

Future News Pilot Fund

End of programme report

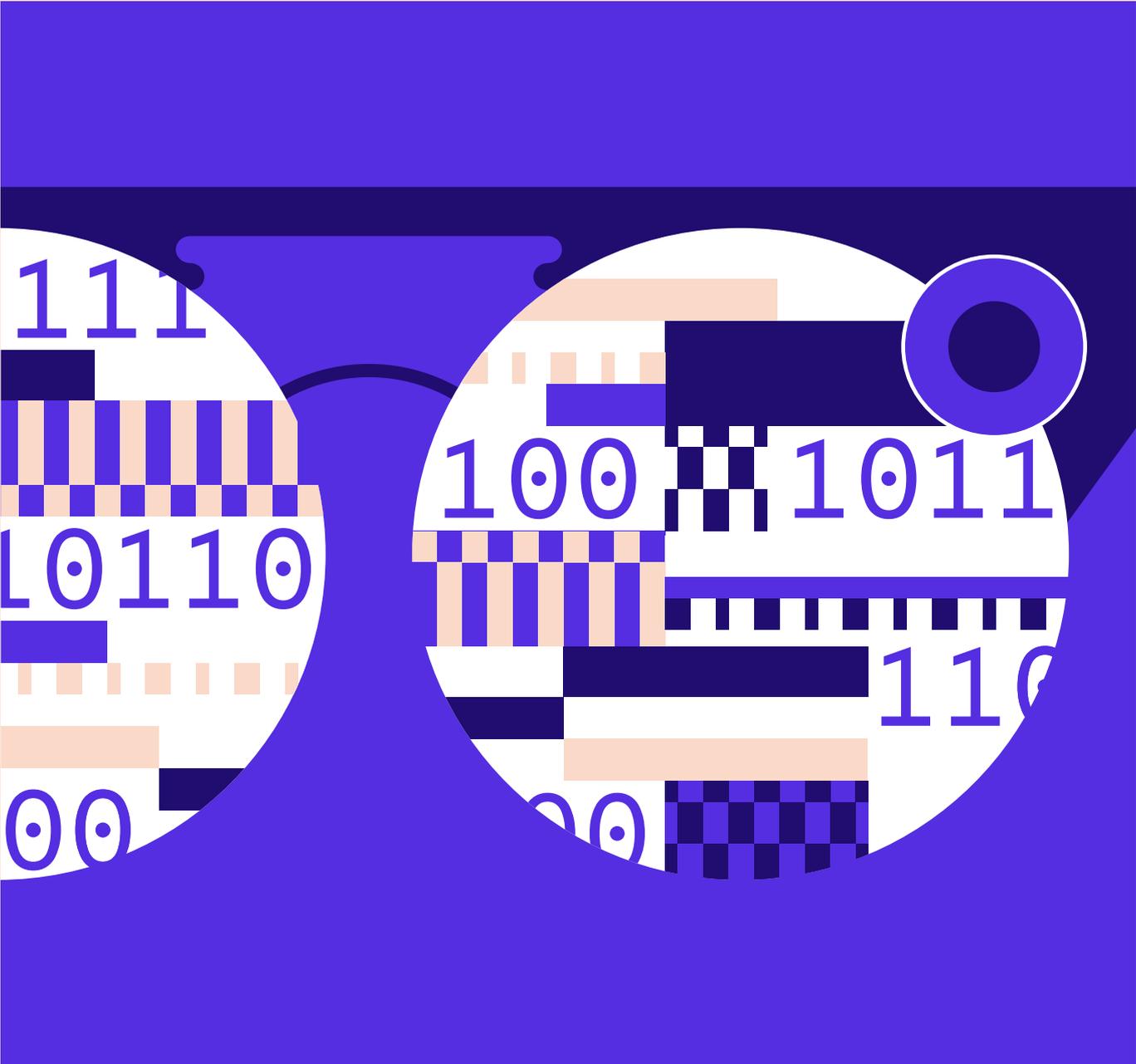
Vicki Sellick

Isabel Newman

Anna Hamilos

Karmel Edmonds

Marc Newall



About Nesta

Nesta is an innovation foundation. For us, innovation means turning bold ideas into reality and changing lives for the better. We use our expertise, skills and funding in areas where there are big challenges facing society. We've spent over 20 years working out the best ways to make change happen through research and experimenting, and we've applied that to our work in innovation policy, health, education, government innovation and the creative economy and arts. Nesta is based in the UK and supported by a financial endowment. We work with partners around the globe to bring bold ideas to life to change the world for good.

Contents

0.0 Introduction	3
0.1 Executive summary	3
0.2 Why the Future News Pilot Fund and why now?	6
0.3 Policy recommendations	8
1.0 The problem we set out to solve	10
1.1 What has led to this situation?	10
1.2 COVID-19	12
2.0 Designing the Future News Pilot Fund	14
2.1 Why now and why Nesta and why an innovation pilot?	14
2.2 Finding the right innovators	15
2.3 Designing the programme	16
2.4 Our approach to impact	16
3.0 The Future News Pilot Fund innovators	19
3.1 Meet the innovators	19
3.2. Emerging areas of innovation	28
3.2.1 Helping journalists and citizens better access information	29
3.2.2 Moving to new, more sustainable business models	30
3.2.3 Improving diversity in the news	31
3.2.4 Strengthening community-led news	32
3.2.5 Reaching new audiences	33
4.0 Innovation in the news ecosystem	36
5.0 What impact could be achieved in 2025?	39
6.0 Conclusion	41
Annex	42



0.0

Introduction

0.1

Executive summary

In 2018 Dame Frances Cairncross' review called for a more structured support to developing and sustaining high quality public interest news in the UK. In 2019 Nesta was asked by the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) to design and deliver a £2 million Future News Pilot Fund (the Fund). The aim of the Fund was to identify and showcase innovation within public interest news, and test the ground for future investments.

With partners Bethnal Green Ventures and a wider team of experts in design thinking, prototyping and media innovation, Nesta awarded 20 grants to innovators across England who ran four month prototypes to diversify and expand readership and find new routes to financial sustainability. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in the middle of their prototyping, many promising ideas proved fruitful for increasing income, audience and diversity.

The Fund unearthed five promising areas of innovation:



Helping journalists and citizens better access information.

Public paperwork, details and useful data are publicly available under statutory law, but are now often held behind antiquated reporting systems. But decisions made by those in power can be made more visible as innovations Courtdesk (which developed software to

generate, validate and disseminate court reports rapidly to local press) and mySociety which prototyped a tool to simplify FOI requests.



Moving to new, more sustainable business models.

As advertising revenues and buying habits have changed, so media organisations have had to diversify their income streams and reduce their cost base. Axate prototyped a promising new subscription model for multiple platforms and New Internationalist prototyped a 'pay it forward' subscription model, where readers who purchased a subscription also got one for a local community group. Hashtag Our Stories and Glimpse Protocol used technology to put new users and readers in the driving seat from creating and accessing content themselves.



Improving diversity in the news.

Improving diversity in the news and media sector is a pressing and systemic issue and not one that is going to be changed with quick fixes. It requires action not only by changing who makes and owns the news, but whose voices are represented in everyday stories. IN our cohort Black Ballad demonstrated what is possible, hiring nine new editors from diverse backgrounds to make new content and seeing a corresponding uptick in readership, and Media Trust who worked with the BBC to develop training for disabled subject experts they can use in news pieces.



Strengthening community-led news.

The Fund backed a number of innovations to test new ideas for democratising and diversifying news content, including Our Economy who worked with young people to generate new content from new perspectives. This approach shows promise for increasing readership/viewership as well as better reflecting our society.



Reaching new audiences.

Many of our cohort experimented with ways of reaching new audiences. Some like Tortoise pushed longform news and tested a move away from static content towards interactive webinars with high profile guests. Others like Manchester Meteor engaged communities in finding, sharing and consuming the news differently through cooperatives.

We think these specific examples tested by the Future News Fund Pilot and the wider fields of innovation around them, give us all good reason to be hopeful about the future. Promising innovations are emerging, and with careful support, have the potential to grow and strengthen public interest news in the UK we recommend.

We draw five conclusions from the Fund



Access to high quality, independent news and information reinforces our democratic landscape, and it is vital it is sustained.

We have found good evidence of appetite and activity to do so.



There are many promising ideas, but to sustain public interest news we now need long term public investment into innovation in the news ecosystem.

Frances Cairncross was right in her review to call for £10 million a year for news innovation for the next decade to support local news providers to transform their business models and reach new audiences. Access to high quality, independent news and information reinforces our democratic landscape. Section 0.3 explores ideas for how this might be funded, from a two per cent levy on the UK revenues of companies with a significant share of online search or social networking markets to business rates holidays for news companies.



The shoots of a news innovation ecosystem are forming.

There is a growing collective of public interest news supporters, including trusts, foundations and philanthropists, as well as tech giants like Facebook and Google. We need more coalitions of funders who will support the goals above.



The #BlackLivesMatter movement that exploded in the aftermath of the George Floyd killing has revealed the need to address diversity in many institutions and industries.

News is no exception. 90 per cent of journalists are white.¹ We need more diversity in newsrooms and in content, which needs to be addressed if the media is to accurately reflect the society that it covers. Specifically we recommend DCMS establish a 'Media Entrepreneur First' scheme to recruit a diverse and ambitious cohort to develop and refine proposals in conjunction with industry experts, and bid for venture capital funding from a consortium of private and public sector backers. This would ensure a steady flow of new entrants to the market. The idea is explored in more detail in section 0.3.

¹ <https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/JaW%20Report%202018%20web.pdf>



Innovation has never been more necessary to create sustainable revenue models.

The COVID-19 crisis has also destroyed the advertising sector, which has had a devastating impact on the media, which is heavily reliant on adverts, leading to layoffs across the industry. We hope many of the promising models for alternative subscriptions and expanding reach in the Fund and explored in this report are replicated by others. We also see an opportunity for the Government to pilot a match funded voucher scheme for all adults in a given community to spend on local, not-for-profit public interest news, and increase exposure. This is explored further in section 0.3.

0.2 Why the Future News Pilot Fund and why now

Dame Frances Cairncross

A year and a half ago, my review of sustainable journalism argued – among other things – for a new fund, focused on innovations to improve the supply of public-interest news, and to be run by an independent body. The Review envisaged that the fund would invest in technological prototypes, start-ups and innovative business models to explore new ways of delivering public-interest journalism.

In the course of last year, the government agreed to invest £2 million in a Future News Fund, to be run by Nesta. Hardly had Nesta opened the competition for innovative ideas that the COVID-19 crisis broke, inflicting on the news business the equivalent of five years of squeeze in under five months. Advertising has vanished, and sales of physical copies have slumped.

Against this glum background, the Nesta Future News Pilot Fund has been a cause for hope, encouraging a wide range of news providers to think creatively and constructively, and financing their experiments. Nesta's experience in backing and spreading innovative ideas, and especially technological experiments, has made it the ideal vehicle. But much more needs to be done – and further investment, from government and/or other backers, will be essential if the full benefits of this ambitious scheme are to be felt.

All round the world, news providers are hunting for affordable ways to deliver the public benefits of high-quality journalism. The need for well-resourced experiments has never been greater. It is essential to build on what Nesta's pilot has achieved.

Emma Meese, Director of Independent Community News Network

Nesta's Future News Pilot Fund has been remarkable to watch unfold. No sooner than it launched, the pandemic turned the world upside down. The way all those involved adapted, developed and grew their ideas into innovative projects is testimony to the grit and resilience of the industry. There is no doubt that journalism as a whole has been hit hard, the future of the industry is in jeopardy but a chink of light amongst the doom has to be the record numbers of visitors to local news websites over recent months, proving there is not only a huge appetite for local news but also a great need.

COVID-19 has pressed the fast-forward button on the downward spiral of job losses and title closures we have seen over the past two decades. Local news publishers have seen their reader numbers skyrocket, yet at the same time their income disappeared almost overnight. We have to protect the future of public interest news at all costs, and our focus must be at the local level; the place where journalism is most valued, but also most at risk. The crisis in the news industry has been felt most acutely in local newsrooms where there are no economies of scale and smaller profit margins. We can no longer walk blindly into the future, hoping for the best.

Whilst this is a very precarious time for journalism it is also a very exciting time as it has encouraged many to re-focus and think outside the box, to collaborate and innovate. We need to build on this innovation and drive to survive. Now is the time to properly fund, nurture and support all our grassroots news publications if we are to ensure they have a thriving future.

Vicki Sellick, Executive Director of Programmes, Nesta

The UK has a proud heritage of quality publishing and independent investigative journalism. Yet even before COVID-19, the challenges of shrinking advertising revenues, poor local paper readership, and the rise of misinformation and fake news, were putting unprecedented pressure on the industry. In parts the public interest news sector looked tired – reliant on old business models commercially, more likely than not to give platform and voice to the elite and unable to respond rapidly.

As the Cairncross Review set out, the public interest news sector is in need of structured support to innovate. At Nesta we support innovation for social good, backing new entrants to challenge incumbent systems. Over the last few years we have been supporting organisations championing democratic participation, new methods for citizen participation and clever AI to tackle fake news.

That's why we were delighted to partner with DCMS to deliver the Future News Pilot Fund, supporting 20 innovations in reimagining engagement and finding new routes to financial sustainability.

The Pilot Fund was always going to be just that, a nine month £2 million pilot fund to see what is possible and make the case for change and further investment in the medium term. I think the stories of rapid prototyping in this report demonstrate it has done just that – local media organisations have reimagined themselves, platforms have built new tech, publications have trialled different subscription models, others have brought in new writers and producers to create a different type of content that elevates diverse voices and attracts new readers.

The 20 innovators have demonstrated what's possible. And the sector has come together to share, learn and campaign. Our hope now is that the government and other funders are now able to build from this foundation, to create a more comprehensive system to support innovation in the creation and distribution of high-quality public interest news. After all, access to accurate information is the cornerstone of our democracy.

Introduction

Collapse, crisis, cataclysm are all words associated with the current news landscape. While the decline in print sales of papers has continued, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a sharp increase in people accessing news online. The emphasis on eliminating mis and dis-information remains critical if individuals and communities are to make informed choices about their health care, where they buy their essential items and how they choose to vote in the future, local and general elections. The news we access and engage with is a central tenet of a functioning democracy.

The sector is experiencing a 'perfect storm': with the immediate impact of COVID-19, historic underinvestment into sustainable business models and the sharp decline in advertising revenue. In order for the news sector to flourish and grow sustainably, we need smarter investment into media innovation, combined with capacity building. We start here with what we think are essential policy recommendations necessary in order for there to be sustained innovation in public interest news – which we have shown exists – and to scale and gain traction across England in order to work towards a sustainable future for news.

0.3 Policy recommendations

DCMS responded to the Cairncross Review by awarding Nesta £2 million to run the Future News Pilot Fund (the Fund). With the Fund we have shown the appetite for innovation and need for further funding to test new routes to a sustainable news ecosystem. And we know this can only happen if we reframe the existing policy framework.

Our starting assumption is that the provision of quality information is a public good and vital for the health of a pluralistic democracy. However, we recognise that there are competing views, held in good faith, about the proper strategies to support the news ecosystem. The extent to which the state has a role is particularly contested. This is because the orthodox position is to view this set of issues through a particular lens, in which the state should only play a reactive role to correct 'market failures'.

We would argue this is an inadequate framework to address the complex structural challenges and lack of diversity that the public interest news ecosystem faces. Instead, the state should adopt a wider, more ambitious concept of 'public value', as outlined in various publications by Mariana Mazucatto.² Viewed through this lens, the proper role of the state is to shape the market in a positive and intentional way. This active, direction-setting role would catalyse public, private and civil society actors to collaborate more effectively to solve the problems that we have identified.

To reinforce the public interest news ecosystem we recommend:

² 'Putting value creation back into 'public value': from market fixing to market shaping.' Mariana Mazzucato and Josh Ryan-Collins. [LINK](#)



Launch a financial rescue package

- a. Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) should immediately extend the 100 per cent business rates holiday to news publishers and maintain it for a period of at least one year.
- b. HMT should explore whether other financial holidays are feasible, such as the continuation of VAT zero rating for online payments, waiving PAYE and/or NI contributions, and/or pension recovery plan deferrals.
- c. HMT should ensure that accredited news organisations have access to low-interest lines of credit to prevent insolvency in Q3 and Q4 of 2020.



