

A 2-in-1 Guide

DEVELOPING IMPACT METRICS FOR NONPROFIT JOURNALISM PROJECTS

is no simple matter. Over the past several years, foundations, researchers and nationally recognized investigative newsrooms have all waded into the fray, offering competing models and arguments for and against. In the end, impact assessment comes down to a dialogue—about goals; how news informs, connects and engages communities; and how best to maintain journalistic integrity in the process.

That's why we've created this guide, which features both conceptual perspectives for foundations and nuts-and-bolts advice for nonprofit news organizations. We hope you'll begin by reading the side that's most relevant to you, and then be drawn into the conversation by reading the other side. We also hope it sparks dialogue about your own projects—among staff, and between foundations and newsrooms.

Text by Jason Alcorn & Lauren Furhman

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Edited by Veronica Jauriqui and the Media Impact Project
Publication design by Veronica Jauriqui

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Text by Jessica Clark, research director for Media Impact Funders (mediaimpactfunders.org), a national network of foundations that support media in the public interest. She also directs Dot Connector Studio (dotconnectorstudio.com), a Philadelphia-based social impact media strategy and production firm.

This half of the guide is published in conjunction with the Media Impact Funders.

MEDIA IMPACT FUNDERS

Edited by Veronica Jauriqui and the Media Impact Project
Publication design by Veronica Jauriqui

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Let's get started!

million to our nonprofit newsrooms.

Fortunately, there are some templates to follow. In this guide, we give you concrete examples and recommendations based on our own experience writing successful proposals—and successful grant reports—that have brought more than \$1.5

think.

It may seem nearly impossible. The time frame of the grant seems too short for your grand vision. And you don't know what news you'll publish in the next 12 weeks, much less the next 12 months. Democracy itself depends on journalism, you might

How do you answer that question?

impact of your project.

And then you get to the part of the proposal that asks how you will measure the

general operating support.

You're at your desk working on a proposal for a grant that could transform your organization. It might give you the money to hire a new staff reporter or add an events manager. It might underwrite a series of stories on a critical topic or provide

INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

JOURNALISM'S OLD BUSINESS MODELS—ONCE DEPENDENT ON LONG-STANDING relationships with advertisers, subscribers and politicians—are being reimagined. Emerging news outlets, many of them digital-first, are more about participatory journalism; they're more opinionated, more engaged and identified with users, and more reliant on topic-specific support. Nonprofit organizations are also reorienting themselves to produce news and information on subjects that would otherwise go uncovered.

Determining the impact of these next-generation nonprofit journalism projects is a journey that funders, editors and development staff are navigating together. This guide is intended to draw from the best current thinking on how to define and track the impact of these news outlets, and to provide foundations and newsrooms with guideposts to answer complex impact questions.

Why Fund News Now?

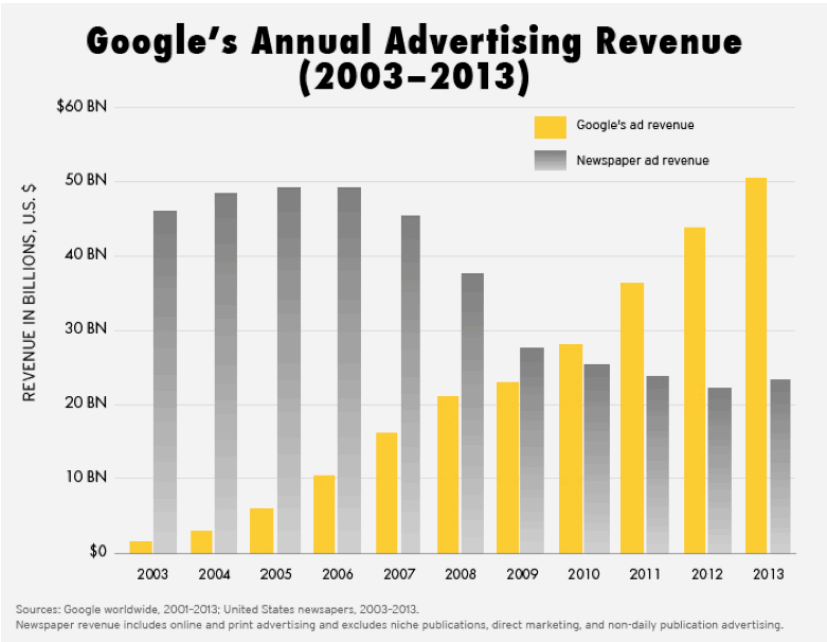
Over the past decade, foundation support of journalism has been growing. Many factors have driven this shift—economic disruptions in the newspaper economy, polarized political discourse, and a realization that social and mobile platforms allow for the creation of exciting new forms of civic information and dialogue.

If recent trends continue, foundations may have an even greater role in ensuring that citizens are informed, and community information needs are met. “Without the revenues to support them, newsrooms all over the country have been decimated,” writes former *Washington Post* managing editor Robert G. Kaiser in an essay titled *The Bad News About the News*.

“Newspapers employed 59,000 journalists in 1989 and 36,000 in 2012 (and fewer since then),” he writes “.... One immediate effect of all these changes and cutbacks is that there's no paper in America today that can offer the same coverage of its

city, suburbs, and state that it provided 20 or even 10 years ago, and scores of city halls and state legislatures get virtually no coverage by any substantive news organizations.”¹

In other words, fewer reporters on the ground means there’s less oversight and investigation. And, in turn, it means that citizens are less informed to participate in our democracy.



This matters not only to funders who want to support media, but those program officers focused on supporting work in other areas, such as education, science or criminal justice. As Michele McLellan and Eric Newton write in the 2011 guide, *Journalism and Media Grant Making*, “This is everyone’s issue...No matter what you are trying to do in your community, you probably can’t get it done without a healthy flow of news and information.”²²

Local and regional foundations are increasingly supporting projects and outlets designed to fill these gaps in accountability reporting. National and international foundations are investing in cross-platform investigative and data journalism projects that provide capacity lost in the shuttering of major broadcast organizations. Funders focused on a particular topic such as the arts, the environment or education are underwriting related beats.

Along with a mission, you also need what people in the nonprofit and foundation world call a “**THEORY OF CHANGE**.” Your theory of change is the arrows you draw between your organization’s activities, the outcomes of those activities, and — ultimately—the impact.

You probably have an official mission statement, and unless you’ve reviewed it lately, it’s probably long with a bunch of fancy words in it. Take our advice and use the plainest language you can.

JOURNALISM (WCIJ), we foster an informed citizenry and strengthen democracy. We do that by increasing the quality and quantity of investigative reporting in Wisconsin, while training current and future generations of investigative journalists.



JASON: At INVESTIGATEWEST, our mission is to build a powerful citizenry in the Pacific Northwest. We do that through consequential storytelling.

