10 to 25 percent
 ■ Less than 10 percent



Question: In your CY 2022 expense budget, approximately what percentage of revenue came from each of the following revenue sources?

Source: NORC survey for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Philanthropic funding currently is a smaller portion of these organizational budgets, but it appears to be an increasing source of funding for the industry. Among those receiving grants from foundations and individuals, about half have seen an increase in that funding over the last five years, and funding has remained steady for nearly all the rest.

Fifty-three percent of for-profit organizations have increased their collaboration with other news organizations over the past five years. The motivation for those partnerships seems primarily self-driven as only 24% of those who have partnered with other news organizations say they received incentives from their funders to increase the collaboration.

Transparency

Another issue for for-profit news organizations that now may accept philanthropic dollars is how transparent they are about those relationships. For most of their history up to now, for-profit news operations have not had to think much about disclosure of where their revenue came from – it was already transparent. The auto dealers and department store ads were right there in the paper for everyone to see. That was the point of the advertising – for consumers to see it and hopefully be influenced.

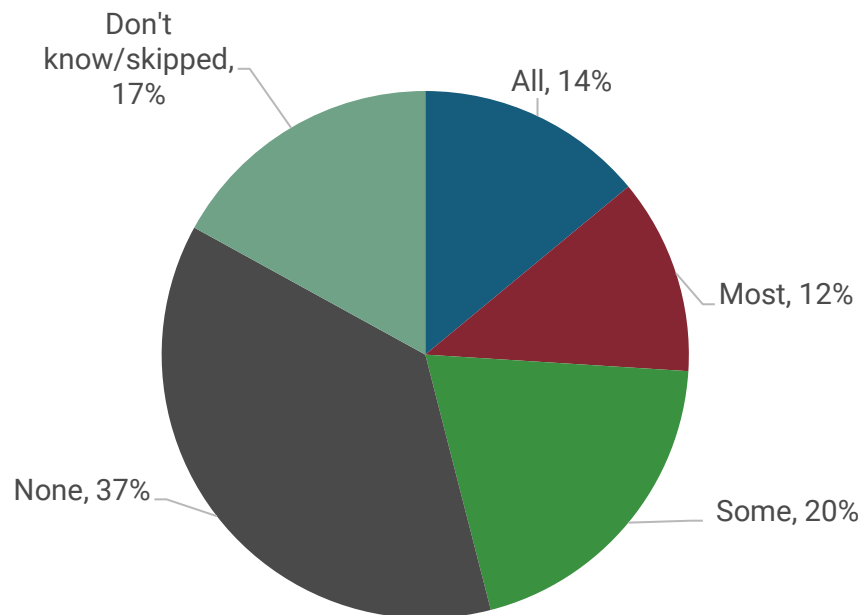
Philanthropic funding is not so automatically transparent. A news organization must make an affirmative decision to disclose who gives them money, since it is not an automatic exchange for space in the publication to promote their product or business. What did the survey discover about disclosure of funders by for-profit news operations?

Overall, the survey suggests that for-profit news operations taking philanthropic dollars (many of them new to this kind of revenue) have some distance to go in 2023 to match the level of transparency that is now practiced by nonprofit news organizations taking philanthropic dollars.

In all, 46% of philanthropy-backed for-profit news organizations publicly disclose at least some of their donors, including 14% who release the names of all funders. But 37% do not publicly release the identity of any donors.

Nearly 4 in 10 do not publicly disclose their donors.

Percent of for-profit news organizations



Question: On its website or annual report, does your organization publicly list all your donors, most of them, only some, or none?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

For those organizations that disclose most or some of their funders, the level of the donor's contribution does not seem to be the determining factor. Most (67%) do not set an amount of funding above which they disclose the funders. Twenty-four percent report the names of funders that provide \$500 or more.

But far fewer transparent policies exist on the for-profit side of philanthropic funding for news than on the nonprofit side. By that we mean nonprofit news organizations are far more likely to have clear, publicly available guidelines about disclosure than for-profit news organizations.

In all, 72% have no written policy about the disclosure of their funders that is posted on their website or annual report. Fourteen percent do have a public policy posted, and another 14% aren't sure about their policy.

