

# Blueprints for better collaboration between journalists and donors

## How to use these blueprints

*"People who work on wicked problems — in, say, public policy or the environment — don't look for grand solutions. They study the system itself, paying close attention to the relationships between the parts. Then they look for leverage points, spots in the system where a relatively low-cost intervention could have an outsized effect." -- Heather Chaplin, [The Crisis in Journalism Is a Wicked Problem](#)*

The blueprints in this document are ideas for low-cost interventions that we believe should have an outsized effect in building better collaboration between journalists and donors.

The idea is that you can take these blueprints, remix them, or add your own solutions. We open sourced them so people can suggest existing solutions where they exist. Organisations and individuals can team up to tackle these problems immediately. The European Journalism Centre will help to co-ordinate! Here's how you can get involved:

1. **Say when you like something.** If you like an idea, leave a comment. That lets us know this is something worth pursuing.
2. **Improve ideas.** Comments in this document are turned on. If you have suggestions or examples of solutions already out there, let us know and we'll add them.
3. **Add totally new ideas.** Throw new ideas into comments and we'll collate them.
4. **Put your hand up.** Are you an individual or organisation who wants to help work on one of these solutions? Add your commitment in as a comment, explaining who you are and why you want to fix this. We'll reach out to co-ordinate your involvement.

## Sharing this document

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# Who is behind this document?

Participants of a [Journalism Funders Forum](#) (JFF) event in Amsterdam kindly helped to define and prioritise all of these ideas. The event was supported by [Democracy & Media Foundation](#) and [Adessium Foundation](#). JFF is an initiative by the [European Journalism Centre](#).

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# Networking

## Blueprint 1: Expert Circle

*The goal is to convene high-level experts with major clout in the foundation and journalism sectors, including out-of-sector experts, in order to work on a charter for donor-supported journalism and discuss trends and strategy in grant making, transparent reporting, and impact measurement.*

**Target audience:** Editors-in-Chief / Journalists Opinion-Makers / Funders.

**Does this already exist?** e.g. German [Expertenkreis Qualitätsjournalismus](#). More generally, [Media Impact Funders](#) have been the driving force behind early attempts to better align funding initiatives with changes in the media ecosystem.

**What does it look like?** Bringing together foundations and media representatives who support quality journalism. This expert group meets regularly in order to develop standard practices on calls for proposals, grant making, transparent reporting, and impact measurement and advocate them across the ecosystem of foundations.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** The expert group could act as an advisory board for the wider funders ecosystem of high-level stakeholders from foundations and media. It would meet on a consistent basis and provide leadership, support and consistent feedback to initiatives like Journalism Funders Forum. The expert group brings diversity of opinions and experiences.

**Risks and challenges:** Making sure there is real continuity in the group, getting to actual results within a reasonable time frame, ownership by participating foundations and establishing standards beyond those funders who participate in the group. How to make sure the group really has influence across the entire community? How to combine expertise and clout in the best possible manner?

**Investment required:** It would require a secretariat that organises the group both in practical terms (travel, venues and such), as well as programmatically.

### Who's working on this?

- David Schraven of Correctiv suggested to get together a group of European experts from both sides on the occasion of this year's [Campfire Festival](#) (August 31 - September 2, Düsseldorf),
- Brigitte Alfter suggested to do the same at Dataharvest (24 - 27 May, Mechelen)
- Informally, lots of foundations and journalists will be present at International Journalism Festival, Perugia from 11 - 15 April where two philanthropy panels will take place.
- MIT, ICFJ, Global Voices, EJC met recently to discuss Impact tool development with a view to feedback to donors

## Blueprint 2: Unconference

**Problem:** There is no dedicated event for funders and journalists to meet, grow mutual understanding and share best practices. But there is a large need for funders and applicants to get to know each other better and discuss potential grant proposals at a point when funders are still in the process of strategy development, so both sides can learn from each other. Such gatherings would also help better balance the power relationship between donors and grantees.

**Target audience:** Editors-in-Chief / Media Executives / Journalists / Freelance Writers / Grant Teams / Funders.

**Does this already exist?** As mentioned above, there is no such dedicated event for funders and journalists available at the moment. There are smaller, country-specific expert circles (e.g. [Expertenkreis](#)) but not on a pan-European scale.

**What does it look like?** Full-day unconference for 100+ selected foundations (including foundations new to journalism) and journalists.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** Such events raise awareness of funding programmes and funding opportunities; bring new knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to existing programmes, improve access to harder-to-reach groups and increase the number of people consulted. Moreover, this set-up challenges existing thinking and can lead to changing the course of programme development to better meet needs. Special attention should be paid to inviting new foundations to initiate them into the journalism-funding sphere.

**Risks and challenges:** Resource-intensive in terms of time and money. Must be feasible as it can take time to adapt existing programmes. It will be challenging to making sure to get the right representatives around the table. Training and support will be needed for beneficiaries involved. Need to manage expectations of attendees.

**Investment required:** Project management and assistance, back office operations, travel and accommodation participants, venue and technical support, supplies and catering.

