



independenceMedia



Community Media Across the Greater Philadelphia Area:

A NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND
A CALL TO ACTION

PREPARED BY

Rosemary Clark-Parsons, PhD

FUNDED BY

The Independence Public Media Foundation

FEBRUARY 2021



Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
About the Independence Public Media Foundation.....	3
About This Project.....	4
Key Terms.....	5
Executive Summary.....	6
Introduction.....	9
Research Methods.....	10
Key Findings.....	16
Recommendations.....	31
References and Resources.....	34
Appendix: Participating Organizations.....	35
Appendix: Additional Data Visualizations.....	36

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by the Independence Public Media Foundation (IPMF). We are grateful to all the Philadelphia-area media-makers, leaders, and organizers who took the time to participate in the survey and interviews. We hope this research activates increased support for your work so that you might continue sharing your communities' stories with the world.

Lead Author

Rosemary Clark-Parsons, PhD

Project Coordination and Support

Rosemary Clark-Parsons, PhD, Program Manager, Center for Social Impact Strategy, University of Pennsylvania, research lead; report author and designer

Ashley Marshall, GIS analyst

Mari Morales-Williams, PhD, research assistant and interviewer

Natalia Smirnov, PhD, research assistant and interviewer

Sherella Williams, Office and Grants Manager, IPMF, financial coordinator

Project Advisers

Molly de Aguiar, President, IPMF

Nuala Cabral, Program Manager, IPMF

Clemencia Rodríguez, PhD, Professor of Media Studies and Production, Temple University; IPMF Board of Directors

Suggested Citation

Clark-Parsons, R. (2021). Community media across the Greater Philadelphia Area: A needs assessment and a call to action [White paper]. Independence Public Media Foundation.

License



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.



Attribution - You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.



Noncommercial - You may not use the material for commercial purposes.



Share Alike - If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you must distribute your contributions under the same license as the original.

About the Independence Public Media Foundation



This project was funded by the Independence Public Media Foundation (IPMF). Founded in 1981, IPMF was formerly a public broadcaster operating WYBE Channel 35 in the Philadelphia market. It was a small public television station with a creative, artistic vision for the role that media can and should play to strengthen communities. It was known, in particular, for programming and staff that represented the true and rich diversity of the Philadelphia region. In 2017, WYBE relinquished its broadcast license as part of the Federal Communications Commission's Broadcast Incentive Auction and received a one-time payment of \$131.5 million. WYBE was the only station in the country to seize the opportunity of the auction and transform itself from a broadcaster into a private foundation, Independence Public Media Foundation, believing it could have a far greater and longer-lasting impact on communities as a funder. Through grant-making and other programs, the Foundation supports building and strengthening networks of people who are creating and sharing information, ideas, and stories for change and justice.

To learn more, visit independencemedia.org.



About This Project

A large part of pursuing the Independence Public Media Foundation's mission involves supporting community media-makers. Across the Greater Philadelphia Area, neighborhood, ethnic, and grassroots media have authentic ties and deep roots in the communities they serve. At the same time, they consistently lack access to resources that would help them grow and strengthen their organizations, support the vital role they play in their communities, and give them equal footing with primarily white-led legacy and digital newsrooms. This COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated this situation, leaving already under-resourced community media organizations struggling to survive. IPMF is on a mission to level the playing field that advantages white media organizations over organizations based in and serving communities of color. Following this goal, this research project draws on interviews, surveys, and funding databases to map the Philadelphia-area media ecosystem, trace funding flows to media organizations across the area, and identify organizations' and communities' information and communication needs. The findings will inform IPMF's funding priorities, help connect media-makers with the foundation and one another, and activate philanthropic organizations to fund community media.

Key Terms

Key terms used throughout the report are defined below, with special attention to media, organizational structures, communities, and identities.

The Greater Philadelphia Area. We define “the Greater Philadelphia Area” as the catchment area for WYBE Channel 35 in the Philadelphia market. Prior to becoming a private foundation, Independence Public Media was a public broadcaster operating WYBE. Since its transition to a philanthropic foundation in 2017, IPMF has committed to focusing its efforts on the same geographic area it served as a public broadcaster. The area includes 11 counties concentrated primarily in southeastern Pennsylvania, central and southern New Jersey, and northern Delaware.

Media Organizations. The term “media” refers to technologies that produce and transmit meaning. Throughout this report, we use the term “media organizations” to refer to collective entities whose mission focuses primarily on using media technologies to transmit meaning to audiences. This broad definition allowed us to capture a broad spectrum of important civic and cultural institutions, from local radio stations and newspapers to museums and oral history projects. At the same time, it focused our study on organizations with a central emphasis on media. While most organizations use media to promote their work, our interest here is in organizations whose work *is* media and whose mission is to increase their communities’ access to communication, information, and expression.

Community Media Organizations. A broad spectrum of media organizations call the Greater Philadelphia Area home. In this study, we focus specifically on *community* media organizations. We define “community media organizations” as meaning-making projects that create opportunities for community members to participate in the production process and/or involve community members in decision-making processes. Their audiences may be localized or geographically bounded, as in the case of a neighborhood community radio station, or they may be bound together by a particular identity or set of experiences, as in the case of a Latinx film festival. Regardless of how they define their audiences, community media organizations prioritize empowering marginalized groups through media access, literacy, and representation. Often run on a not-for-profit basis, they value participation and collaboration over their bottom line.

Community Media Ecosystem. We use this term to refer to the network of meaning-making projects that create opportunities for residents to participate in media production and organizational decision-making processes. Referring to this network as an “ecosystem” highlights three key areas for analysis: 1) the role these organizations play in sustaining the wellbeing of the communities they serve; 2) the cooperative ties that connect these organizations to one another and to their communities; and 3) the role environmental resources, including community assets and external funding, play in sustaining these organizations

Audience Communities. Throughout this report, we use the term “audience communities” to refer to the networks of people community media organizations serve. The combination of “audience” with “communities” helps capture how community media organizations make more than just radio shows, neighborhood newspapers, film festivals, and digital programming. They also bring people together into networks of mutual aid, learning, and support.

Philanthropic Organizations. Nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations that invest assets from donors into social impact initiatives. Throughout this report, we use the terms “philanthropic organizations” and “funders” interchangeably.

BIPOC. “BIPOC” stands for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.” Activists have developed this term to center the specific experiences of Black and Indigenous people in discourse concerning racial justice issues and organizing.

Latinx. “Latinx” offers an inclusive, gender-neutral way to refer to people of Latin American origin or descent.

Queer and Trans. Throughout this report, we use the phrase “queer and trans” to capture a spectrum of identities that fall outside normative and/or binary constructions of gender, sex, and/or sexual identity.

Executive Summary

Community media organizations in the Greater Philadelphia Area contribute significant value to the audiences and neighborhoods they serve. Despite this, they remain under-resourced, a situation that has only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Philanthropic organizations have the potential to amplify community media's impact across the region, but funders need to work with media leaders to make grant opportunities more accessible.

Community media organizations' missions are driven by marginalized communities' information and communication needs.

Overwhelmingly, the community media leaders we surveyed and interviewed described their organizations' top priority as empowering marginalized communities through media literacy, access, and representation. This stands in stark contrast to commercial media institutions and platforms, whose primary goals revolve around profit margins and audience metrics.

The organizations included in this study put their values into practice by including community members in their media work and decision-making processes, offering free or low-cost media production training to community members, and creating opportunities for community members to tell their stories through participatory media projects. When assessing their impact, community media leaders often described practicing critical self-reflexivity to identify when and how their work could be more inclusive and accessible to the audiences they aim to serve. Rather than taking a competitive stance toward organizations attempting to reach the same audiences or tackle similar issues, they frequently practice an ecosystem approach, cultivating collaborations and partnerships to amplify their reach. While their audiences may not always be large, their potential impact is significant. Their localized media projects offer audiences pathways to civic engagement and their missions connect neighborhood progress with broad-scale reforms.

Despite the value they bring to the audiences they serve, community media lack key organizational capacities.

Across the board, survey and interview participants described their organizations as underfunded and understaffed, with the vast majority employing five or fewer full-time employees. Participants also described a need for increased media tools, access, and training, as well as skill-building in areas like community outreach and public relations.

These needs have only become more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community media organizations have had to slash already tight budgets, as donations and earned income decrease in a struggling economy. Social distancing requirements have made face-to-face engagement nearly impossible, forcing organizations to move programming to virtual environments that are often difficult for their staff and audiences to access. Many of the organizations included in this study have innovated new ways to make the most of their existing assets during this difficult time, from transforming their websites into local COVID-19 information hubs to using their social media platforms to spotlight media artists across the region. But while their commitment to their mission is unshakeable, community media's inadequate organizational capacities have made it all but impossible to stay afloat during the pandemic.

Under-resourced media organizations face an uphill battle in communities with poor communication infrastructures.

The community media leaders we surveyed and interviewed described their organizations as driven by the needs of the audience communities they serve. Consistently, participants articulated these needs as falling into three major categories: 1) information access, 2) media representation, and 3) internet infrastructure. Many reported that their communities and neighborhoods lack access to timely and relevant information, an especially problematic challenge during a public health crisis like COVID-19. Others drew attention to a lack of media representations and coverage that reflect their community members’ lives with dignity and respect. To address this imbalance in information and representation, community media organizations offer residents the tools and platforms to take a “for us, by us” approach, telling and sharing stories about their own communities. This intervention is hampered, however, by uneven access to broadband internet services. For community media organizations, COVID-19 has only underscored their audiences’ ongoing need for better internet access. Survey and interview participants called on elected officials and internet service providers to do more to increase their communities’ internet access and literacy.

“Our audience is thirsty to listen and be heard. They want to be uplifted, inspired, and enlightened by the stories of others, especially now. They want to hear their own voices represented and shared with a larger community. Marginalized communities want their voices amplified within and beyond their borders so that others can gain a true understanding that we are all human and more connects than separates us.”

- Survey Participant

Philanthropic organizations are vital to the community media ecosystem, but funding remains difficult to access.

The vast majority (82%) of the organizations we studied reported receiving funds from philanthropic organizations. This finding is further reflected in the data we pulled from the Foundation Maps database, which indicates that philanthropic organizations invested more than \$340 million into information, communications, and projects across the Greater Philadelphia Area from 2016 to 2020. Participants told us that grant funding makes their work possible and without it, their organizations simply would not exist. Philanthropy has a large role to play in the overall health of the region’s community media ecosystem.

Even so, community media leaders reported facing several hurdles to accessing external funding at all stages of the grant process. Small and new organizations, and organizations led by women and people of color, often reported not having the resources, expertise, or social capital necessary to produce successful grant applications. Participants also described a problem of “fit” when it came to seeking out external funding. Some said that, in their experience, funders did not see media and communications as top priorities, while others felt that their work did not fit neatly into traditional funding “buckets” or categories. When they have been awarded grants, community media leaders reported that funding often came with frequent progress reports, detailed financial accounting, and complex bureaucratic procedures. These tasks take away from already limited staff time and often include impact assessment categories misaligned with organizations’ mission. Ultimately, our findings show that there are important opportunities for growth and improvement for philanthropic funders seeking to invest in the Philadelphia region’s community media ecosystem.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings, we propose the following set of recommendations for funders, community media organizations, and their audience members.