Interestingly, newer for-profits that take philanthropic funding are further along in developing these policies than older news organizations. Among for-profit news organizations that have been in business less than 15 years, 23% have publicly available policies about funder disclosure. In comparison, less than 10% of older companies have such written policies.

As noted in Section II (the journalism funders section) another issue in philanthropic funding of news when it comes to transparency and disclosure involves the role of donor-advised funds or DAFs. In politics, donor-advised funds have been used to shield a handful of large donors who want to back a political candidate or issue without identifying themselves.

In the new world of philanthropic funding of journalism, however, a lot of activity involving donor-advised funds has taken on a different character. Local community foundations can use the same structure to gather small contributions and donations to help raise funds for journalism. What do we see on the for-profit side of philanthropic funding of news?

Thirty percent of for-profit media organizations report that they receive contributions from donor-advised funds. It should be noted that most donor-advised funds can only support nonprofit organizations, by nature of their set-up and legal/tax structure. Of these, a third are unsure whether their organization provides any information about the contributors to donor-advised funds. Nineteen percent identify the donor-advised fund but not its constituent contributors, and 10% disclose both the name of the fund and its contributors. Seventeen percent offer no information about the donor-advised funds that support their work.

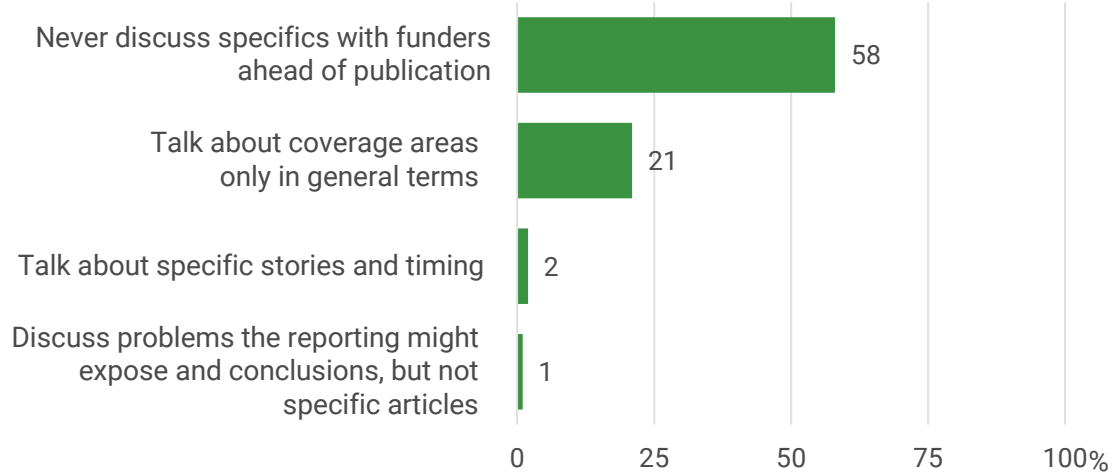
Possible Conflicts of Interest

The tradition in commercial media, of course, is that advertisers, and even the advertising side of the publication, have no contact with the way news is covered. That is often referred to as the separation of church and state in news.

It appears a similar tradition exists in the philanthropic funding of for-profit news. Most for-profit news organizations have little or no direct engagement with their funders about the specific work they're doing. The majority, nearly 6 in 10, say it is their policy never to discuss specifics with funders ahead of publication.

Few for-profit news organizations discuss specific journalistic content with their funders.

Percent of for-profit news organizations



Question: To what degree does your organization usually communicate with funders about what you are working on prior to publication?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

An even larger majority of for-profit news operations (83%) say they never share editorial content with funders ahead of publication. Three-quarters say they have never made changes based on a funder’s input, and another 14% say they have never been asked by a funder to make editorial changes.

The most controversial dynamic in philanthropic funding of journalism is associated with how specific a funder gets in terms of the kind of journalism they want produced. The closer that a funder gets to paying for a specific story, series, or exposé to be produced, the more there can be the appearance of purchased journalism. Much depends on how such work comes about. A news organization that has previously decided it wants to do a series or exposé and seeks out financial support for the work, that can look very different than if a funder approaches a news outlet and suggests the exposé.