**Who's working on this?**

- The European Journalism Centre is committed to getting this idea off the ground as part of its Journalism Funders Forum series. We have tentative support from two funders.

# Resources and Support

## Blueprint 3: Database of grant writing consultants

**Problem:** There is currently no comprehensive information hub of fundraising and grant writing professionals specialising in journalism available. On top of that, the right consultant for a specific project is hard to identify in the first place, and may be expensive.

**Target audience:** Fundraising Professionals / Consultants / Journalists / Freelance Writers.

**Does this already exist?** Not on a European level. Various U.S. examples e.g. [AFP Fundraising Consultants and Resource Directory](#), [The Association of Consultants to nonprofits](#)

**What does it look like?** It is set-up as a database or community related to consultants specialising in media and journalism, complete with recommendations or some kind of rating system.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** Gives fund-seekers on-demand access to experts and cultivates an expert community that is trusted by both sides, funders and journalists. Fosters pan-European cooperation, knowledge exchange, and education among fundraising professionals.

**Risks and challenges:** Managing and regularly updating the database in a way that it doesn't get outdated.

**Investment required:** Could start as a Slack community to which both consultants and information seekers can turn for information and in order to connect.

**Who's working on this?**

- No-one yet (that we know of!)

## Blueprint 4: Database of Funding Opportunities

**Problem:** The funding landscape is so diverse that grant-seekers can easily miss calls targeted for them.

**Target audience:** Journalists / Freelance Writers / Fundraising Professionals / Foundations.

**Does this already exist?** E.g. [GIIN](#), [IJNET](#), [Foundation' Centre](#) Funding Information Centre.

**What does it look like?** Structured, categorised, and editorially managed database of funding opportunities. It could be accompanied by a newsletter on open calls and funding opportunities for European journalists.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** Improves how grant-seekers learn about suitable funding opportunities.

**Risks and challenges:** The functional design and completeness of such a database are essential. Shouldn't duplicate existing efforts.

**Investment required:** Could start as a Google Sheet and be expanded afterwards into a proper, usable database.

**Who's working on this?**

No-one yet (that we know of!)

## Blueprint 5: Regular Grantee Surveys

**Problem:** Funders should regularly survey their grantees in order to learn about new trends, rapidly changing environments, perceived future needs, and forecasts, which they could then convert into new funding opportunities.

**Target audience:** Foundations / Beneficiaries.

**Does this already exist?** E.g. [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#) funded efforts to solicit beneficiary voice in its domestic education work and its global health and development work.

**What does it look like?** Set up a systematic way to solicit the perspectives of beneficiaries and share results among foundations. Different methods available: self-administered surveys; systemic interviews; focus groups; third-party evaluations.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** Views and experiences of beneficiaries offer an invaluable source of insight into a grants programme effectiveness. Listening to their feedback in a structural way helps foundations become more effective, gather new ideas and even guide their decisions about future directions and funding. Survey results help funders better understand the progress that their foundation is making strategically and a more accurate understanding of the impact the foundation is having on the communities and fields in which it works.

**Risks and challenges:** Requires a handful of foundations to launch well thought-through surveys and share lessons learned. Reaching beneficiaries can be expensive and time-intensive. Lack of staff-skills/capacity to rigorously collect feedback.

**Priority/Investment required:** Can start very small and ad-hoc, with some time allocation within each participating funder organisation for three months. Collecting, processing, and publishing the material from various participating donors might need centralised organisation.

**Who's working on this?**

- [The Center for Effective Philanthropy](#)

## Blueprint 6: Research Newsletter

**Problem:** Designing projects - and in particular defining their approach to impact metrics - requires knowledge of existing best practice and lessons learned, but carving out time to keep abreast of the increasing number of newly published scientific papers and case studies on a regular basis is challenging - especially when one's main job is doing journalism (or fundraising, for that matter). There is a lot of useful material (including internal evaluations as well as blog posts) and scientific research out there, however, such knowledge is not sufficiently circulated and digested. This is about best practice awareness and inspiration for how best to design a project.

**Target audience:** Editors-in-Chief / Journalists / Freelance Writers / Grant Teams / Funders

**Does this already exist?** No.

**What does it look like?** Information hub collecting and processing scientific and heuristic findings in a digestible manner, and pushing them out to the community.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** A newsletter would increase best practice awareness and inspiration for how best to design a project. It will help grantees as well as funders to stay on top of newly published literature. This in turn improves the quality of the grant proposals. To be able to provide novel ideas and solutions, one needs to know what has been done before. It also helps journalists benefit from all the ideas, data, and interpretations that have accumulated in the literature right up to that point.

**Risks and challenges:** The information hub requires access to paywalled publications, possibly with a limited re-distribution agreement, and might therefore ideally be placed at a university or research centre, or at a large foundation.

**Priority/Investment required:** Requires editorial management by a knowledgeable person with good writing skills and access to scientific journals and a newsletter platform.

**Who's working on this?**

No-one yet (that we know of!)



