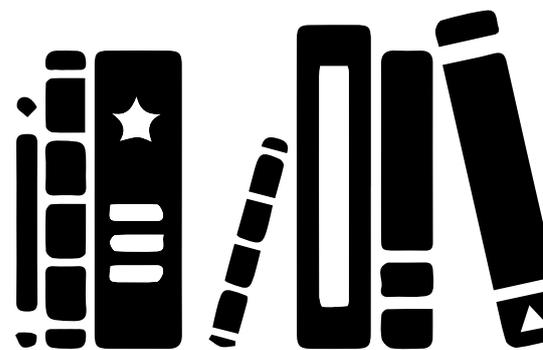


FOUNDATION-FUNDED JOURNALISM:

THE STATE OF RESEARCH



Reading List

TO HELP THOSE WANTING TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS AREA, WE HAVE PRODUCED AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXISTING RESEARCH INTO FOUNDATION-FUNDED JOURNALISM. THIS LISTS THE MAIN PUBLICATIONS TO DATE, THE METHODS USED AND THE MAIN FINDINGS.

Research into foundation-funded journalism is relatively scarce and disconnected. There is, for example, no single edited volume on this topic.

This matters because while philanthropists and foundations often want to support journalism, it is not always clear how they should do this. Similarly, journalists are often unsure about common practices in this area.

For those interested in carrying out further research in this area, this matters because it is useful to know what methods have been used to study this topic in the past and how their findings compare to others.

We are certain that this list is incomplete, though. So please get in touch to let us know what is missing – we intend to produce updated versions as further research is published.

There are three key characteristics of research in this area:

1. Most of the research is US-centric. This is partly because, as Eric Karstens [explains](#), ‘charitable journalism funding largely remains a US affair – both in terms of donors and beneficiaries’. According to [data](#) from Media Impact Funders, ‘more than 90 per cent of grant money flows to US-based organizations, with some 6 per cent of funds allocated to Europe, and only about 1 per cent to media outlets in the developing world... The vast majority of foundations engaging in the sector are also based in the US’.
2. A number of the studies listed here rely upon data held by [Media Impact Funders](#) for their analysis. The other dominant methodology is interviews or surveys of journalists and representatives of foundations. By contrast, there are very few ethnographic studies of specific cases of foundation-funded journalism, or systematic analyses of news content itself. As Harry Browne [puts it](#), ‘there has not, as yet, been any comprehensive content analysis of the work produced by foundation-funded journalists’.
3. By far the greatest concern of existing research is about how foundation funding may affect journalistic independence or autonomy. Other common issues addressed include the volume and sustainability of funding, the consequences of an ‘impact agenda’ and the effects of foundation funding on the role perceptions and ‘boundaries’ of journalism.

Publications are listed in alphabetical order and the full version of many should be freely available via the hyperlinks.

Martin Scott

Martin.scott@uea.ac.uk
@martin.scott2010

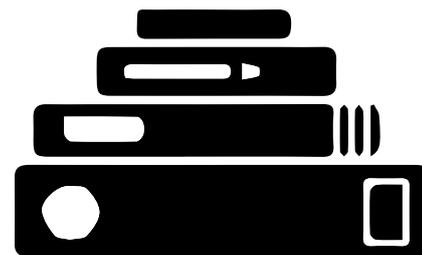
Kate Wright

Kate.Wright@ed.ac.uk
@newsprof1

Mel Bunce

Melanie.Bunce.1@city.ac.uk
@meljbunce

ACADEMIC RESEARCH



RODNEY BENSON (2017)

[Can Foundations Solve the Journalism Crisis?](#)

Journalism Studies.

An important article that highlights, amongst other things, how foundations can place many news nonprofits in a Catch-22, 'because of competing demands to achieve both economic "sustainability" and civic "impact," ultimately creating pressures to reproduce dominant commercial media news practices or orient news primarily for small, elite audiences'. This argument is also made [here](#) and [here](#).

BILL BIRNBAUER (2018)

[The Rise of Nonprofit Investigative Journalism in the United States.](#)

Routledge.

