

A Snapshot of Global Journalism Funding in 2024

New survey highlights how funders are examining their journalism funding strategies.



Introduction



Throughout the world, the state of journalism today is perilous. Intersecting global challenges are threatening the free flow of information in the public interest. These include a lack of safety for journalists, the rise of authoritarianism and backsliding of democracy, the disintegration of journalism business models, and the implosion of social media and explosion of AI-generated content, as well as reader news fatigue and avoidance.

In 2019, Media Impact Funders released “[Global Media Philanthropy: What Funders Need to Know About Data, Trends and Pressing Issues Facing the Field](#),” an initial attempt to provide a global view of the state of media funding. Since the publication of that report, the outlook for journalism has changed dramatically, with major upheavals including the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid technological advances around the globe further accelerating the instability of the journalism sphere.

News outlets are struggling to serve the public worldwide. Reporters Without Borders’ most recent [World Press Freedom Index](#) found that the journalism landscape is currently

considered “bad” in 70 percent of countries. In a 2022 report on world trends in freedom of expression and media development, [UNESCO found](#) that 85% of people worldwide have experienced a decline of press freedom in their countries over a five-year span. [Freedom House reports](#) that “the indicator for media freedom has declined more than any other during the past 17 years of democratic recession.”

At the same time, “a deluge of mis- and disinformation has contributed to years of declining trust in media worldwide,” according to UNESCO. They [warn](#): “Declining trust in media is frequently accompanied by declining trust in other democratic institutions, reflecting what some see as a broader political

crisis.” [Reuters](#) explains how “the twin dangers of selective news avoidance and news fatigue remain a major source of concern for media companies looking to sustain interest in news from Gaza and Ukraine, amongst other difficult stories.”

The COVID-19 pandemic drew new urgency to the role of journalism as a potentially lifesaving public necessity, but support for journalism during and post-COVID was not distributed equally: Countries that already had strong systems of public interest journalism, including Canada, Norway, and some other parts of Europe, shored up resources. In contrast, countries without such systems backslid, and authoritarian countries “[expanded censorship and media repression and undermined the public health consensus](#).” Meanwhile, some countries with authoritarian governments are making it [increasingly difficult](#) for international funders to fund journalism projects within their borders.

Compounding these critical challenges is the pivot point we find ourselves in with regard to technological disruptions, particularly the rise of generative AI. Reuters’ [2024 Digital News Report](#) states the urgency:

The disruptive power of artificial intelligence (AI) will sweep through the information space this year at a time of intense political and economic volatility around the world. The implications for the reliability of information, and the sustainability of the mainstream media are likely to be profound in a year that sees critical elections due in more than 40 democracies . . . journalists and news organisations will need to rethink their role and purpose with some urgency.

About this report



This report is a targeted snapshot of the state of global journalism funding today. It is not meant to be comprehensive. Instead, it’s a conversation starter, and we have included questions for discussion at the end.

Based on a survey of media funders and conversations with funders and journalists, this research—conducted by Dot Connector Studio on behalf of Media Impact Funders—provides deeper insights on how funders are examining their own journalism funding strategies. Survey respondents included 47 funders of all sizes encompassing private, community, and family foundations; public charities; regranting organizations; pooled funds and venture philanthropy models; and individual donors. Geographical locations of respondents included the United States, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Two respondents had headquarters in multiple geographic locations.

In addition to the survey, we held conversations with funders and journalists located in Nigeria—where journalism funding in Africa is concentrated—as well as Ukraine and the U.S. to add additional context. All responses are anonymous.

In combination with this report, we have published complementary research on how 25 of the top journalism funders are funding journalism.

Using data from our media grants data map, Foundation Maps for Media Funding, we found that 25 of the top media funders gave over \$1 billion in journalism funds from 2018-2022.