FOR FUNDERS



- Make media top funding priorities.
- Fund organizations to do community media work, however they define it.
- Develop more flexible funding opportunities and expand resource offerings.
- Center community members in decision-making.
- Create more reflexive, inclusive, and bold funding processes.
- Invest in community media infrastructure

FOR COMMUNITY MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS



- Create opportunities for mutual learning, collaboration, and coalition-building.
- Think creatively about community involvement.
- Map your true assets.

FOR AUDIENCE AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS



- Find out who is making media in and for your community.
- Seek out opportunities to support community media organizations.
- Call on government and industry leaders to strengthen communication infrastructure in the region.

Introduction

Community media organizations work to empower marginalized groups through media access, literacy, representation, and participation. Across the Greater Philadelphia Area, hundreds of local radio stations and newspapers, film and television studios, digital media and video production programs, and museums and cultural history projects open up space for BIPOC, queer and trans communities, and working class neighborhoods to make their voices heard. In the process, they fill gaps that established commercial media institutions have largely ignored. But despite the value they bring to the region, community media organizations remain underfunded.

This report offers a detailed look at the status of the **community media ecosystem** across the Philadelphia area. We use this term to refer to the network of meaning-making projects that create opportunities for residents to participate in media production and organizational decision-making processes. Taking an ecosystem approach to understanding community media draws our attention to the role these organizations play in sustaining the wellbeing of the communities they serve, as well as the cooperative ties that connect them. Whereas commercial media institutions compete for consumers' attention and dollars, community media organizations build collaborative information and communication solutions for underserved and underheard demographics.

With Philadelphia-area community media as its focus, this report tells a story of both hope and urgency. The community media leaders included in our study are engaged in critical communications work with a clear sense of purpose, audacity, and

resilience, even in the face of great obstacles. Their words, quoted throughout this report, demonstrate authentic commitment to the people they serve. They also reflect the impact they have had on their communities of active audience members, many of whom would not otherwise find their experiences reflected or needs met within the region's commercial media environment.

At the same time, the community media leaders quoted here speak to an intense need for greater organizational capacities. Many report lacking the funding and staff to pursue their essential missions. While most have successfully secured some external funding, they describe hurdles to accessing grants that would amplify their impact across the region. These hurdles include the same economic, racial, and gendered barriers that keep marginalized communities from equitable participation and representation across commercial media industries. Community media leaders report that established organizations with the track record and capital necessary to produce successful grant applications continue to benefit from grant funding, while developing grassroots projects and the marginalized communities they serve struggle to stay afloat. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic downturn have only exacerbated these conditions.

Community media organizations' needs point toward clear calls to action. Philanthropic funders should make community media top priorities and allow community media-makers to play a meaningful role in shaping the funding process. Equity in media access and participation across the Greater Philadelphia Area depends upon a more reflexive, community-centered approach to philanthropy.

Research Methods

The research team used a multimodal approach for evaluating the current state, capacities, and challenges of the Greater Philadelphia Area's community media organizations, with the ultimate goal of activating funders to support the region's communication and information needs. This approach included a survey of more than 50 organizations and interviews with 16 media-makers and community organizers. In addition to basic information about organizations' demographic and structural compositions, we asked survey and interview participants to share how they view their communities' information and communication needs, what resources they require to meet those needs, how they collaborate with the communities they serve, and how philanthropy can support their missions. We supplemented the survey and interview data with geographic information system (GIS) mapping, tracing funding flows from philanthropic foundations and donors to media organizations across the region. Combining these methods allowed us to develop a broad, bird's eye view of the Philadelphia region's media landscape while also cultivating a more in-depth, situated understanding of community media organizations' goals and challenges.

A commitment to the Philadelphia area's media-makers and community organizers, a sensitivity to the complexities of seeking external funding, and respect for practitioners' expertise guided our research approach. Research participants were compensated for their time and labor. The information survey respondents shared with us was anonymized, so as to eliminate the possibility of their disclosures affecting future funding opportunities. The interviews were loosely structured, allowing each participant to shape the conversation according to their expertise, experiences, and concerns, and interview participants were consulted before their words were published in this report.

The following sections offer detailed overviews of the major components of our research agenda and design, as well as the demographic and structural composition of the organizations who participated in this study.

RESEARCH AGENDA

We assessed Philadelphia-area local media organizations' goals, challenges, and strengths, as well as their understanding of the information and communication needs of the communities they serve. Working with a database of philanthropic funding information, we also mapped the flow of external funding to local media organizations across the region from 2016 through 2020.

The following research questions guided our inquiry:

Organizational Values and Practices.

What goals and values drive media organizations? What practices do they engage in to serve their audience communities? How do their audience communities shape their missions?

Organizational Capacities. What are local media organizations' current needs and assets? Do local media organizations have access to capital? Which do not? What are the barriers blocking access to capital?

Community Needs. What do local media organizations think the information and communication needs of their communities are? What resources do they require to meet those needs? What obstacles do they face in their work to meet those needs?

Opportunities for Funders. What kinds of infrastructure and support can philanthropy provide local media organizations? What practices can philanthropic organizations engage in to better support community media organizations?

Our goals for this report include:

- Activating philanthropic funders to target their support toward Philadelphia-area media organizations, particularly those whose work is community-led and driven.
- Illuminating challenges and opportunities within existing systems and patterns of funding for community media organizations.
- Providing media organizations in the Philadelphia area and beyond with a snapshot of both the challenges and success stories coming out of communication and information work in the region.

STUDY DESIGN & APPROACH

The research team, composed of social scientists with expertise in media and community organizing, collaborated with members of IPMF's staff and board of directors to develop a survey instrument and interview guide. We then worked to recruit survey respondents and interview participants (See Appendix for complete list of participating organizations). Our recruitment strategy began with a catalog of Philadelphia-area community media organizations. We reached out to these organizations via email, inviting them to participate in the survey. Once respondents completed the survey, we then invited them to participate in the interview portion of the study, in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of their work and experiences. In addition to the combined survey and interview approach, we also drew on data from the Foundation Center's Foundation Maps database to track and visualize the flow of funding from philanthropic entities to the region's media organizations. In collaboration with IPMF, the lead author analyzed the collected data for emergent themes.



Surveys

We used a purposive sampling method to recruit survey respondents who lead media organizations based in the Greater Philadelphia Area. For the purposes of this study, we define “media organizations” as collective entities that produce and transmit meaning to an audience or audiences. We define “the Greater Philadelphia Area” as the catchment area for WYBE Channel 35 in the Philadelphia market. Prior to becoming a private foundation, Independence Public Media was a public broadcaster operating WYBE. Since its transition to a philanthropic foundation in 2017, IPMF has committed to focusing its efforts on the same geographic area it served as a public broadcaster. We developed a catalog of organizations that fit our definitions and reached out to their leaders via email with an invitation to participate in the study in exchange for a modest honorarium. We invited only one representative from each organization captured in our catalog.



Map showing WYBE catchment area

The survey, which was hosted on Qualtrics and available only in English, was divided into five sections; each section included a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions: 1) Organizational Structure and History, 2) Audience, 3) Media and Organizational Practices and Goals, 4) Media, Information, and Communication Needs of Communities, and 5) Resources Needed. Previous and ongoing needs assessment projects focused on media organizations, such as the Out for Change Transformative Media Organizing Project and the Listening Post Collectives, informed our questions. In a final open-ended question, respondents were invited to describe any other details, concerns, or ideas they would like to share, such as new challenges or questions brought on by the COVID-19 crisis. Upon completing the survey, respondents were directed to a separate form, which they could complete with their contact information in order to receive an honorarium. In total, 51 media organization leaders completed the survey from August 2020 through December 2020. All survey data was anonymized prior to analysis. The lead author conducted basic statistical analyses, such as frequencies and descriptives, on the survey data. She also analyzed text-based responses to open-ended questions for emergent themes.

Survey n = 51



Interviews

Interview participants were recruited from the pool of survey respondents. We interviewed 16 media organization leaders from August 2020 through December 2020. The interviews included a loose agenda focused on key themes that had emerged from early survey data, including organizational mission, audience communities, access to media technologies, funding challenges and opportunities, and partnerships and collaborations with other media organizations. We followed a semi-structured interview format, which allowed participants to focus the conversation on areas of special interest to them. With participants' consent, we audio recorded all interviews. Interviews were then transcribed and coded for emergent themes, using NVivo, a qualitative coding software. Participants reviewed quotations included in this report prior to publication.

*Interview n =
16*



Funding Flow Maps

We collected data for the funding flow maps from Foundation Maps, a global database that includes information on foundation funding from 2006 to the present date across a variety of subject areas. Using Foundation Maps, we narrowed our search to the counties represented in the WYBE catchment area and honed in on funding activity related to the subjects of information and communications. The database defines this subject area as consisting of communication media, information communications technology, libraries, media access and policy, and news and public information. While it is unlikely that the database's definition captures the full breadth of our own working definition of "media organization," we found that bounding the funding flow data by this subject area gave the clearest picture of philanthropic activity focused on media and communication. In addition to geography and subject area, we also bounded our search by time, choosing to focus on the years 2016 through 2020. This timeframe allowed us to visualize the most recent trends in funding flows across Philadelphia-area media organizations.

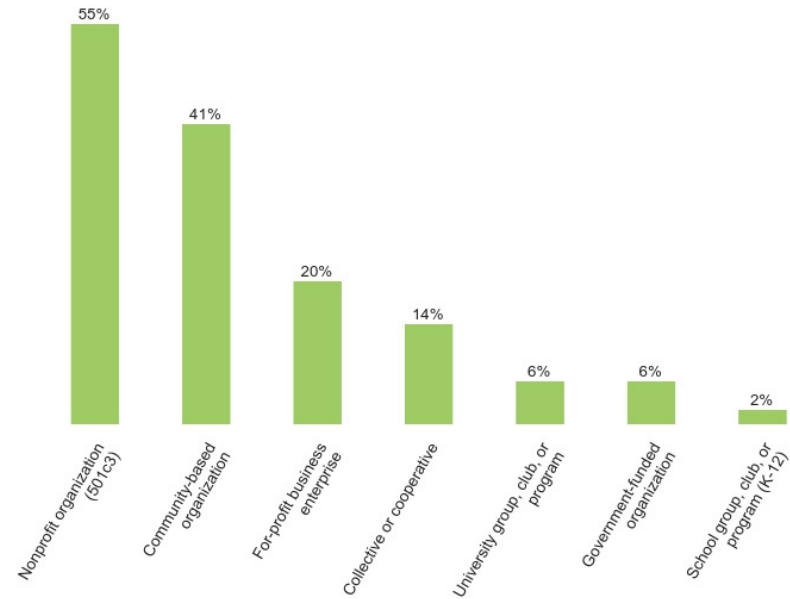
With funding data captured from each county represented in the catchment area, the research team's GIS specialist developed map-based visualizations to illustrate philanthropic trends across the Greater Philadelphia Area. These visualizations offer key contextual information for interpreting survey and interview participants' reflections on their access to financial resources and on their experiences with philanthropic funders.