What does the survey reveal about this when it comes to for-profit news outlets?

A large majority never had to confront the issue because they never received an offer from a funder to produce a specific story on a particular issue. But a sizable minority did. In all, 28% of for-profit news organizations received offers from foundations to fund stories on a particular issue. Of them, 79% accepted the funding, largely because the project seemed worthwhile (43%) or was already on their radar (40%). Ten percent said they went forward with the specific project because the funding was important for their sustainability or because they wanted to establish a relationship with the funder.

Still, that number is markedly lower than was found in 2015. Eight years ago, about half of the for-profit organizations surveyed had received offers for specific stories on

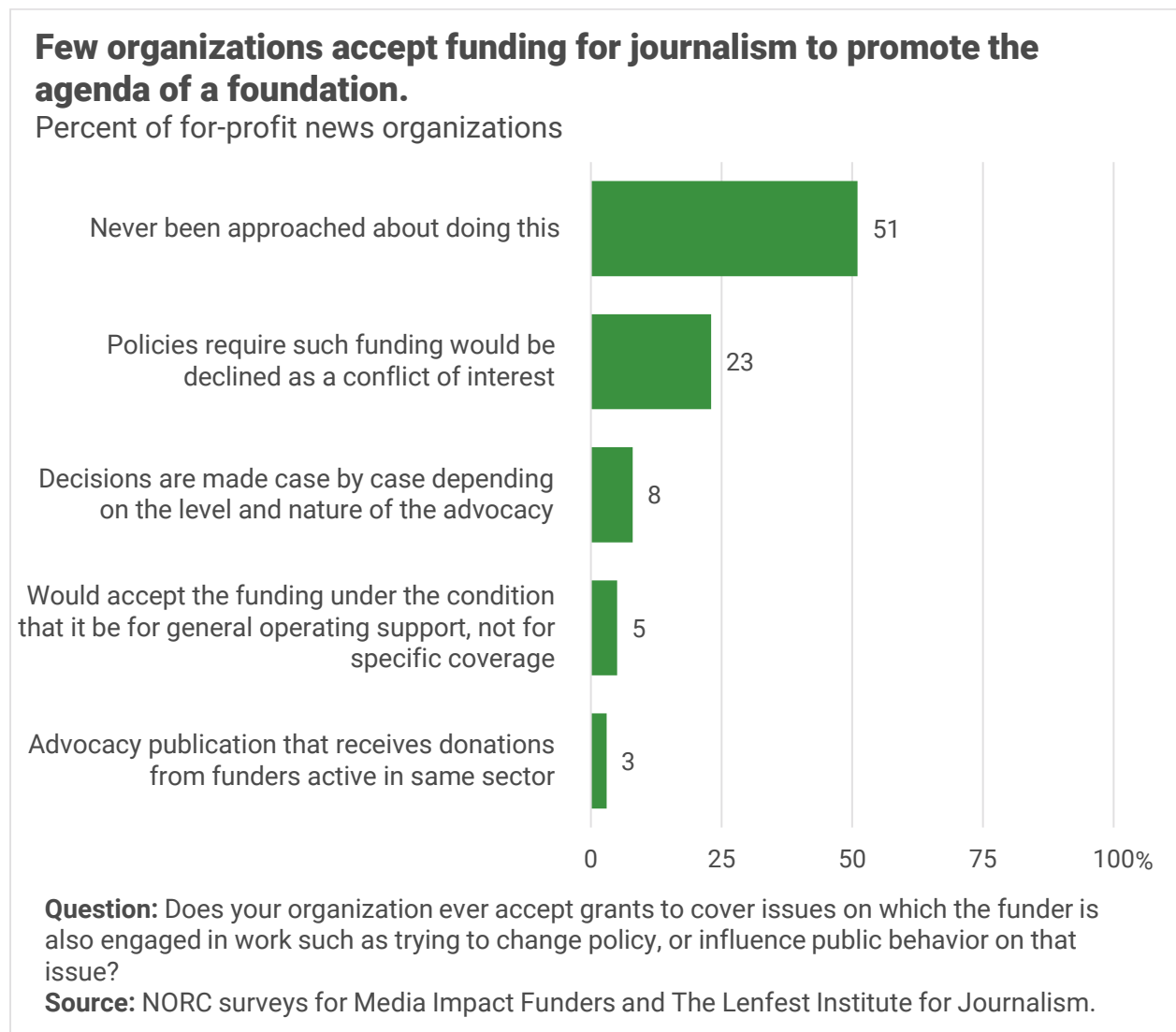
an issue. At that time, 57% said the funding was accepted. Thirty percent said they accepted the funding because they already had a good relationship with the funder and 25% because the project was already on their list. Fifteen