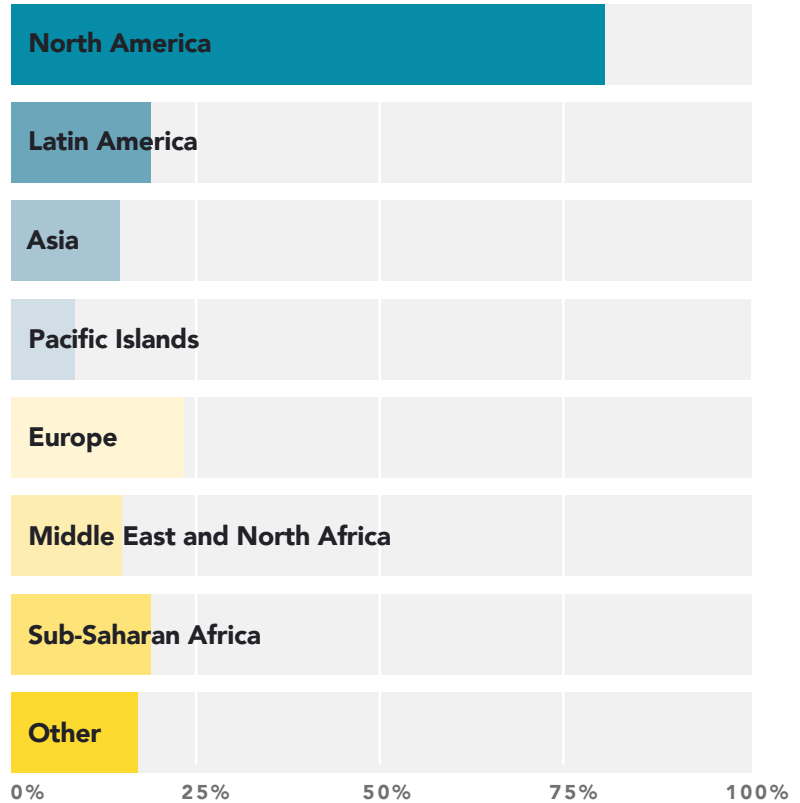
The bulk of funds went to North American recipients, with 5.5 percent going to European recipients, 3 percent to African recipients, and .5 percent to Asian recipients. In 2022, these foundations dedicated an average of 7.3 percent of their total giving to journalism projects, and 14.3 percent to media projects more generally. Go to mediaimpactfunders.org to read the full analysis.

Key Survey Findings

Finding #1: Funders distributed the majority of funds within North America.

Where does your foundation fund?

Percentage
(47 total respondents)



Our survey results demonstrated funding across the globe, but the funding is heavily concentrated in North America (just over 80% respondents).

While it is not surprising that survey respondents were most likely to fund in North America, given that this is where many of them are located, some respondents called attention to the lack of funding internationally. One called for “an urgent need for greater donor funding outside of North America.”

Journalists we spoke to in Nigeria and Ukraine also pointed to the need for international support for their work. Nigerian journalists explained that they face a host of challenges and dangers in performing their jobs, including bribery, threats, harassment, confiscation of media equipment without compensation, violence, and imprisonment. The lack of funding in this area is a serious challenge, given that funding provides journalists access to legal support and resources to be able to conduct independent reporting on issues such as illegal mining, the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency, corruption, and kidnapping.

At [The Kyiv Independent](#), an English-language media outlet with the goal of providing independent journalism on events and issues in Ukraine, one journalist told us that

community-driven media and reporting can be overlooked and underfunded, emphasizing the importance of providing continuous support to independent media outlets to lift up local Ukrainian voices and experiences. Both the Nigerian and Ukrainian journalists we talked to explained how difficult it is to do their jobs when dealing with a lack of personal safety and spotty infrastructure. Yet they all emphasized the need to keep going to get important stories into the world: “If we stop, we die,” said the Ukrainian journalist we spoke to.



If we stop, we die.

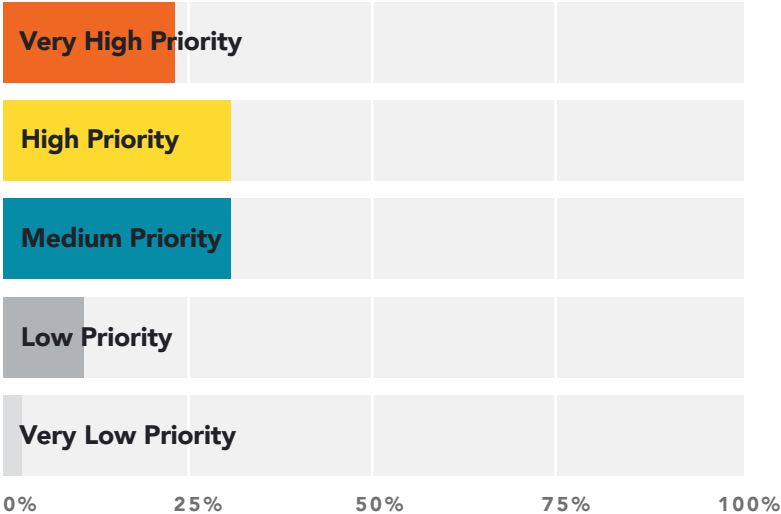
—Ukrainian journalist on the dire need to continue reporting despite serious funding challenges and threats to safety and security