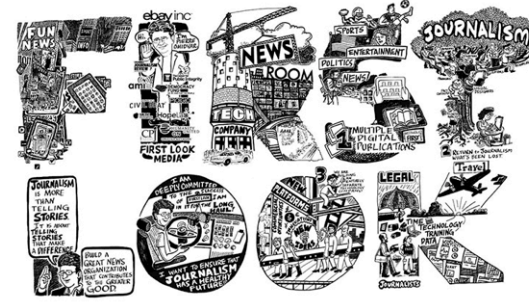


GOOD IMPACT MEASUREMENT STARTS WITH A CLEAR MISSION. PUT EVEN MORE simply: What problem was your organization founded to solve, and how do you solve it? That’s the standard you hold yourself up against at the end of every year and measure how much progress you’ve made.

Getting Started: We're on a Mission

JUSTIFY YOURSELF





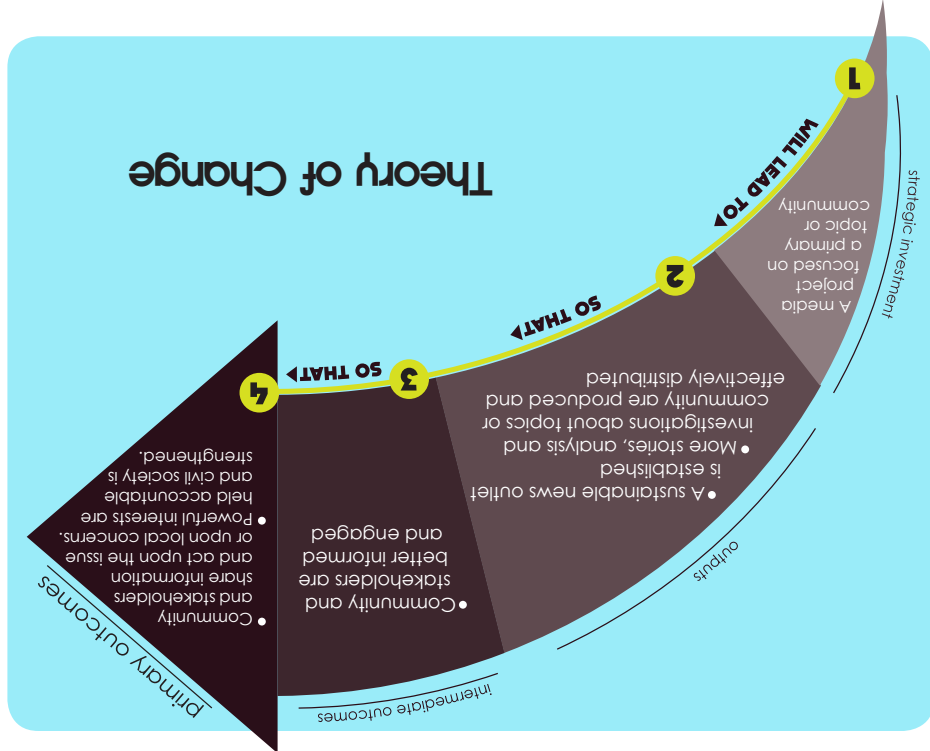
Venture capitalists and individual investors are also jumping into the fray, often supporting highly visible digital-first platforms that have a public interest focus, such as First Look Media,³ supported by philanthropist and investor Pierre Omidyar.

Across the board, philanthropic and VC investment accounts for a small but significant new force in the journalism field, totaling an estimated one percent of all financial support for news. According to the Pew Research Center's *State of the News 2014* report, "These newer investments—many of which are 'unearned revenue'—do not yet represent a sea change in the business model. But they do signify a pivot in the news world. More than the sum of dollars and cents, this funding patchwork serves as a series of signposts pointing toward the ways journalism may be paid for in the years to come."⁴

Of course, noncommercial news is not entirely new. Foundations have supported the journalism produced by public broadcasting stations and networks for many years. However, more recent experiments such as digital-first local news sites and hubs for syndicated investigative reporting venture into territory that used to be dominated by ad-supported commercial outlets. These projects must justify themselves to their boards and donors to get support, rather than relying simply on distribution and engagement metrics to attract sponsors.

Whatever reason individual funders have for supporting the myriad forms of nonprofit news, their support is disrupting old assumptions about how newsrooms articulate their mission and track their outcomes.

Sometimes the arrow is short and direct. You publish a story that is read by a legislator who passes a new law. That's an easy story to tell, but it's sure hard to promise to a funder, so it's not a great answer to that all-important question. In the rest of this guide we'll show you patterns for each step of your theory of change that you can use with foundations to make the case that you—yes, you!—are a brilliant investment.





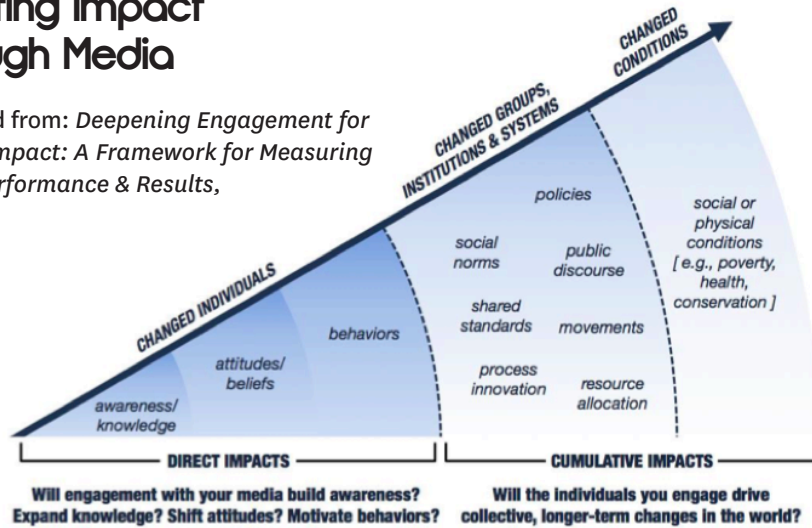
HOW DO YOU DEFINE "IMPACT"?

FUNDERS ARE GRAPPLING WITH THE QUESTION OF HOW TO BEST GAUGE THEIR journalism grants and have commissioned a number of reports on the topic. One useful point of reference is *Deepening Engagement for Lasting Impact: A Framework for Measuring Media Performance & Results*, a report commissioned in 2013 by the Knight and Gates Foundations.⁵

This guide provides a thoughtful snapshot of how funders and public interest outlets have been working through the process of setting meaningful goals, identifying key audiences, measuring engagement and demonstrating impact. It also offers a model (below) that gets to the crux of the debate about evaluating journalism.