## Blueprint 7: Media & Philanthropy Handbook

**Problem:** There is a grant writing skills gap in journalism. Journalists are often unaware of the requirements of donor funding, or they simply lack the time to do this. Grant writing support and resources would benefit all stakeholders.

**Target audience:** Editors-in-Chief / Journalists / Freelance Writers / Grant Teams / Funders. The research shall take into consideration all stakeholders involved; beneficiary landscapes; funding themes, systematics and principles; “firewall” provisions safeguarding journalism’s independence; public reception and their relation to the economic state of journalism. The research will be a team effort by experts in the selected countries.

**What does it look like?** Something like the EJC’s *Data Journalism Handbook* – dubbed the holy book of data journalism. It is a reference on how journalists can use data to improve their work, with contributions from the New York Times, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, the Chicago Tribune, the Guardian, etc.

### Why this idea should be put into practice?

The Journalism Funding Handbook could assist journalists in learning about all funding options available (short- and long-term grants, equity investment, loans, startup support) and better understanding why funders require impact, and what they mean by it. It could also help foundations new to the space understand legal matters, impact measurements and types of grants.

**Priority/Investment required:** Editorial coordination, content production, website design with optional translation, printing and distribution.

### Who’s working on this?

- European Journalism Centre is keen to work on this with willing partners

# Training

## Blueprint 8: Grant Development Workshops

**Problem:** Journalists and media outlets are good at journalism, yet frequently not very experienced in project development and business management.

**Target audience:** Reporters / Freelance Writers / Business Development Managers

**Does this already exist?** No pan-European initiatives focusing exclusively on journalism/media grant seekers. There are examples from the U.S., e.g. grant preparation talks and advice sessions ([Foundation Center Trainings](#)), mostly through private organisations or donors, e.g. [Proposal Writing Workshops](#) by [Association of Fundraising Professionals](#).

**What does it look like?** Workshops provide journalists with various trainings and guidance on developing grant narratives by experienced professionals and instructors. It helps journalists better convert their ideas into fundable projects or research. After the workshop, participants will understand better how to address grant procurement, identify the critical sections of successful proposals, and demonstrate the excellence and innovation that distinguishes their project or research from other submissions. They will understand the diversity of the funding community and how to respond to various guidelines.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** Provides training opportunities for journalists on a pan-European scale.

**Risks and challenges:** Requires a well-prepared agenda, balancing the general and the specific. Willingness of participants to attend.

**Priority / Investment required:** Set-up includes project management and assistance, back office operations, travel and accommodation participants, venue and technical support, supplies and catering).

**Who's working on this?**

- No-one yet (that we know of!)

## Blueprint 9: Funder/Journalism Strategy Workshops

**Problem:** There is a lack of beneficiary involvement in setting up funding programmes whereas their knowledge would help funders make better decisions of what to fund. The beneficiaries are often best placed to understand their needs and how to address them.

**Target audience:** Journalists / Freelance Writers / Grant Teams / Funders.

**Does this already exist?** There is a number of courses on developing fundraising strategies but nothing targeted specifically for media related collaborative strategy development.

**What does it look like?** High quality collaborative process between reporters and funders in order to develop strategic goals and help each other prioritise. Funders can learn from media people what's in demand, while journalists might better appreciate donor choices (and ideally be able to change them).

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** Increases the chances for mutual understanding and learning. Currently, funders decide what they want to fund, not specifically keeping in mind whether there's a journalist or media organisation interested, or whether it's a good idea in the first place. Journalists/media on the other side are in a reactive role, which implies that they sometimes have to contort themselves.

**Risks and challenges:** Requires a well-prepared agenda, carefully selected participants including out-of-sector experts, lots of openness.

**Priority/Investment requirement:** Set-up includes project management and assistance, back office operations, travel and accommodation participants, venue and technical support, supplies and catering).

**Who's working on this?**

No-one yet (that we know of!)

## Blueprint 10: Workshops Connecting Grantees

**Problem:** Lack of peer-to-peer learning and exchange of knowledge on a pan-European level and across domains. e.g., a media grantee doesn't necessarily know how NGOs go about funder relations, and vice versa.

**Target audience:** Journalists / Freelance Writers / NGO Fundraising Professionals.

**Does this already exist?** No.

**What does it look like?** Regular get togethers to connect journalism grant-seekers (who are often in an observer position only) with grant-seekers who get their hands dirty in the real world. Journalists can meet new sources for their regular work and get acquainted with new topics.

**Why this idea should be put into practice?** Peer-facilitated workshops increase interactivity, engagement and mutual learning among the grantees. Journalists (especially the ones working for non-profit outlets) learn the ropes from seasoned NGO fundraisers and organisers, while NGOs could improve their media relations skills.

**Risks and challenges:** It's an experiment, which may or may not work.

**Priority/Investment required:** Initial set-up includes project management and assistance, back office operations, travel and accommodation participants, venue and technical support, supplies and catering.

**Who's working on this?**

- No-one yet (that we know of!)