A financially sustainable future

- a. DCMS should establish an Institute for Public Interest News (IPIN) in Q1 2021, as recommended by the Cairncross Review. The IPIN's core strategic objective should be to ensure the future provision of public interest news. Funding should target local, not-for-profit news organisations with governance structures that guarantee editorial independence. The IPIN could also sponsor cutting-edge research that brings together stakeholders from government, academia, industry and charities.
 - i. One way that the IPIN could be financed is through the imposition of a 2 per cent levy on the UK revenues of companies with a significant share of online search or social networking markets.

- b. The Charity Commission (CC) should widen the scope of news organisations which can be permitted to register as charities under the law of England and Wales. In order to meet registration requirements, public interest news organisations would need to meet set criteria, as outlined by the Public Benefit Journalism Research Centre (PBJRC) in its submissions to the House of Lords Inquiry into the Future of Journalism. DCMS, CC and PBJRC should work together to chart a way forward.
- c. HMT should create a new scheme to provide financial support to small and medium enterprises working at the cutting-edge of journalism. Modelled on the Coronavirus Future Fund, it would issue convertible loans between £125,000 to £5 million to innovative news and news-adjacent organisations that are facing financing difficulties.



Investing in local democracy

- a. DCMS should pilot a matched fund for co-operative journalism.
 - i. In this pilot, all adults in a given community would receive a voucher to spend on local, not-for-profit public interest news. This funding would be matched by charitable foundations and/or local businesses. The cost of the experiment would therefore be a function of the price of the voucher and the community's population, within a limit agreed upon by the matched pool.



Investing in Diversity of Voice and Representation

- a. DCMS should establish a scheme, analogous to Entrepreneur First,³ that aims to support early-stage innovation in the news media ecosystem. The goal of this scheme would be to help an ambitious and diverse cohort of individuals and organisations to turn promising ideas into sustainable ventures. This 'Media Entrepreneur First' (MEF) scheme would foster innovation by helping participants to develop their professional networks, refine their proposals in conjunction with industry experts, and bid for VC funding from a consortium of private and public sector backers. DCMS should engage with Entrepreneur First and others to scope this idea in more detail.
- b. To ensure that the scheme does not discriminate against those who do not have the means to financially support themselves, all MEF participants should be provided with a stipend for the duration of the scheme. Entrepreneur First provides £2,000 per month in London for the three month 'Form' stage, which then culminates in bids for longer-term startup VC funding.
 - i. To ensure that the scheme supports a truly diverse cohort, we recommend that, at the very minimum, the application process is CV and name blind and designed to strip out all opportunities for bias.⁴ Places on the scheme should be allocated based primarily on the quality of responses to application questions. Consideration could also be given to how positive discrimination could be used to ensure that the cohort is representative of the diversity of the UK in terms of race, gender, class and geography.

³ <https://www.joinef.com/>

⁴ Cf. <https://www.beapplied.com/>



1.0

The problem we set out to solve

1.1

What has led to this situation?

Journalism in the UK has been in terminal decline for more than a decade. As a result, public interest journalism, the most essential for civic life but the hardest to pay for, has shrunk. The independent [Cairncross Review](#), commissioned by DCMS, reported in 2019 that:

'A majority of people – in the case of young people, a huge majority – now read the news entirely or mostly online. In 2018, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism reported that 74% of UK adults used some online method each week to find news, and 91% of 18-24 year olds...At the same time, sales of both national and local printed papers have plunged: they fell by roughly half between 2007 and 2017, and are still dropping.'

The drivers of this decline are multiple and complex – and, as Section 1.2 will show, the Coronavirus pandemic has intensified many, if not all of them. But we feel they're important to include in this report, as they set the context for the innovations we have supported in this pilot and the problems and dynamics they aim to solve.

News media of all types, which were formerly in a position of status and power, are now in a position of extreme pressure. There are many reasons for this, including:

- The proliferation of new digital media and competition for attention.
- The steady decline of print circulations.
- Ad revenues declining in print, migrating to digital, monopolised by intermediaries like Google and Facebook.
- A perceived crisis of trust in institutions and authority.
- Political rhetoric at the highest levels against individual journalists and news media.
- The wider propagation of misinformation and disinformation.

Newspapers and magazines are a particular concern. According to a 2018 [Mediatique report for DCMS](#), they provide the majority of original reporting in the UK media. News at the local level has suffered the most. According to research by the *Press Gazette*, 245 of local newspapers closed between 2005 and 2018.⁵ Many others have been acquired by bigger regional newspaper groups, which, although able to operate at a measure of scale, are

⁵ <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/more-than-40-local-news-titles-closed-in-2018-with-loss-of-some-editorial-275-jobs-new-figures-show/>

implementing cost-cutting measures, including merging or closing outlets, withdrawing from particular geographies, or covering larger areas from centralised hubs.

In some ways, audiences have never had access to more content. But when it comes to news that's relevant to an individual's life and community, audiences of all kinds are being both under- and ill-served. This is supported by research showing the impact of the loss of the last reporter in a Welsh town ([Howells, 2015](#)), the widespread hollowing out of local news infrastructure in the UK ([Ramsay & Moore, 2016](#), [Firmstone, 2016](#)), and increasing social inequalities in access to digital news ([Kalogeropoulos & Nielsen, 2018](#)).

Many communities are no longer covered by local media. The metaphor of 'news deserts', [imported from the USA](#), and others like 'ghost newspapers', has helped to pinpoint the nature of this problem in the UK. But systematic research and analysis on this in the UK is lacking, perhaps to some extent because of the public service mandate of the BBC and other broadcasters.

The national media has not escaped unscathed. The *Independent* closed its print edition in 2016, *The Guardian* relied on reader donations to break even for the first time in 2018,⁶ and most media organisations (public service ones included) are expected to do more with less. Some have prospered during this era by using pay-walls, including the *Economist*, *Financial Times* and *The Times*.

The field has also suffered in general because of self-imposed isolation and disconnect from other sectors, most notably the tech industry. Thinking and learning opportunities from

other sectors have not permeated, refreshed or driven decision-making in journalism to a sufficient extent. And within the sector itself, there is a profound lack of collaboration and a high level of fragmentation. Competitiveness in the field has – with notable exceptions – led to a territorial and closed approach to development and innovation.

This fragmentation extends to funders of, and investors in, the domestic media and public interest news fields in the UK. There is no official forum for them to share news, ideas or experiences. So, with no collective space or voice, funders' efforts to strengthen public interest media have been hampered. New ideas, innovation and scalable responses are unable to build wide-scale momentum, and collective lobbying for joint endeavours is limited (for example, for certain kinds of journalism).

As a result, while the UK is a world-leading centre for organisations and funders supporting press freedom, media development and public interest journalism around the world, funding for the public interest journalism sector within the UK itself has been minimal.

With scarcer revenues, and decreasing philanthropic and government funding, competition for these resources is intense. This means that organisations performing a clear public interest role have not had stable or predictable revenue streams, and therefore not been able to invest, experiment and risk. Many organisations lack the means, and often the foresight, to invest in R&D, innovation and know-how. This has created a reactive, short-term view across much of the sector, leading to job losses, missed opportunities, and a fragmented field.

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2019/aug/07/guardian-broke-even-last-year-parent-company-confirms>

In late 2019, the Future News Pilot Fund was born into a world in which media was struggling to survive and citizens were struggling to be informed. The Fund was designed on the hypothesis that:

- There was a latent demand in the public interest journalism field for innovation funding.
- Those applying would have strong ideas about how to inform and engage communities.
- It would generate new sources of revenue for journalism.
- It could help to bring the public interest journalism field closer together, with a common purpose.

1.2 COVID-19

This landscape has suffered a wildfire in COVID-19, with some calling it a near-extinction event. Without any ad revenue, events and, for print products, distribution outlets, some analyses (e.g. [Enders Analysis](#)) estimate that in 2020, UK media will suffer a loss of revenue equivalent to the total loss of revenue in the previous 5-10 years put together.

'Enders forecasts a £570m fall in ad revenue for print newspapers, a £200m drop for magazines and a £210m decline for digital in 2020. The decrease in circulation is expected to lead to a £215m shortfall for news brands.'⁷

The industry was already failing to transform quickly enough or attract enough sources of investment, revenue or funding. But under lockdown, it lost its principal source of money.

Advertising from businesses has almost stopped, triggering furloughs, cost-cutting measures, layoffs and even closures. For print media, the lockdown has severely restricted newsstand sales, to the extent that many newspapers no longer publish circulation figures.

The pandemic has been a genuine cataclysm for the industry, affecting journalism providers from small, independent and local media to household names like [Buzzfeed News](#). This has exposed just how fragile the local and public interest news ecosystem is for many communities across the country. Commentators from many disciplines, none more so than health, have woken up to the media crisis and seen how the thinning of the fabric of local news weakens wider society.

While the government has not yet allocated large-scale emergency support for the media sector in the way that it has for other sectors, like arts and culture, nor has philanthropy been able to provide widespread support. Emergency relief came to newsrooms in the UK and internationally from the [Google News Initiative](#) and the [Facebook Journalism Project](#), and on a much smaller scale, the [Public Interest News Foundation](#).

Over the last six months, the turmoil in the media environment has meant we've all had to tear up our assumptions about what was possible – for the fund overall and for the projects its grantees were planning to deliver – and we've all had to rethink rapidly and creatively what we wanted to achieve. So it's true to say that the premise and rationale of the fund stand even stronger than before.

7 [Enders Analysis](#)

2.0

Designing the Future News Fund

2.1

Why now and why Nesta and why an innovation pilot?

Funded by DCMS, designed and delivered by Nesta, the £2 million Future News Pilot Fund aimed to identify and showcase innovation within public interest news. Analysts and observers across the news and journalism sector, from the largest to the smallest players, regularly report a lack of funding for R&D, experimentation and innovation. Both investment and philanthropic capital for this is limited.

From 2016–19, appetites were whet by no-strings funding for innovation projects and products through the high-profile Google Digital News Innovation Fund (DNI Fund). Many voices across the field in the UK called for Dame Frances Cairncross to recommend that the government set up a UK-specific innovation fund for journalism.

Recently, efforts to spark innovation in the public interest media sector had been launched – and mothballed. In 2007, Ofcom held a consultation on a proposed new Public Service Publisher, built for the networked era, and the allied Open Media Network concept. In 2010 4iP, Channel 4's public-interest investment fund (in which Nesta was a partner) closed. The fund originally planned to spend £50 million over three years and had spent a year investing in a range of start-ups from hyperlocal to national levels.

Comparable initiatives in the arts and creative industries have in general been more widespread and larger (for example, the recent [UKRI Audience of the Future challenge](#), which had £33 million to spend across its priority areas, and the Arts Council England's £160 million emergency fund for coronavirus). Cairncross noted this, comparing the Institute for Public Interest News (IPIN) to the Arts Council.

In 2019, the Cairncross Review recommended that the government establish a £10 million per year innovation fund, specifically focused on public interest news. It recommended that the fund should be managed initially by a body like Nesta, before being taken over for a four-year period by an IPIN.

Although the government rejected the recommendation to set up an IPIN, through DCMS it awarded Nesta an initial £2 million to run a pilot innovation fund to see what was possible and scope appetite, options and expected impact for a future fund.

During the Cairncross Review, multiple third parties suggested Nesta as a potential home for such a fund. Reasons for this included: our focus on social innovation, in both not and for-profit settings; our deep expertise in using different financial tools to support innovation (from high support grant making, to accelerators, to repayable loans and investment); and our research and data science capabilities. These were also areas that Cairncross had noted as deficits in the sector.

Having recently supported the journalism and media sector through our *Destination Local* and other programmes, Nesta understood the forces affecting journalism, yet remained neutral and independent of the sector.

As part of the scoping process, we consulted widely with specialist journalism funders and other experts, to help us map out and understand the existing landscape. We brought together a core advisory board of experts from across the sector, to lessen the risk of reinventing the wheel and to help the core grant-making team to identify genuine innovation and transformation.

2.2 Finding the right innovators

The aim of the Future News Fund was to seek out promising solutions in public interest news, focused around the following two themes:



Reimagining the engagement of communities:

This theme focused on ways to give audiences, people and communities a role in producing, presenting, distributing and even owning local news. It also reflected the need to increase diversity and representation in the 'newsroom'. We were looking for ideas and solutions that not only addressed these themes, but also helped public interest news generators to increase the relevance, trust and value of their work for the communities they serve.



Models of financial sustainability:

This theme was rooted in the need to help news organisations explore alternative revenue streams and routes to sustainability. Having relied on advertising revenue (which is now in serious decline) for decades, there was an urgent need to test ideas that make the generation, validation and dissemination of public interest news more efficient. There was also a need to explore new payment models which would cater to an audience more demanding of flexibility than ever.

To select our innovators we cast the net wide in an open call to organisations and innovators across England. We reached out to independent and public media outlets and tech-for-good networks to promote the fund. And to encourage diverse applications and ideas, including those from outside the London bubble, we contacted individual sector leaders across the country, and used paid marketing.

With a short application window and relatively small grant amounts available, we were pleased with the response. We received 178 applications from organisations of all shapes and sizes, from a wide spectrum of industries and disciplines: from small community organisations to mainstream media publishers, libraries and creative arts organisations, from civic tech organisations to university tech spin outs and AI projects.

We focused our selection around the following assessment criteria: Feasibility, Sustainability, Impact, Capacity, Innovation. We also took into consideration geographical distribution, population density (i.e. urban/rural) and audience focus.

With the expert input of a panel of over 25 internal and independent assessors, over a three-stage process, we narrowed the original 178 applicants to a final 20 innovators, to whom we distributed a total of £1million in grant funding.

2.3 Designing the programme

We took inspiration from across the globe and other funders in the field, from [Luminate](#), to the [Engaged Journalism Accelerator](#), to the [Google DNI Fund](#). As well as providing funding, our aim was to create a programme that was high challenge and high support, attracting talent and ideas from right across England.

As a fast-paced pilot, we had a strong focus on testing and trialling ideas and experimentation, and encouraged our grantees to test, try, fail and share. We partnered with Europe's leading early-stage VC, Bethnal Green Ventures (BGV), to deliver the programme, drawing on their specialism in scaling the commercial ventures.

Our research into the field showed a disparate and divided ecosystem, so collaboration and connection were running themes throughout the programme. We knew that part of our role as Nesta was to act as a convenor, creating the spaces and times for grantees to come together, share learnings and grow their understanding of how their project or product might best fit into an emerging public interest news landscape.

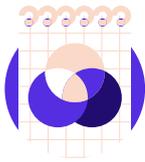
We selected grantees, crafted a programme, and nurtured relationships and connections. Through this, we are happy to have helped unearth ideas and tease out potential solutions which together paint a positive and alternative view of the future of news.

2.4 Our approach to impact

Everyone involved in the Fund has been keenly interested in understanding the impact of the projects being delivered. We wanted to build a picture of what investment in innovation can unearth and grow, and whether there's a case to do more of it.

Measuring the impact of journalism is a relatively new idea within the UK sector but, with more government and philanthropic funding of news, it's becoming increasingly important. We were keen to develop an approach that would be useful both for grantees and funders, while not being onerous or overly complicated. It needed to account for the breadth of activities and kinds of impact that the innovators were delivering, as well as the flexibility and iteration we were encouraging. This meant that our impact measurement approach needed to be suitable for all these organisations, while ensuring some level of consistency across the cohort.

To help design and deliver our approach, we worked with impact measurement specialists [Flip Finance](#), who followed these steps:



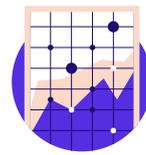
Step 1

Theory of change: Connecting activities and outcomes

Impact is all about the connections between activities and outcomes.⁸ This means the first step in impact measurement is to create clear statements of what an organisation is doing, the groups that are involved with or affected by those activities, and the changes it's hoped those groups will experience.

The starting point was to introduce the grantees to the basic building blocks (or 'first principles') of impact measurement in a collaborative workshop. From there, grantees were provided with a simple 'theory of change' framework to map out these elements and the connections between them.

⁸ The word 'impact' is used in multiple different ways, and sometimes denotes a certain kind of analysis e.g. where impact is the effect that can be attributed to the work of an organisation. For the FNPF, 'impact' was used informally, referring to the measurement of outcomes and the activities that create them.