Finding #2: The majority of foundations report an increase in journalism funding in the past five years. However, foundations are mixed on where journalism fits as a priority.

Nearly three quarters (74%) of foundations reported an increase in journalism funding within their foundations over the past five years. Respondents offered different perspectives on where journalism fits as a funding priority, reflecting the breadth of foundations that are funding this work. Over half of respondents (55%) remarked that funding journalism was either a “high” or “very high” priority. For some, journalism support is a core strategy or perhaps their foundation’s entire focus. For others, it is more peripheral. Respondents provided additional nuance on this question, such as: “We would like it to be a higher priority but don’t have the funding to make it so,” and, “We feel it is a high priority, but many of our [Donor Advised Fund] holders do not.” One funder noted that “leadership is supportive but just not as supportive as with other grantmaking strategies.”

How would you characterize how your foundation prioritizes journalism compared with its other portfolios?

Percentage (47 total respondents)



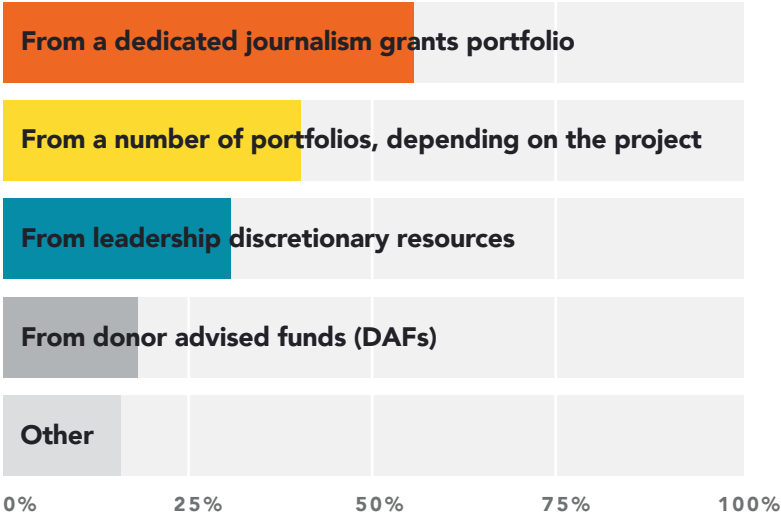
Finding #3: Journalism funds are most likely to come from a dedicated journalism portfolio (57.5% respondents), but they can come from a variety of portfolios or other sources such as leadership discretionary resources or donor advised funds.

This finding was surprising, as previous MIF research indicated that most foundations that fund journalism did not have dedicated journalism portfolios. This is an important area of further inquiry, as strategies may have shifted in recent years.

When journalism is related to a specific topic, climate change and health/health care (both selected by 42% of respondents) were named as some of the top portfolios/program areas. Other topics run the gamut: education, global development, racial equity, human rights, economic justice, science, democracy, people with disabilities, foster youth, older adults, conflict, nuclear weapons, workforce development, migration, and criminal justice. A small number of funders do not relate grants to a specific portfolio, with three respondents reporting following a general support or endowment model.

How are journalism grants distributed in your foundation?