DEMOGRAPHICS

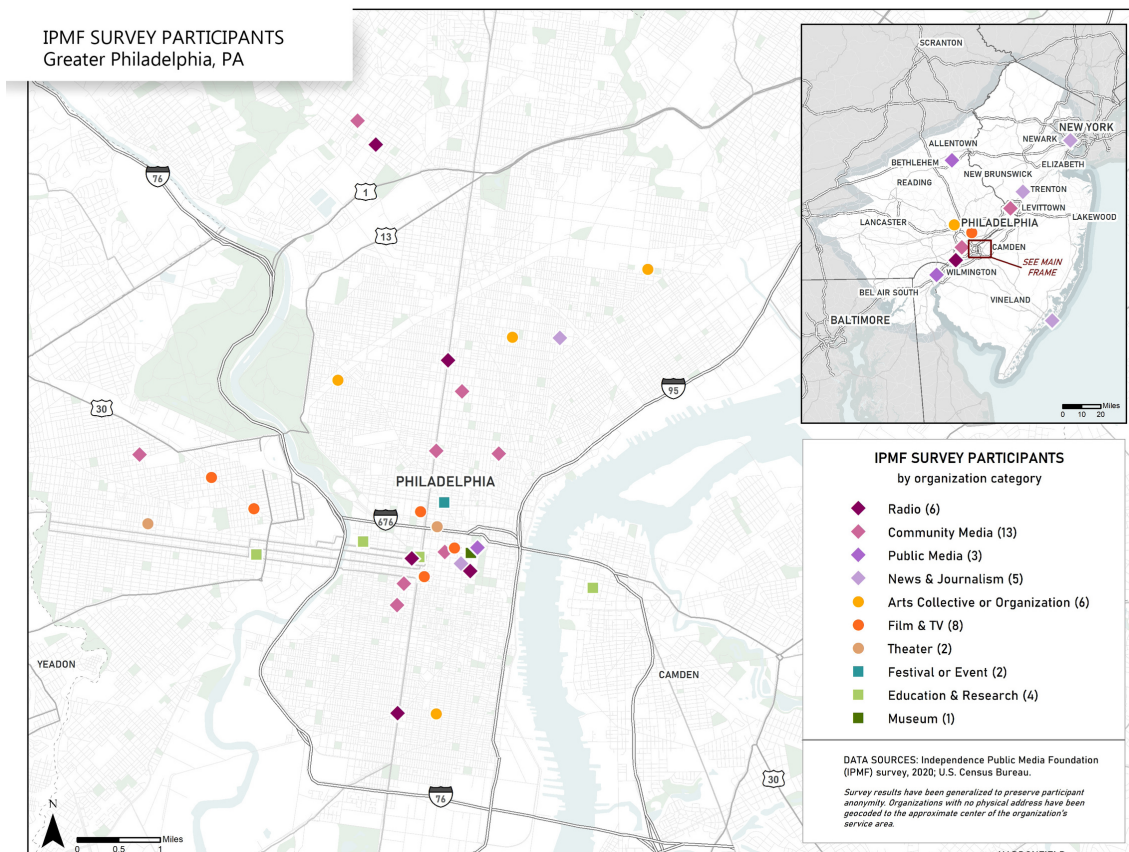
This section describes the demographic and structural composition of the organizations who participated in the survey and interview portions of the study.

A total of 51 unique media organizations that serve audiences throughout the Greater Philadelphia Area participated in the online survey. The organizations varied in mission and spanned a range of media genres, including film, television, digital media, and journalism, among others. While some organizations serve audiences in specific areas and neighborhoods, others described a mission to serve specific audience demographics across the region, such as communities of color, queer and trans communities, underserved youth, and artists. Participants described a range of audience sizes; while some reported reaching fewer than 500 people, others reported audience sizes of more than 25,000 Philadelphia-area residents. Survey participants represented a diversity of organizational structures. While more than half (55%) reported following a non-profit organizational structure, participants were also likely to describe their organization as community-based (41%), for-profit (20%), and collective (14%) enterprises. A handful of participating organizations were sponsored by schools, universities, or government agencies,

How would you describe your organization's structure?

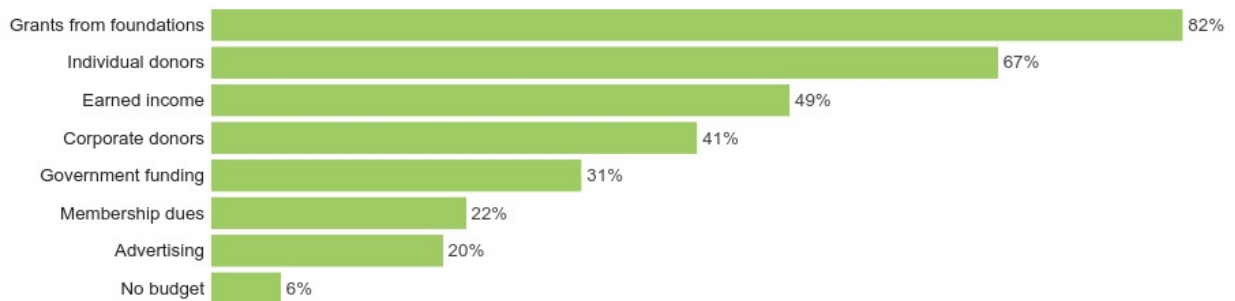


IPMF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS
Greater Philadelphia, PA



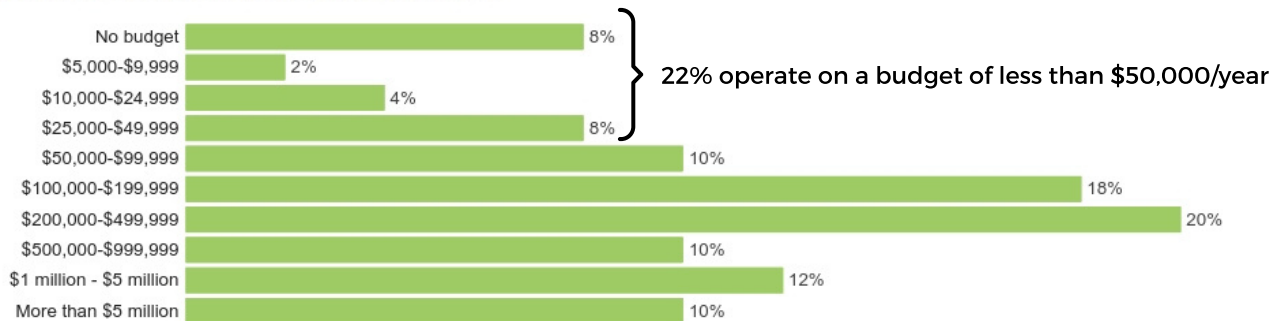
This structural diversity was further reflected in participating organizations' funding sources. Close to half (49%) of all participants reported developing earned income through sources like paid subscriptions, ticket sales, and commissioned projects, while 22% were supported in part through membership dues and 20% earned income through advertising and sponsorships. Participants were most likely, however, to report relying on external funding to pursue their missions. The vast majority (82%) reported receiving grant funding from foundations; 67% reported receiving funds from individual donors, 41% described corporate donors as key parts of their funding structures, and 31% indicated that their organizations had benefited from government funding.

How is your organization, institution, or group funded?



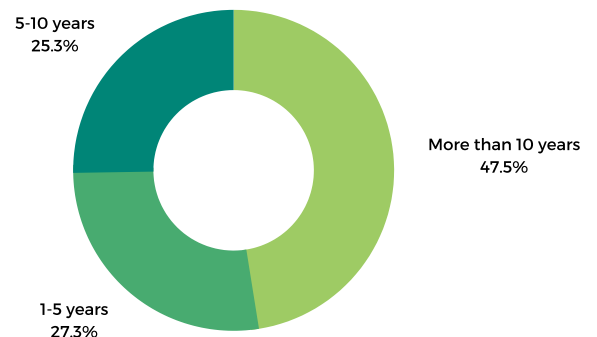
Participants reported a wide range of organizational budgets. The most common budget bracket (20% of participating organizations) was \$200,000 - \$499,999 per year. Half (50%) of participating organizations have an annual budget of less than \$200,000. Nearly one-quarter (22%) of participants operate on a small budget of less than \$50,000 per year, including ten percent who reported operating on less than \$10,000 a year or having no budgetary funds at all.

What is your organization's annual budget?



Most (47%) of the organizations who participated in the survey have been operating for more than ten years. Remaining participants were split nearly evenly between young (1-5 years) and maturing (5-10 years) organizations.

How long has your organization been operating?



Key Findings

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES, PRIORITIES, AND PRACTICES

Our study focused on Philadelphia-area community media organizations. The media-makers included in our study represent a diversity of organizational missions, funding structures, and target audiences. They share, however, community-centered values, priorities, and practices that set them apart from the commercial goals of corporately-owned media institutions.

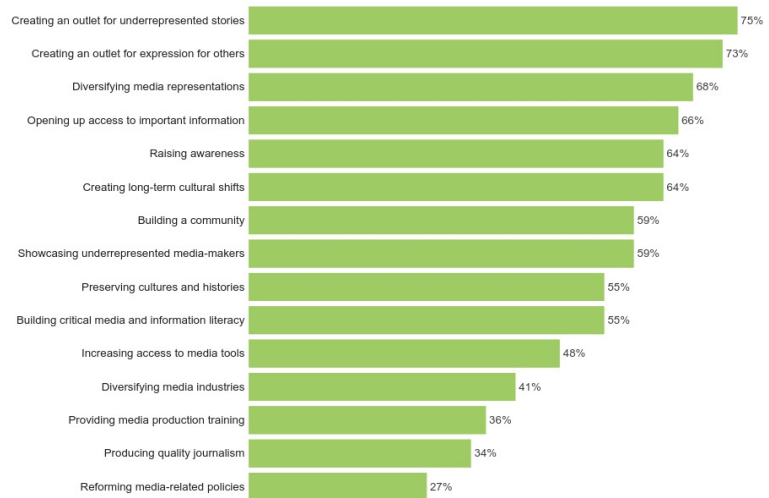
Community media organizations prioritize underrepresented communities.

In both surveys and interviews, participants emphasized diversity and representation as key pillars of their mission. A majority of survey participants described highlighting underrepresented experiences (75%), creating outlets for expression for others (73%), and diversifying media representations (68%) as their highest priority goals. Nearly 60% of survey participants also reported showcasing underrepresented media-makers as an important goal for their organizations. In response to open-ended questions, many survey respondents described their organizational missions as focused on specific marginalized communities, including communities of color, immigrant communities, queer and trans people, underserved youth and artists, and linguistic minorities.

“PhillyCAM exists for those that feel underrepresented in mainstream media. We are looking to them as creators and storytellers, as people that are interested in shedding light on stories and news items in their neighborhoods.”