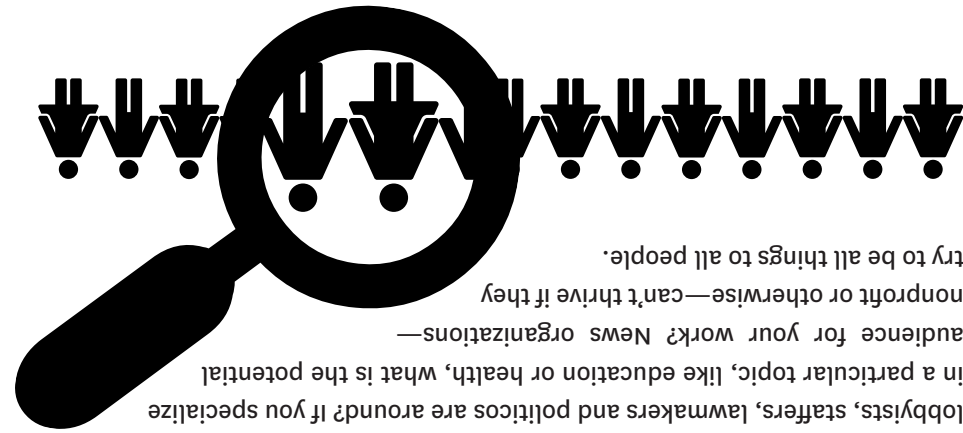
Creating Impact Through Media

Reprinted from: *Deepening Engagement for Lasting Impact: A Framework for Measuring Media Performance & Results*, 2013



Oriented around the concept of "impact" as "change," this funnel-shaped model traces effects of a story or media project first on individuals, then on institutions and systems and then real-world social or physical conditions—creating what we could call an "impact continuum."

The more you can define your target audience, the better you can estimate its size, and how many you're reaching. Just like a business, your goal is to get as much market share as possible.



IN FOUNDATION LANGUAGE, WHO ARE YOUR "CONSTITUENTS"? JUST LIKE HAVING a clear mission and theory of change, knowing who you serve is one of the building blocks of an effective evaluation framework for nonprofit news. If you're a local newsroom, you serve a geographic market. How many people live in your city or your region? If you specialize in political reporting, how many lobbyists, staffers, lawmakers and politicians are around? If you specialize in a particular topic, like education or health, what is the potential audience for your work? News organizations— nonprofit or otherwise—can't thrive if they try to be all things to all people.

WHAT IS YOUR MARKET?



Update it on a weekly basis, including the following information:

- slug
- run date
- headline
- reporter(s)
- partner/collaborations: Keep track of who you worked with and the nature of the collaboration. Did you split the work evenly? Did a newspaper provide images for your story? Was it a tip from a news organization lacking the resources to complete the story?

The easiest way to do this is by establishing an internal list of stories. Your content management system may have this capability, but if not, a Google spreadsheet will do the job.

The first question you want to answer is: *What did we do?* Or, in other words, what did we cover? The answer will include a total number of stories and details of that coverage—how many stories did you produce? What communities did you cover? What topics did you focus on?

Goal Setting: What Did We Do?

The information you gather should be shared on a regular basis with staff members, whether it's in a weekly email update or discussion at staff meetings.

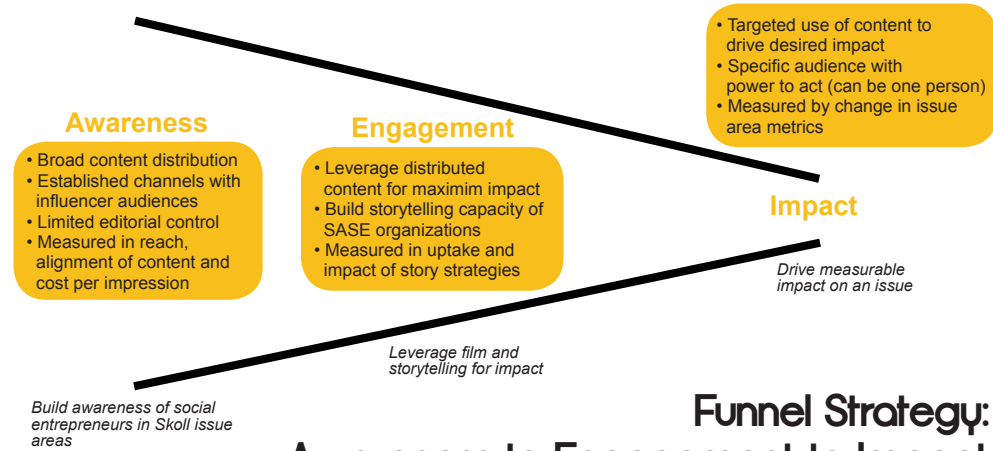
Before we get started, open up your calendar and set a recurring weekly reminder to gather and analyze your organization's metrics. Set another recurring reminder to review the metrics you gather on a quarterly basis to determine if you're looking at the right numbers. It's easy to put these tasks off when you're faced with a constant barrage of fundraising deadlines and editorial work, but if you keep up with it week by week, when grant report time rolls around, you can spend your time thoughtfully reporting your impact, rather than hustling to find all of the different numbers from the various sources.

In this guide, we'll help you evaluate the impact of your work through three lenses: *What did you do? Who did you reach? What happened?*

Getting Specific: Evaluating Your Impact

In this way it resembles a number of models that have been developed over the past several years. For example:

- The Center for Investigative Reporting's media impact analyst, Lindsay Green-Barber, developed a journalism impact model divided into three levels derived from social science research: "micro" or individual-level outcomes, "meso" or discourse-level outcomes, and "macro" or structural change outcomes. This model posits that these levels are "interrelated in complex, fluid ways, rather than one leading to the next," Barber says.⁶
- In partnership with the Skoll Foundation, The Sundance Institute has developed a funnel model (below) to represent the role that storytelling plays in the foundation's work to celebrate social innovation. It positions the "exposure to a narrative" at the broad end and narrows all the way down through different levels of engagement to progressively deeper action that reaches key influencers.⁷



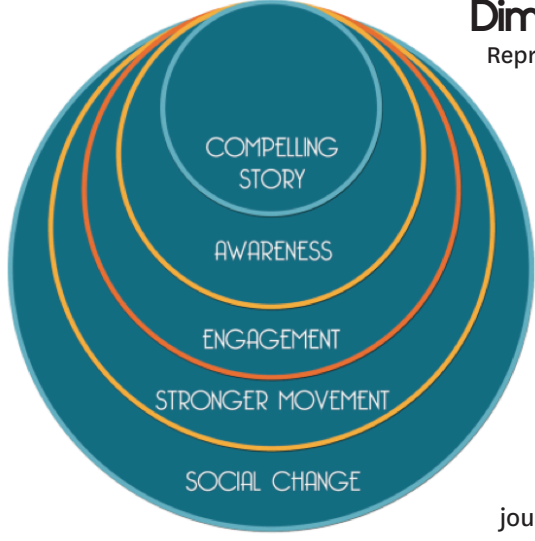
Funnel Strategy: Awareness to Engagement to Impact

Reprinted from The Skoll Foundation/Sundance Institute, 2015

- In their work with documentary filmmakers, The Fledgling Fund has developed a "Dimensions of Impact" model (next page) that moves in ripples out from the story, through awareness and engagement, into movement-building and finally to social change.⁸

Dimensions of Impact

Reprinted from The Fledgling Fund, 2010



These models can't capture the full range of factors that influence individuals and stakeholders, but they are clarifying for those who practice journalism that accepts social change as part of their mission.