percent said the funds were accepted to develop a relationship with the funder and another 15% mentioned that the project seemed to be worthwhile.

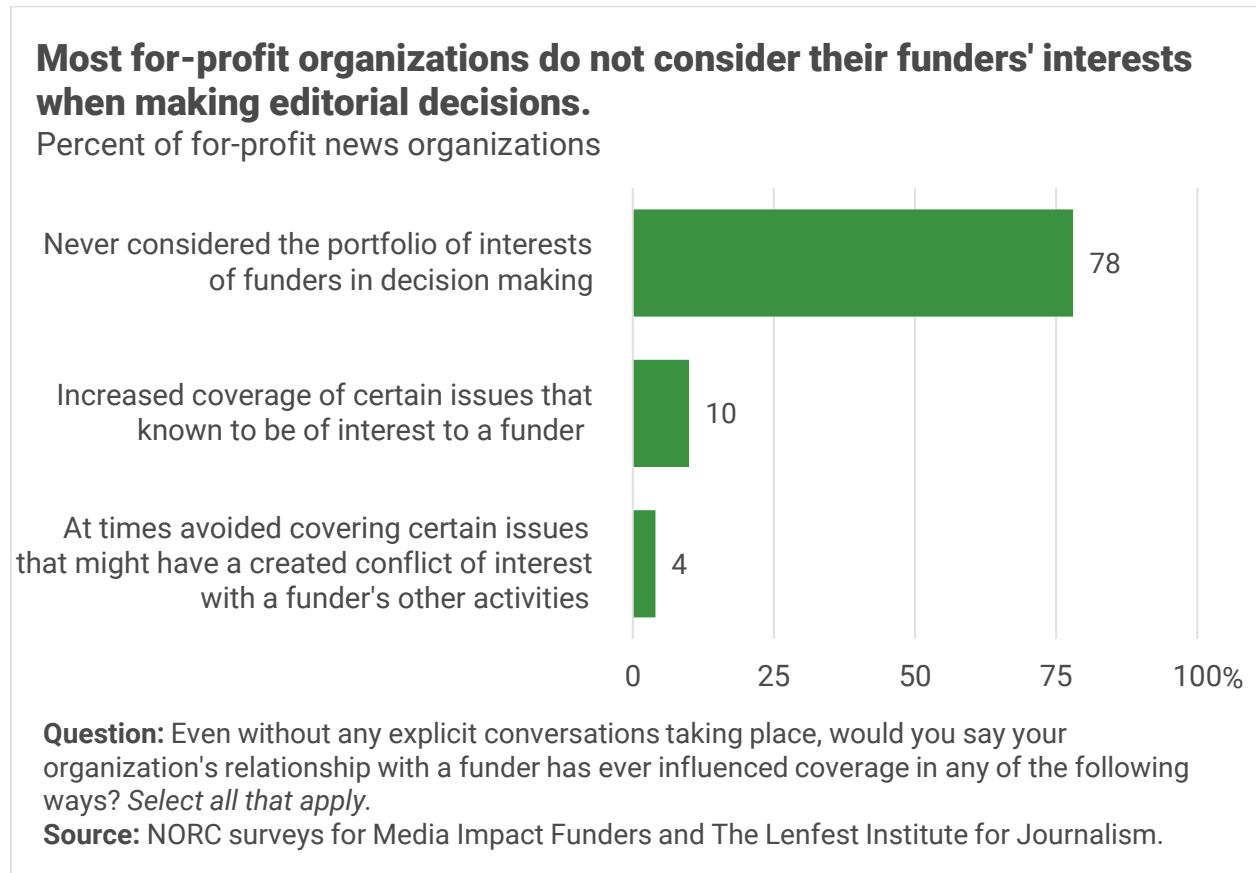
Most organizations (82%) say they have not had to defend themselves from public criticism after accepting funding from any particular source.