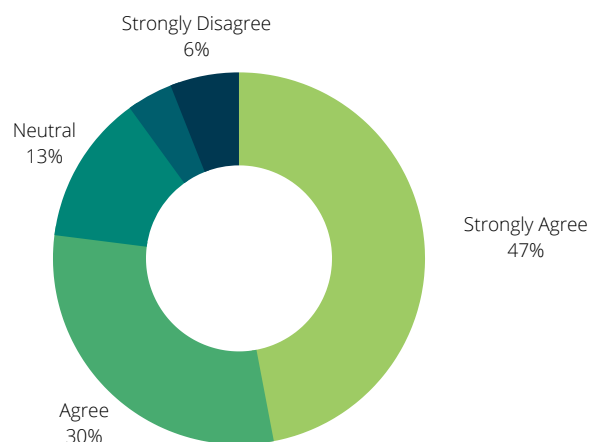
- Gretjen Clausing, PhillyCAM

What are your organization's highest priority goals for your media work? Select all that apply.



Following their values of inclusion, more than three-quarters of survey participants reported that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “The demographics of my organization's staff are representative of the public we aim to reach.” In interviews, participants described ongoing strategies to ensure that their organizational leadership better reflects their audience communities, such as hiring staff directly from the neighborhoods they cover and bringing on bilingual team members and creators. Gretjen Clausing, Executive Director of PhillyCAM, described this approach as doing away with a “first come, first serve” basis and instead “being very aware of who is not here and being intentional about inviting people to come in.”

“The demographics of my organization's staff are representative of the public we aim to reach.”



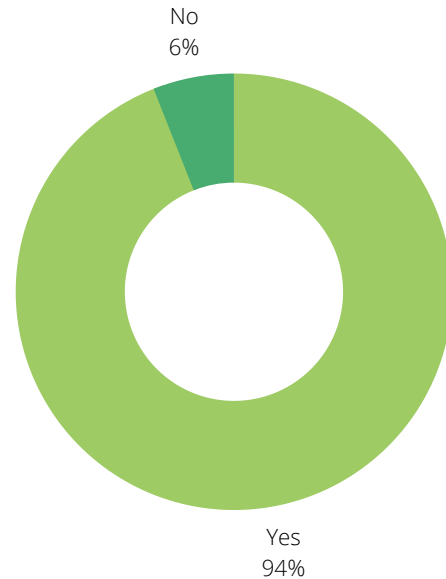
Media literacy and access are core values.

After diversity and representation, media and information literacy and access ranked among survey participants' highest priority goals. A majority said increasing information access (66%) and building critical media and information literacy (55%) are among their organizations' top priorities. Participants also emphasized literacy in and access to communication tools. Nearly half (48%) of survey participants reported that their organizations aim to increase access to communication tools.

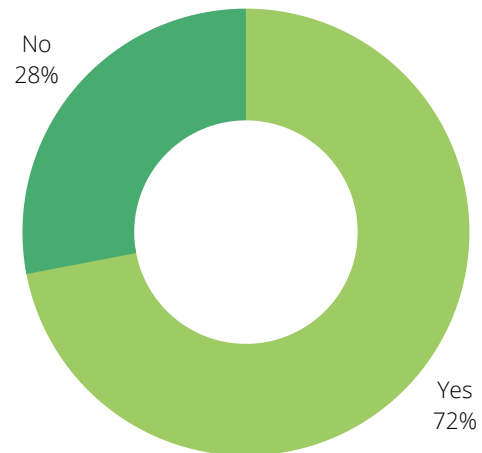
Community drives community media work.

The media organizations included in this study place a central emphasis on community involvement in their work. Almost every organizational leader surveyed (94%) said that their organizations involve community members in their media work and 72% of participants said their organizations provide media training to community members. In interviews, participants described a variety of strategies for incorporating community members into their media projects. These included local "pop-up newsrooms," where residents met face-to-face with the staff behind neighborhood newspapers, and incorporating an open-door policy for anyone interested in joining a workshop or contributing to a media project. One survey respondent summarized this community-centered approach: "Needs vary from community to community, and we co-design solutions with residents on how to best respond to their various needs."

Does your organization involve community members in its media work?



Does your organization provide media training to community members?



"We are trying to bring more community members in, in different roles, and trying to figure out how we can make them involved in a way that's sustainable."

- Andrea Wenzel, Germantown Info Hub

Community media aim to create large-scale changes.

While their focus may be localized, Philadelphia-area community media organizations view large-scale cultural, industrial, and structural changes as part of their missions. A majority of survey participants listed raising awareness (64%), preserving cultures and histories (55%), and creating long-term cultural shifts (64%) among their organizations’ top goals. In line with their emphasis on diversity and representation, 41% of survey participants described diversifying media industries beyond their own organizations as an important goal. More than one in four survey participants also said that their organizations aim to reform media-related policies at the state and national levels. Interview participants described these broad reform goals as deeply linked to their community missions:

“Radio has the opportunity to bring people together, to create a sense of community, to encourage people to get involved in civic engagement. We’ve always believed that our listeners are not only consumers, but they’re citizens. We want to provide programming that will make them better and more engaged citizens.”
- Bob Ottenhoff, WGBO

Collaboration, not competition, is key.

Survey and interview participants reported favoring an ecosystem approach to community media. Rather than competing with organizations that pursue similar audiences or goals, participants expressed the value of partnership, collaboration, and connection with fellow Philadelphia-area media-makers.

As Jean-Pierre Brice of CMP Radio in Chester, PA put it, “There are many organizations that do similar work to us. But it’s not about one voice. It’s about multiple voices coming together to make sure the message is heard by all.” Ninety-one percent of survey participants said that partnerships with other organizations have strengthened their media work. When asked about organizational assets and needs, 82% of survey participants described inter-organizational partnerships as important existing resources, and another 18% reported a desire for increased collaboration. In their responses to open-ended questions, survey participants described the benefits of collaborating with other organizations in the region:

“Our partnerships have given us such a wider range of skills and resources to draw on when we work on community-based projects...We are always looking at who we can bring into our projects to ensure our impact is maximized.”

“Partnering with organizations opened up a wider door and better opportunity for the youth who go through our media training program, allowing them to focus on media as a career through internships and mentoring...These partnerships have widened the horizon for our work and have allowed us to give our youth twenty-first century skills for a more lucrative and creative career in the arts.”

“As an organization that focuses on power-building and leadership development to transform local news ecosystems, collaboration is essential to our work. In order to change powerful and entrenched systems, we need to build collective and durable power.”

- Survey Participants

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITIES

Community media organizations offer valuable opportunities and information to the audiences they serve. Despite this, they remain underfunded and under-resourced. This situation has only become more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. We asked both survey and interview participants a number of questions designed to better understand their media organizations' existing strengths and weaknesses.

Community media organizations need more funding and staff.

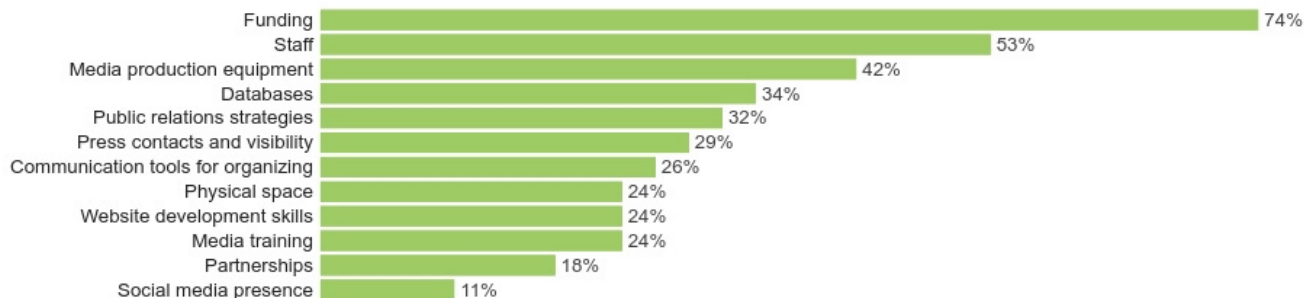
We asked survey participants, "What resources does your organization require, but currently lack, to address your community's media, information, and communication needs?" Both survey and interview participants frequently described a need for increased and more consistent operating capacities.

The vast majority (74%) of survey participants said that they have an ongoing need for more funding. Nearly 10% of participants reported that their media organizations operated on no budget. More than half (53%) of participants also reported a need for increased staffing. On average, the community media leaders we surveyed reported that their organizations employed 11 paid, full-time staff members and three paid, part-time staff members. Thirty percent of survey respondents said they have no full-time staff members at all and nearly three-quarters (74.5%) said they employ five or fewer full-time staff members. Participants' reliance on contract workers and volunteers further underscored the need for more consistent staffing. On average, survey respondents relied on approximately 13 paid freelancers and 44 volunteers each year.

“We need general operating capacity, the ability to sustain supporting staff time and compensating contributors over time. We are looking for ways, as a fiscally sponsored nonprofit, to have new forms of revenue that match our values and sustain our work.”

- Survey Participant

What resources does your organization require, but currently lack, to address your community's media, information, and communication needs?



Beyond staff and funding, nearly one quarter (24%) of participants said their organization needs access to physical space to do their work, while 18% described a need for help facilitating partnerships with other organizations.

“We need consistent funding. We have no funding to hire full-time employees. We’re only able to hire independent contractors.”

“We are a small organization that is growing faster and has to scale up our projects and programs to address the needs of the young people and the community we serve. The biggest challenge is to get larger funding that matches the scope of the work we are doing.”

- Survey Participants

Community media organizations need media tools, access, and training to do their work.

After basic operating capacities, participants reported that their organizations were in need of increased media tools, access, and training. Forty-two percent of survey participants said their organizations need more or better media production equipment and software, 34% said their organizations would benefit from access to databases that would enhance their outreach to potential audiences and supporters, and 25% said they lack communication tools for internal organization. Participants also reported a need for training on interacting with journalists (24%) as well as press contacts and visibility (29%). Others described a need for skill-building opportunities in the areas of public relations (32%), website development (24%), and social media marketing (11%).

All surveyed organizational leaders reported engaging in multiple types of media practices. For example, a nonprofit youth organization’s mission may be focused on digital filmmaking, but its staff draws on a variety of media strategies, including social media marketing, press releases, and website development, to pursue the organization’s mission. Proficiency across multiple media platforms requires access to a broad spectrum of media tools and training.

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing challenges, but community media have innovated new ways to utilize existing assets during the pandemic.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic shut down business as usual in the Greater Philadelphia Area in the spring of 2020, community media organizations have struggled to stay afloat.