These might include investigative journalists seeking to rally support to right a wrong, accountability journalists

who want to mobilize public support against corruption, or advocacy journalists focused on reporting stories that bolster the case of a particular movement or group. Each of these forms has played a long and storied role in journalism's history, as journalist Finley Peter Dunne famously said, working "to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." Josh Stearns, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation's Director of Journalism and Sustainability, notes in a post on the foundation's Local News Lab that this historical impulse is resurfacing in a raft of online journalism startups.

"Today, I'd argue that journalism is still grappling to identify its theory of change," he writes, "but we are beginning to see more experimentation around setting goals and measuring impact. And, just as there is no one business model for news, there is likely no one answer to this question of journalism's role in making change. Newsrooms and communities have to navigate these questions about engagement together, and define the right focus for their goals."⁶

InvestigateWest has won nearly three-dozen awards since we began publishing in 2010.



Finally, you should track the quality of your work as recognized by others. Receiving awards and honors for stories proves to your funders, readers and supporters that you are producing professional, high-quality coverage. Keep track of any instances in the same spreadsheet or a detailed page on your website.

Slug	Status	Run Date	Headline	Project Reporter	Partner	Subject
Grand Jurors	Published	1/2/15	Grand jury reform	Lee van der Voo	The Portland Tribune	Government Accountability
Grand Jurors	Published	1/7/15	If secret grand jury	Lee van der Voo	The Guardian	Government Accountability
Habitat	Published	2/4/15	Fish sticks, export	Lee van der Voo	Government Accountability	Pacific Northwest
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	After 10-Year Plan	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	Homeless Families	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	Privacy Or Funding	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	What Homeless?	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health
Oiy - Fish Consumption	Published	3/10/15	Balancing risks	Chris Dunagan	Kitsap Sun	Environment
Oiy - Fish Consumption	Published	3/10/15	Feds watch closer	Chris Dunagan	Kitsap Sun	Environment
Oiy - Solar	Published	3/20/15	Homeowners' Pay	Chris Dunagan	Kitsap Sun	Environment
John Marshall	Published	3/24/15	State Health Official	Kim Drury	KING 5	Public Health
Oiy - Energy Efficiency	Published	3/27/15	Energy advocates	Chris Dunagan	Olympia Syndication	Environment
Oiy - Energy Code	Published	4/4/15	Energy Code Edit	Kim Drury	Olympia Syndication	Environment
Oiy - Toxics	Published	4/5/15	Senate Committee	Chris Dunagan	Olympia Syndication	Environment
Homeless	Published	4/7/15	And Seattle's Aff	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health
Homeless	Published	4/8/15	Homeless Families	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health
Wage Theft	Published	4/9/15	Winning in Court	Stuart Silverstein	FairWarning	Government Accountability
Oiy - Puget Sound	Published	4/12/15	Budget-Cutters T	Chris Dunagan	Olympia Syndication	Environment
Oiy - Microbeads	Published	4/13/15	Microbeads Ban	Kim Drury	Olympia Syndication	Environment

- subject or categories (i.e. education, environment)
- market/geographic location
- any other characteristics that are critical to your coverage goals (minority communities covered, neighborhoods, etc.)
- story elements, such as multimedia, interactive databases, etc.



THINKING OUTSIDE THE FUNNEL

THESE IMPACT MODELS MAY MAKE LESS SENSE FOR OUTLETS THAT DEFINE THEIR mission differently: to report rather than advocate, provide platforms for users to tell their own stories, act as spaces to increase dialogue instead of narrowing audience members' focus down to a single perspective. Their "theories of change" do not focus on changing minds, but instead on changing the ways audiences acquire a more complex understanding of civic issues.

Models focused narrowly on social change are also unsatisfying for funders who may have yet another engagement goal: reimagining the relationship between news outlets and consumers.

For example, The Knight Foundation has been analyzing how newspapers previously met their "community information needs"¹⁰ and how their collapse has hindered citizens' abilities to participate in democracy. Central to this, the Foundation is investing in developing innovative journalism forms using new platforms that can fill the gap. Launched in 2006, the Knight News Challenge is an open contest designed to "accelerate media innovation by funding breakthrough ideas in news and innovation."



When they evaluated the Knight News Challenge four years later, they came up with very different standards of success than those outlined in the previous models. The first lesson? "Measure success based on how funding improves the field, not just on the adoption or impact of individual projects." For example, the platform developed by 2011 winner Waldo Jaquith for the website The State Decoded (statedecoded.com) has been adapted in several states and municipalities in order to make state laws more accessible. They noted that other markers of success for news innovation projects include developing user-friendly interfaces, successfully navigating pushback from incumbent media businesses, and finding ways to deftly balance paid and volunteer staff.¹¹

Week	Visits	FB likes	Twitter follows	Twitter story shares	Newsletter subscribers	Donations	Event attendees
1	4055	2492	3377	75	933	3	3
2	4336	2506	3389	76	936	2	2
3	4111-1/17	2506	3402	97	940	1	1
4	118-1/24	2515	3421	86	937	0	0
5	125-1/31	2527	3427	104	943	5	5
6	21-2/7	2526	3427	106	943	5	5
7	218-2/14	2526	3451	95	946	3	3
8	215-2/21	2528	3451	87	942	2	2
9	222-2/28	2536	3466	93	941	0	0
10	31-3/7	2540	3477	99	940	1	1
11	318-3/14	2513	3523	131	942	3	3
12	315-3/21	2515	3523	115	943	2	2
13	322-3/28	2524	3536	106	943	1	1
14	329-4/4	2525	3551	163	945	0	0
15							
16	Total	31838	1336	102.7692308	0.16%	2.285714286	16
17	Weekly avg (total or percent change)	4548.285714	0.24%	0.36%	102.7692308	0.16%	2.285714286
18							

Your spreadsheet might look something like this:

This digital dashboard should also contain social media and other engagement tool analytics. Track Facebook fans, Twitter followers, and email newsletter subscriber growth, and any metrics that are important to your engagement strategy (i.e., Twitter retweets, FB shares, newsletter open and click through rates, etc.).

To track growth and changes over time on your website, pull the numbers you care about on a regular (weekly is ideal, monthly is okay) basis and compile them in a "digital dashboard" spreadsheet. The exact numbers should be tailored to your organization's goals, but may include pageviews, sessions and/or users, and engagement action analytics, like polls, interactive databases and photo galleries. More details on web metrics and what they mean can be found in our previous guide, *Web Metrics: Basics for Journalists*. If you use Google Analytics, you can set up a custom dashboard that's e-mailed to you weekly.

Direct distribution

There are two main ways that many nonprofit news organizations reach their target audience. The first is **DIRECT DISTRIBUTION** through your website and social media channels. The second is **PARTNER DISTRIBUTION**, or distribution through partner news organizations. Each is tracked differently, but together they give a general view of who you reached.

Goal Setting: Who Did We Reach?