Percentage (47 total respondents)



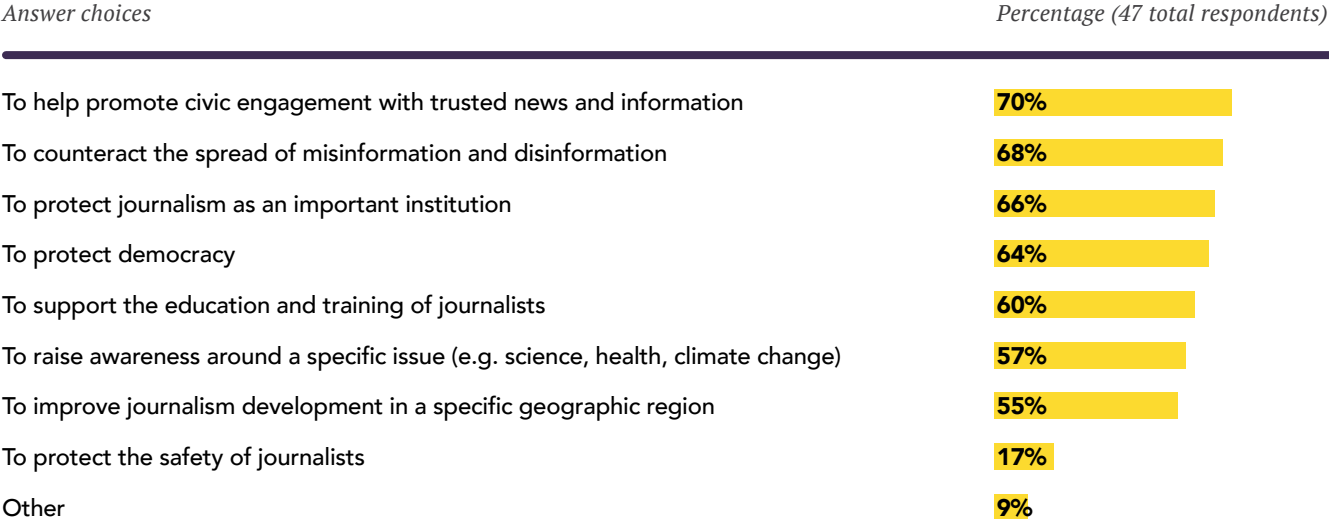
Finding #4: Foundations have a variety of motivations for supporting journalism. They are most motivated by bolstering trustworthy news and counteracting misinformation, and least likely to be focused on promoting the safety of journalists.

Foundations are most concerned with helping to promote civic engagement with trusted news and information (70% of respondents) followed by, counteracting the spread of mis- and dis-information (68%); protecting journalism as an important institution (66%); protecting democracy (64%); supporting the education and training of journalists (60%); raising awareness of a particular issue (57%); and improving journalism development in a specific region (55%).

Protecting the safety of journalists was the least likely to be named as a motivation for funding (17% of respondents). Other reasons for supporting journalism include ensuring policymakers have accurate information about health policy, reducing the harm of journalism practices and supporting community-led journalism, and exploring the intersection of “big tech” and journalism, including the effect on revenue streams and policy regulation.

The lack of support for journalists’ safety is a gap worthy of further exploration, given that reporters are doing an increasingly dangerous job, in which they are subjected to online and in-person harassment. In 2023, [nearly 800 journalists were jailed](#) and [120 journalists and media workers were killed](#) around the world, simply for doing their jobs. It’s not just their physical safety that is in danger, but their financial security, as [legal action](#) remains a [tool](#) powerful actors use to silence journalists. Additionally, many independent reporters are freelancers, without the legal and physical protections that come with full-time employment. This trend is only likely to increase as journalism business models are ever-more unsustainable. With journalists literally caught in the crossfire of multiple deadly conflicts, protecting their physical safety is a key concern.

Motivations for supporting journalism funding



Finding #5: Foundations primarily support news organizations, followed closely by supporting journalism education and training.

Unsurprisingly, foundation dollars are most likely to support news publications and organizations (83% of respondents), followed by journalism education and training (74% of respondents).

A major change since Media Impact Funders' last published research on global journalism is the [growing prevalence of narrative change projects](#). A 2021 [report from ORS Impact](#) explains:

While narratives often sharpen or crystallize around certain issues or events, they are just as often the product of decades (even centuries) of construction and reconstruction and they shape how we perceive and respond to any number of today's most pressing social issues. It is the effort to reshape the instinctive way that we think about those issues—and in doing so, to shift our understanding of what can or should be done about them in order to achieve a more just and equitable future—that lies at the heart of narrative change efforts.