Another issue in philanthropic funding involves potential conflicts of interest between newsrooms and funders. The risk is higher when a funder is supporting journalism in an area where they are also supporting policy change or advocacy efforts. Again, that can become a sensitive issue because usually the number of philanthropic donors to a news outlet – for-profit or nonprofit – is small compared with the number of advertisers a news organization might once have had. How large an issue is it for for-profit news operations?

Although most philanthropic donors do indeed fund journalism in areas where they also do policy work, the survey finds that half of the for-profit organizations surveyed have not received such an offer. Another quarter say their policy would be to decline that type of funding.



Even when offers for specific coverage or coverage conversations are not taking place, most for-profit news organizations do not feel their relationship with a funder influences their decision making. Almost 8 in 10 say they never consider the portfolio of interests of funders when making editorial decisions. Only 4% say they have avoided covering issues that might have created a conflict with a funder’s interests. And 10% acknowledge they have increased coverage of an issue that they know a funder is interested in.



What did the survey find about how for-profit newsrooms manage news coverage of funders? Twenty-eight percent of for-profit media outlets have featured stories about a partner or funder. Of those, 44% mentioned the relationship in the article, 23% did not, and 8% cited the funding in some stories but not others.

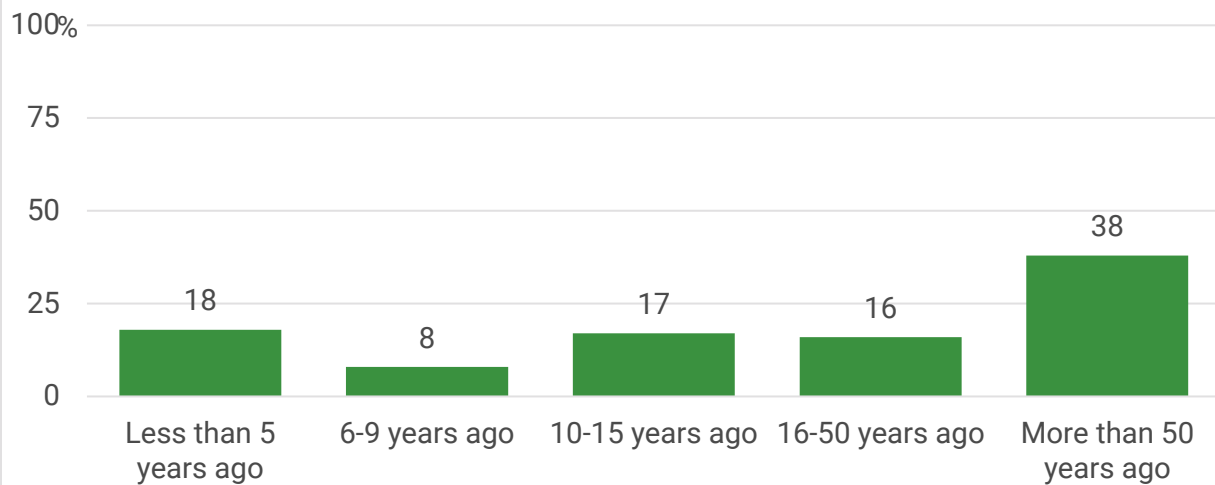
The Philanthropic Landscape for For-Profit News

What are the characteristics of for-profit news operations that receive philanthropic funding? Most for-profit news outlets responding to the survey report that they have received direct support or have participated in training or other programs supported by journalism philanthropy in the last five years.

