



NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
FAMILY PHILANTHROPY

# SPLENDID LEGACY

CREATING AND RE-CREATING

YOUR FAMILY FOUNDATION



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# COMMUNICATING IN A CONNECTED, MEDIA-DRIVEN WORLD

BY NINA SACHDEV HOFFMANN AND VINCENT STEHLE

## Introduction

Whatever purpose you may choose for your foundation — improving education, advancing science, preserving the environment, or any other mission — media and communications activities can amplify your message and accelerate philanthropic impact. In today’s digitally connected world, media and communications offer powerful tools to help tell your story and raise awareness about your mission. But, as these tools have grown more varied and complex, it’s become more important for family foundations to be deliberate and strategic in their use.

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COMMUNICATING IN A CONNECTED, MEDIA-DRIVEN WORLD

For most, the starting point is to create a communications strategy that will effectively convey the foundation’s purpose and activities. Beyond this, foundations may also seek to bring greater attention to their grantees, through coordinated communications efforts. In addition, foundations are increasingly engaged

in grantmaking to support media activities, including journalism, documentary film, and social media.

And there are a number of good reasons for you to publicize the work of your foundation—and its grantees. Family foundations use communications to:

- Expand the base of potential charitable partners (especially grantees), thus helping to find nonprofit organizations that are best suited to carrying out the foundation’s mission;
- Inform the community — including other grantmakers — and generate community and

- additional financial support for initiatives;
- Create a supportive environment for grantees;
- Spread the results of grantees' work to a larger audience; and
- Support media activities that advance philanthropic missions.

Rapid improvements in information technology have brought an endless array of communications capabilities to your desktop — and especially to the mobile device in your pocket. A growing number of family foundations now routinely use email, websites, social media, newsletters, and other techniques to communicate with one another, keep family and trustees up to date, and disseminate information to the public. In addition, foundations are becoming more sophisticated in media relations, publishing, and digital communications. As a result, you have access to many well-established practices and resources to help you choose the proper communications strategy. Even the smallest foundations now have the opportunity to use myriad techniques and channels to provide information, reinforce communications efforts of grantees, and support media activities.

At the same time, information resources available to grantseekers and others researching foundation activity have expanded exponentially in the past decade. The Foundation Center and its more than 450 associated research libraries, operating throughout the country and online, provide information on tens of thousands of foundations. And Guidestar, an online search service run by Philanthropic Research Inc., seeks to publish financial and program information about all charities and foundations.

The Internet is a treasure trove of information about foundations that is easily accessible to grantseekers, journalists, and so many others. As such, it is now much harder for a foundation to operate in obscurity. In fact, instead of focusing on how to remain in the shadows, foundations can and should embrace some level of transparency knowing that access to information is greater than ever before. There is no way to escape the fact that an increasingly connected, curious public wants to know how and why foundations spend their resources the way they do.

At a minimum, you have a legal obligation to provide basic financial details when your foundation receives inquiries from the public, as part of the bargain of not paying taxes. Likewise, most grantmakers recognize a basic responsibility to provide information about eligibility to prospective grant applications. But at a more strategic level, foundations now understand that they can only achieve their larger objectives if they engage in some form of communications.

This chapter explores communications from two perspectives. One, the various ways that foundations can communicate their own message in an increasingly transparent and digital environment, and second, how they can support media activities that will advance and promote their philanthropic missions. Though media has long been used a tool for social change, it is becoming increasingly more central to the work of foundations that are trying to move the needle on important issues.

This chapter addresses three subjects:

- Thinking about transparency and the family;
- Developing a communications strategy; and
- Supporting media that matters.

**FIGURE 1: Ideas on Communications for the New or Small Family Foundation**

- Consider how communications can facilitate your own internal operations, such as communication among trustees via email or a collaborative workspace, a “family” page on a website (likely password-protected), and communications with contractors and advisors.
- Develop a strategy for disseminating the important messages found in your mission statement, grant guidelines, and anything else you want to communicate to a larger audience: issue an announcement via social media, a press release or brochure; produce videos for YouTube or Vimeo; create a listserv for grantees; write blog posts for your website or the website of a philanthropy network interested in your work.
- Develop an annual reporting mechanism that complements your Form 990-PF, one that’s right for your family foundation style. For example, you can send a PDF of the annual report to those you hope to involve or to those who request information. Many foundations are also choosing to produce annual reports exclusively on their websites.
- Talk with other founders and trustees in your community who share funding interests, and ask for ideas on how to get the word out.
- If you do not accept unsolicited proposals, say so. Many family foundations begin by funding organizations they know, while researching new ones.