It is unclear whether this represents a shift in practice—or a shift in how funders are talking about existing practices. This is an area worthy of further investigation, within a larger conversation around what constitutes “journalism” and how journalism grants are categorized.

Funders were least likely to fund games and interactive media (9% of respondents). However, as news content becomes [increasingly gamified](#), funders may wish to explore strategies to either explore gamified news media or to counteract the rising trend by investing in longform or immersive media. Other areas funded included “digital media startups and media tools” and “journalism awards.”

One funder noted how its media and journalism funding “covers the whole functioning and costs of the media outlets, not only the journalists. If a story can't be broadcast because there is no fuel to power the transmitter, what's the point?” Indeed, we saw issues of infrastructure come up in our interviews with journalists. In Nigeria, the power went out in the middle of our interview. In Ukraine, we learned that air raid sirens and the need to take immediate shelter disrupt the ways in which journalism can take place.

Which areas of media does your foundation fund?

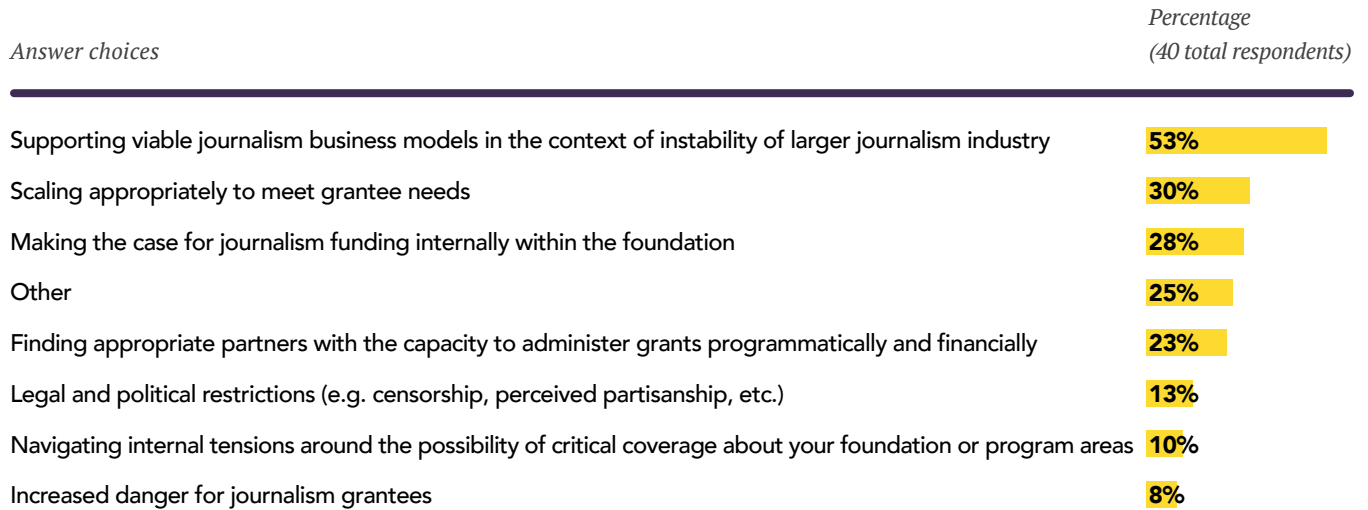
Answer choices

Percentage (47 total respondents)



Finding #6: Funders face a variety of challenges when it comes to supporting journalism. Over half of respondents were concerned with supporting viable business models in the context of the instability of the larger journalism industry. Only three respondents listed increased danger for journalism grantees as a challenge.

What are the main challenges your foundation faces with respect to global journalism funding?



Funders identified a host of additional challenges, with many mentioning challenges meeting the significant need with the current resources. Others noted a fear of creating new dependencies, “making the best possible investments in a crowded funder field,” and “supporting and growing community-centered journalism as a counterbalance to dominant practices and narratives of mainstream press.”