Step 2

Measurement plan: Creating hypotheses for testing

It's not possible or desirable to capture everything contained in a theory of change. To provide focus, a helpful exercise is to define hypotheses: clear, simple statements about the delivery of a programme or project that can be tested by collecting and analysing data.

Once the grantees had written a clear set of statements, the next question they were asked to consider was which aspects of these activities and outcomes can and should be measured. Grantees were provided with a 'measurement plan' framework and asked to think of a series of hypotheses that they could realistically expect to be able to test by mid-June 2020.

We carried out one-to-one meetings or calls with all grantees to agree their theory of change and measurement plan. The structure provided by these documents acted as a communication tool between grantee and the Flip Finance team, as it pushed both sides to communicate in concrete terms about delivery and measurement, and pin down details that were useful reference points for the duration of the programme.

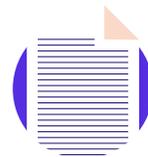


Step 3

Data agreement: Defining which data is relevant

The next stage was to create a data agreement with each grantee. The data agreements state the final reporting requirements for each grantee, and are structured around the hypotheses in their measurement plans. For complete clarity, this document spelled out exactly what kind of information the grantee was expected to share with Nesta/Flip Finance by the end of the programme.

Over the duration of the programme, Flip Finance was available to work with grantees who wanted additional support in designing data collection forms or other measurement tools.



Step 4

Impact report: Collating data and analysing outcomes

Grantees submitted raw data alongside a final 'impact report' that explained the data and how it had helped them to test their hypotheses. These reports also contain their own analysis of whether the data supports the hypotheses. The emphasis is not on providing an answer of either 'true' or 'false', but on drawing tentative conclusions from the information available.

The hypothesis and analysis aspect of the reporting is itself an innovation in impact reporting within a grant programme of this kind. It is particularly apt for this programme, for several reasons:

It provides a common structure that is extraordinarily flexible and suitable for almost any kind of activity and outcome.

It gives grantees leeway to decide what they want to measure.

It gives grantees the opportunity to apply their own reasoning in reporting on the impact they have had, and could have in future.

3.0 The Future News Pilot Fund innovators

The beauty of the grantees lies in the diversity, contrast and crossover between them. Each organisation brings new ideas, technological capabilities and values which we feel signal a step-change in the way that the communities of the future will be served their news.

The various solutions they've found cluster around the Fund's aims of financial sustainability and diversity. Their innovations range from community-based person-to-person news gathering and dissemination, to solutions which digitise civic information, test our bias, make use of algorithms, offer alternate payment structures and explore how we can be savvier with our personal data.

We hope this mix typifies what our national news landscape will look like in the future, one with diversity of voice and financial resilience at its core.

3.1 Meet the innovators

 <p>Axate axate.com</p>	 <p>Black Ballad blackballad.co.uk</p>
 <p>The Bristol Cable thebristolcable.org</p>	 <p>Courtsdesk courtsdesk.com</p>
 <p>Entale entale.co</p>	 <p>Glimpse Protocol glimpseprotocol.io</p>

 <p>Hashtag Our Stories hashtagourstories.com</p>	 <p>The Manchester Meteor themetor.org</p>	 <p>Media Trust mediatrust.org</p>	 <p>mySociety mysociety.org</p>
 <p>New Internationalist newint.org</p>	 <p>Open Democracy opendemocracy.net/en</p>	 <p>Omni Digital omni-digital.co.uk</p>	 <p>OneSub onesub.io</p>
 <p>Our Economy ecnmy.org/about</p>	 <p>PressPad presspad.co.uk</p>	 <p>Shout Out UK shoutoutuk.org</p>	 <p>Tortoise tortoisemedia.com</p>
 <p>W.T. Social wt.social</p>	 <p>#THISMUCHIKNOW thismuchiknow.news</p>		

Case study 1

Axate

THE PROBLEM

Local news publishers need more revenue. With income from print sales and advertising declining fast, online advertising income is unpredictable and often insufficient. However, the alternative, selling subscriptions, is no better. Most readers do not want the commitment of a subscription (or multiple subscriptions). Readers typically want to access the news on a casual basis from a variety of sources.

COVID-19 has made this difficult business environment even more challenging. Just as in 'normal' times, advertisers do not want to be on sensitive content pages (e.g. a local murder) they have been avoiding the content which readers need and want most (e.g. coronavirus). This has created an additional short-term revenue crisis for local news, at the time when it is needed most.

The internet right now offers readers and publishers a frustrating choice of unsatisfactory business models and product experiences, which existing digital payment mechanisms have so far failed to resolve.

THE IDEA

Axate is an easy-to-integrate digital wallet that enables casual payments across multiple publications on a pay-as-you-go basis. A user might initially sign up to pay for their local news website but could also use their wallet to pay to read a specialist magazine or a big subscription newspaper on a casual basis.

Axate allows publishers to set their own prices and completely control the product and business model including core functionality ('pay as you go' vs. 'pay if you can') with simple and consistent revenue share terms and a price point that is clearly communicated to the reader.

As well as providing a payment mechanism which suits the needs of local publishers and their readers, our project also focused on helping publishers understand how to adapt and evolve their offering to suit the needs of a reader-, not advertiser-, centric business model.

THE IMPACT

What was delivered?

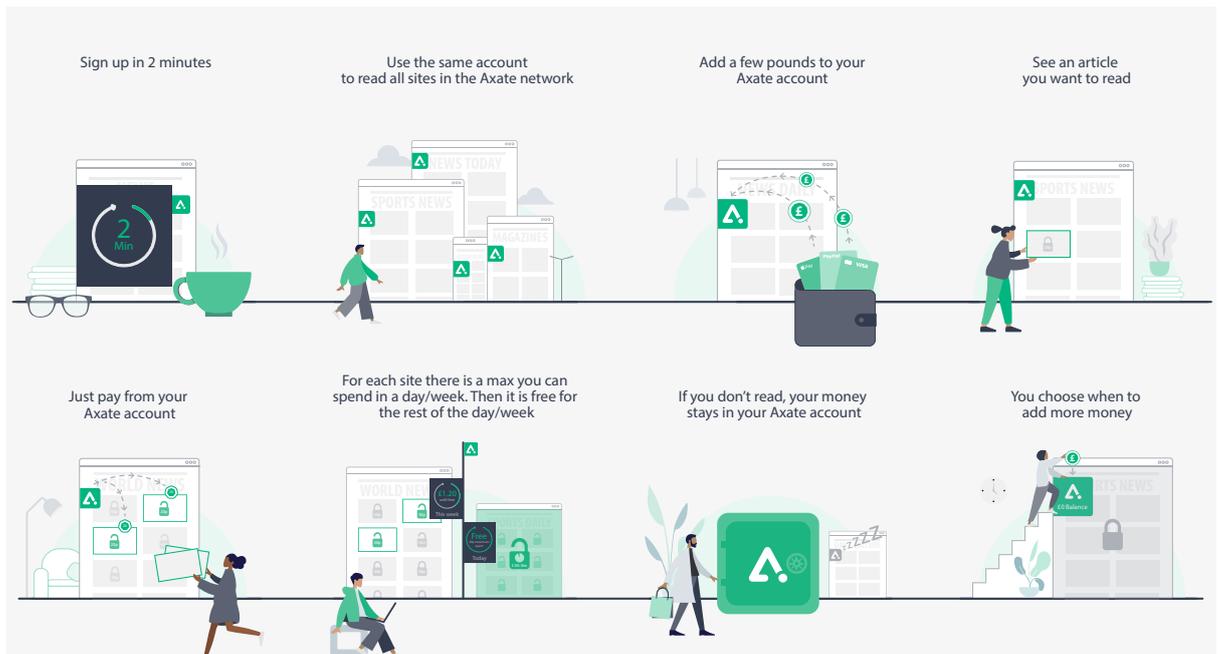
Axate worked with new publishers introducing the idea of paying for news to their audience for the first time. They also supported existing Axate publishers that (in response to COVID-19) changed their offering to the new 'pay if you can' functionality, allowing readers to opt not to pay.

Through editors' letters, to connect with their local reader base, they explained why they were introducing the change and focused the proposition on the need to pay journalists and maintain operations.

Publishers were funded to create new content with their readers in mind.

THE MEASUREMENT PLAN

At the start of the programme, in collaboration with Flip Finance, Axate defined one key hypothesis to be tested: 'People are prepared to pay for digital news on a pay-as-you-go basis creating a path to sustainable publisher revenue'.



What were the results?

Key headlines were:

- Despite the option not to, some readers opted to start paying and publishers did not receive any negative feedback.
- Even at this early stage, some articles generated a higher gross revenue via Axate payments than they would have generated through digital advertising using average industry rates.
- One local publisher went from just introducing Axate to acquiring nearly 1,000 new users in 90 days.
- New content funded by the Fund resulted in significantly increased average reading time.

POTENTIAL IMPACT

Axate successfully trialled a new model that makes it easier for publishers to give readers the option to pay for news – generating new income as part of a mix of revenue streams.

The digital wallet model creates the possibility of a network effect, as readers of one publication are easily able to support other publications using the same system – building a wider base of paying customers for different forms of public interest news.

It is clear from this work that an easy-to-use payment system, and an overlapping market of paying readers, opens up the prospect of reader revenues to a far wider group of publishers than a subscription model. Whether and when this will enable public interest news publishers to generate a significant proportion of their income through these kinds of casual payments is a function of their product as much as the way of paying for it, but Axate's project shows that reducing the barriers to payment can significantly increase access to a reader revenue stream, with the potential to surpass advertising revenue relatively early. If it does work at scale, the potential impact of this shift is significant in terms of enabling publishers to focus existing resources on producing content that readers want to read and enjoy supporting, rather than content that advertisers require for page views in order to generate advertising impressions.

Case study 2

Shout Out UK

A major consequence of the internet age is the volume of people turning towards non-traditional news sources. The next generation is both highly vulnerable to negative influence online and disengaged from the traditional media. It is therefore imperative to introduce new tools that reimagine the relationship between young people and the media in a positive and effective way.

THE IDEA

Our solution tackles the root cause behind widespread disengagement from, and distrust of, public interest news and democratic life: lack of critical thinking skills and emotional resilience.

Shout Out's approach was to:

Create a bespoke Digital Newsroom, which provided a space for interaction between young people and journalists.

Design a six-week Media Literacy course for young people aged 14-19, to be delivered by teachers / youth workers.

Publish the best student articles, written as part of the course, on the Shout Out UK website or in local publications.

THE IMPACT

What was delivered?

The Digital Newsroom was always going to be fully online, so the main change due to COVID-19 was to take the classroom sessions online as well.

Four secondary schools and nine youth clubs took part, in areas across England. Of the 130 who signed up, 104 students completed the course, with the support of 16 youth workers and teachers, and 6 local journalists. 70 of the students completed articles.

So far, 5 of these articles have been published on the Shout Out UK website, with a further 13 due to be published in July 2020. Four of these articles are published (or due to be published) by other news outlets.

THE MEASUREMENT PLAN

At the start of the programme, in collaboration with Flip Finance, Shout Out defined the following hypotheses to be tested:

- Engagement with the project will lead to young people publishing an article for the first time.
- Introducing the Digital Newsroom to eight areas in England will lead to the young people communicating with the local journalists and vice versa.
- Student engagement with the platform will increase over the course of the project.
- The media literacy course will lead to young people's improved journalistic skills.

What were the results?

A combination of feedback and evaluation forms, the results of course assessments, the content posted in the Digital Newsroom, and platform analytics concluded the results were positive:

- At least 48 (69 per cent) of the young people who published an article on the Digital Newsroom had never had an article published online before.
- Levels of engagement between students and journalists were good: analysis of the Newsroom showed journalists made almost 50 detailed comments on student articles, with nearly 30 responses from students to these comments.
- Students were engaged with the platform, with an average of 54 logins per student per month. Significantly, students continued to log into the platform even after they had completed the course.
- Course assessments showed an overall improvement in the quality of articles, and students self-reported increases in journalistic skills.

POTENTIAL IMPACT

Shout Out was successful in both getting schools and youth groups to sign up, and in keeping students engaged, despite the turmoil of the country going into lockdown. This indicates the intervention is valuable to the target audience, despite the myriad of other ways to spend time online.

It is not possible to know at this stage what effect the experience might have over the longer term. It could spark an interest in journalism amongst young people who have never thought of it as a career option before. In a few years, these enthusiasts might look to Press Pad, another Fund grantee, to help them take up an internship opportunity. Even if journalism is not a career choice, the initiative could give young people foundational critical skills needed for engaging with news – skills they can build on as they grow older.

Case study 2

OneSub

THE PROBLEM

The public are being pushed into media bubbles that reinforce their bias because of the lack of choice in the way they are sourcing news:

- Publishers are turning to subscription models which rely on a high degree of commitment from the consumer. Those who are driven to the subscription model are willing to subscribe to only one publisher.
- Younger readers are consuming their news largely via social media, where there are algorithms that understand what they like to read and push more similar articles, to get them hooked on that particular platform.

THE IDEA

OneSub aimed to create an alternative revenue for publishers and a balanced source of news for consumers. They use artificial intelligence (AI) to read and understand thousands of articles a day from dozens of known publishers. For every article, they determined bias against an array of criteria, then clustered articles into discrete 'stories' to build a picture of the emerging news landscape and each publisher's position within it.

When the platform serves content to a reader, it is able to personalise their experience by giving them the best article to provide balance against articles they read previously around a particular topic. This is in contrast to social media platforms whose models are designed to propagate the user's previous reading habits.

Access to OneSub is tiered, with paid for access for certain features. Revenue from these subscriptions will eventually be shared with publishers.

THE IMPACT

What was delivered?

OneSub's project involved:

- Developing and launching a paid for subscription service, 'OneSub Pro', to allow users to access a weekly news health check (a report), personal news bias dashboard, richer personal recommendations, and full article history. This work is ongoing, and the Fund allowed them to create the means to a sustainable alternative revenue stream for publishers, as well as a revenue stream for our organisation.
- Re-working their Chrome (web browser) extension to be able to collect data (post the Fund) from their initial 'social media cohort', a group of OneSub users. This tool will be tested in partnership with the University of Houston to look at volunteers' Twitter and Facebook feeds and the news articles they are fed. The initial joint analysis will look at whether social media algorithms feed individuals a certain narrative to keep them hooked, or if they see all posts. OneSub will also report back to each volunteer and make suggestions of further reading to balance their digestion of the news.

THE MEASUREMENT PLAN

In collaboration with Flip Finance, OneSub defined the following hypotheses to be tested in relation to the platform:

- Improving readers' comprehension of the news ecosystem will lead to a more engaged readership.

- Giving people a broader range of news articles around topics the reader is interested in, will enable them to start to become more aware of the biases (or 'language choices') of some publishers.
- People are willing to pay for a news service that they can trust.

What were the results?

We mainly used surveys in combination with some platform analytics. The results were informative to product development, but relatively small sample sizes mean that they are not yet conclusive.

- On the whole, users have more confidence that they understand the news ecosystem and that they can read content more critically. Seventy-eight per cent of users think that OneSub provided them with articles from more publishers than they would have previously consumed. On average, the degree to which users felt engaged by the news was 7.1 (0 = not engaged, 10 = yes engaged). It is unclear at this point in time if this is due to the platform or interest in critical information relating to COVID-19. Regarding the weekly report feature OneSub is developing, users gave early indication that they want to be shown stories from around the world that they've missed, and an overview highlighting important issues they may have missed relating to the topics they've read about.
- Similarly, respondents (this time people who do not currently use OneSub) on the whole have more confidence that they understand the news ecosystem and that they can read content more critically. The majority believe that 'a balanced world view' (40 per cent) is

more important than 'an intelligent newsfeed' (32 per cent) or 'a future for real journalism' (28 per cent).

- OneSub built, implemented and beta tested the subscription functionality that will allow users to test that people are willing to pay for a news service they can trust. However, they took the commercial decision to delay the promotion of this pro user version until additional features – weekly news health check and personal news bias dashboard – are in place.

POTENTIAL IMPACT

It is hard to predict now what long-term effect OneSub will have on existing and future users, as well as on publishers and the wider news landscape. This is partly because OneSub had a relatively short testing period (six weeks less than other grantees) and also because of the currently unquantified impact that COVID-19, and now other topics such as Black Lives Matter, are having on the consumption of news in general.