These journalism grants position audiences not as subjects to be influenced or educated, but as active participants in finding, sharing and even generating news—potential adopters of and ambassadors for emerging digital and mobile information tools.



Similarly, NPR's Analytics Dashboard¹² focused on helping editors and producers better understand online audience behavior as well as shifting the culture of the newsroom

to be more responsive and nimble in the process.

“A change in culture is equally as important as building a useful tool,” writes Melody Joy Kramer, who co-created the dashboard. “You can build the most useful tool in the world, but if you can’t change people’s behaviors so that they use the tool and understand the value of the tool, then what’s the point? Culture—and changing existing habits—is key to introducing a new product in a newsroom.”

Kramer wrote that the dashboard had begun to influence newsroom behavior, looping social media analytics into the decision making around editorial and outreach, allowing audience choices to serve as a guidepost.¹³



NewsLynx (newslynx.org) is a tool that helps you categorize stories, connect them with mentions in Google Alerts, Facebook, Twitter and other sources, and gather basic metrics. It was built by Michael Keller and Brian Abelson while they were fellows at the Columbia Tow Center for Digital Journalism. It's still in beta testing now, but stay tuned. It may be more widely available to nonprofit news organizations by late 2015.

The screenshot shows a dashboard with several sections:

- Top Section:** A list of news stories with columns for date, title, and source. One story is highlighted in green.
- Middle Section:** A line chart titled 'How many people shared and when was it shared on social media?' showing two data series over time.
- Bottom Section:** A bar chart titled 'What events have happened around this story?' showing activity across different categories.
- Right Side:** A sidebar with filters for 'Date Range', 'Source', and 'Category'.

Partner distribution

Use two different spreadsheets to track the use of your content by other news organizations.

- 1 Story tracker: a list of the stories that ran in your partners' media channels
- 2 Partner organizations: a list with details about your partners

STORY TRACKER

The data you gather for the story tracker spreadsheet should include information about how your partners used your content, including:

All of this depends, however, on journalists maintaining audience trust—a commodity currently in short supply. With a sharp rise in partisan media, questions of news bias have come to the forefront. Participatory and citizen media are providing new sources of information, but also raising questions about sourcing and fact-checking. The influence of advertisers on content has long been an issue for editors, but now foundation funding is raising new concerns about journalistic independence.

As the Nelson Poynter Scholar for Journalism Values for more than a decade, Steele has trained media leaders and news organizations on reporting ethics.

“There’s so much emphasis on transparency in this era, and I’m a big believer in (it),” he said. “But transparency without accountability is hollow, and accountability is built on having quality control, built on skill, built on journalistic purpose and commitment. Too often in this era that all goes by the wayside. The pressures on editors and journalists is phenomenal—to produce more, much more quickly. And if we lose that checks-and-balances process or there’s no quality control in place, then you lose the accountability. You can be transparent all you want, but it doesn’t solve the problem.”¹⁵

Supporting newsrooms in maintaining such quality control is one way that funders can help to ensure impact without calling a newsroom’s integrity into question.

Tom Rosenstiel, the executive director of the American Press Institute and co-editor of *The New Ethics of Journalism: Principles for the 21st Century*, offers three guidelines for the effective journalistic transparency that funders and newsrooms should keep in mind:

- 1 Show how the reporting is done and why people should believe it.
- 2 Acknowledge your intentions, and be honest about how that might impact what you report and how.
- 3 Engage community as an end rather than a means.

“Journalism must be accurate, transparent,” he writes, “and should serve citizens, not simply leverage them for commercial reasons.”¹⁶

Description of Target Audiences

News outlet	Type	City	State	Affiliation	WNA member	Unique visitor	Circulation
1	Newspaper	Arlene	WI				
11	Newspaper	Arlene	WI				
12	Newspaper	Arlene	IA				
13	Newspaper	Arigo	WI				
14	Newspaper	Apleton	WI	Gannett Wisconsin Media			
15	Blog	Ashland	WI				
16	Newspaper	Tucson	AZ				
17	Newspaper	Ashland	WI				
18	Newspaper	Ashland	WI				
19	Newspaper	New York	NY				
20	Newspaper	Augusta	WI				
21	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
22	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
23	Newspaper	Baraboo	WI	Capital Newspapers			
24	Newspaper	Baraboo	WI	Capital Newspapers			
25	Newspaper	Baron	WI	Capital Newspapers			
26	Newspaper	Beaver Dam	WI	Capital Newspapers			
27	Newspaper	Beaver Dam	WI	Capital Newspapers			
28	Newspaper	Bellevue	WI				
29	Newspaper	Bellevue	WI				
30	Online community	Mill Valley	CA				
31	Online community	Mill Valley	CA				
32	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
33	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
34	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
35	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
36	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
37	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
38	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
39	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
40	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
41	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
42	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
43	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
44	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
45	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
46	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
47	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
48	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
49	Newspaper	Madison	WI				
50	Newspaper	Madison	WI				

Now it’s time to populate your story tracker. The way you distribute your content will determine how you should track its use.

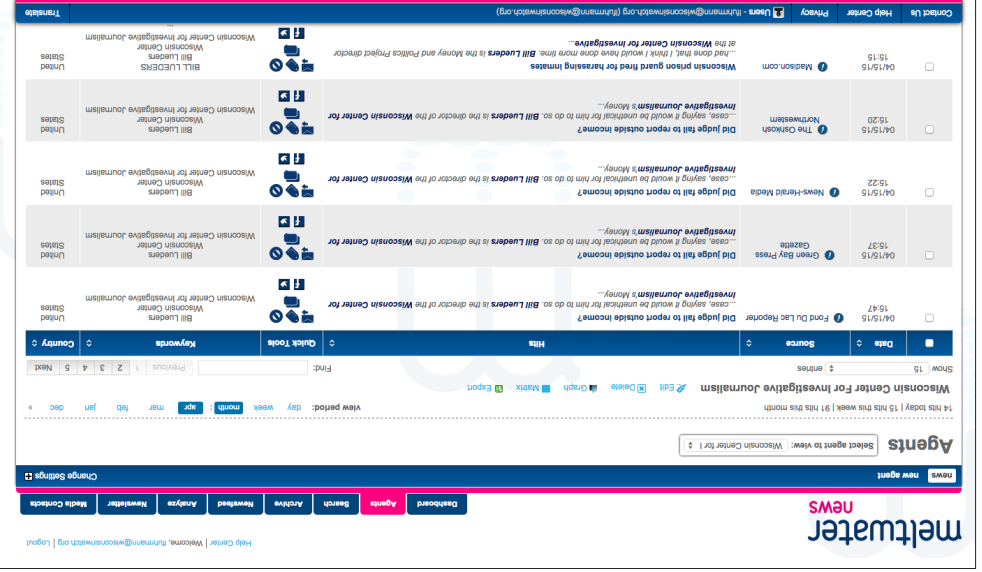
Jason: At InvestigateWest, we work with more than a dozen media partners to produce and distribute our stories in the Pacific Northwest.