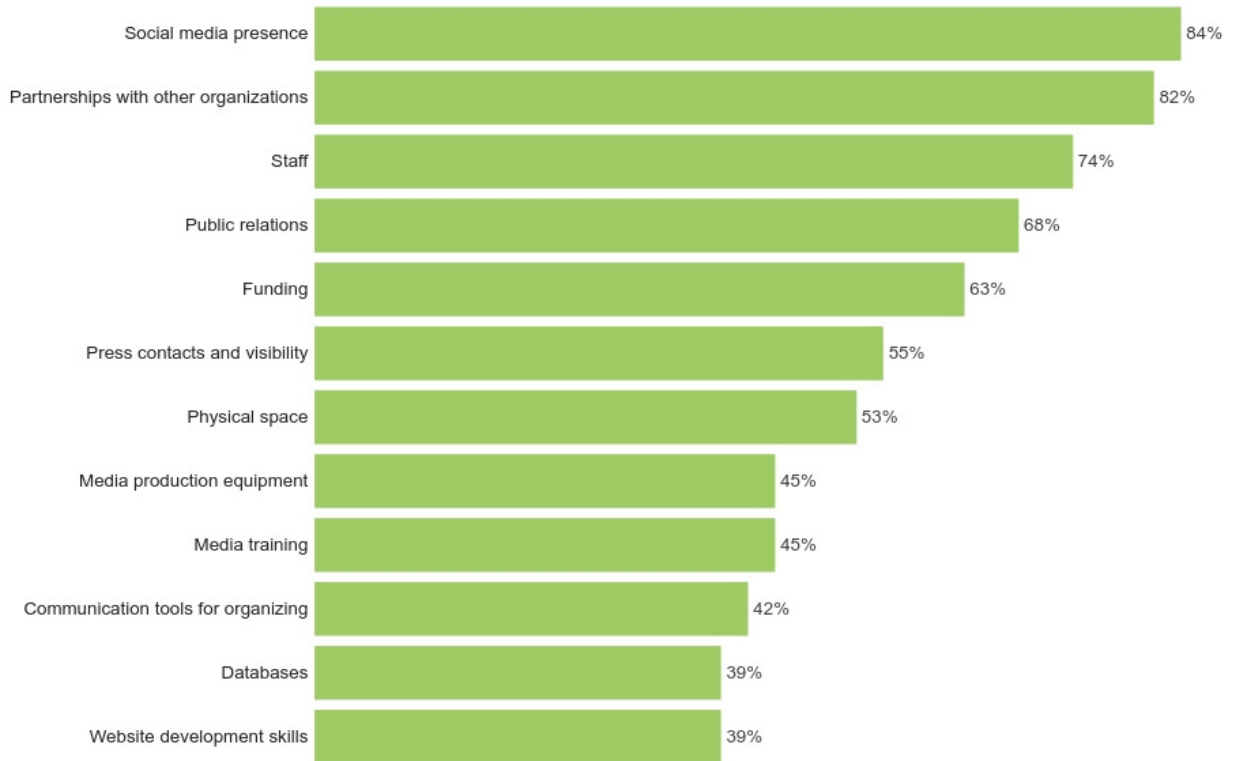
“Funding is always a challenge, especially in these challenging economic times amidst a pandemic, with a lot of our audience being hit hard by the economy and with engagement challenges.”

“The biggest challenge currently is the COVID situation. Lack of access to physical spaces and equipment makes learning media production difficult, to say the least.”

- Survey Participants

Despite the challenges they face, media organizations have worked diligently to use their existing strengths and assets to problem solve during the COVID-19 pandemic. We asked survey participants, “What resources does your organization currently use and readily access to address your community’s media, information, and communication needs?” The vast majority of participants reported that their social media presence (84%), their partnerships with other organizations (82%), and their staff (74%) were all assets they currently use to pursue their mission.

What resources does your organization currently use and readily access to address your community's media, information, and communication needs?



“Our biggest assets include our commitment to partnership, as it leverages the impact of our work and improves our own practice and our relationships with hundreds of documentary-makers around the world. They allow us to be responsive to the needs of the community.”

“Our team and community is devoted. They rise to the occasion and go above and beyond. They understand the intense needs of the moment and find ways to push participation, representation, and media production.”

“Access to information is so important for underserved communities, particularly in the aftermath of COVID-19. We used our website to create food resource maps in multiple languages that were accessed hundreds of thousands of times by readers searching for information about how to feed their families.”

- Survey Participants

COMMUNITY NEEDS

The community media leaders we surveyed and interviewed described their organizations as driven by the needs of the audience communities they serve. Consistently, participants articulated these needs as falling into three major categories: information access, media representation, and internet infrastructure.

Underserved neighborhoods need better access to local coverage and information.

Consistently throughout surveys and interviews, participants made strong cases for the importance of local media coverage in underserved neighborhoods. Some participants framed this issue as an imbalance in information flows and access, an especially problematic challenge during a public health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic:

“The communities that we serve are lacking information about programs and services that will help them continue to grow and improve the quality of life in their neighborhoods.”

“Equitable access to information is limited or prevented by various barriers that exist within any of the communities we work in. These include, but are not limited to: the digital divide, news is not reported in language spoken by community, lack of local news source, local news source uses a paywall, local news source is not trusted, and in many cases, a combination of these various barriers.”

- Survey Participants

Other participants drew attention to the importance of media representations that reflect community members’ lives with dignity and respect. The same underprivileged communities facing information access challenges are less likely than their more affluent and white counterparts to see their stories told by commercial media institutions. When their stories are told, they are often filled with degrading stereotypes and broad generalizations that fail to portray the full complexity of their character:

“The Germantown Info Hub grew out of a research study where residents told us they were frustrated with feeling that their community was primarily associated with crime coverage. They felt that journalists didn’t really come into their community to find out more about community issues. They had a hard time finding out about their own community issues because of that.”

- Andrea Wenzel, Germantown Info Hub

“The news media were constantly framing the neighborhood in the same way. People who live in the neighborhood were saying, ‘Wow, the only thing that anybody knows about us is drugs and there is so much more.’ That impacts not just what people outside of Kensington think about Kensington, but how Kensington sees itself....This is a really resourceful, resilient community. Where are those studies? There are many more stories about the negative than there are about the positive things that are happening.”

- Jillian Bauer-Reese, Kensington Voice

“We offer the community access to journalists who look like them and share their experiences.”

- Survey Participant

In each case, participants described their organizations as motivated by a strong drive to balance the scales when it comes to both information access and media representation. For these community media leaders, access and representation are deeply connected to positive social, health, and economic outcomes for their audience communities:

“Digital media play a vital role in all aspects of society, yet youth from marginalized communities often lack access to hands-on digital media education which can hinder their academic achievement, career paths, and representation in the media. We address these needs by providing free project-based programs where youth learn the digital media skills they need to prepare for the real world and participate in shaping its narrative.”

- Survey Participant

Marginalized communities want to tell their own stories. Community media offer them a platform.

Many of the community media organizations who participated in this study shared the same approach for addressing the mis- or under-representation of marginalized communities. Rather than allow large, predominantly white and male commercial media institutions to represent marginalized communities, community media organizations often “pass the mic” (See the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative for research on the demographic composition of media industries). As one survey respondent put it, “We are telling community stories for us, by us.”

Participants described opportunities their organizations have created for their constituents to plan, produce, and publish their own news stories and artistic expressions, drawing on the power of their and their neighbors’ voices:

“One of the ways these communities become disempowered is when people say that they have no value, that they are in decline, that they’re slums. We try to give people a platform to say, ‘No, you can’t see the value in this neighborhood but the residents here can tell you why it does have value to us.’”

- Louis Massiah, Scribe Video Center

“The needs we are addressing include the lack of access to technology and equipment available to underserved young people. Our young creatives use media as their launchpad to share their videos, documentaries, narrative films, photography, animations, and illustrations that address the issues or topics that matter to them.”

- Survey Participant

Community media leaders reported their audience members articulated a clear need and desire to see and tell their own stories, which in turn drove their organizations’ strategies for community involvement in their media work:

“Our audience is thirsty to listen and be heard. They want to be uplifted, inspired, and enlightened by the stories of others, especially now. They want to hear their own voices represented and shared with a larger community. Marginalized communities want their voices amplified within and beyond their borders so that others can gain a true understanding that we are all human and more connects than separates us.”

- Survey Participant

Community media, and the communities they serve, need better communications infrastructure.

We asked survey respondents, “Approximately what percentage of the community your organization serves is mostly offline, meaning they generally lack the tools, literacy, and/or time to access the internet?” On average, respondents reported that approximately 31% of their target audience community is mostly offline. This number reflects broader trends in broadband internet access across the region. A 2019 study conducted by the School District of Philadelphia found that only 58% of high school students accessed the internet from a computer at home (Hetrick & Purcell, 2020). According to 2018 census estimates, approximately 16% of Philadelphia households are not connected to the internet, making it among the worst of the nation’s largest cities for internet access (Hetrick & Purcell, 2020).

Approximately what percentage of the community your organization serves is mostly offline, meaning they generally lack the tools, literacy, and/or time to access the internet?



“Municipal broadband is our number-one need. WiFi access should be treated as a public utility. Lack of access endangers lives, limits education, impedes small business, and segregates artistic creation.”

- Survey Participant

Poor neighborhoods and communities of color are disproportionately affected by this digital divide. A 2018 Free Press report demonstrated that families of color in the U.S., who are more likely to earn less income than their white counterparts, often cannot afford to subscribe to broadband (Floberg, 2018). Even within the same income brackets, Free Press found that Black and Hispanic people lagged beyond whites in broadband adoption, indicating that systemic barriers beyond internet service providers’ subscription fees block access. Given that residents in many of the region’s largest cities, including Philadelphia, Camden, Trenton, Wilmington, and Chester, are predominantly people of color, this racial digital divide presents a major challenge for Philadelphia-area media organizations.

“The digital divide impacts the community we serve. Many of our youth access the internet only on smartphones with data plans. This limits usage.”

“Our constituents need access to technology and consistent access to affordable and reliable internet services.”

- Survey Participants

Participants described a variety of strategies their organizations used to engage with community members offline, including community events and workshops, door-to-door canvassing, print media distribution, phone banking, and text messaging services. However, the need for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic has made face-to-face encounters nearly impossible. Participants reported that, due to the pandemic, their organizations began relying heavily on internet-based resources and virtual events. While the forced move online prompted innovative programming, it also raised concerns about keeping audiences connected at a time when information and community are more important than ever.

“The digital divide is real and we need to address the fact that communities experiencing poverty need to be able to be online in order to access and participate in the stories being told about their experiences. Though our organization has multiple platforms and hours of relevant content, it remains a challenge to direct that content in a way that is responsive and accessible.”

“As we seek to advance equity in our community of storytellers, one ongoing challenge includes reaching previously underserved communities who are not already tied in to the community via email newsletters, online workshops and events...That challenge exists within the context of systemic inequities, which we must all work to address.”

- Survey Participants

For community media organizations, COVID-19 has only underscored their audience communities' ongoing need for better internet access and infrastructure. Survey and interview participants called on elected officials and internet service providers to do more to increase their communities' internet access and literacy. Some reported that their organizations actively campaigned to reform internet regulations. Their activism further highlighted the connections between community media organizations' work at the neighborhood and national levels, a connection many participants identified as vital to their missions. As one interviewee put it, "Supporting small media projects is great but we are rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic until we address the larger structural issues like the digital divide."