This book examines the rapid growth, impact and sustainability of not-for-profit investigative reporting and its impact on US democracy and mainstream journalism. It includes chapters focussed specifically on the sustainability of foundation funding, the agendas of foundations and the ethical issues that arise from philanthropically funded journalism.

HARRY BROWNE (2010)

[Foundation-Funded Journalism. Reasons to be wary of charitable support.](#)

Journalism Studies.

In one of the earlier articles in this field, Harry Browne highlights some of the tensions involved in foundation-funded journalism through an analysis of ProPublica in the United States, Transitions Online in Eastern Europe and the Centre for Public Inquiry in Ireland. He concludes that 'the increasing role of direct foundation funding for journalism might be a cause for celebration, if there was strong reason to believe that the ultimate source of subsidy was both (1) always clear to readers and (2) democratic and responsive to the wider public. However, there is at least some reason for concern as to whether these conditions can be met, or whether such support brings new worries for the credibility and viability of journalistic institutions'.

MEL BUNCE (2016)

[Foundations, Philanthropy and International Journalism.](#)

The International Journal of Communication Ethics.

This article looks at the foundations that fund international news and it suggests a number of ways this funding may influence journalism. This includes 1) the content of international news, because foundations support journalism on some topics and not others; 2) The objectives and norms of journalism, because many foundations fund advocacy journalism, rather than journalism for its own sake; and 3) The yardsticks that are used to measure the "success" of journalism, including its impact on the real world. The article includes a brief case study of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and its philanthropic support of journalism about health and development.

DAVID CONRAD (2015)

[The Freelancer-NGO Alliance: What a story of Kenyan waste reveals about contemporary foreign news production.](#)

Journalism Studies.

Unusually, this article focuses on the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, an intermediary organisation which distributes funds on behalf of private trusts and foundations. In it, the author reflects on his own involvement in a collaborative media project involving NGOs, commercial partners and freelance journalists, about a health crisis in East Africa. Conrad argues that the nature of these collaborative projects means that framing and ideology is contested by multiple actors, who all have their own interests and brands to consider. He shows that this makes it very difficult for journalists to adhere to longstanding journalistic norms and conventions, including highlighting the pressure which the photojournalist were under to draw attention to themes which were of importance to the funders of the Pulitzer Center, rather than issues of importance to those depicted.

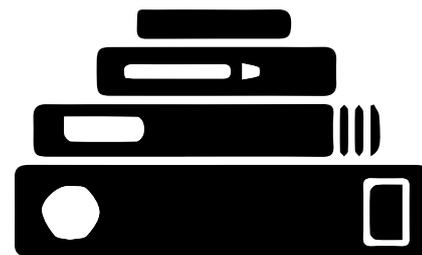
BOB FELDMAN (2007)

[Report from the Field: Left Media and Left Think Tanks—Foundation-Managed Protest?](#)

Critical Sociology.

In this article, Bob Feldman suggests that there is evidence that left-wing news outlets that are depended on foundation funding, have moved towards a more mainstream political position. This is evidenced, he argues, by the "progressive," reformist tone of formerly radical organizations; the gradual disappearance of challenges to the economic and political power of corporations or United States militarism and imperialism; and silence on the relationship of liberal foundations to either politics and culture in general, or to their own organizations.

ACADEMIC RESEARCH CONTINUED...



MAGDA KONIECZNA AND ELIA POWERS (2016)

[What Can Non-profit Journalists Actually Do for Democracy?](#)

Journalism Studies.

Although not focussed primarily on the role of foundations, this article does reveal how they can inadvertently influence their journalistic grantees, through a case study of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). The authors argue that, 'a focus on impact—encouraged, at least in part, by the organization's foundation funders—is leading ICIJ to measure its democratic role in a way that sets its behavior apart from traditional journalistic entities.'

MARY MYERS (2018)

[Nigerian Newspapers: The Attractions and Drawbacks of Foreign Aid Funding.](#)

African Journalism Studies.