That funding is going to both newer start-ups and legacy news organizations. Among the for-profit media organizations that receive philanthropic funding, more than half have been in operation for more than 16 years, and 38% were established more than 50 years ago. They are distributed throughout the country with 33% in the Northeast, 15% in the Midwest, 25% in the South, and 23% in the western states. Seventy-nine percent are in the same state where their owners are headquartered.

Half of for-profit news organizations receiving philanthropic funding have been in operation for more than 16 years.

Percent of for-profit news organizations



Question: What year was your organization founded?

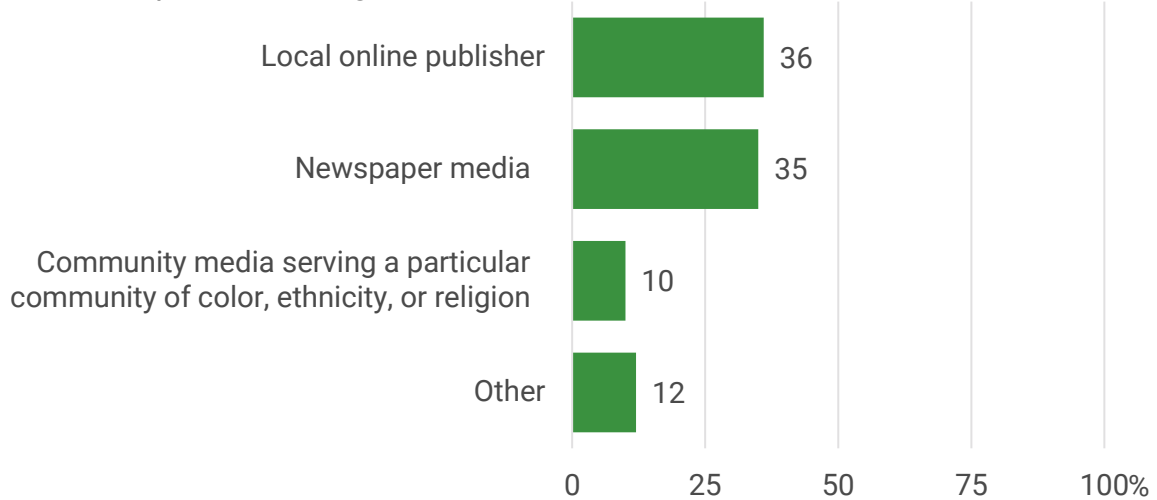
Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Most for-profit news organizations are local online publishers (36%) or newspaper media (35%). Ten percent are community media organizations serving a particular community like BIPOC or religious populations. Other types include radio (4%), single subject organization (1%), podcast or social media (1%), and television (1%).

A majority are local in their geographic scope (73%), while 14% provide state-level coverage and 9% are regional or multi-state. Only about 1% are national or global in scope.

Most classify as newspapers or local online publishers.

Percent of for-profit news organizations



Question: Which media category best describes your news organization?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

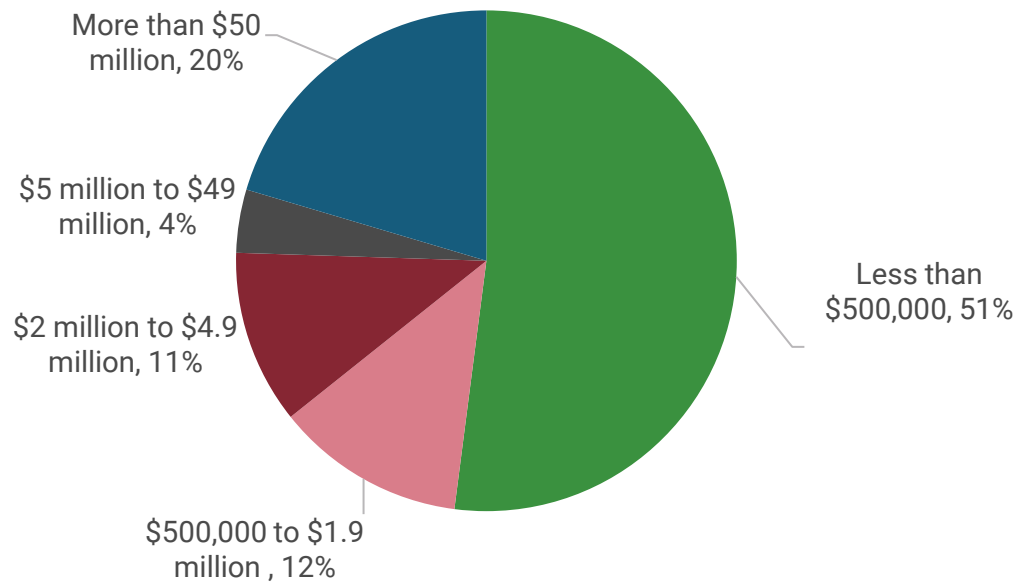
About half of for-profit news organizations have an annual budget of less than \$500,000. Online only and newer publications tend to have smaller budgets compared to established newspaper media organizations.