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHILANTHROPIC FUNDERS

Given community media organizations' important missions but lacking resources, philanthropic funders have great potential to strengthen communities' access to information and representation. Community media leaders, however, face several hurdles to accessing external funding at all stages of the grant process. There are important opportunities for growth and improvement for philanthropic funders seeking to invest in the Philadelphia region's media ecosystem.

Community media organizations depend on philanthropy.

Community media organizations in the Philadelphia area have relied heavily on outside funding to pursue their mission. A minority of survey respondents reported relying on earned income (49%), membership dues (22%), or advertising (20%), while the vast majority reported that some or all of their funding came from foundations (82%), individual (67%) and corporate (41%) donors, and government agencies (31%). Nearly all survey respondents (94%) reported that funds from philanthropic organizations or foundations have helped their organizations address their community's media, information, or communication needs.

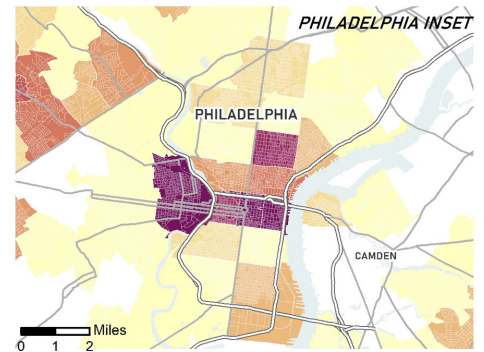
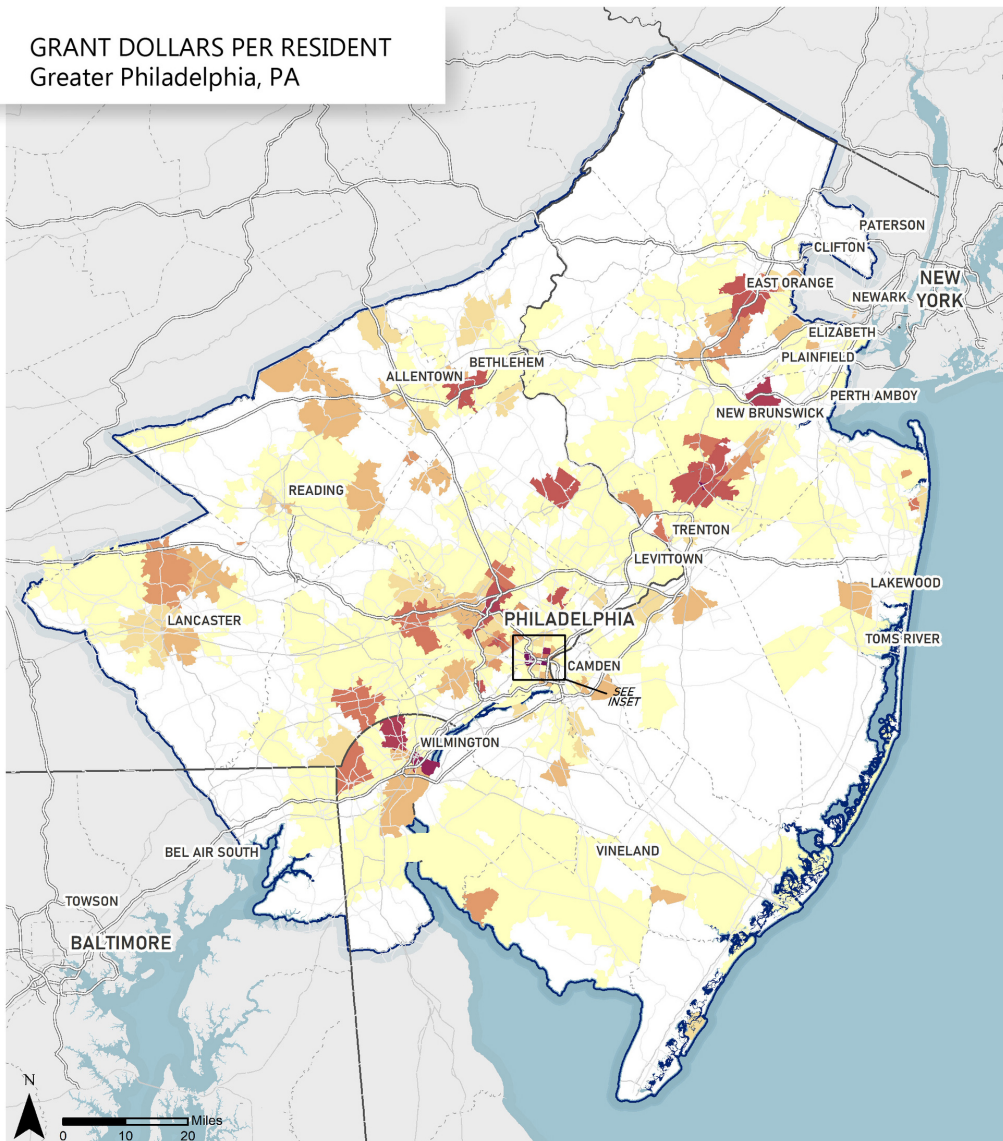
“Philanthropic funding has been vital in the development and sustainability of our organization. We would not be able to operate without it.”

“We have received funding to support projects that amplify community voices to generate and disseminate content both live and online.”

- Survey Participants

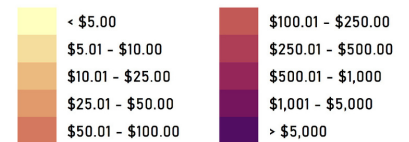
Community media organizations' reliance on philanthropic funding is further reflected in longitudinal data across the region. Using the Foundation Maps database, we pulled data on funding activity related to information and communications across the Greater Philadelphia Area from January 2016 through July 2020. We found that, across the region during that time period, funders invested more than \$340 million in approximately 1,100 organizations and individuals engaged in media and communications work. These findings indicate that philanthropic funders currently play a substantial role in community media across the Greater Philadelphia Area. More importantly, they have the potential to preserve and even strengthen the region's media ecosystem, which would in turn significantly improve the lives of its residents.

GRANT DOLLARS PER RESIDENT
Greater Philadelphia, PA

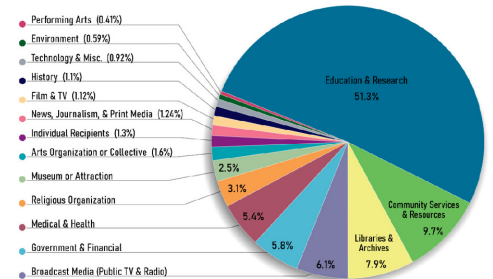


GRANT DOLLARS PER RESIDENT (ZIP)

Total grant dollars received per zip code (Jan. 2016 - July 2020), divided by total residential population per zip



GRANT BREAKDOWN BY RECIPIENT CATEGORY



*A sum of 7,696 grants totalling \$342,613,644 were analyzed for the funding breakdown. Grants were received between Jan. 2016 and July 2020. Individual Recipients are not reflected on the map to preserve anonymity.

DATA SOURCES: The Foundation Center, 2020;
U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018 Estimates

Community media leaders report hurdles to accessing grant funding.

Despite philanthropy’s significant presence and potential within the Philadelphia area’s media ecosystem, survey and interview participants described a number of hurdles to accessing philanthropic funding. Chief among these are the same racial, gendered, and economic barriers that keep marginalized media-makers from successful careers in media industries:

“As a woman of color leading an organization, sometimes funding for us looks a little limited or nonexistent. We’re very small but we do a lot of work, and we’ve very boots-to-the-ground. The way the philanthropy landscape is laid out has made it hard for us to apply for large grants. I don’t know if it’s just not being part of a certain social network, but just being in the rooms with some philanthropists, I can tell they feel like I may not know what I’m doing even though I’ve been doing it for years and have been very successful at it.”

- Janine Spruill, Lil' Filmmakers

“Many local foundations want to see an organization have reserves and working capital of at least six month of fixed capital before funding them...As a small organization, we have struggled to meet this requirement, especially now during the pandemic. These funders have communicated that they are very interested in our work, but need to see us have more liquidity before funding. Without further infrastructure support as well as project support, we lack the capacity to build our assets.”

- Survey Participant

Participants also indicated that many philanthropic organizations do not view media and communications work as a funding priority:

“They think community journalism is not essential or a direct service. Many foundations reject the idea that providing information is an essential service. We know that especially in a pandemic and in the absence of a vaccine, information can be life-saving. We think that applies to all areas of our work because it is essential to helping involve the community in the decisions that are made that affect their lives.”

- Survey Participant

As highlighted throughout this report, community media organizations’ top needs include funding and staff. Participants reported that calls for grant applications, however, are typically geared toward specific projects. This means that awarded grant funds are restricted to covering the expenses of particular projects, rather than covering more general operational costs. Lack of access to unrestricted grant funds can be problematic for media organizations, like neighborhood newspapers and community radio stations, whose work involves ongoing local coverage, not intermittent projects.

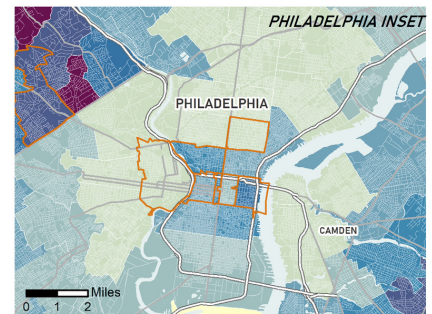
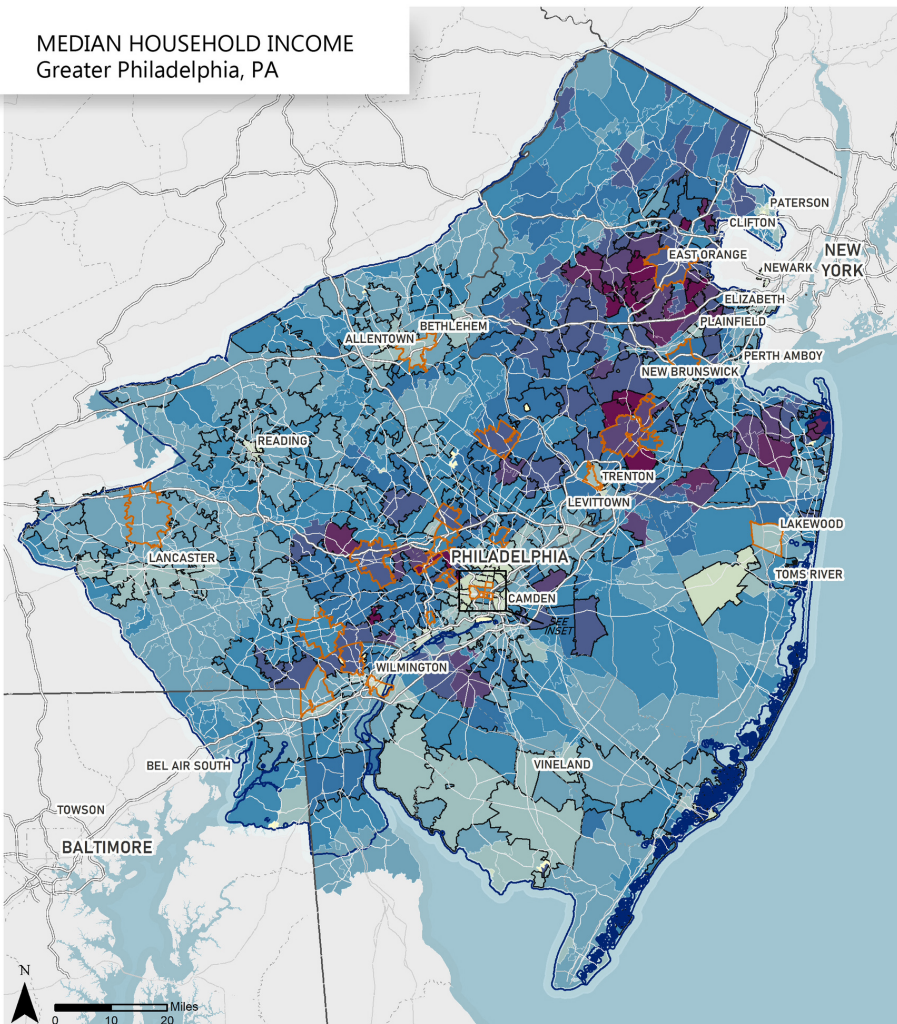
“Most funding sources will not fund general operations. They will only fund projects. Most will not fund existing projects. They want to fund something new. So in applying, you have to be really, really thoughtful, like, are we ready to take on yet another project? What happens if we have a successful project one year, and need funds to continue running it?”