It is quite possible that big world events are a future normal. Within the ongoing and intractable challenge of misinformation and conjecture, OneSub's mission to 'offer the consumer a better news experience, from a central source which they can trust to have their interests, and the interest of balance, breadth and depth' may be met with demand. OneSub's current users – in particular the beta users – are very loyal to the platform and if they can harness this in the recruitment of new users, the future could bode well.

Case study 2

The Bristol Cable

THE PROBLEM

The Bristol Cable is a community-led media co-operative that exists to serve the public interest in Bristol, but many people in the city were not accessing their journalism. They have a track record of engagement in content production, operational decision making and community outreach. But the depth and scope of this work had been limited.

For The Bristol Cable's ongoing financial sustainability, they needed to maximise the quality and quantity of journalism they could produce on a low budget. In the wake of COVID-19, they had faced the additional challenge of continuing reporting with journalists constrained by the need to social distance and work from home. So collaborating with members to have many more 'eyes and ears' across the city had become even more vital.

THE IDEA

The Bristol Cable wanted to test deeper engagement models to see if they could use them to build trust and relevance among communities underserved by journalism in the city.

The initial plan was to pilot two interrelated engagement practices – one online, and one face-to-face – in two local communities in Bristol.

They have the huge asset of a dedicated, diverse and knowledgeable pool of 2,100+ members and have previously drawn on this knowledge to inform their journalism. They wanted to refine this process to establish more continued and efficient participation in media production on and offline.

They also wanted to share learnings with the wider news ecosystem, making the case for building trust through deeper ongoing engagement, accountability and participation.

THE IMPACT

What was delivered?

Once COVID-19 hit, the planned face-to-face engagement was cancelled and they decided to focus on the online engagement ('Cable Links'), building a member database which journalists could search through to find potential sources.

Members who wanted to help with reporting could volunteer relevant information e.g. their job, areas of experience. Journalists were then able to see this information and get in touch with members directly.

THE MEASUREMENT PLAN

In collaboration with Flip Finance, The Bristol Cable defined the following hypotheses to be tested:

- Selected members will participate in an online collaborative journalism process.
- Journalists will find useful contributions to their reporting from the membership through the Cable Links project.
- Getting community members involved in the production of local media will improve their media and improve people's knowledge and trust of the Cable.

What were the results?

The Cable Links membership community relationship manager (CRM) system was successfully used in a recent editorial series around mental health services in Bristol.

The Cable ran a callout in their newsletter, asking for input on the series from members. Ten members submitted the information requested in the callout. The journalist working on the series was able to search through responses and have conversations with seven of them to inform their work. Four members are in discussion with the journalist about writing an opinion piece themselves.

Benefits for the journalist working on the project included:

- An improved understanding of the topic.
- Additional sources for the articles.
- Useful advice and feedback from members.

POTENTIAL IMPACT

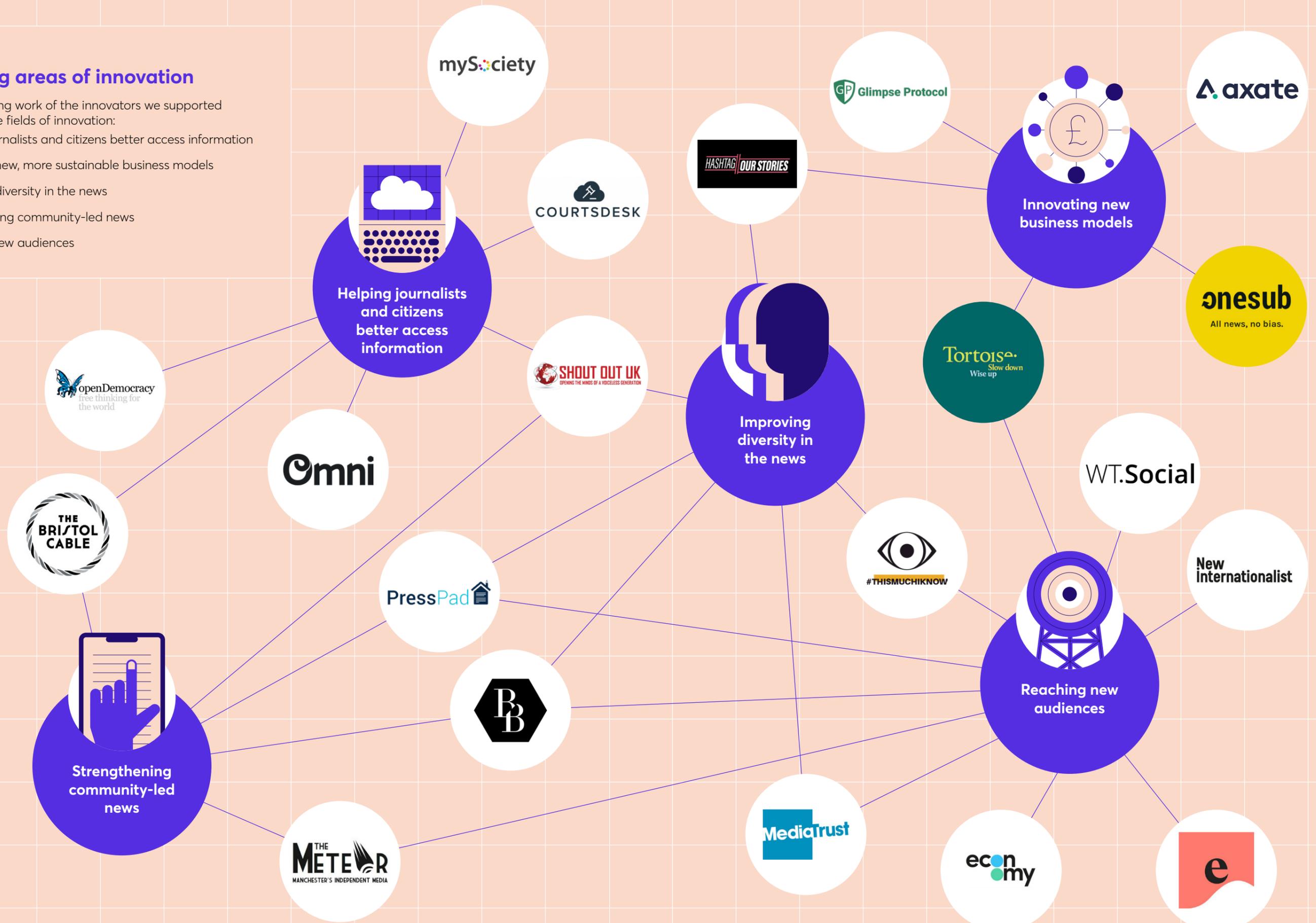
While the timescale was short and the sample size was small, the initial success of the Cable Links project suggests both that it is possible for media co-operatives to involve members in their news reporting and that journalists find this useful. There is clear potential for this model to build ongoing engagement and trust.

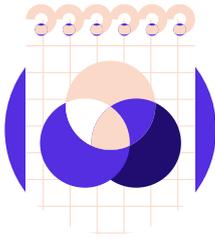
It is likely that The Cable will continue to develop and make use of this model – and there is potential for other co-operatives (and possibly other types of news organisations) to learn from and build on the open source membership system.

3.2 Emerging areas of innovation

The prototyping work of the innovators we supported unearthed five fields of innovation:

- Helping journalists and citizens better access information
- Moving to new, more sustainable business models
- Improving diversity in the news
- Strengthening community-led news
- Reaching new audiences





3.2.1

Helping journalists and citizens better access information

On a daily basis, hundreds of decisions, negotiations and deals are made in the courtrooms, boardrooms, halls and corridors of our institutions and establishments. These are decisions that change people's lives and affect us all.

The majority of people feel a great disconnect from those in power. This includes state-elected individuals and highly-monied, powerful private organisations who make decisions on how public funds are spent, impacting upon society and our daily lives.

Part of this disconnect lies in a lack of public-accessible information. Paperwork, details and useful data are publicly available under statutory law, but are often held behind closed doors, mountains of bureaucracy and antiquated reporting systems.

What would happen if this information was more readily available to citizens and journalists? What if decisions made by those in power were immediately visible and apparent?

Courtsdesk

The Cairncross Review cited studies showing a 40 per cent decline in regional newspapers covering court rulings, posing a significant threat to the justice system. [Courtsdesk](#) developed the software to generate, validate and disseminate court reports.

mySociety

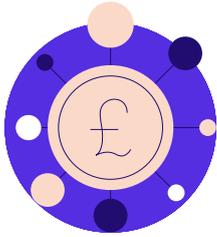
Freedom of Information (FOI) requests are vital as they yield so much useful data, yet they are time consuming to obtain. [mySociety](#) developed a tool to simplify the way in which the public and journalists can access and contribute to FOI topics of public interest.

Future thinking

Imagine a town, a city, a country where decision-making was transparent, where everybody could easily and freely access information about democratic decision-making, and where newspapers were the conduit of this information.

As soon as a politician has received a donation from an organisation, journalists would be notified, and council spending would be presented in an accessible way and easily available to anybody who requested it.

Deals and decision-making would be held up to the light, available for all to see, critique and understand. This more open and accessible attitude to accessing data, would in turn help citizens feel informed about state-level decision-making in the UK.



3.2.2

Moving to new, more sustainable business models

Between 2007 and 2017, printed national newspaper circulation in the UK fell from 11.5 million to 5.8 million per day, and from 63.4 million to 31.4 million weekly for local newspapers. By 2019, two-thirds of people were using a smartphone to access news weekly, and an increasing number of people had started accessing news in audio format (e.g. podcasts) or through online news aggregators.

Over the same decade, revenues from advertising and sales of printed newspapers also dropped by over 50 per cent, causing massive disruption to traditional business models. As news provision and consumption have become digital, online advertising has not been able to compensate for the decline in print revenue. This has left many publishers to develop coping strategies in an attempt to fill the revenue gap to prevent reducing or ceasing operations altogether.

A number of solutions have emerged among news publishers trying to stay afloat, as well as digital organisations looking to weigh in on the revenue-generating issue. Many of these solutions are flawed or have unintended consequences, often missing the mark when it comes to reporting on public interest news.

Within our group of grantees, we are excited to support ideas targeted at tackling this issue specifically around public interest news and creating sustainable income streams for democratic reporting.

Glimpse Protocol

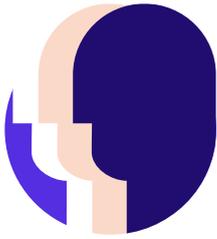
Data: its use and misuse, storage and safety is daily news at the moment. [Glimpse Protocol](#) developed new technology – based on distributed ledger techniques – to transform data privacy and shift the power into the hands of the user.

Hashtag Our Stories

By providing marginalised communities – who experience racism and hate crime – with AR storytelling tools [Hashtag Our Stories](#) is empowering people to tell their own stories and guiding them through the video capturing process.

Future thinking

Imagine a news process where local journalists, personal accounts and stories from all over the country and from all kinds of individuals were represented in the news. Local journalists and newspapers would be credited for their work and able to sustain themselves through their reporting.



3.2.3

Improving diversity in the news

Research tells us that journalism as a sector is not representative of the population. Ninety per cent of journalists are white and the proportion of under-25s in journalism is lower than that for the UK workforce as a whole.⁹ Oxford Reuters research also found that news consumption is more unequally distributed in the UK than income.¹⁰ This needs to change so that communities are more connected and access news that matters to them. And we need to fund and invest in spaces where news by and for specific communities is front and centre.

Improving diversity in the news and media sector is a pressing and systemic issue and not one that is going to be changed with quick fixes. It requires a fundamental shift in who has power in the industry and whose voices are valued as integral when covering stories. However, the benefits of working towards better representation are huge.

Diversifying the news starts not only by changing who makes and owns the news, but whose voices are represented in everyday stories. The hope in doing so is that under-represented stories will be heard and communities will have more trust in the news industry.

Black Ballad

"Since the start of the Fund, our membership has grown 30 per cent, with 35 per cent of that

growth directly attributable to our commitment to telling the stories of black women outside of London".

[Black Ballad](#) ran two callouts for black female creators in Britain – outside of London – resulting in 190 applicants (85 per cent of which were black, female and currently based in Britain). Focussing on their regional and cultural experiences, Black Ballad commissioned six articles while also hiring nine part-time, project-based editors across the country. Each of these editors have a budget to commission up to 10 black female writers from their region.

Media Trust

In partnership with the BBC, [Media Trust](#) developed training for disabled subject experts which can be run entirely online including pre-recorded video, Q&A sessions, and one-on-one interviews with feedback. This was achieved by working in tandem with an advisory group comprising the Disability Unit, Ofcom, BBC, other broadcasters and leading disability organisations.

Future thinking

Imagine communities reading or watching the news and seeing people like themselves, talking about their communities through lived experience. More diverse voices would make decisions about which stories to run, expanding the breadth of coverage and conversations. Journalism as a sector would move away from a homogenous, elite-like workforce to one that truly represents the many types of diversity within the UK population.

⁹ <https://www.nctj.com/downloadlibrary/JaW%20Report%202018%20web.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/Kalogeropoulos%20-%20Social%20Inequality%20in%20News%20FINAL.pdf>



3.2.4 Strengthening community-led news

Research from last year showed that only 40 per cent of people living in the UK trust the news overall and more than a third (35 per cent) often or sometimes avoided the news.¹¹ This comes at a time when there has been a rapid decline in the number of local newspapers operating across the UK and a sharp increase in tech giants, like Google and Facebook, stepping in to fill this hole with unregulated posts and centralised story-sourcing.

The disconnect between the public experience and experiences which are portrayed in the news has meant that the gap between those who make the news and the communities they write about widens every day. Part of reviving the news ecosystem means seeking out and inviting diverse voices into news production – democratising news processes and hearing accounts from a representative body of citizens.

Our Economy

One way to respond to this disconnection is supporting connections between journalists and communities. [Our Economy](#) explored just that by pairing local journalists in the West Midlands with local people. Together they explored topics that mattered to them about the local economy and generated editorial content that reflected the lived experience in the area.

New Internationalist

[New Internationalist](#) explored how to reach disengaged groups and grassroots organizations to bring their stories into their editorial process. The launch of their digital reading room was viewed by over 2,082 new users during the Fund by supporters living in 11 cities in England, including Manchester, Grimsby, London, Sheffield, Leicester and Newcastle. Community journalism is now integrated into their regular editorial cycle and approach. The intention is for a 'Pay it forward' mechanism to become a future income stream for New Internationalist – allowing people buying a subscription via the website to also buy an annual institutional subscription for a grassroots organisation, community group or state school.

Future thinking

Imagine a landscape in which trusting and collaborative relationships benefit both publishers and the community. Where there is an understanding of how to effectively engage communities in specific areas, and that people within the community help to drive the media agenda.

Models of engagement and membership would be decentralised and resilient, as subscribers and supporters bought into a movement, a community and shared values.

¹¹ <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/united-kingdom-2019/>



3.2.5

Reaching new audiences

We know from other organisations' research that journalism as a sector is not representative of the population. Nesta's forthcoming research¹² found that in particular, areas with higher levels of unemployment and lower levels of education see a decline in journalistic activity.

Improving diversity is in part about changing who we see and hear in the news. That's why we're supporting the Media Trust, in partnership with the BBC, to improve the under-representation of disabled people commenting on current affairs.

It's also about changing who makes and shapes the news, so the Future News Pilot Fund supported Press Pad to build better routes into journalism for young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds by matching up interns with industry experts who can house and mentor them.

Improving diversity also means focusing on audiences who are normally underserved by mainstream news. Projects such as Black Ballad, an online media outlet with a membership model, has a target audience of black women in the UK and amplifies the voices and stories of a group that is largely overlooked by the mainstream UK press.

We also need to reimagine how newsrooms engage with communities and find ways of opening them up, while retaining high journalistic standards. This will help journalists to rebuild trust with people who have become disengaged from the news.

We supported Tortoise to test new models of open news meetings, allowing those who attend to give their opinions and shape the editorial line. Other innovations test how to bring the newsroom to groups who normally wouldn't engage with news. We're also backing media co-operative Manchester Meteor who are taking their newsroom into the community, for example into food banks, in order to reach underrepresented groups.