Most online-only organizations (86%) have an annual budget under \$500,000. Among for-profit newsrooms that have been in operation less than 15 years, 87% have annual budgets under \$500,000. Still, 1 in 5 for-profit newsrooms receiving philanthropic funding are in large operations with annual budgets over \$5 million.

Twenty percent devote less than half of their budget to producing journalism, while 59% spend half or more of their budget generating journalism. Twenty percent are not sure of the proportion of their organization’s budget that directly funds journalism.

Half have yearly operating budgets of less than \$500,000.

Percent of for-profit news organizations



Question: What was your organization's approximate calendar year (CY) 2022 expense budget?

Source: NORC surveys for Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism.

Regarding newsroom staffing, 51% of these organizations have fewer than five full-time journalists or news producers. Twenty-four percent have between five and 19 newsroom staff and another 24% have more than 20 journalists on staff. Thirty-eight percent have seen an increase in their newsroom staff budgets over the past five years, 32% have seen a decrease, and 27% have remained about the same.

About half of the organizations (52%) have not eliminated any newsroom staffing positions in the last five years. Twenty-two percent have removed fewer than five positions, 11% lost between five and 29 positions, and another 12% removed more than 30 jobs.

SECTION V. STUDY BACKGROUND

The survey is the first phase of a larger project that will later include case studies and recommendations for the industry. If you would like to participate in this next phase of research, please contact Jennifer Preston at jepresto@gmail.com.

METHODOLOGY

This study was led and commissioned by Jennifer Preston and conducted NORC at the University of Chicago in partnership with Media Impact Funders and The Lenfest Institute for Journalism. Funding was provided by The Lenfest Institute, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Arnold Ventures, and Media Impact Funders. The research was conducted by Marjorie Connelly and Betsy Broadus from NORC, Tom Rosenstiel, the Eleanor Merrill Professor on the Future of Journalism at the University of Maryland Philip Merrill College of Journalism, and senior fellow at NORC, and Preston, a consultant for Media Impact Funders and a coach in the journalism funding lab at the Local Media Association. Preston is a former reporter and editor at The New York Times and former Vice President for Journalism at the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, where she worked from 2014 until 2021 during a significant expansion of philanthropic giving in support of local journalism.

The study includes three separate online surveys: a survey designed for funders that support journalism and news media; a survey for leaders at nonprofit news and public radio stations; and a survey for leaders at for-profit news organizations, including legacy news organizations and online independent local outlets. This is the first comprehensive survey of funders and the field since the API study in 2015 that charted the growth of the nonprofit journalism sector and new ethical concerns about potential conflicts of interest between funders and the journalists they support.

The research team constructed a sample list for all three survey populations and all organizations on the list were invited to participate. The surveys do not represent the complete population of the foundations and grantmaking institutions that fund journalism and news media. They also do not represent all nonprofit journalism organizations or for-profit news media organizations in the United States. The precise size and scope of that universe is difficult to determine, but efforts were made to have as comprehensive and representative sample as possible.

For the three samples, we identified as many funders supporting journalism and leaders at nonprofit and for-profit news organizations as possible.