This article looks at the relationship between four major newspapers in Nigeria and foreign donors. The discussion centres on the attractions and drawbacks of foreign donor funding from these newspapers' point of view and highlights points of convergence and divergence in the agendas of the newspapers and the international donors. The drawbacks of foundation funding include, the costs associated with training, the opportunity cost of building a relationship with donors and the issue of the sustainability of donor-funded initiatives. Myers concludes, however, that journalists, 'have far more agency in this relationship than they are often given credit for'. This research is based on thirty-eight interviews, largely with Nigerian journalists.

REBECCA NEE (2011)

[The Role of Digitally Native, Non-profit News Media in the Future of American Journalism.](#)

PhD thesis.

There is a common assumption that foundation funding allows news organizations to adopt a stronger public service commitment, either by simply providing journalists with greater resources, or by alleviating, to some degree, profit expectations. In one of the few empirical studies to begin to test this assumption, Nee finds that one of the most commonly cited benefits of donor funding among the leaders of the foundation-funded nonprofit news outlets she interviewed was that they had greater 'freedom to choose stories based on merit and public impact rather than popularity' because they did not have to 'pander to commercial interests to generate more traffic'.

NTIBINYANE NTIBINYANE (2018)

[Investigative Journalism in Africa.](#)

University of Oxford.

Although not focussed primarily on the role of foundations, this research into investigative journalism in Africa does highlight some of the challenges of a reliance on foundation funding. It shows, for example, that, 'most donor organization prefer to award organizations grants on yearly basis. What this means is that every year organizations are supposed to submit proposals for funding. This is a time-consuming exercise that also brings about uncertainty and has a potential of destabilizing the organizations.'

ANYA SCHIFFRIN (2019)

[Fighting for Survival: Media Startups in the Global South \(CIMA\).](#)

This report follows up, three years later, on Publishing for Peanuts, which surveys 35 media startups in the Global South. Schiffrin finds that even though these outlets are important in providing information, holding power to account, and bringing about social change in difficult political circumstances, they still find it very hard to obtain sufficient funding. The sector remains dependent on philanthropic donations because of the difficulties of obtaining sufficient advertising, or income from audiences. However, Schiffrin argues that, there is a risk that too many small startups are being made to compete for the same pots of philanthropic funding. She recommends that there is a need for a larger global fund, as well as an industry body to help small startups build capacity, particularly in relation to fundraising.

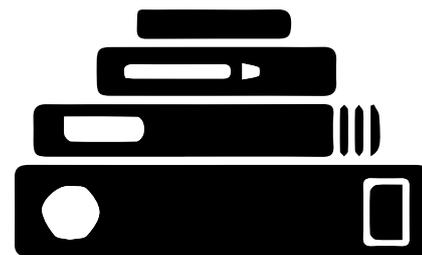
ANYA SCHIFFRIN (2017)

[Same Beds, Different Dreams? Charitable Foundations and Newsroom Independence in the Global South.](#)

Centre for International Media Assistance (CIMA).

Based on a series of interviews and surveys, this research examines the nature of the donor-journalist relationship in media houses in the Global South. It argues that, 'media houses in the Global South face unique circumstances. They are often operating in more restrictive environments, with fewer protections against threat and intimidation by the state or powerful individuals'. It concludes by 'highlighting the need for formal guidelines and firewalls'.

ACADEMIC RESEARCH CONTINUED...



ANYA SCHIFFRIN (2010)

[Foreign Donors and Journalism Training in Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda.](#)

Journalism Practice.

This study critically considers the effectiveness of journalism training initiatives in Africa by foundations and others. The paper argues that 'given the challenges faced by the African media, donor-driven training programs will have only a limited effect on the larger media climate'. The research is based on content analysis and interviews with journalists who have received journalism training.

MARTIN SCOTT, MEL BUNCE AND KATE WRIGHT (2019).

[Foundation Funding and the Boundaries of Journalism.](#)

Journalism studies.