The Manchester Meteor

Over the course of the Fund their cooperative membership grew by 100 per cent, from 41 to 82 members. With members' subscriptions averaging £3.12/month, this provides an important step towards financial sustainability. Another component is the supported content offer, similar to *the Guardian's* but on a regional scale. During the Fund period, the Urban Institute at the University of Sheffield agreed to a supported content deal, reporting on their work in Manchester. And in collaboration with Glimpse Protocol, the Manchester Meteor will integrate an ethical advertising platform on their site that gives control of the data collected back to the individual users.

¹² https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_Future_News_Fund_Research_Report_FA.pdf

PressPad

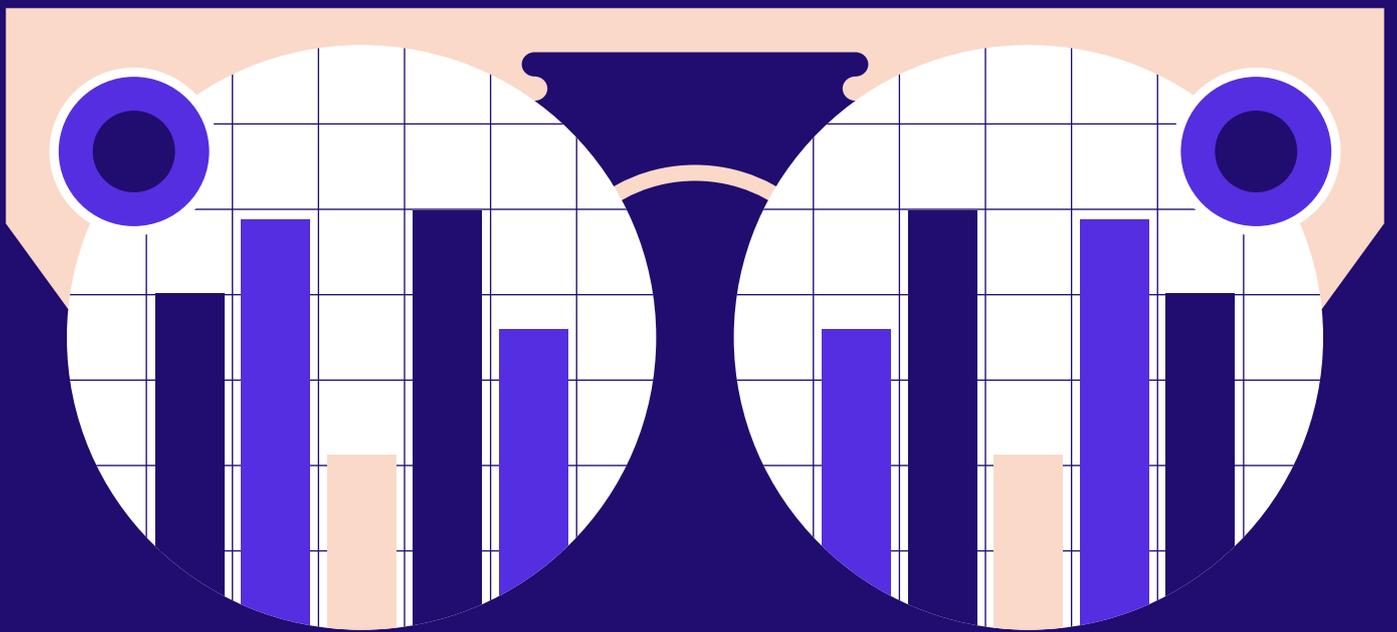
PressPad Remote delivered a range of events and activities which included 30 hours of one-to-one CV and pitch clinics (for 60 young and career-changing journalists), a four hour-long Zoom masterclasses, seven Instagram Q&As, and two online speed mentoring events. All this in just 60 days.

PressPad Remote reached almost 3,500 people through these free, public events and, despite the limitations of the coronavirus, secured a diverse range of speakers. Their Instagram Q&A's guests were 44 per cent working class and 42 per cent from minority ethnic groups.

Future thinking

Imagine newsrooms that reflected the communities they serve: sourcing, crafting and publishing news that matters most to them. Creating a value proposition for quality, accurate, local and regional news.

Media Entrepreneurs bubbling up across the UK with their communities at the heart of their ventures creating a sustainable local and regional news ecosystem. Coupled with a government-funded community voucher scheme for local, not-for-profit public interest news. A future that recognises the value of news!



4.0

Innovation in the news ecosystem

Innovation is taking place across the country and it needs sustained support to thrive

We knew the relative scarcity of journalism funding would mean the fund would be popular. But the number and quality of applications we received, in such a short space of time, confirmed there is a great appetite to innovate in news and media organisations across England and beyond. Applications ranged from the internationally noteworthy to the unknown, from the long-established to the very new, from the market leader to the new entrant, from purely commercial to purely community-run. The proposed solutions were wide-ranging: products in print, audio and video, paywalls, content management systems and other newsroom technologies, open databases, websites, networks, new technological standards, physical spaces and events, and coverage of essential public services.

But our sense is that we've only been able to support the tip of the iceberg and what we've tapped into is an ambitious, creative and diverse field of innovation. Having seen the progress that just the small handful of organisations we were able to support (from Black Ballad increasing their membership by 30 per cent and Glimpse Protocol ending the Fund by launching beta trials of their platform across 10 million consumers) have been able to make over the course of the Fund, we remain convinced that to address the problems threatening the future of news, we need to invest more in nurturing, supporting and scaling innovations across the board.

Transformation of the sector won't come through a single breakthrough innovation. There is no silver bullet. More likely it will be a combination of new business models, working at different local and regional levels, with different communities, at different points along the supply chain, targeting different barriers on the supply and demand side. They'll range from working with journalists on the frontline, to the tech platforms that provide an ad or data or payment service. Together, this powerful mix can create a new and sustainable future for news.

Beyond the silos

We've seen real strength and value in the connections and partnerships that have been seeded and grown across the cohort and beyond: Open Democracy and mySociety, Glimpse Protocol and The Manchester Meteor, The Bristol Cable and Tortoise. COVID-19 created a barrier for face-to-face networking and simultaneously highlighted the greater need for collaboration and connections.

Networking and making connections were both top priorities when we initially asked the innovators what they wanted to get out of the programme, and when we asked them what they'd got out of it at the end. The Fund clearly met a previously unmet need by creating a safe space for peers to talk, collaborate, share, compare and support each other, despite being commercial competitors at times.

Evaluating impact for the news and media

Impact measurement and management in this field is challenging, where the dominant metrics are usually readership and revenue.

Compared to other areas of public service/ social sectors, this is a relatively young measurement field. The concept of 'public interest news' is emerging, alongside an increased role for government and philanthropy in supporting news as a social good (that may not be commercially viable). This is a major development.

There is a growing need for news organisations and funders to understand the extent to which their activities are able to deliver a social impact. However, there is limited accessible evidence of what works, a lack of standardised metrics, and only an emergent language and practice of impact. The sector needs more resources and better collaboration to really take this area forward.

With four to six month delivery timelines for innovators, full scale quantifiable pre and post impact evaluation was never going to be possible. As a pioneering fund within the UK media landscape, we wanted our approach to contribute to the understanding of impact for the emerging sector. To do this we drew on the thought leadership and expertise of Flip Finance to design and implement an innovative, 'hypothesis-led' approach that we felt would best suit the short, iterative (and it turns out COVID-19 affected) nature of the projects.

The innovators agreed upon hypotheses that could be tested by the end of the programme. This gave them the room to determine the best options for measurement and allowed them to apply their own reasoning in working out what the final results mean. This approach was a really helpful way of focusing attention and, when the course changed, we had the flexibility to change the metrics while the hypothesis remained the same.

We were pleased that the innovators were engaged, thoughtful, progressive and positive in getting to grips with this approach and, while a handful struggled to provide detailed data or analysis, the majority embraced it and used the framework as a way of deepening their own understanding of their projects.

As the practice of impact measurement develops in this field, this hypothesis-led approach could inspire other funders, especially in situations where there is no prospect of generating large amounts of 'objective' data about projects. We hope this will contribute to the foundations of promising practice within the field.

The shoots of a media innovation ecosystem are forming

When we take a step back from the Fund to consider the wider media innovation ecosystem, we find a field that is exciting, active and full of energy. But it's just emerging and in need of significant support and investment.

For example, we've found the media funder community to be growing, collaborative and keen to be organised. The ongoing work of the Media Innovation Studio at Lancashire University – researching the appetite for innovation funding – and the newly established Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) – in response to the need for investment in independent local publishers – fill us with confidence. But it's held back by limited resourcing and is sub-scale compared to the size of the challenge.

Meanwhile, the support functions, institutions and activities that characterise other areas of media innovation are only just emerging. There is a great need for more accelerators, capacity building, impact measurement support, networks, events and other sector-specific bespoke services. This is a huge opportunity to help build the capacity and success of the entrepreneurs in the field – as increased investment in this kind of infrastructure in countries like the USA and, to some extent, the Netherlands, Germany and the Nordic region.

The fact so much innovation is happening in the absence of these support functions is testament to the ambition of the people at the frontline.

But they shouldn't have to take this on alone and with more support, they could achieve so much more. In this paper we have showcased news innovation that is alive in England coupled with clear policy recommendations DCMS, Treasury and supporting government departments must implement in order to create the right conditions for news innovation to thrive, support immediate challenges, while also working towards a long term future of public interest news.

5.0

What impact could be achieved by 2025?



We will be adding to knowledge and understanding on how international journalism can connect local communities fighting for change. We will be sharing knowledge on how a multistakeholder media co-operative can engage its members, listen to their thoughts and ideas and put their ideas in to practice. We will have developed our relationships with local co-operative media and be collaborating on community journalism work.

New Internationalist

The storytelling generated through our augmented reality camera lenses diversify the media landscape by giving us access to more angles, more perspectives and more truth than ever before. This is achieved through amplifying the voices of marginalized, underrepresented communities. Everyone has a powerful story to tell but don't know how to tell it.

Hashtag Our Stories



Our open-sourced, much improved Community Relationship Manager (CRM), will be used by public interest media organisations worldwide to facilitate deep member participation. We'll have contributed to a wider culture shift moving journalists beyond 'us and them'- thinking when working with readers and members of the public.

We'll have continued to share our learnings with other public interest media organisations, building on our webinar and support offer. We'll see new media organisations start up, and old ones transform. We'll feel part of a large community of organisations structurally committed to public interest journalism while experimenting with different models and revenue streams.

The Bristol Cable

In 5 years our project will support a broad and diverse network of community contributors from across the UK who we will work with to co-produce local and national public interest economics news coverage which will aim to achieve the following three goals:

- Understand the economic realities facing people and communities across the UK, particularly those currently underserved by the media
- Communicate economic evidence, debates and policies through the media in ways which are accessible and relevant to most people's lives
- Scrutinise economic decisions through the media and give more people the means to hold decision-makers accountable

This will reinvigorate and transform the media ecosystem by diversifying who has a public voice on the economy, providing a popular language which bridges the currently disconnected worlds of media economics and everyday life.

Our Economy



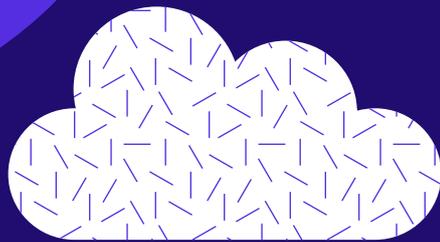
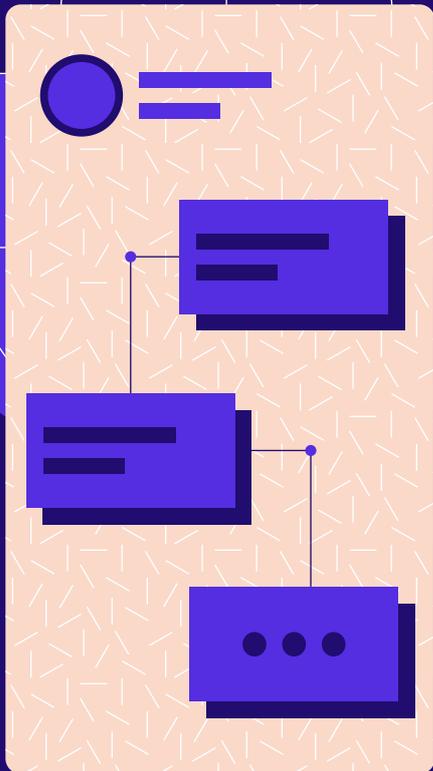
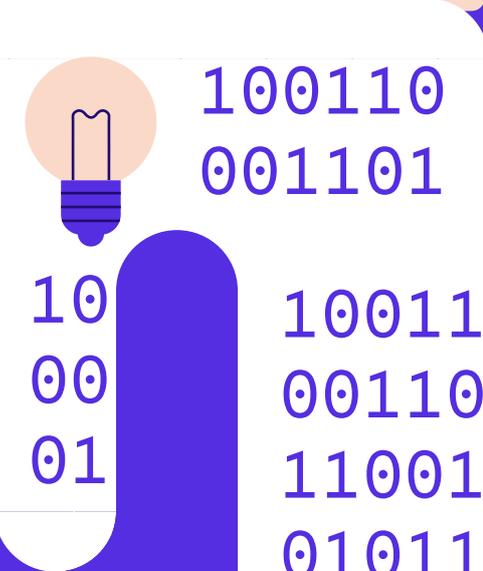
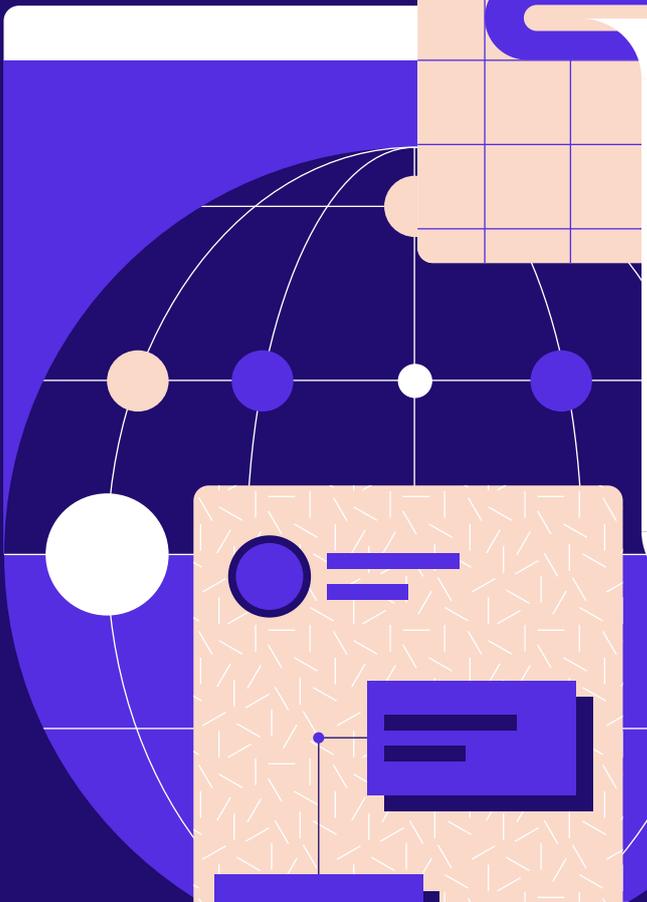
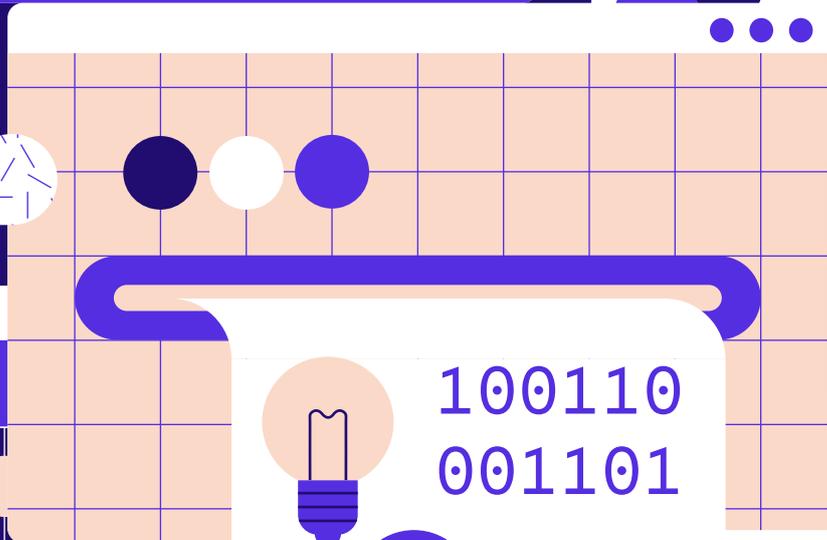
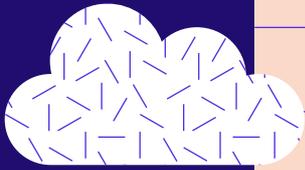
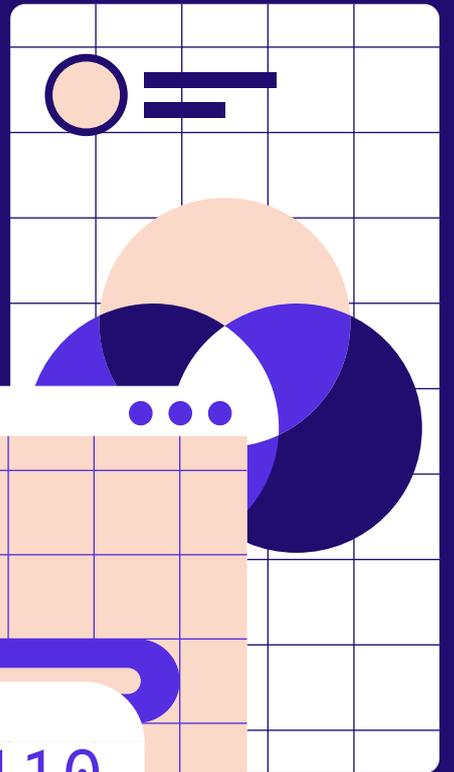
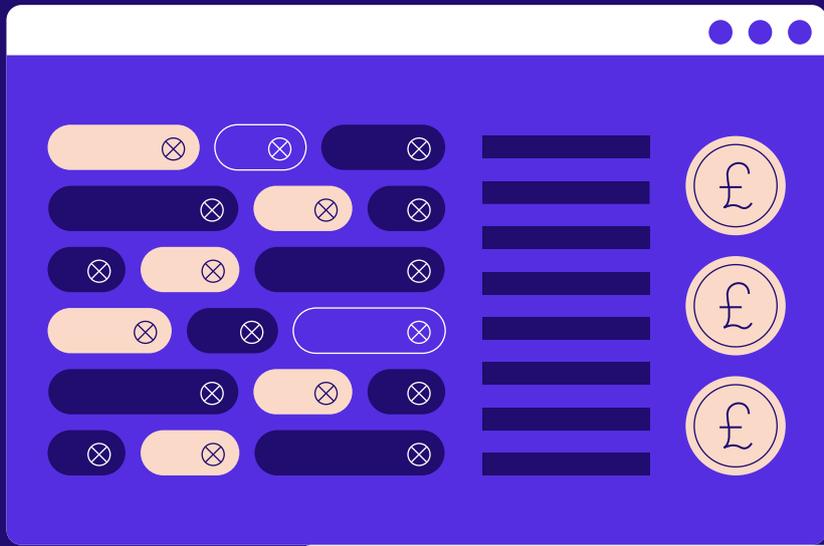
Public interest journalists embark on more ambitious projects across issues like the climate crisis, Covid response, and unequal access to power and privilege, as they know they can produce news stories more efficiently and collaborate more easily using Projects, and that they can build their relationship with their news organisations' members at the same time, by getting them to collaborate on managing the FOI requests. They boost the credibility of stories by using open datasets to back them up, because it's easy to do so.