- Louis Massiah, Scribe Video Center

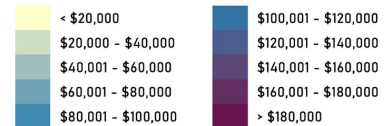
Economic Barriers to Funding

Drawing on data from Foundation Maps, we mapped total funding received by zip codes in the Greater Philadelphia Area from January 2016 through July 2020. Then, we compared this data with zip codes' median household income. We found that **more than 98% of all funding dollars** invested in named grant recipients went to **only 6.4% of the total catchment population**. The remaining 1.8% of funding dollars went to 51.1% of the catchment population, while more than 42% of the population did not receive any funding to named recipients. Further, we found that funding was concentrated in zip codes where the median household income is between \$50,000 and \$100,000. This suggests that funding distributions for information- and communication-related organizations and projects remain uneven. Many under-resourced neighborhoods across the region are lacking funding for projects that support community media and local information flows (See Appendix for additional data visualizations).

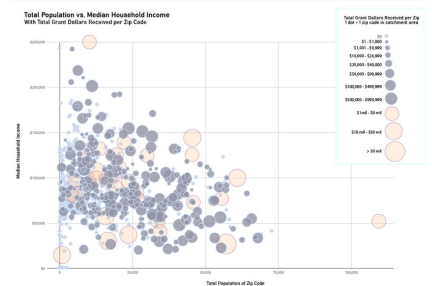
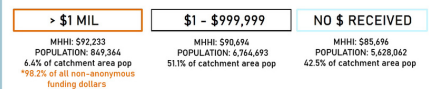
MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME
Greater Philadelphia, PA



MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME
by zip code



CATCHMENT AREA ZIP CODES
by grants received (aggregated, Jan. 2016 - July 2020)



DATA SOURCES: The Foundation Center, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2018 & 2019 Estimates

“Because of our ever-changing funding and projects, and the difficulty of getting funders to commit to us for an extended time (one to five years), we have a lot of shifts in where and what we are providing. Much of what we provide is unfortunately temporary. We are constantly applying for long-term funding to create sustained resources hubs in the neighborhood.”

- Survey Participant

Participants also reported that funding awards often came with onerous obligations to funding organizations, including lengthy applications, frequent progress reports, detailed financial accounting, and complex bureaucratic procedures. These responsibilities take away from media organizations’ staff time, which is already in short supply, and may not always align with organizations’ mission or priorities:

“Our biggest challenge with outside funding has been cumbersome reporting requirements that aren’t necessarily in alignment with our top priorities or how we assess or evaluate impact.”

“We don’t have the time, skills, and staff members to develop relationships with funders and apply for more funding to hire full-time staff members. It’s a vicious cycle.”

“English is not my team’s first language, so accessing grants, writing proposals, explaining goals is highly difficult.”

- Survey Participants

Lastly, the community media leaders who participated in this study described a problem of fit when it came to seeking out external funding. Survey and interview participants explained that their organizations’ missions often did not match funders’ definitions of their ideal applicants. Those whose work fell outside the traditional bounds of what qualifies as “journalism” or “art” reported that they especially struggled to find relevant grant opportunities:

“Our challenge is finding funding organizations that understand what community radio is and how it operates, because we don’t fall into a traditional model of how most radio stations function.”

- Tom Casetta, G-Town Radio

“Foundations don’t know where to place us: queer, immigrant, black and brown, gender non-conforming, artistic, nontraditional. Foundations have struggled with putting us in funding buckets. Our intersections have hurt us because foundations don’t know how to neatly label us.”

“As a social justice-oriented youth development organization, we do not fit ‘the box’ of typical organizations. This is not always easy to communicate to funders.”

“Sometimes, the philanthropic community wants us to define our work as ‘either/or,’ but most often, I’d describe it as ‘and.’ We are an arts *and* culture *and* education-based organization.”

- Survey Participants

Funders have the opportunity to invest in community media. The process should start with listening to community media leaders.

Study participants described a number of opportunities for funding organizations to better support the Philadelphia-area community media ecosystem, particularly as media-makers struggle to stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic. First, they called on funders to do more to give small or growing organizations a better chance at receiving grant awards. They also argued that funders should invest in organizations that center diverse voices, equity, and social justice.

“Foundations have historically funded organizations or initiatives that have gotten a great deal of funding in the past. This creates a vicious cycle that cuts out organizations like ours from being able to prove ourselves.”

“I want to see Philadelphia’s population directly represented in every single news outlet in Philadelphia. I suggest funding work that supports Black and Latinx journalists and other journalists of color to report on not just the Black and Latinx communities across the city, but on topics and issues like politics, health, education, and technology.”

- Survey Participants

Others suggested that funders reevaluate complex grant funding processes, as well as offer more resources with the flexibility to cover long-term projects like building organizational capacities and building relationships with partners.

“The greatest need is for flexible general operating dollars that we can deploy as needed in our organization. There is a somewhat unfortunate pattern of some journalism funding organizations really focusing only on funding projects. Funding projects is only really awesome if you can afford to keep the lights on and pay your people.”

- Maria Archangelo, Chalkbeat

“Multi-year support is crucial...It takes multiple years of support to see something develop and actually address whatever need it’s attempting to address.”

- Maori Karmael Holmes, BlackStar Projects

“There are unique opportunities to build the sector by gathering grantees into cohorts for learning, especially around exploring programming ideas and best practices and emergency management planning. Funders can help us gather together to build stronger programs.”

- Survey Participant

Above all else, participants argued that funders should follow their lead and allow community needs to drive decision-making around grants.

“Look within neighborhoods for the experts. Allow the final product to be flexible based on the needs of the neighborhood. Allow for discovery, flexibility, and neighbor-led initiative. As much as possible, ensure all funding gets spent within a neighborhood.”

“We would suggest robust funding for smaller organizations that have a proven track record of impact on the communities they serve. We would also suggest having members of the community join advisory committees to help steer decisions about funding initiatives.”

- Survey Participants

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we recommend key stakeholders in the Philadelphia-area community media ecosystem take the following actions:

FUNDERS



Make media top funding priorities. Media, communications, and information are vital to people’s personal, social, and economic wellbeing. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated that information flows through media and communications platforms are crucial to positive health outcomes. Community members cannot make informed decisions about the future of their families and their neighborhoods if they cannot access information relevant to their lives. Media are essential, and should be funded with the same urgency as top priorities like healthcare and education.

Fund organizations to do community media work, however they define it.

Philanthropic funding is often restricted to organizations and projects that fit funders’ definitions of the work at hand. Community media leaders have identified a sizable gap between their media work and funders’ understanding of media work. Funders should work with community media organizations to develop opportunities that open up access beyond traditional grant funding categories.

Develop more flexible funding opportunities and expand resource offerings.

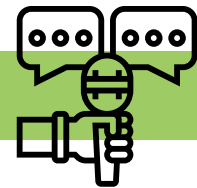
Now more than ever, community media organizations need the operational funds and resources to do capacity-building work. Grant funding opportunities, however, are often limited to particular projects or short timeframes and may come with burdensome bureaucratic reporting procedures. Community media organizations’ ability to sustain long-term community engagement depends upon access to consistent funding and staff. Philanthropic organizations are also in a position to build other developmental resources, like skill-sharing networks, databases, and resource libraries, that will further advance the Philadelphia-area’s community media ecosystem.

Center community members in decision-making. Fund community-based research to determine what types of media programming and resources constituents actually need. Empower community members to have a say in funding priorities, decisions, and impact assessments. Create responsive funding opportunities that allow underserved communities to tell their own stories and build their own information flows.

Create more reflexive, inclusive, and bold funding processes. People of color, poor people, women, and queer, trans, and nonbinary people are marginalized in predominantly white and male commercial media industries. Similar systemic barriers prevent marginalized media-makers from accessing philanthropic funding. Often, grant dollars are invested in already well-established organizations, who have the people power, know-how, finances, and track record to develop successful grant applications. Meanwhile, under-resourced community media struggle to secure funding, raising questions about inclusivity across the philanthropic landscape. We need bold new approaches to grant funding that incorporate critical reflexivity about who is being served and who is not and accept the risk that comes with investing in new voices.

Invest in community media infrastructure. Community media organizations cannot achieve their missions if their audiences cannot access their programming and services. The COVID-19 pandemic has only further underscored the need for stronger information and communications infrastructure across the Greater Philadelphia Area. Support efforts to increase broadband internet access, particularly in communities of color, who are disproportionately impacted by the digital divide.

COMMUNITY MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS



Create opportunities for mutual learning, collaboration, and coalition building. Overwhelmingly, our participants indicated that partnerships with other organizations were key to the successful pursuit of their organizations' goals. Approaching organizations with similar mission statements or target audiences as potential collaborators rather than competitors has the potential to strengthen the vitality of the Philadelphia-area community media ecosystem. Mapping your network of potential collaborators and conducting outreach work requires expending time and resources, but the return on investment can be invaluable.

Think creatively about community involvement. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced community media organizations to develop creative strategies for engaging their audiences while maintaining social distancing guidelines and grappling with an economic downturn. Community media and information flows are critical in a crisis situation, so it is more important than ever to innovate new ways to stay connected with audience members and to collect audience insights. Audience connection is also essential for creating and demonstrating impact, which can in turn offer a pathway to competitive funding applications.

Map your true assets. Community media organizations need increased staffing and funding. In the absence of these resources, high-impact organizations have leaned into other assets, including community members' expertise and interests, free or low-cost communication channels, and peer knowledge exchange networks. Taking inventory of your community assets may present new opportunities for mission fulfillment, even as other organizational capacities remain low.