In this article, we argue that concerns about whether philanthro-journalism may be compromising journalists' autonomy may be missing the bigger picture. Our research shows that foundation funding is inadvertently shaping the "boundaries" of international non-profit journalism, or the ways journalists understand, value, and carry out their work. In the case of international news, it is being inadvertently directed toward outcome-oriented, explanatory journalism in a small number of niche subject areas. This research is based on 74 interviews with the most active foundations funding international non-profit news and the journalists they support. It seeks to provide an overview of the processes of funding and state of the field from both journalist and donor perspectives.

MARTIN SCOTT, MEL BUNCE AND KATE WRIGHT (2017)

[Donor Power and the News: The Influence of Foundation Funding on International Public Service Journalism.](#)

The International Journal of Press/Politics.

Using content analysis, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic research, this research documents the changes that occurred in IRIN's outputs, target audience, and public service values as it transitioned from being funded by the United Nations to a private foundation. It finds that IRIN is a non-profit news outlet, in this case, donor power operated entirely indirectly and always in concert with the dominant journalistic values.

MARTIN SCOTT, KATE WRIGHT AND MEL BUNCE. (2018).

[Foundation-funded Journalism, Philanthrocapitalism and Tainted Donors.](#)

Journalism Studies.

This article argues that journalists at foundation-funded outlets tend to see foundations' influence over day-to-day editorial decision-making as the main threat to their independence and integrity. As a result, they do not adequately prepare for other kinds of problems with philanthropic donors, including the tendency of some to use generous financial pledges to repair their 'tainted' reputations. It grounds this argument in a year-long case study of relations between IRIN and the Hong-Kong based Jynwel Foundation, run by Jho Low, as allegations against Low escalated. Using detailed interviews with journalists, managers and board members it develops a theoretical model of what finally triggered IRIN's decision to part company with the Jynwel Foundation, whilst also demonstrating how difficult this was because of journalists' economic need.

KARIN WILKINS AND FLORENCIA ENGHEL (2013)

[The Privatization of Development through Global Communication Industries.](#)

Media and Society.

Although not focussed specifically on journalism, this article does express some of the broader critiques of foundation-funded media very clearly. It highlights the concern that foundation funded journalism could adopt a framing of global development issues that, 'serves the agenda of privatized development within a neoliberal project'.

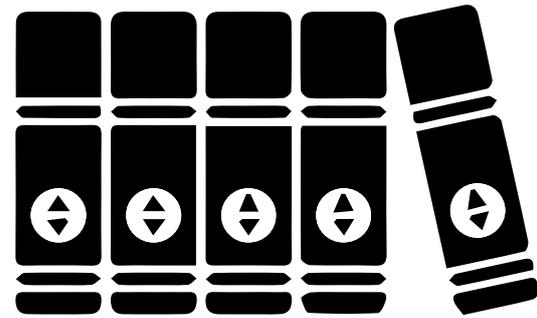
KATE WRIGHT (2018)

[Digital Dialogue, International Development and Blogging.](#)

In Who's Reporting Africa Now?: Non-Governmental Organizations, Journalists, and Multimedia. Peter Lang.

This chapter analyses why funding by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, when combined with the casualisation of media production, tends to privilege particular kinds of actors in, and definitions of, international development. Specifically, it interrogates the production of a Poverty Matters blog, which involved trusted Western freelancers reworking material originally produced for a Gates-funded INGO (Internews) and selling it on to a Gates-funded news site (The Guardian's Global Development sub-site.). Using detailed interviews and internal memos, it highlights how foundation-funding may contribute to the unintended emergence of closed systems, which exclude more radical critiques.

OTHER RESEARCH AND REPORTS



SARAH ARMOUR-JONES AND JESSICA CLARK (2019)

[Global Media Philanthropy: What Funders Need to Know About Data, Trends and Pressing Issues Facing the Field.](#)

Democracy Fund.

This comprehensive report provides an extensive overview of the state of global media philanthropy. It includes discussion of data from the Media Data Map, results from a survey of leading organizations engaged in funding media-related projects, analyses of existing literature and reports, and insights offered by experts across a range of media funding issues. It concludes that, 'power dynamics are skewed in favour of American funders', 'foundations can have an outsized influence on a country's media system' and 'funders need to see the bigger picture'.