mySociety



OneSub should be making a significant contribution to the re-staffing of National and particularly local news, including an increase in citizen journalism and vocational journalism. We have big dreams to rethink the way in which we monetise news, and then potentially change the dynamic so that it is worthwhile being a local journalist. Currently, the economics of writing localised news is bleak, but by changing the economics so people in your local area spend time reading the localised news that journalists write in the local newspaper, then the economics of having more journalists covering a small area becomes viable again.

OneSub



6.0

Conclusion

The analysis in the Cairncross Review is more relevant than ever before. Right now, the news industry desperately needs to innovate and it needs dedicated funds to do so.

COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability of the sector. Not future-focused or interdisciplinary enough, much of the field has been too wedded to antiquated ways of doing things. It's also drastically underfunded in some areas.

The pandemic has forced everyone to adapt to try to survive, but the recent losses at BuzzFeed News, Quartz and others show how fragile independent advertiser-supported news is. So all organisations, even the industry's poster children, are going to have to rely on a wider mix of revenues, and a more fluid set of responses. The industry may well be much more reliant on freelancers than it has been to date.

The Fund has shown that the sector is crucial to people's information needs, and to meet those needs, the industry needs substantial support to access funds, skills and tech. With that support, the long-term outlook could be positive. These findings have also been demonstrated by parallel initiatives like the [Independent Community News Network](#), [Public Interest News Foundation](#) (formed earlier this year), [Public Benefit Journalism Research Centre](#), the [Public Media Stack](#) and others.

Innovation has never been more crucial. And when it comes to imagining how we will rebuild from the current crisis, we strongly believe that it has to be right at the heart. Now is the time to be bold. We need to support new models, new reach, new ideas that can bring quality public interest news to all communities. And we need to do it quickly.

That innovation is already underway. The Fund's grantees (and those who originally applied for funding) show creativity, passion, expertise and collaboration. These qualities were needed to resurrect a struggling industry pre-pandemic. Now they're crucial for it to survive.

The work we've seen in the Fund is heartening. There are many in the industry who, despite the lack of funds, lack of change, institutional turf and history of competition, are willing to work together in search of better grounds. And this is the case from all our stakeholders, from innovators through to our advisory board.

So with minimal funding and support, the shoots of a media innovation ecosystem are already forming. The creativity and energy is there, but now we need to get behind innovators with an annual investment – set as Dame Frances Cairncross recommended at a minimum of £10 million a year – for the next decade.

Funding needs to come from diverse sources. While tech giants are helping to drive innovation, the government needs to step up and provide sustained financial support, as well establish a much-needed Institute for Public Interest News, as recommended by the Cairncross Review. Our policy recommendations clearly outline what we believe needs actioning in the short term by central government in order to support a thriving media ecosystem where innovation is at its heart.

If these elements are in place, we think there is good reason to look to the examples of the Future News Fund Pilot and be hopeful about the future. Promising innovations are emerging, and with careful support, have the potential to grow, ensuring communities get the news and information they need.

Annex



A large blue rectangular area representing a notepad page, featuring horizontal white lines for writing. The notepad is positioned below the spiral binding rings.



Hashtag Our Stories

Marginalised communities are underrepresented in the media and traditional newsrooms lack the required diversity to cover our global and interconnected world. This leaves audiences with little understanding or empathy for different cultures. The political landscape has alienated minorities and created a fear of others, and hate crime is on the rise. From antisemitism and islamophobia, to attacks of people of colour and disabled people, we need to do more to amplify these communities and highlight their positive impact on the UK.

The idea

Hashtag Our Stories is empowering marginalised communities to tell their own stories, by providing them with augmented reality (AR) storytelling tools to guide them through the video capturing process. Hashtag Our Stories then publish and amplify the stories across our social media platforms. Hashtag Our Stories reached over a billion views in 2019.

Communities feel listened to and heard. Hashtag Our Stories first engage with them to determine the storytelling skills they require and to customise our tools to their requirements. Then they train them how to use the tools and finally they curate their video stories. A team of journalists adds value to those videos, through fact checking and visual packaging (like subtitles and music).

Finally, audiences watch stories from marginalised communities who are often talked about, but rarely to. The stories are shared both on our social platforms and with media partners, creating a more diverse media landscape. Hashtag Our Stories also monetise the videos on social media platforms with mid-roll adverts, creating a sustainable citizen journalism business model.

The outcome

Empower

Built two augmented reality camera systems within Snapchat to help communities tell their own stories.

Engage

Trained 40 people to tell stories with their phones, using our MOJO (mobile journalism) AR system.

Experience

Published 10 videos from marginalised communities.

New Internationalist

New Internationalist

New Internationalist has a loyal and highly engaged audience, including 3,600 co-owners, most of whom are in England. Part of their mission is to provide a platform for marginalised people and grassroots issues, and they also strive to write in a way that is accessible to all (e.g. unpacking complex issues using clear, jargon-free English). But they know that they are not engaging enough readers who face disadvantage, or who are most impacted by the issues that they cover.

Meanwhile there are areas of England that are underserved by public interest news but where teachers, activists and community organisers are working hard to make a positive change in their community and beyond. Many of New Internationalist's core supporters shared articles with their friends or people they've met through volunteer work, and that reading about others facing the same challenges around the world inspires and invigorates them. They value New Internationalist bringing worldwide movements and issues into their homes.

New Internationalist's public interest journalism reaches well-educated people who care, but not always the people most affected by the issues we cover. So how can they start to reach a wider range of people?

The idea

New Internationalist's project had two main parts which changed and adapted throughout, due to COVID-19.

Widening access to subscriptions base through virtual reading rooms and a 'pay it forward' campaign. The reading rooms encouraged supporters to share free digital subscriptions for people in lockdown via a link (giving one month of access). The 'pay it forward campaign' allows people buying a subscription via the website to also buy an annual institutional subscription for a grassroots organisation, community group or state school. Readers have also nominated groups to receive these free subscriptions. The idea was to connect communities fighting for change, widen access to the magazine, and engage new readers.

Community journalism workshops and events. Working with On Our Radar, New Internationalist held two community journalism workshops in north east England. The second was held over Zoom because of COVID-19. Participants interviewed people in their community and we worked with them to develop articles. New Internationalist dedicated a page in their air pollution themed magazine to some of the work that came out of their projects. This means that people directly impacted by an issue have their voices published in the magazine.

New Internationalist continue to develop stories with the writers for their website and are also holding an online event on air pollution, targeted at communities in underserved areas of England.

The outcome

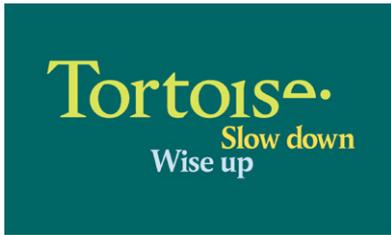
New Internationalist's digital reading room was viewed by over 2,082 new users. Supporters who shared the reading rooms link indicates it was accessed by people in at least 11 cities in England, including Manchester, Grimsby, London, Sheffield, Leicester and Newcastle.

Among those nominated for an annual subscription were a racial justice campaign organisation, writers' group, community cinema, drop-in café, and grassroots anti-poverty groups.

Everyone who attended the community journalism workshops and completed the survey, reported an improvement in interviewing skills and was positive about the experience. *"It was really interesting to see how even a totally inexperienced novice like me, could do something worthwhile,"* said one participant.

The community journalism content that appeared in the magazine was very well received by our readers and co-owners. One of New Internationalist's supporters said: *"I thought this piece was great. I thought it was really compelling. I liked the personal aspect – really powerful."* Another suggested that New Internationalist could make this kind of community journalism a regular feature in the magazine. This is something that the team plans to do.

Finally, New Internationalist will hold an online event for people from some of the most underserved places in England, including the North East. The event will connect global struggles for air pollution with what people can do in their communities.



Tortoise Local

Tortoise is a membership organisation that puts its members at the heart of its journalism through engagement events called ThinkIns.

The idea

With local news needing new sources of income, we wanted to trial partnerships with local newsrooms to test the appetite for franchising the Tortoise model. Through this we hoped to see whether they could find a new source of income from local events, either through member fees or commercial sponsorship. Rather than selling content for revenues, could local news return to its core purpose of being a community convenor?

The outcome

The pandemic stopped the project in its tracks and made the team rethink the model entirely. With 'real life' events at the core of the project they had to adapt quickly. Tortoise held one ThinkIn in Grimsby in early March, with 40 Tortoise Local members joining and taking part in a conversation about how to rewrite the rules of politics. When lockdown happened, Tortoise pivoted their work to digital ThinkIns, attracting 30 people to an online event that gave them insight into life inside the care industry, schools and factories in the town.

Tortoise held a third ThinkIn discussing the case for more regional power after the pandemic. Tortoise's Grimsby members came to that, but at the peak of lockdown they struggled to engage people with digital ThinkIns at a sustainable scale. The team learnt that digital is inclusive in that you can bring more people together, but it has its limits.

So Tortoise introduced a new model called a ReportIn. Their London-based reporter worked with members in Grimsby to tell the story of lockdown from outside the bubble. Together they operated an 'open notebook', reporting transparently together and producing a story which questioned the London-driven lockdown strategy in a place that was hardly touched by the virus. Tortoise also helped support the launch of a new hyperlocal, produced by their charity partner, East Marsh United, with collaboration from Grimsby Live. Tortoise's franchising model is in place for post-lockdown.



mySociety

Over the past five years there has been a significant decline in levels of trust in the news in the UK and a worryingly large number of traditional local newspapers have closed. At the same time, pioneering journalist groups, media platforms and local media outlets have emerged which have collaboration and participation at the heart of their mission. These include the Bureau Local, The Ferret, openDemocracy, the Bristol Cable and the Manchester Meteor.

These groups are increasingly attempting to bring members of the public into the creation of stories, including through collaborative fact-checking, co-reporting and crowdfunding investigations.

They also use Freedom of Information (FOI) requests in impactful ways, creating public interest news stories and data sets that effectively report our changing society at every level, and hold powerful institutions to account.

But these organisations don't have an effective way of bringing their readers into the process of creating FOI-driven stories and datasets. How can this be done?

The idea

Over the last 10 years, [WhatDoTheyKnow.com](#) has helped more than 150,000 people make more than half a million FOI requests. mySociety's 'Pro' features allow journalists to embargo requests and responses and to make requests to multiple authorities at once. Over 200 individuals are already using the service, which has been used to report some of the most impactful public interest stories of the year. For example, the award-nominated '[Sold from Under You](#)', the Bureau Local's investigation into the sale of public assets, which involved over 700 FOI requests.

mySociety knows from feedback that journalists, campaigners and members of the public want to collaborate on FOI-driven stories but at the moment they can't easily work well together. So mySociety's wanted to develop a new 'Projects' feature in [WhatDoTheyKnow Pro](#) to allow teams of journalists, citizen investigators and others to source material for stories through FOI requests, and to analyse the information with a transparent, crowd-sourced and community-driven approach. Projects would enable Pro users to provide citizen investigators with access to sets of requests and responses, enabling them to make and manage requests and help turn the responses into a data set or story.

mySociety believed that this would make it significantly faster and easier for journalists to use FOI and help bring readers into the reporting process. This would result in more and better public interest news stories and contribute to an increase in public trust in journalism.

The outcome

mySociety developed the idea into a viable working feature with great promise for the future. To make sure they were delivering something of genuine use, mySociety conducted user research with journalists who use FOI and are interested in developing their membership proposition. mySociety took an agile and flexible approach to design and development to make sure they could respond to feedback and change direction appropriately.

They tested [WhatDoTheyKnow Pro](#) with [openDemocracy](#), who ran a pilot investigation and recruited collaborators to help use the tool. From that pilot, they learned more about what makes an engaging and successful project.

From the interviews with journalists and participants at the end of the Fund, mySociety found that WhatDoTheyKnow Pro was successful in saving the journalists' time and effort. They found it an efficient tool that they would use even if working on a project on their own.

It also succeeded in engaging contributors. Some feedback mySociety received from the project debrief interviews with contributors included: *'It's a good tool'*, *'actually quite fast'*, *'fascinating!'*. And further statistical analysis showed that around 50 per cent of the work of classifying responses to requests was done by project collaborators.

Overall mySociety delivered a tool that met the goal of making it significantly faster and easier to turn multiple FOI requests into a story, and engaged news organisation members in the process of producing the story.



Economy

Only one in ten people feel the media talks about economics in a way that is accessible and understandable, according to a recent YouGov/Economy poll. As a result, one third of respondents reported that they rarely paid attention to economic stories in the media, despite the fact that four out of five recognised it was relevant to their everyday lives. This disconnection creates a vacuum which is filled by misinformation and contributes to a decline in public trust in the media.

It also undermines democracy. The 'economy' was mentioned 74 and 56 times respectively in the 2017 Conservative and Labour Party manifestos. Yet our polling found that only one third of people felt information about the economy in the media around this time was useful enough to make an informed voting choice.