Lauren: At WCJ, we give our content away for free to news media in Wisconsin. More than 230 news organizations have used our content. Partners log in to our website and download what they want to use. To estimate the size of our reach, we search for pickups and citations of our work online, in print and broadcast.

If you have content agreements with a small number of organizations, like InvestigateWest, try to establish a relationship with their analytics staff to request pickup details and metrics on your content on a regular basis. You can accomplish this by calling or emailing each person to request specific numbers, or sharing a Google Form for them to fill out that will feed into a Google Spreadsheet.

If they provide web analytics by story, keep track of those in the “Story tracker” worksheet. Otherwise average monthly pageviews, circulation and broadcast details can be kept in the “News organization” database. For partners, the number of pageviews isn’t as important as who the partner is and the implied audience it reaches.

You should also check with newspaper associations in your area to see if they offer a print monitoring or a searchable archive of their member newspapers.



Alternatively, if you have the budget for it, use a paid clipping, or media monitoring, service like **MELTWATER** and **VOCUS**. Media mentions will be compiled for you, along with audience estimates from Comscore and Compete.

that Google Alerts may miss, search for the same keywords on different search engines and the top 10 news sites that use your content.

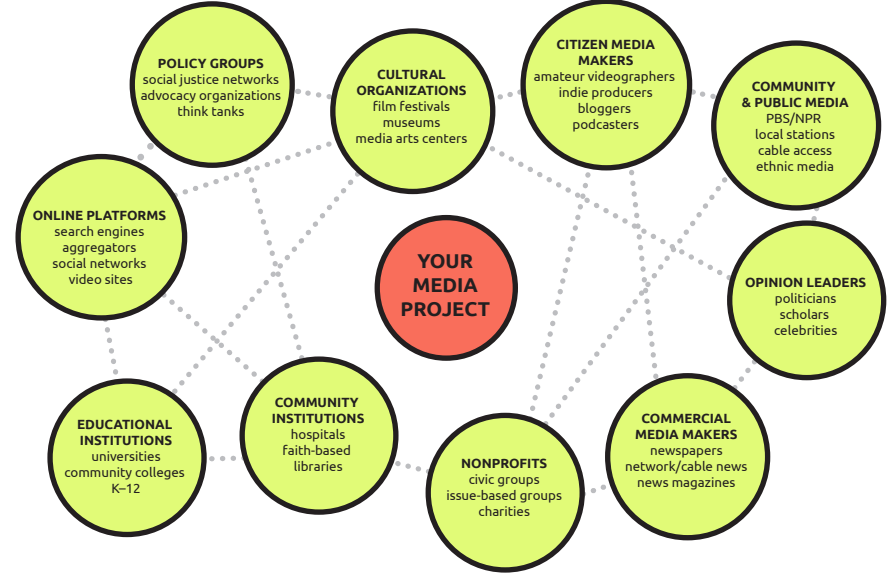


if you have too many partners to request analytics from each, it's time to get searching!

Set up **GOOGLE ALERTS** for all variations of your name, reporters' names and story-specific keywords. To find results



WHO ARE YOUR PARTNERS?



Adapted from *Public Media 2.0*, Jessica Clark and Pat Aufderheide, 2009. Visit dotconnectorstudio.com for more strategy tools.

Just as journalists must establish transparency in their relationships with foundations and other supporters, they must also clearly define their relationships with other outlets, community partners and advocates, as illustrated in the diagram above. Funders often see collaboration as an important tool for increasing the impact of their investments. However, at a certain point, collaboration can move beyond simply amplifying coverage or engaging audiences in an issue. Defining appropriate boundaries for partnerships is key.



SHOULD THERE BE A PRENUP FOR NEWSROOMS?

BECAUSE OF THE COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MISSION, QUALITY, AUDIENCE engagement, independence and social outcomes, many journalists are frustrated when asked to account for the impact of their work. Charles Lewis and Hilary Niles of American University’s Investigative Reporting Workshop sum up this stance nicely in their 2013 report, *Measuring Impact: The Art, Science and Mystery of Nonprofit News*:



*[I]t should be noted that veteran reporters and editors, particularly of the investigative ilk, have an inherent, almost visceral dislike of audience measurement and engagement strategies and other metrics-producing data. They perceive themselves, first and foremost, as intrepid hunter-gatherers of information, hearty truth-tellers treading through the often extremely difficult, well-nigh impossible terrain of disingenuous politicians, opaque institutions, potentially litigious, public relations-larded corporations, trying to do original reporting that cannot be reduced to mere data, an inhospitable milieu. ... They also believe, correctly, that sometimes the most significant journalism is the least read, least viewed initially, stories discovered months or even years later, or maybe crucial to public understanding of complex issues but in an undramatic way.*¹⁷

The report raises questions for funders of news projects—considering that their own funding may be perceived as undercutting the integrity of that journalistic piece. How funders answer these questions relies on agreements they make with grantees about whether and when journalism can or should aim to make change. These decisions will in turn shape impact assessment.

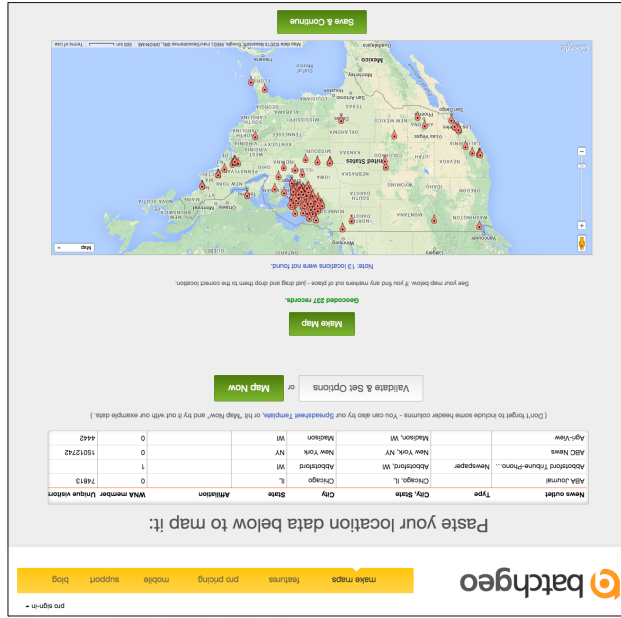
Some funders may still choose to take journalism’s value to democracy as an article

One strategy to compile these anecdotes is an online form shared with all staff members to submit examples of impact. One example is CIR’s Outcome Tracker (shown on the left). You might want to try classifying these qualitative indicators with the **OFFLINE IMPACT INDICATORS GLOSSARY** developed by the Center for Investigative Reporting, together with Columbia University’s Tow Center for Digital Journalism and the Media Impact Project. The glossary is currently available on the Media Impact Project’s website at bit.ly/impactglossary.

We’re going to shift away from quantitative analytics and talk about story vectors, i.e., news with a direction and a velocity. You want to prove to your funders that your work is contributing constructively to the conversation and moving public opinion and policy. Anecdotal evidence of impact that resulted from your work should be compiled in a spreadsheet or database similar to, and ideally linked to, those you’ve already created.