BRUCE SIEVERS AND PATRICE SCHNEIDER (2017)

[The Civic Media Crisis and What Philanthropy Can Do.](#)

Stanford Social Innovation Review.

This article places philanthropic funding of journalism in the context of weakening civic communication in general and highlights 'ways forward' for philanthropic funding. It draws heavily upon conclusions and recommendations that emerged from an October, 2016 gathering in Turin entitled "Beyond Disruption" of 50 practitioners and scholars from philanthropy, nonprofits, government, and the media to explore the possible role philanthropy can play in addressing the contemporary crisis in civic media.

KATIE DONNELLY AND JESSICA CLARK (2018)

[Supporting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Journalism: Trends in National Grantmaking.](#)

Media Impact Funders.

The aim of this report is to map philanthropic interventions that support diversity, equity, and inclusion in journalism from 2009 – 2015. It draws on data from Media Impact Funders.

EUROPEAN JOURNALISM CENTRE (2017)

[Philanthropic journalism funding in the UK, Germany and France](#)

Journalism Funders Forum.

These three separate reports each provide a descriptive overview of the landscape of Philanthropic journalism funding in three European countries. They include a map of the key funders, examples of current funding and recommendations for future funding.

ANNE NELSON (2009)

[Experimentation and Evolution in Private U.S. Funding of Media Development.](#)

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA)

This report discusses the implications of the entry of 'new foundations from the new media technology sector' into the field of media development. It illustrates how these foundations are changing the nature of media assistance. One of the recommendations is for U.S. foundations to, 'try harder to think beyond their cultural context'. It concludes that, 'for the moment, the private foundations working in international media assistance are like accomplished classical musicians putting together a jazz ensemble – it is still music, but they might need to improvise'. The report is based on 13 interviews.

MATTHEW NISBET, JOHN WIHBEY, SILJE KRISTIANSEN AND ALESZU BAJAK (2018)

[Funding the News: U.S. Foundations and Non-profit Media.](#)

Shorenstein Center.

This research offers an extensive analysis of the state of foundation funding for non-profit media in the US, based on an analysis of 32,422 journalism and media-related grants totalling \$1.8 billion distributed by 6,568 foundations between 2010 and 2015. It finds, for example, that public media received approximately \$796 million or about 44% of the \$1.8 billion in grant money, and twenty-five public media stations and content producers accounted for 70% of all funding.

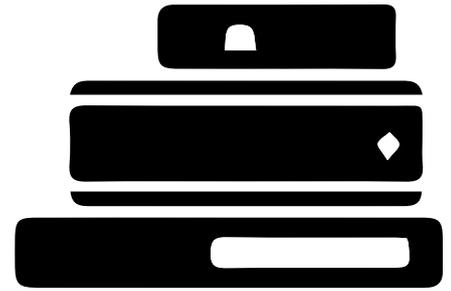
TOM ROSENSTIEL, WILLIAM BUZENBERG, MARJORIE CONNELLY AND KEVIN LOKER (2016)

[Charting New Ground: The Ethical Terrain of Nonprofit Journalism.](#)

American Press Institute.

This well-cited report, by the American Press Institute, explores the ethical terrain of non-profit journalism in the US by examining the kinds of grants made, the nature of communication between funders and grantees, the existence of journalistic firewalls, and the prevalence of written guidelines. The report is based largely on a survey of funders, non-profit news organizations and commercial partners. The results show, for example, that over half (52%) of funders surveyed make media grants on issues where they do policy work. The report also includes five essays by individuals from various media and foundation stakeholder groups.

OTHER ARTICLES AND PUBLICATIONS



ALLIANCE MAGAZINE (2017)

[Philanthropy and the Media.](#)

The December 2017 edition of Alliance Magazine included a special feature on philanthropy and the media. This included articles from journalists working at publications including Spiegel, The Guardian and the BBC, as well as representatives from a range of foundations.

SANDI DOUGHTON AND KRISTI HEIM (2011)

[Does Gates Funding of Media Taint Objectivity?](#)

The Seattle Times.