- To develop the sample for the funder survey, we created a database from a publicly available data map, Foundation Maps for Media Funding, developed by Candid and hosted by Media Impact Funders. To help confirm and further identify journalism funders, we also used ProPublica's NonProfit Explorer and reviewed annual reports and websites of nonprofit news sites that belong to INN because they ask members to publicly disclose donors giving more than \$5,000. We also included top leaders at as many community foundations as possible to help learn about local funder engagement, if any, for journalism and news media.

- For the for-profit survey, we began with the recently updated database of for-profit news organizations in the United States at The University of North Carolina’s Hussman School of Journalism and Media and the national database of community media at the Center for Community Media at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism. We refined the database by assembling lists of news organizations that had engaged with philanthropy from publicly available information at the API, Local Media Association, Journalism Funding Partners, LION Publishers, The Poynter Institute, The Lenfest Institute, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Several of the above organizations also responded to requests to urge their members to consider participation in the survey.
- For the survey of nonprofit news organizations and public radio stations, we assembled a database with the assistance of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and INN. More than 400 nonprofit news organizations belong to INN, which has created community guidelines on donor disclosure and journalistic ethics. INN produces the INN Index, an annual survey that tracks trends about this growing sector, and this survey sought not to replicate questions. INN invited members to participate in this survey, and the survey was only sent to those INN members who agreed to participate.

Email invitations containing links to the appropriate online survey were sent, with multiple reminder follow-up emails. The surveys were conducted in English using Qualtrics XM, an online research software system. The analyses are based on unweighted data, and no margin of sampling error can be calculated because this was not a probability-based sample. The surveys were conducted from April 13 to July 21, 2023.

Survey invitations were sent by email to representatives at 563 private foundations, family foundations, community foundations, and other grant making institutions. A total of 156 funding organizations responded. Most results are based on the 129 funders who said yes to the screening question, “Does your organization make grants in support of journalism and news media?”

For nonprofit media organizations, including both NPR-affiliated public radio stations, 493 email invitations were sent, and representatives from 293 outlets responded.

Email invitations were sent to 540 for-profit news companies and 164 responded. Of those organizations, 138 were determined to be eligible for the study because they said in the last five years, they had received donations or other direct philanthropic giving, or had participated in philanthropic-funded training and leadership programs. Of those, 91% said they received direct charitable contributions.

It is possible that many of the funders chose not to respond because they do not give grants for journalism and news media organizations, and some news media outlets may not have responded because they have had no relationships with funders and foundations. No responses were dropped from the dataset due to poor data quality.

The report and complete topline can be found at: <https://mediainpactfund.org/our-work/reports/>. For more information on the study, please contact Jennifer Preston at jepresto@gmail.com.

CONTRIBUTING RESEARCHERS

From NORC at the University of Chicago

Tom Rosenstiel, the Eleanor Merrill Scholar on the Future of Journalism, Merrill College of Journalism, University of Maryland and Senior Fellow, NORC Public Affairs and Media Research

Marjorie Connelly, Senior Fellow, NORC Public Affairs and Media Research
Betsy Broaddus, Research Associate, NORC Public Affairs and Media Research
Jennifer Benz, Vice President, NORC Public Affairs and Media Research
Sean Collins, Research Associate, NORC Public Affairs and Media Research

From Media Impact Funders

Jennifer Preston, Consultant
Nina Sachdev, Director of Communications
Vince Stehle, Executive Director

From The Lenfest Institute for Journalism

Amy L. Kovac-Ashley, Head of National Programs
Allison Vanyur, Program Manager

ABOUT MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

Media Impact Funders (MIF) is a national membership organization that advances the work of a broad range of funders committed to effective use and support of media in the public interest. Learn more at mediainpactfunders.org.

ABOUT THE LENFEST INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

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

ABOUT NORC AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

NORC at the University of Chicago is an independent research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions. Since 1941, NORC has conducted groundbreaking studies, created, and applied innovative methods and tools, and advanced principles of scientific integrity and collaboration. Today, government, corporate, and nonprofit clients around the world partner with NORC to transform increasingly complex information into useful knowledge. Please visit www.norc.org for more information.