Goal Setting: What Happened?

Because much of this data has some type of geographic tag and is in spreadsheets, you might want to try mapping it out using a tool such as **BATCHGEO**. All it takes is copying and pasting the data you want to map from a spreadsheet and adjusting the settings where your stories have been cited or picked up and what geographic locations your work has focused on.



NOW YOU HAVE A BUNCH OF DATA THAT YOU CAN ANALYZE ALL TOGETHER — WHAT YOU COVERED AND HOW MUCH, WHO YOU REACHED AND WHERE, AND SOME ANECDOTES AND OTHER INDICATORS ON THE TYPES OF IMPACT YOU HAD.

TELL YOUR STORY



of faith, providing little more than operational support, and only asking for proof that the project was completed. Others may hone in on a particular area of coverage without specifying reporters' subjects or conclusions. Still others maintain a dual focus—on both individual grantees and the broader health of the industry.

Working with journalism grantees to carefully define what constitutes impact in each case—and what to track as a result—can take extra time up front. But ultimately, it will head off misunderstandings, allow both funders and grantees to identify appropriate boundaries for interacting with one another, and strengthen the strategies that grantees use to engage audiences and stakeholders.

A useful tool in approaching the question of defining impact, specifically in the realm of documentary film, is a site produced by Active Voice: *The Prenups: What Filmmakers and Funders Should Talk About Before Tying the Knot*¹⁸ (theprenups.org). Based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with both filmmakers and foundations, this framework lays out a set of “archetypes” for both groups that helps them to understand one another’s goals and motivations.



Reprinted from Active Voice

Walking both parties through questions designed to surface roles, expectations, power dynamics and business relationships before “tying the knot,” *The Prenups* has become a standard tool for documentary producers and funders in the US and UK.

We can reframe the questions to consider about evaluation to fit journalism projects:

- What is the purpose of reporting and evaluation on this project?
- What must the grantee report to the funder and when? For example, progress in

production, new project advisors, changes in the budget or updates on subjects?


- What happens if the grantee is delinquent in providing interim reports? Are there sanctions? Can the funder withhold funds?
- After the project or grant period is completed, what is the time frame for evaluation of impact?
- What is covered by short-, medium- and long-term evaluations?
- How will impact be measured and what specific data is the grantee to collect for evaluation?


Answering these questions together can help funders and media outlets nail down what type of evaluation to put into place.





WRAP UP: DO'S & DON'T'S


READY TO FUND YOUR NEWS ORGANIZATION? HERE'S A QUICK CHEAT SHEET:


Do use tools and templates that make data gathering and interpretation easier. 


Do make a recurring appointment on your calendar to keep data gathering manageable. 

Do set benchmarks and goals, and look at both trends and totals. 

Do help your entire team understand and discuss the data you're gathering—and why. 

Do tell a story—your story—with the data that really matters for your organization. 

Don't data dump. Every report should have a sentence or two highlighting what's important—good or bad. 

Don't just gather quantitative data. Sometimes it's an e-mail or a mention in a certain publication that really indicates the impact you've had. 



SHARING OUTCOMES OUT LOUD

AS JOURNALISM CONTINUES TO REINVENT ITSELF, TWO OF THE MOST VALUABLE steps that funders can take are to explicitly provide support for evaluation, and to work with journalism projects and researchers to publish what they learn.

Richard J. Tofel—president of online investigative newsroom ProPublica, and a former funder at the Rockefeller Foundation—laid out his own impact taxonomy.¹⁹

“Put most simply, different sorts of journalism have different objectives, and therefore will produce—seek to produce—quite different sorts of impact,” he writes. Hard news seeks to inform, feature writing seeks to entertain, and opinion seeks to persuade. However, according to Tofel, ProPublica’s goal is to produce two distinct types of high-impact journalism: “Explanatory journalism” which “seeks primarily to elucidate, while investigative journalism, even if sometimes only implicitly, seeks change. The impact that results is thus also different: the impact of explanatory journalism will be determined by measuring how much readers’ awareness or understanding has increased, while the impact of investigative journalism must be judged by how much things beyond the reader have changed.”

The report goes on to outline several of the complex questions related to journalism and advocacy, and to detail how ProPublica regularly charts impact through a document called the *Tracking Report*.

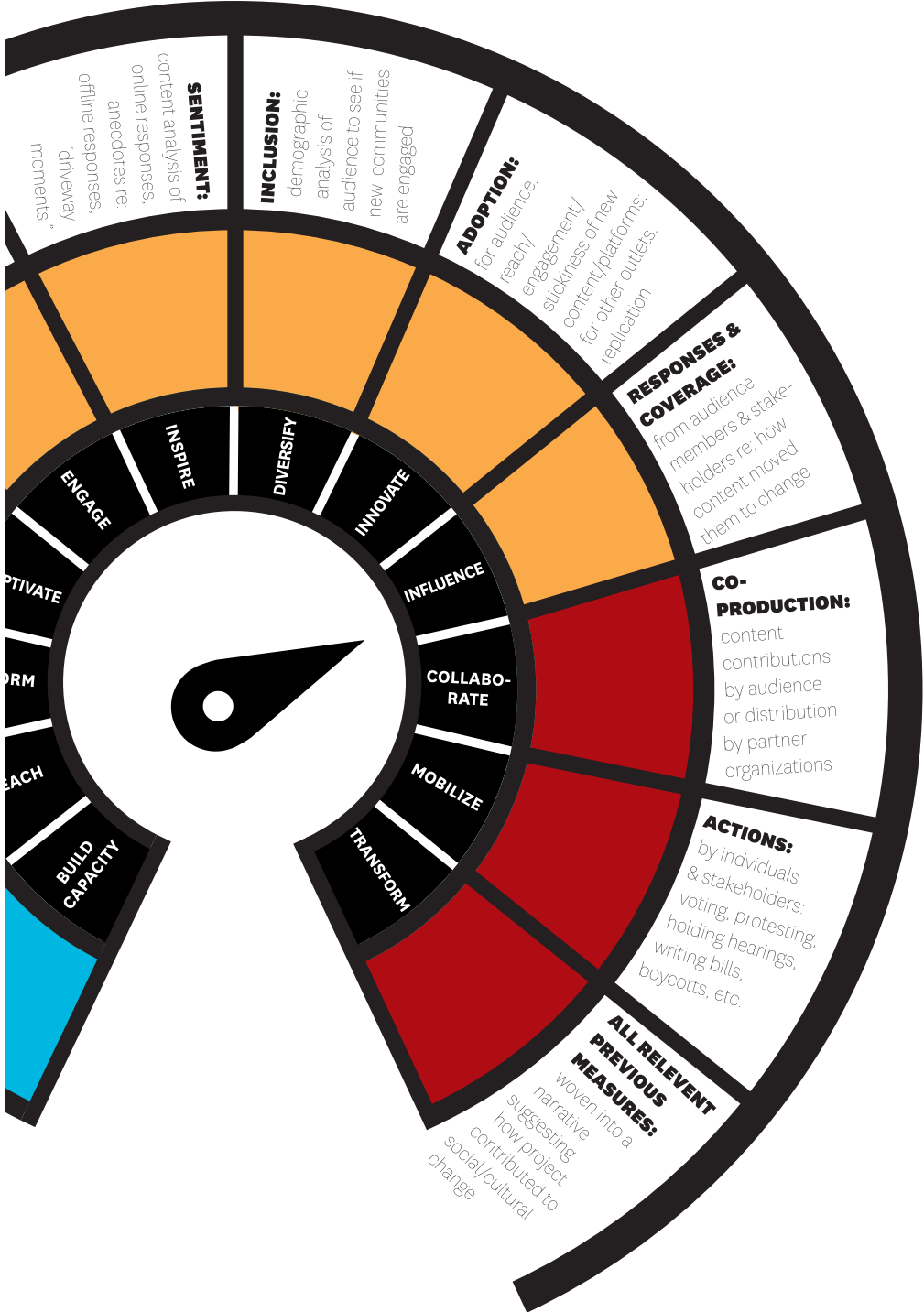
For each published story, this includes key partnerships, prominent coverage or reprints, official actions influenced by the story, opportunities for change such as related hearings or studies, and “ultimately, change that has resulted. These last entries are the crux of the effort. They are recorded only when ProPublica management believes, usually from the public record, that reasonable people would be satisfied that a clear causal link exists between ProPublica’s reporting and the opportunity for change or impact itself.” These tracking reports are rolled up periodically into an *Impact Report*.