This often-cited article highlights concerns around whether growing support for media organizations by foundations can ‘blur the line between journalism and advocacy’. The authors also ask, ‘How can reporting be unbiased when a major player holds the purse strings?’

RICK EDMONDS (2002)

[Getting Behind the Media: What Are the Subtle Tradeoffs of Foundation Support for Journalism?](#)

Philanthropy Magazine.

This article first coined the phrase, ‘benevolent fog’ to describe one way in which foundations might conceivably shape news coverage. Rick Edmonds wrote that, ‘the lack of overt editorial influence should not blind us to the more subtle, one might say cultural, ties that bind these news organizations to their funders... Lost in the benevolent fog that surrounds most foundations is the notion that they may have more of an agenda, not less, than a sponsoring corporation’.

CAROL GUENSBURG (2008)

[Nonprofit news.](#)

American Journalism Review.

This article provides an overview of the benefits and challenges of foundation funding. ‘Done right, the journalism-funder relationship benefits both parties as well as the public they aim to serve. It supplies important news resources, and it satisfies a grantmaker’s mission — maybe even bringing a touch of prestige. Done wrong, the association raises concerns about editorial objectivity and whether it has been compromised by a funder’s agenda’.

MIKE JANSSEN (2015)

[Foundation Support for Media: A Boon with Strings Attached.](#)

Society.

This short article provides a clear overview of the opportunities and ethical challenges associated with foundation-funded journalism.

MIA MILAN (2018)

[Quid Pro Quo: How Donor-Funded Journalism Redefines Job Descriptions.](#)

African Journalism Studies. (Commentary).

This article documents how the health desk of one of South Africa’s legacy media outlets, the Mail & Guardian, owes its existence to philanthropy. However, it also highlights how foundation funding ‘has radically changed staff members’ job descriptions from being mere journalists or editors to spending significant time—often up to 30 per cent for reporters and 40 per cent for editors—as data collectors, fundraisers, event organisers, proposal writers, conference moderators, creators of information management systems and donor report writers’.

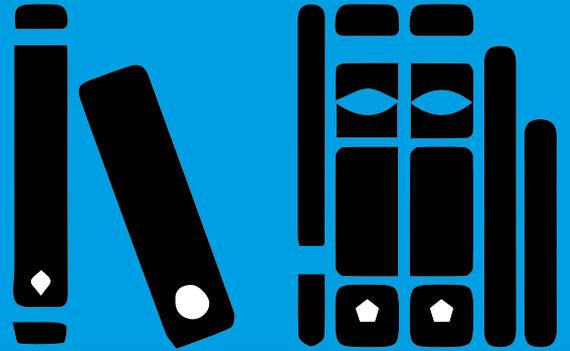
RAUL RAMIREZ. (2002)

[Foundations, Funding and Independence.](#)

Poynter Institute.

This short article about the opportunities and challenges of foundation funding ends with an early attempt to offer guidance for journalists on how to negotiate the ethical issues in this area. The suggested practices include, ‘provide unambiguous disclosure’ and ‘build a solid firewall and honour it’.

GUIDELINES



AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE (2017)

Guidance on Philanthropic Funding of Media and News.

In 2017, API produced two sets of broad guidelines of best practices, one for funders and another for nonprofit newsrooms, based on consultations with funders, nonprofit media executives and researchers. The focus of these often-cited guidelines is primarily on establishing best practices for ensuring editorial independence.

MICHELE MCLELLAN (2018)

Journalism and Media Grant Making: Five Things to Know, Five Ways to Get Started.

Media Impact Funders.

This booklet is a guide for foundations interested in exploring how to make journalism and community-information grants. It shares the experiences of dozens of foundations that have recently funded news and information projects. It also introduces the work of peer foundations that support journalism.

SAMEER PADANIA (2018)

An Introduction to Funding Journalism and Media.

Despite stating that this 'is not designed to be a comprehensive manual setting out best practices on grant making in the media space', this report offers an extremely clear and practical overview of the ways in which foundations can support journalism responsibly. It includes sections on the rationale for funding journalism, advice from experienced donors and specific areas of opportunity and threat.