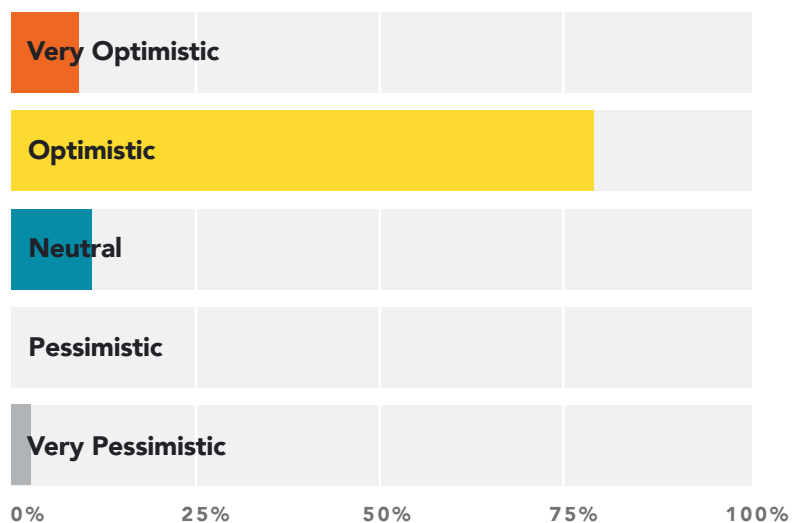
Finding #7: Despite these challenges, funders remain overwhelmingly optimistic about philanthropy’s opportunity to make an impact in journalism.

In recent years, philanthropy has emerged as a key solution to the crisis in journalism, so it is not surprising that funders are generally optimistic about philanthropy’s role—with over 87% of funders in our survey reporting that they are either “optimistic” or “very optimistic” about philanthropy’s prospects to enact change in the field, and only one funder reporting feeling “very pessimistic.”

However, funders are also aware of the limitations of what philanthropy alone can accomplish. Strands of pessimism came up throughout the rest of our survey responses. As one funder wrote, “We are a committed nonprofit journalism funder, but there are limits to what philanthropy can do. Without federal policy and regulation to protect for-profit media from big social media/tech or at least provide a transition period to new economic models, we fear that journalism . . . will continue to decline as an industry and will continue to become more polarized and divided along ideological lines.”

How do you feel about philanthropy’s opportunity to make an impact in the field of journalism?

Percentage (47 total respondents)



Conclusion

We hope that funders will use the information in this snapshot and its companion report online to start a conversation within their own foundations and within the field, and examine their own funding strategies and motivations. Comprehensive global data remains difficult to access, so we also hope that the data gaps in this report inspire funders to contribute to data collection efforts. Such efforts will shed important light on the story of global journalism funding moving forward.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Your perspective:**

Do these findings track with what you are experiencing? What surprised you after hearing these findings? How have you been seeing journalism funding shift over the last few years?
- 2 Your foundation:**

Many survey respondents report having funding come from a dedicated journalism grants portfolio. Does this align with your organization's practices, as well as what you're seeing among peers?
- 3 Signals of change:**

How have recent disruptive trends, such as emerging tech and AI, been influencing your work or journalism funding broadly?
- 4 The role of safety:**

It was striking to see very few survey respondents indicating that journalist safety was a priority. However, we know this is an issue that is important to the field. What are your thoughts on this discrepancy? Do conversations on duty of care come up internally or in conversations with peers? Whose responsibility is it to address journalist safety, and how effectively do you think this is being done right now?
- 5 The puzzle of sustainability:**

The top challenge funders reported in the survey was: "Supporting viable journalism business models in the context of instability of the larger journalism industry." Does this challenge resonate with your organization's context? Do you think philanthropy has a role in helping news organizations develop sustainable strategies? Or should philanthropic funding for journalism stand on its own, like a public good?
- 6 Building on wins:**

How can funders capitalize on the significant optimism for philanthropy's impact in the field of journalism?
- 7 Working together:**

With increasing challenges and need for this funding field, what solutions is your organization exploring internally? Are you aware of partnerships or other forms of collaboration happening in this area? What creative solutions can be explored to build power and move resources in bigger ways?

About the authors

Katie Donnelly and Jenna Rines are research consultants at Dot Connector Studio, a Philadelphia-based strategy firm and longtime MIF partner. Dot Connector Studio works seamlessly with clients across the philanthropy, media, arts and culture, and futurism sectors to make sense of a rapidly changing world and chart a path toward futures that center justice and belonging.

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