Coverage of the economy in the media:

Is dominated by white, male, 'posh' accents and this contributes to many people feeling that economics in the media isn't accessible or relevant to them.

Focuses on macro aggregate indicators like GDP growth, unemployment, interest rates, inflation and productivity, which often fail to reflect peoples' lived experience of the economy and contribute to a feeling that the media is out of touch and favours elite interests.

Conceptualises the economy in a narrow and abstract way as separate and different from people's everyday economic experiences.

The decline of local news provision exacerbates and entrenches this problem increasing the sense of alienation felt by large numbers of people.

The idea

'Economy' began as a digital news and entertainment platform in 2016. They developed offline activities in schools and communities across the UK in following years because we recognised the importance of building personal relationships with communities and making the abstract economy relevant to people's lives.

They have developed a place-based approach in which Economy partners with local community and media organisations to develop a social infrastructure and public culture of co-produced public interest reporting on local economies.

When coronavirus forced the team to postpone their place-based work in Birmingham, they pivoted to focus on the economic consequences, responses and possibilities of coronavirus.

The aim was to begin to develop a national and digital model of high-quality co-produced public interest reporting on the national economy, which was able to capture the specifics of people's economic experiences and views in communities across the UK.

The team started asking communities across the UK to provide written and video content sharing their economic experience, views and values. Economy's editorial team provided support and mentoring to contributors to produce the content and Economy will be offering digital journalism workshops online in the near future on ecomy.org

The next stage is to work with other media organisations and the network to produce content which can be published on other platforms. It's hoped this will influence media coverage on the economy nationally. As part of this Economy will offer support and training to journalists and media organisations that want to use and develop their approach.

The outcome

Economy has pioneered a different kind of public interest economic news: one which is understandable and reflects peoples' lived experience; speaks about local issues and is spoken about by local people; and that makes everyone, particularly those furthest from power, feel part of the conversation about how the economy should be run.

During the delivery of the pilot Fund Economy was forced back online by coronavirus. This gave the team the resource to develop the digital infrastructure necessary to work with communities across the UK on co-produced and user-generated economics news.

Coronavirus has made the functioning of the economy so much more visible to the UK population. This has increased the demand for clear and accessible information which helps make sense of the changing economy, what the government response is, and how different communities will be affected. Economy has continued to provide this information through the weekly 'What Just Happened' newsletter.

Early highlights include:

- Working with ten community contributors from across the UK to co-produce content that explores the economic consequences, responses and possibilities of coronavirus.
- Producing seven episodes of a new podcast bringing together communities, experts and decision-makers to discuss the economy.
- Launching a 'we need to talk' campaign calling for user-generated content that explores the economy.
- Piloting our journalist training for 30 journalists.

Economy's key aim was to make people feel like they have a voice and are being listened to on economic issues and decisions which affect them. It's too early to understand whether this has been achieved, however the team will continue to evaluate their progress through the rest of 2020 and beyond.



COURTSDesk

Courtsdesk

There are 1,500,000 criminal court cases heard across the UK in the Magistrates' Court every year. That's 93 per cent of all criminal cases, and 100 per cent of all prosecutions, as even the most serious cases start at this level.

The only way journalists can access this crucial source of information is to spend hours reading documents published by their local court. These documents are usually at least 40 pages and not readily amenable for editorial use. Journalists have no ability to search this information, or to cross reference it to related data (such as which cases are referred up to the Crown Court).

Critically, they have no way to access information from other courts around the country, meaning cases of direct relevance to their local area are effectively invisible.

Newspapers have fewer and fewer journalists to cover these court cases. Reporters have to spend hours each day just to find important matters of public interest to report on, and when they find them, have to spend even more time making the content of those documents suitable for publication.

The idea

The Courtsdesk newsfeed is designed to supply all of this information, across the entire court system, to bona fide news outlets in real time, and in improved ready-to-use text formats.

Crucially, the newsfeed means time-starved reporters can filter a huge volume of cases, so they can prioritise the most relevant to them, or set alerts for important subject matters which come up in court.

Because reporters now have access to cases across the judicial system, they gain access to many more relevant cases. This creates a vital source of additional news content, of the highest value in terms of both public interest and reader interest. All this at a time when their news cycle has gone from once-a-day to 24/7.

The Courtsdesk newsfeed includes two types of information. Each part is designed to help with different challenges.

- **Advance lists of cases** which are still due to be heard in court, are made available as soon as they are published. Using Courtsdesk, journalists and news managers can filter, bookmark and track those cases in advance. This improves their ability to plan when reporters should attend court and is particularly vital with the number of staff dwindling.

- **Published registers with the outcomes of cases** are also distributed as soon as Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) makes them available. Until now it took hours to read, digest, select, copy and edit these case reports into stories for publication. But using Courtsdesk they can be made available, with filters to select by case types, locations, or a variety of other criteria set by each journalist depending on their area, or speciality.

The outcome

One important statistic stood out: 100 per cent of stakeholders in the state and news media support the idea enough to commit to it.

As part of reaching agreement with HMCTS to set up the platform, support was received from the Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, News Media Association, Society of Editors and the Justice Minister acting on behalf of the Lord Chancellor.

Regional court reporters, editors, content directors, data journalists, digital and paper publications, and editors at the BBC, were interviewed and every one agreed that the specific functionalities and services offered in Courtsdesk's news platform were useful, if not vital.

In the words of one veteran court reporter: *"News is people. And court means people. I suspect that every day you could use this to produce a guaranteed page in every title that we have across the whole of the UK".*

One goal of the Fund was to determine the financial sustainability of the Courtsdesk news wire service. The feedback from regional news organisations was unanimous: criminal courts news is their most valuable content. For one news group, which has over 150 titles all over the UK, 50 per cent of articles read by 'hyper-engaged' readers (which they define as people reading more than 21 articles per month) were courts and crime reports. Another found that courts content was by far the most paid-for content on a per-click basis on their payroll.

As a result of the Fund, the news outlet Courtsdesk spoke to has committed to a trial of the service, accounting for coverage across the entire courts system of England and Wales.

For news organisations, Courtsdesk offers solutions to the most critical problems facing the sector:

- Insight and clarity in the face of a deluge of data.
- Time-savings for reporters as their numbers are being cut.
- Increased amounts of vital, reliable content to populate their pages and engage their readers.
- Transparency into a critical part of our social system that has often been opaque.



Glimpse Protocol

Glimpse Protocol addressed the second of the Fund's core aims: to test new ways to improve the financial sustainability of public interest news.

Today, user data is often illegally collected, processed and stored within walled gardens that Facebook, Google and other third parties control. As data brokers, they facilitate audience targeting and charge a premium for matching advertisers with their customers. A recent two-year study by PwC concluded that, on average, 41 per cent of ad spend can be lost before it reaches the publisher.

This problem is about to get worse. After a decade of disruption, publisher revenue is set to be negatively impacted again by technical and regulatory changes driven by privacy concerns.

Most significantly, Google's decision to deprecate the third party cookie in 2022 is driving innovation, and large publishers are seizing the advantage to regain control over their audience and value. (See the *New York Times* recent announcement that they are offering their own platform for ad targeting based on first party data.)

Smaller publishers, however, do not have the budget or expertise to capture and maintain these databases. Therefore, they must continue to give up a significant portion of their ad revenue to third parties and will, again, be the most significantly impacted by new privacy-driven changes.

How can publishers, with a particular focus on smaller entities, generate maximum value for their inventory without breaching privacy laws and without using audience data maintained inside walled gardens?

The idea

Glimpse Protocol is a privacy-preserving advertising platform. They create a socially responsible marketplace that brings together brands and publishers.

Their private data architecture establishes a user-centric model, and their system plugs into the adtech stack seamlessly, working directly between advertisers and publishers to cut out data-broking middlemen. As a result, consumer data is no longer centralised.

Glimpse Protocol protects publishers against incoming privacy-led disruption and will increase publisher revenue by up to 60 per cent. Further, they offer publishers a socially responsible means to monetise their site with digital advertising.

On the other side of the market, advertisers can find the audiences they want, but without harvesting the data of their customers and infringing their privacy. Glimpse Protocol removes exposure to regulatory risk and, as a more direct route, they are better value than the existing wasteful programmatic system.

Glimpse Protocol is a B2B product: consumers don't need to take any additional action outside of the existing consent management process. Scaling is not limited, giving them the potential to make a significant difference to UK publishers in the near-term.

The outcome

Hitting all milestones, Glimpse Protocol ended the Fund by launching beta trials of their platform across 10 million consumers. This has been the accumulative product from three months of focused work supported by Fund, and BGV and Nesta's support.

Leading up to the trials, they augmented their engineering team to design and build technical integrations and interfaces for publishers. Now in production, publishers can enable our privacy-preserving ads and access a fairer share of ad spend. This progress has led to Glimpse Protocol agreeing a partnership with an independent news platform (to be announced) who have conducted test integrations and early pilots. A roadmap is in place for product launch.

For publishers not already using ads, Glimpse Protocol has also successfully trialled a system of direct integration to their platform – requiring almost no engineering cost or prior ad set-up. Looking ahead, Glimpse Protocol is partnering with fellow Fund cohort member, the Manchester Meteor, to introduce ethical ads as an additional revenue source.

Supporting this work, Glimpse Protocol conducted an external review of their architecture and privacy claims by technical subject matter experts. The report concluded that their technology complies with the "legal obligations of the data protection legislation" and is a viable solution to identify industry pain points. This assessment gives assurance that Glimpse Protocol's technology can future-proof publishers against forthcoming privacy-driven disruption.



Omni Digital

Content generated by smaller hyperlocal news publishers is often stolen, or used without payment or correct attribution, by local, regional and national media. Our goal is to reduce this to ensure fair payment and recognition. This matters not only to the hyperlocals generating news, but also to all consumers of news. If local news is not made more resilient and sustainable, it is unlikely to survive.

The idea

[Ping!](#) as a platform will innovate the UK news supply chain by connecting the content from grassroots journalists with mainstream publishers. It will build industry resilience by generating new revenue streams that support independent and community news publishers, so that they can continue covering stories that matter to their local communities and be paid for their work.

Ping!-Trends is a centralised platform which allows regional and national media organisations to identify trending news topics, search by location, and tag and access stories quicker. This will enable them to create more diverse, balanced and ultimately more valuable content that is locally relevant and which would otherwise go unreported.

The outcome

During the course of the Fund, Omni Digital carried out 10 semi-structured interviews with national media (including BBC Archent, Reach, Reuters and *the Guardian*) to establish how they

can enrich their national stories with hyperlocal, regional content.

The evidence from these interviews shows that independent community media and hyperlocals are an essential, and currently undervalued, part of the UK news supply chain.

There is interest from two large regional groups in supporting VMN as a network of independent 'stringers' or community correspondents – as a new way of resourcing journalism.

Omni Digital successfully delivered an updated version of Ping! containing the new Ping!-Trends functionality to real-world alpha users and actioned initial alpha test feedback.

The new functionality allows users to:

- Tag newly created content, increasing a hyperlocal journalist's chances of having their stories picked up by mainstream media and receiving fair compensation for their work.
- Hyperlocal journalists now have a central location which can be used to quickly identify trending news topics by tag and location. This allows them to create highly valued content which may impact mainstream media.
- Mainstream media publications are able to use the advanced data analytics tools to identify trending news topics as early as possible, or use historical or comparative data to anticipate future news trends, or news black holes (e.g. no news from a specific location).



Media Trust

Despite one in five people having a disability, just 7.4 per cent of people on-screen and 5.5 per cent of the workforce off-screen are disabled (Scope). Ofcom's *Diversity in TV* report, September 2019, found TV newsrooms have the lowest proportions of disabled and non-white staff versus other TV industry sectors. Some larger broadcasters still lack targets for improving disability representation and fewer broadcasters are reporting disability data, with only a third providing a full breakdown of staff disability data.

The underrepresentation of disabled people in news stories and newsrooms means:

- Important issues risk going un- or under-reported, e.g. the sharp increase in hate crime against disabled people (Inclusion London).
- We are failing to tap into a huge talent pool. You rarely see a disabled person being interviewed about something that isn't about disability. And off-screen, media organisations too often focus on the accommodation required rather than what disabled talent can bring.
- How the media reports on disability affects how the public feels about it. We are limiting the horizons of disabled people who don't see accessible role models they can aspire to emulate being celebrated in the media. Meanwhile, two-thirds of British people feel awkward around disabled people who continue to be negatively stereotyped in almost all aspects of their daily lives. According to Scope: "When disabled people

don't see themselves represented, talent and potential go unrecognised and negative attitudes and stigma goes unchallenged."

The idea

Media Trust's idea aimed to tackle the underrepresentation of disabled voices in the news and give people with disabilities a stronger voice.

They partnered with the BBC to build on its 50:50 project (which led to a significant increase in the number of women contributors in news and current affairs programmes) and extend this to disability. Recently, the BBC announced its intention to improve disability representation on-and-off screen in 2020. Leveraging the processes created for 50:50, the idea was to test interventions that are most effective in moving the dial for disability in the news. Media Trust did this by drawing on the ideas identified at their Reframing Disability Summit 2019 which brought together scores of disability charities and media industry representatives.

A key barrier 50:50 faced was the assumption there weren't enough interview-ready female experts. Working in close consultation with disability organisations and disabled people, Media Trust aimed to create a Disabled Experts directory, run media training for disabled experts, and hold speed-pitching events to connect disabled experts with journalists. They also planned to produce a series of online resources for disabled contributors including guides and templates on asking for reasonable

accommodations. Another barrier highlighted by the journalists attending our summit was that they feel awkward around people with disabilities. Media Trust planned to run training for journalists in approaching and interviewing disabled people.

Following the Fund, Media Trust planned to share the results and resources with relevant stakeholders and encourage the industry to adopt them. These stakeholders include Ofcom, the Disability Unit within the Cabinet Office, and Media Trust's other broadcaster industry partners.

The outcome

The programme faced significant challenges as a result of COVID-19. In particular, journalists and newsrooms have understandably not been able to dedicate time to new programmes and the development of new voices. As of June 2020, only four BBC news/current affairs programmes are tracking their disability representation and the BBC currently expects that November is the earliest they will have the original target of 50+ participating programmes.

Nonetheless, Media Trust achieved much:

- They developed training for disabled subject experts which can be run entirely online including pre-recorded video, Q&A sessions, and one-on-one interviews with feedback. This was achieved by working in partnership with an advisory group comprising the Disability Unit, Ofcom, BBC and other broadcasters and leading disability organisations.
- They worked with the BBC to develop disability awareness training for journalists and have run two pilot sessions. One attendee described it as *"the best disability training I have ever done"*.
- The BBC will host a networking day in July to train participants and journalists.
- They created an online resource for disabled experts, newsrooms and journalists that will be freely available.
- They raised awareness via social media and their networks to build a Disabled Experts database and have had dozens of responses so far.
- Media Trust submitted a paper, on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on disabled people, to the Women and Equalities Select Committee inquiry and pitched programme ideas to the BBC on the same topic.



PressPad

It's often said that the British media is pale, male and stale. But according to City

Journalism lecturer, Jane Martinson: "it's probably fairer to call it pale, male and posh." However, diversity is about more than what you can see: coming from a working class and poor economic background, or growing up outside of London, is a huge, unspoken disadvantage. Former social mobility tsar Alan Milburn's *State of the Nation* report found that only 11 per cent of journalists are from working-class backgrounds, compared to 60 per cent of the population.

When you combine the dominance of a London-centric media, the unethical yet entrenched practice of unpaid internships, and a particularly acute housing crisis, you get a perfect storm. This makes it even harder for the most disadvantaged, diverse and silenced community members from starting a career in the media. In 2018, the Sutton Trust estimated that it costs £1,019 a month to do an unpaid internship in London, where most opportunities are based. This prices out talented people who cannot afford to work for free or who don't have friends or family to stay with.

The lack of representative newsrooms matters if journalism is to continue to act as the fourth estate and hold power to account. Inherent bias of individuals and existing power structures block the questions, investigations and coverage that are most pertinent to our underserved audiences. And we know that when newsrooms do not reflect the demographic and economic diversity of their audiences, we – the fourth estate – lose their trust.

The idea

PressPad is a social enterprise that aims to diversify the media by removing one of the main financial obstacles to those trying to enter the profession: the cost of accommodation. They pair young people from across the UK who have work experience or an internship in London, and other big cities, with experienced media professionals in the capital that have a spare room.