However, Tofel writes, “the final and most important test of ProPublica’s claims of impact comes when public credit is taken. This occurs occasionally on ProPublica’s website (where a subsection of “About Us” is headed *Impact*), but most regularly with ProPublica’s annual report.”²⁰

Despite all of these efforts, Tofel concludes, “true impact—in the real world change sense that we have been discussing it in this paper—is relatively rare.” Like many philanthropic investments, there is a level of difficulty and risk involved in funding journalism for social good. However, many less quantifiable outcomes may result.

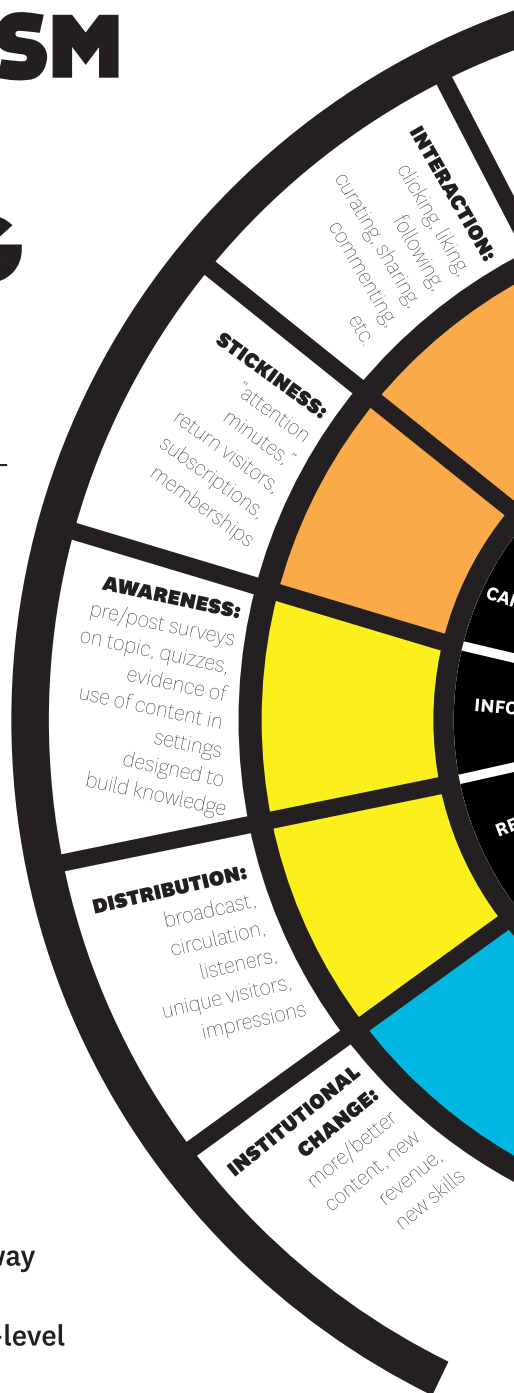
Rigorously proving a causal relationship between reporting and social change is very difficult—“there is no one reliable measure of journalism’s impact, no single algorithm that can be devised, no magic formula to load into a spreadsheet or deploy in an app.” Rather, he observes, sometimes words alone can explain how the many different trajectories resulting from a single investigation contribute to a broader shift, sometimes over a very long period.

Tofel’s analysis demonstrates how it might take the very toolset of an investigative reporter to tell the story of a journalism project’s impact—an ability to crunch numbers combined with a skeptical eye for spurious data, the patience and skill to assemble varying accounts from many sources, and the tenacity to follow the twists and turns of a process to its apparent conclusion.



THE JOURNALISM IMPACT PLANNING GAUGE

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



IMPACT IN ACTION

AS IS THE CASE WITH MANY COMMONLY USED NEWSROOM METRICS PACKAGES such as Chartbeat (chartbeat.com) and Parse.ly (www.parse.ly.com), is your focus on tracking audience reach and engagement? Or do you want a full-fledged evaluation process, complete with audience surveys, influence analysis, content analysis and media analytics? What do the journalists think about that?

Flip this booklet for a nuts-and-bolts guide to how a pair of newsrooms are assessing their work in terms of outputs, outcomes and impact.









And if you're curious to find more case studies of journalism impact, visit the Media Impact Funders' Assessing Impact of Media (AIM) resources:

bit.ly/AIM_journalism



WRAP UP: DO's & DON'T's

READY TO GET STARTED ON WORKING WITH NEWS GRANTEES TO ASSESS IMPACT?
Here's a quick cheat sheet:

-  Do define how the media project you are seeking to fund relates to the goals of your foundation. What is your own theory of change, and how might that translate into concrete activities in the newsroom?
-  Do have a frank conversation with your grantee about where to draw lines that will protect the project's editorial independence (see questions from The Prenups above as a discussion-starter).
-  Do prepare to be transparent, and answer hard questions about the outcomes you seek.
-  Do celebrate both successes and productive failures. The impact evaluation process should be informative and strategic, not punitive.
-  Don't expect grantees to conduct rigorous evaluation without providing funds and related support for it.
-  Don't confuse outputs with outcomes—the number of stories published does not equal changed minds, habits and fields.
-  Don't neglect the long tail of impact—build in checkpoints at various stages of the project rather than a single evaluation at the end.
-  Don't forget that the outlet may be answering to multiple funders, as well as audiences, board members and stakeholders. Temper your reporting expectations accordingly.



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