AUDIENCE AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS



Find out who is making media for your community. Community media organizations offer important opportunities for expression, connection, and information. Take time to investigate who is making media for your community. If no one is, consider whether your community would benefit from expanded media coverage and access. What are your community's information and communication needs? Are they being met? How might your community work together to strengthen local information flows? As the participants in our study made clear, community media work starts with community members.

Seek out opportunities to support community media organizations.

Community media organizations rely heavily on outside funding, including funding from individual donors. If you are able, consider donating to community media. You can also support community media organizations by consuming and contributing to the content they produce, by volunteering to support events and programming, by amplifying their work within your own social networks, and more.

Call on government and industry leaders to strengthen communication infrastructure in the region.

The Greater Philadelphia Area continues to struggle with communication infrastructure, especially broadband internet access and adoption. Community media organizations simply cannot fulfill their missions unless they can connect online with the communities they seek to serve. This has only become more apparent under social distancing guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic. Join community media organizations in supporting media policy reforms that would make stable broadband internet access more affordable across the region.

References and Resources

References

Floberg, D. (2018, December 13). The racial digital divide persists. *Free Press*. Retrieved from <https://www.freepress.net/our-response/expert-analysis/insights-opinions/racial-digital-divide-persists>.

Hetrick, C., & Purcell, D. (2020, 3 April). Thousands of Philly students are stuck at home without internet after coronavirus closed schools. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Retrieved from <https://www.inquirer.com/education/coronavirus-students-digital-divide-philadelphia-comcast-20200403.html>.

Resources for Learning More

Annenberg Inclusion Initiative. (2021). Research areas and reports. *USC Annenberg*. Retrieved from <https://annenberg.usc.edu/research/aii#research-areas-and-reports>.

Center for Cooperative Media. (2021). Resources and tools. Retrieved from <https://centerforcooperativemedia.org/resources/>.

Creech, B., & Bodle, R. (2020). The video from journalism's post-crisis generation: Navigating precarity and opportunity in Philadelphia and Cincinnati [White paper]. Media, Inequality, Change Center. Retrieved from https://mic.asc.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Creech-Bodle_11.pdf.

Listening Post Collective. (2021). Toolbox. Retrieved from <https://www.listeningpostcollective.org/toolbox>.

Media, Inequality, and Change Center. (2020). Philadelphia media activism guide [White Paper]. Retrieved from <https://mic.asc.upenn.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Philly-Media-Activism-Guide-2019.pdf>.

Movement Alliance Project. (2021). Programs. Retrieved from <https://movementalliance.org/programs/>.

Stonbely, S., & Advincula, A. (2019). The state of ethnic and community media in New Jersey [White paper]. Center for Cooperative Media. Retrieved from <https://centerforcooperativemedia.org/research/state-of-nj-ethnic-community-media/>.

Wenzel, A. (2020). *Community-centered journalism: Engaging people, exploring solutions, and building trust*. University of Illinois Press.

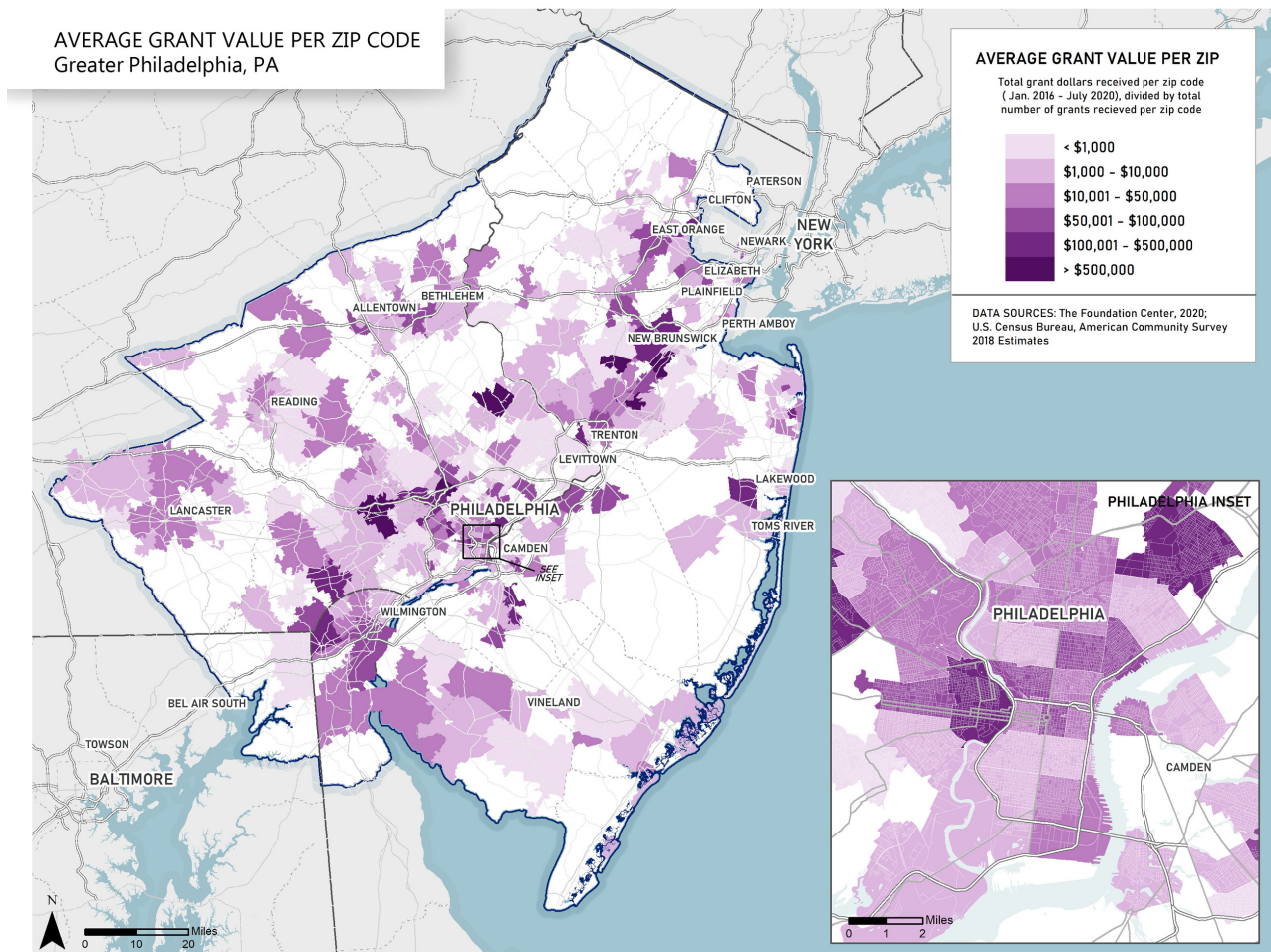
Appendix: Participating Organizations

Leaders from the organizations listed below participated in the survey and interview portions of this study.

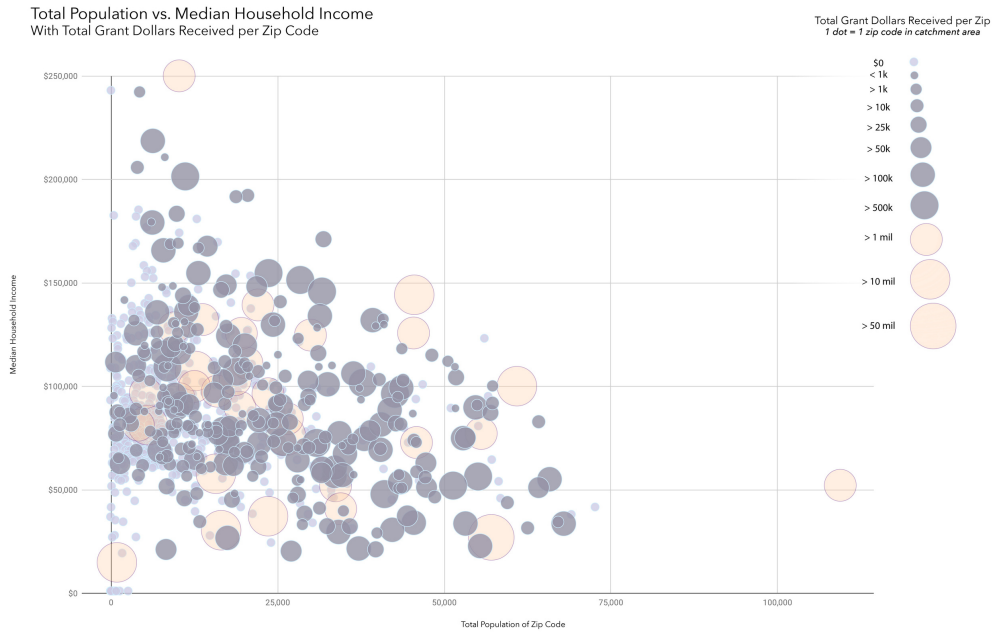
- African American Museum in Philadelphia (AAMP)
- Amber Arts and Design
- Big Picture Alliance
- Black Quantum Futurism/The AfroFuturist Affair
- BlackStar Projects
- Centro de Cultura, Arte, Trabajo y Educación (CCATE)
- Chalkbeat
- cinÉSPEAK
- City of Philadelphia's Digital Literacy Alliance
- Climate Central
- CMPRadio.net
- Digital Literacy Alliance
- Doc Society Inc.
- DosPuntos Radio
- First Person Arts
- Free Press
- FunTimes Magazine LLC
- Germantown Info Hub
- Grid Magazine
- G-Town Radio: The Sound from Germantown
- Healthy NewsWorks
- Heaux History Project
- HipCinema Labs
- Institute for the Development of Education in the Arts (IDEA)
- Kensington Voice
- Lehigh Valley Public Media
- The Lenfest Institute
- Lil Filmmakers Inc.
- Love Now Media
- Media, Inequality, and Change Center
- Monument Lab
- Movement Alliance Project
- The Nubian News
- Philadelphia Latino Film Festival
- Philadelphia Schools Television (PSTV)
- Philadelphia Tribune
- Philadelphia Weekly
- Philadelphia Young Playwrights
- Philatinos Media
- Philly Community Access Media (PhillyCAM)
- Prometheus Radio Project
- Science Leadership Academy's CTE Digital Video Program
- Scoop USA Media
- Scribe Video Center
- Sisters in Film and Television
- Taller Puertorriqueño
- Theatre in the X
- Uptown Entertainment and Development Corporation
- University Community Collaborative
- WBGO Public Radio
- WHY Y Philadelphia
- YallaPunk

Appendix: Additional Data Visualizations

Using the Foundation Center's Foundation Maps Database, we collected information on philanthropic funding invested in Philadelphia-area information and communication projects and organizations between 2016 and 2020. The visualizations in this appendix offer additional context for our findings.



This map illustrates the average value of grants received per zip code within the catchment area. The scatter plot on the following page suggests that philanthropic funding in the areas of media, communication, and information has been concentrated in neighborhoods with middle- to upper-income families.



The Greater Philadelphia Area's community media ecosystem relies heavily on philanthropic funding. However, we found that the vast majority of grant funds have gone to a small proportion of the region.