PressPad's objective is to create a more equal and diverse media industry with greater access and representation of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. They achieve this through our unique grassroots social enterprise model of host-mentorship. This is paired with a marketplace tech platform that simultaneously allows them – with the permission of their users – to collect data to hold the industry to account for their unpaid work practices, and connect hosts and young media professionals in a fast, seamless and tailored way.

Their scheme works primarily by engaging and benefiting three distinct groups:

- Aspiring journalists from disadvantaged backgrounds and communities who live outside of London and other expensive UK cities.
- Media professionals and journalists who have a spare room and want to host.
- Businesses and media organisations whose business models will thrive as they create more socially relevant content aided by the inclusion of more diverse and better networked staff.
- Their enterprise gives young people the soft skills and robust practical support they need to make it in the media. And Press Pad is the only mentorship and hosting service that does both these things at the same time.

The outcome

Due to the pandemic, Press Pad's hosting services and new marketplace website have been postponed until 2021.

So the team pivoted, and on 13 April launched a new educational and support programme for young journalists called #PressPadRemote. Since then they have delivered a range of events and activities which include 30 hours of one-to-one CV and pitch clinics (for 60 young and career-changing journalists), four hour-long

Zoom masterclasses, seven Instagram Q&As, and two online speed mentoring events. All this in just 60 days.

PressPad reached almost 3,500 people through these free, public events and, despite the limitations of the coronavirus, secured a diverse range of speakers. Instagram Q&A's guests were 44 per cent working class and 42 per cent from minority ethnic groups. Feedback has been glowing and has already helped individuals secure jobs and commissions through the clinics. One participant wrote: *"The CV session with Olivia was really helpful. I was impressed by how she was able to so quickly understand what I needed from the session and provided clear constructive feedback. I also appreciated how personable Olivia was which made me feel comfortable talking to her."*

PressPad improved their blog (now publishing weekly) and newsletter. Topics have included: journalism interns' coronavirus concerns, profiling three interns whose work experience had been cancelled; disability and the media during the pandemic written by BBC journalist Dayne Martin; networking and building relationships during lockdown; and how to prepare to get a job after lockdown.



Black Ballad

Based on research in 2016 by City University, in the UK, media is broadly undiverse, with 94 per cent of journalists being white and 55 per cent male. By contrast, just 0.2 per cent of British journalists are black, making black people 15x underrepresented in media. The result of this is a media ecosystem that, despite various attempts at solving racial diversity over the last 20 years, systematically fails to sufficiently and adequately cover topics pertaining to black audiences.

While this is an issue across the entire UK, it is particularly acute outside of London, where black people make up just one per cent of the population, compared to 10 per cent in the capital. Many local news organisations are struggling to transform digitally, and are seeing a drop in print circulation and advertising rates. So they have little incentive to use their limited resources to cover the issues, stories and perspectives that are specific for the proportionally small number of black people in their communities.

The impact of these two trends, the lack of diversity in media and the decline of local news, work together to silence the stories, experiences and conversations of the black community outside of the capital. This means that black people within these communities do not have the opportunity to be heard by others. The result of this is those outside of these underserved communities do not get to hear about their issues, leading to a lack of empathy, understanding or action.

The idea

Black Ballad's solution was a project launching their reporting, community engagement and research activities for, by and about black women in four regional hubs across the UK.

Black Ballad aimed to do three things:

- Create text, audio, photography and video content produced for, by and about black women in the highlighted regions.
- Conduct and publish a piece of research highlighting the differences and similarities in the experiences of black women across the country.
- Facilitate events for these audiences outside of the capital to further engage and create additional context around the content produced and the research conducted.

In doing so, Black Ballad would provide the following benefits to these underserved audiences and the larger news ecosystem:

- Create content in a range of media formats that speaks specifically to the black community outside of London, on a platform with a global readership and paying membership base.

- Deliver research, digital content and physical events that work together to deliberately and explicitly engage underserved audiences in news and media that is hyper relevant.
- Give black female journalists and creators from these regions the opportunity to create and produce journalism in a paid capacity, making the industry more diverse from a race and region perspective.
- Provide stats and headlines that can be shared with other media organisations and platforms to ensure that the conversation about black women outside of London goes on beyond Black Ballad.

The outcome

Research

- Over a two-week period in May/June, Black Ballad conducted a nine-part, 128 question survey, designed to highlight the differing experiences of black women in Britain. In the two weeks that the survey was in the field, it gained 3,400 respondents, with a 50 per cent completion rate.
- 55 per cent of the survey respondents were from outside of London, with at least 100 respondents from every region of the UK, except Northern Ireland.

Improving regional diversity among black British journalism

- Black Ballad conducted two callouts for black female creators in Britain, resulting in 190 applicants (85 per cent of which were black, female and currently based in Britain).
- Black Ballad commissioned six articles from black women outside of London, talking about their regional and cultural experiences.
- Black Ballad is currently in the process of hiring nine part-time, project-based editors across the country, who will each have a budget to commission up to ten black female writers from their region.

Engaging audiences outside of London

- Since the start of the Fund, Black Ballad's membership has grown 30 per cent, with 35 per cent of that growth directly attributable to their commitment to telling the stories of black women outside of London.
- A further 13 per cent of Black Ballad's membership growth was attributable to creating and distributing content specifically about the experiences of black women as it pertains to coronavirus.



#THISMUCHIKNOW

This Much I Know (TMIK)

Millennials believe mainstream news to be biased, untrustworthy and overly-focused on negative content, resulting in them feeling apathetic and/or stressed out by the news.

- 58 per cent of millennials feel stressed from the news (American Psychological Association).
- 57 per cent do not trust the news (Edelman 2018).
- 66 per cent are worn out by the amount of news (Pew Research Centre).

For journalism to truly engage millennials across the UK, it must speak to and hear from diverse voices, especially those underrepresented in the media.

Regional representation is particularly important. London is the hub of British media, being home to the head offices of the biggest newspapers and Westminster. Data from the Office of National Statistics backs this up. London is also where most of the journalism projects that receive funding are located.

As well as regional representation, we also addressed the issue of trust in the media in the UK. With the rise of fake news and misinformation, trust is falling and people increasingly believe that the news is bad for their mental health.

The idea

TMIK's idea was to offer an antidote to these feelings, and build a project that readers felt would help them to engage in healthy, empowering conversations around the headlines.

They aimed to start a newsroom (a 'Midlands Hub') in Birmingham and expand our activity outside of London, paving the way to reach and hear from voices that are not currently represented in the media.

The Midlands Hub would be responsible for audience growth in regions outside of London, making connections with NGOs and charities, and producing stories with a strong regional focus. The office would also hire an intern from an ethnic minority background, in seeking to improve TMIK's diversity and offer opportunities to communities that are underrepresented in media.

The Ambassador Scheme would recruit voices from across the country to report from their area. Having real people report on local and national issues they care about would help us to build trust in their reportage, and hear from people whose voices most need to be heard.

The outcome

TMIK Birmingham opened with the recruitment of a lead reporter and an intern. Both the team and the content created is more diverse. Together, the reporter and intern produced 15 reports with a specific regional focus, and increased our regional followers by more than 500. Feedback from the community shows they are delighted at the regional nuance in TMIK's reporting.

TMIK interviewed care workers on the frontline in parts of the country that rarely make it into national papers.

The team also launched our TMIK Ambassador Scheme during the Fund, which was a pivot move in response to COVID-19. At a time when their community was just about to go into lockdown, we recruited 89 ambassadors from across the UK (outside of London). Sharing video reports from real people, outside of the capital, was an incredible win for the team.

TMIK hired a UX/UI designer to map out their next stages of tech development, which includes being able to donate or crowdfund for good causes within their app. In the coming weeks, this product will be developed so that users and ambassadors can communicate inside the app, allowing for greater news reach from all around the UK.



The Manchester Meteor

Traditional media is in crisis. A shrinking number of corporations control more and more of our media, journalists are laid off and titles closed, as they try to survive the digital revolution destroying the advertising-based business model they relied on. This relentless attrition results in the reduction of high-quality public interest journalism and a resulting 'democratic deficit'.

The COVID-19 crisis has cast even more doubt on traditional media's ability to provide public interest journalism, with newspaper [sales plummeting](#) and thousands of [journalists furloughed](#) with uncertain futures.

Manchester has a rich history of progressive ideas and campaigning media, and a community of active citizens and organisations at its heart. Many are frustrated with the mainstream media and look to the Manchester Meteor as an outlet that truly scrutinises local power, and provides a place for their voices to be heard. The city needs a greater plurality of the press, which they offer with their fair, honest and accurate reporting focusing on social, economic and environmental justice issues.

Through the Fund they sought to strengthen and grow the Manchester Meteor's community base to reach a wide and diverse group of citizens who feel genuine ownership over, and therefore trust in, their local media.

The idea

Manchester Meteor's idea was to build a community-based grassroots democratic media in Manchester that offers an alternative to the ownership and business model prevalent in traditional media. This would be a co-operative media with strong ethical values and an editorial line steered by our members to ensure public interest comes first.

They aimed to test ways of increasing the size and the diversity of their membership, and enable members' participation. They applied human-centred design and community organising approaches, to co-create rich and rewarding online and real-life environments where members could be entertained, informed and educated.

They aimed to develop two-way communication with members. This would be key to allowing people to contribute ideas and vote on issues, enabling the Manchester Meteor's to receive feedback to improve community outreach and engagement.

Their aim was to become a financially sustainable media organisation that is not primarily dependent on advertising revenue. A diverse range of income streams, including membership subscriptions, would protect them from the degradation of many traditional media organisations' output, due to their pursuit of the clickbait model in an attempt to bolster their online advertising revenue.

The outcome

The COVID-19 crisis created significant problems during the Fund as Manchester Meteor's project incorporated public outreach events to boost their interaction with diverse communities across Manchester. The team pivoted from real-life events to virtual workshops, debates and performances using video conferencing.

Over the course of the Fund, their cooperative membership grew by 100 per cent, from 41 to 82 members. With members' subscriptions averaging £3.12/month, this provides an important step towards financial sustainability. Another component is the supported content offer, similar to *the Guardian's* but on a regional scale. During the Fund period, the Urban Institute at the University of Sheffield agreed to a supported content deal, reporting on their work in Manchester. And in collaboration with Glimpse Protocol, the Manchester Meteor will integrate an ethical advertising platform on their site that gives control of the data collected back to the individual users.

Manchester Meteor gave members the opportunity to vote on future editorial content. This was combined with a revamp of the website and giving members the ability to vote on editorial and organisational issues. The Fund has promoted the production of public interest news that Manchester deserves.



Open Democracy

The idea

Over the course of the Fund, Open Democracy built, tested and prototyped an online database of UK politicians' registers of interest, focussing on Bristol as a pilot area. The online database is searchable, published as open data and provides alerts to users when the data changes. They have also established an Open Data Standard to encourage public bodies to make the data they publish more accessible.

The outcome

The research and testing phase of the project has demonstrated that the online database will dramatically cut the number of time journalists must spend obtaining and interrogating Registers of Interests, making it easier to sustain public interest journalism based on this source of data. The service will give media organisations an opportunity to work with local supporters on a crowd-sourced investigation, boosting engagement.



Entale

The Idea

Entale's project with the Future of News Pilot Fund aims to explore alternative distribution and monetisation mechanisms for public interest podcasting.

The Outcome

Davina McCall discussed and provided key information about mental health, female wellness, parenting, education and relationships during Corona. The Mark Nicholas show was created as a response to the lack of sport that people find so valuable as a way of connecting in normal times. Entale have worked with him to produce a fantastic range of content that has seen him talk to everyone from Piers Morgan about the US reaction to Corona, Gary Lineker about what it's like to have your job taken away by the lack of sport, and the former Governor of the Bank of England Mervyn King about what the economy could look like in the future, all the while mixing in sporting and cultural reminiscence with people like Giles Coren and Michael Atherton. With the All Hail Kale guys, Entale specifically produced and distributed a public interest show about the myths around COVID-19 – such as how to properly wipe down your Amazon packages, can you catch the virus from petting other people's dogs – specifically designed to cut through the mis-information out there in the public interest.

The original plan of charging customers for access or for donations to these shows, so Entale pivoted to donations to a fund set up to support independent podcasters who have lost their jobs or been furloughed. Entale used the same tech mechanisms that they had planned to build for podcaster donations to point towards the fund instead.

In addition to the three podcasters, Entale encouraged other creators on their network to insert a payment widget into their shows, and they tested app-wide banners and notifications in the same way that they had originally intended to – just with the money going to charity rather than the creators directly.

WT.Social

Wikiritribune

Their website contained usability issues. These created barriers to adoption by high profile or heavy social media users, as well as users at a local level. For example, there was a lack of internal content promotion, an inability to find content relevant to a user's 'brand', and an inability to share content internally.

The idea

W.T. Social aimed to build tools to allow users to perform the tasks outlined above. They also aimed to invest in a content producer to help high profile/heavy social media users to serve content relevant to themselves and their community to increase engagement on their platform.

The outcome

W.T. Social created features to let them use the "blue tick" functionality so their identity can be verified), and to promote interesting users to others, so that they gain more followers. A new W.T. Social content producer joined the team in June and led a campaign to engage 100 VIPs as future ambassadors.

Acknowledgements

Advisory Board

Matthew Barraclough: Head of Local News Partnerships at the BBC, Emma Meese: Director of Independent Community News Network, Centre for Community Journalism, David Newell: Chief Executive of the News Media Association, Douglas McCabe: Chief Executive Officer of Enders Analysis, Dame Frances Cairncross: Author of The Cairncross Review, Akshat Rathi: Senior Reporter for Quartz, Rasmus Nielsen: Director of the Reuters Institute, Oxford University's School of Journalism, Ed Owen: Director of Communications at HM Courts & Tribunals Service (HMCTS), Martin Moore: Director of the Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power at KCL, Michelle Stanistreet: General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland), Kathryn Geels: Director of Engaged Journalism Accelerator at European Journalism Centre (EJC), Benedicte Autret: Head of Strategic Relationships – News & Publishers – UK/IE, France & Benelux at Google, Madhav Chinnappa: Director of News Ecosystem Development at Google, Rebecca Stimson: Head of Public Policy at Facebook, Mukul Devichand: Executive Editor of Voice + AI, BBC, Nico Lumma: Managing Partner, Next Media Accelerator, Jennifer Jones: Founder, Hacks and Hackers, Ian Murray: Executive Director, Society of Editors, Kitty Von Bertele, Luminare, Sarah Brown, Head of UK/I News Partnerships Facebook,

Danielle Batist, Kirsty Styles, Marverine Cole, Esra Dogramaci, the team at Enders Analysis in particular the insights from Douglas McCabe, Jess Daggars, Kat Davis and David Floyd of Flip Finance, Lydia Ragoonanan of Kintsukuroi Consulting, the team at Thomson Reuters Foundation Jonathon Heawood of PINF, Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust, The David & Elaine Potter Foundation and Lankelly Chase.

All of the FNPf Grantees

Nesta: Anna Hamilos, Isabel Newman, Rachel Shapcott, Karmel Edmonds, Lucy Hawkins, Wallis Grant, Marc Newall, Valerie Mocker, Lisa Barclay, Vicki Sellick, Sue McDonald, Emer O'Kelly, Kelly Duggan, Diana Hidalgo, Catherine Chambers, Chantale Tippett, Adeola Otubusen, George Richardson

BGV: Cansu Deniz Bayrak Nelly Lavielle Dama Sathianathan Mehdi Mestassi and all of the mentors. To all involved in the BGV Accelerator pre-programme: Dylan Itzikowitz and Lynn Anderson Clark Founders Factory, GMV Ventures, Kreena Shah, MariaGiulia Benato, Emma Cosh from Graceful Robot Ltd., Eren Kocyigit from NBT, Gerd Maria May from Room of Solutions, George Bevan, Lisa O'Brian, Melanie Hayes, Sophie Pacquot, Bethany Greer, Matt Webb, David Jackson, Nandus du Plessis, Kelly Mackenzie from White Bear Studio, Ellen Donnelly, Jo Taylor

Ongoing thanks and appreciation goes to Sameer Padania.



nesta

58 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DS

+44 (0)20 7438 2500

information@nesta.org.uk

facebook.com/nesta.uk

nesta.org.uk

[@nesta_uk](https://twitter.com/nesta_uk)

Design: Joana Pereira