Think about how communications can help your grantees add “bang to your grant dollars.” Draft procedures for and standard language on how nonprofit organizations can and cannot use your foundation name and logo in their communications.

- Develop a strategy for responding to press inquiries before it’s an issue.
- Consider the advantage of hiring a communications advisor as an ad hoc or retained consultant or firm. Such a professional can help you during the startup phase and be available later, as needed.

## Thinking about Privacy and the Family in an Era of Transparency

*“Transparency is, in a word, openness. A foundation that operates transparently provides information in an open, accessible, and timely manner.”*

— GlassPockets

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At the outset, it’s important to acknowledge the common urge to operate anonymously. There are several good reasons why donors might seek to operate foundations in anonymity. Many founders and their families are concerned about privacy. But gone are the days when foundations might seek to operate under a cloak of secrecy.

For one, giving anonymously is not really an option when a donor decides to establish a private foundation under U.S. tax law. By virtue of the tax benefits extended by the government, foundations have an obligation to operate for public purposes and to make regular reports to the public. Private foundations

have long been required to provide information about their operations, especially since 1969, when a major overhaul of tax laws greatly increased formal scrutiny of foundation affairs.

And in the age of social media, where every individual and organization is expected to have a public profile, it is incumbent upon your foundation to adopt a communications strategy that reflects its mission and objectives. As philanthropy works to address the most pressing issues of our time, sharing information that is both useful to foundations and grantees — goals, strategies, and processes — has become a critical factor in achieving social change.

## The Benefits of Transparency

Grantmakers often think of transparency in terms of how it benefits grantseekers and external audiences, pointing to how transparency serves to strengthen credibility, build public trust, and improve relations with grantees and other stakeholders. However, the value of increased foundation transparency may be even greater for grantmaking professionals themselves, as transparency also reduces duplication of effort, facilitates greater collaboration, and cultivates a community of shared learning and best practices.

*Source: GlassPockets*

The Barr Foundation stands out as an example of a foundation successfully navigating the shift from anonymity to transparency. Now a champion of openness, both for its own activities and for the field as whole, the Boston-based foundation certainly did not start out that way.

“It was like a secret society with a secret handshake, and you had to ask to be invited to click your heels together three times and you might get a grant,” said Joyce Linehan, chief of policy for the city of Boston.

Then, the once famously secret foundation decided for the first time to publicize one of its gifts, \$50 million to various organizations fighting climate change. Since then, under the leadership of Jim Canales, the Barr Foundation has publicized several years of tax returns and has instituted a publicly searchable database of its grants. That growing openness helped the foundation position itself as more than just a grantmaker, but a major, influential player in shaping local policy.

## Transparency Resources

Glasspockets, a service of the Foundation Center, seeks to advance transparency throughout the field of philanthropy. Go to [glasspockets.org](http://glasspockets.org) to learn more about the benefits of openness and how you can achieve transparency within your own organization.

With this new baseline of transparency and openness in mind, the question is no longer whether to communicate your foundation’s activities; rather, it is a question of who will do it, how, and on what platforms.

## Developing a Communications Strategy

Communications has always occupied a large part of American life. But in the last decade or so we have entered into a new era of expression. Our use of computers, tablets, smartphones and other gadgets has dramatically accelerated, keeping us in a constant state of connectedness and information-sharing. Because of this, foundations agree that communications efforts are central — and essential — to their philanthropic work.

If you are thinking of setting up a foundation today, you'll need to consider how you will communicate its activities as a means to achieve its stated goals and objectives. There are many benefits to getting into the regular practice of conveying that knowledge to a wider audience.

In an influential Harvard Business Review article, Michael Porter and Mark Kramer argue that foundations can only justify their existence if they do more than merely transfer money. Foundations create value in four ways, according to Kramer and Porter, founders of FSG, a consulting firm for leaders trying to tackle social change.

In order of increasing impact, foundations add value beyond their financial contributions by:

- **Selecting the best grantees.** Like investment advisers, foundations channel resources to their most productive uses by studying a range of organizations and

selecting the groups that are most effective.

- **Signaling other funders.** Foundations can attract additional resources from other funders who follow their lead when they can show that their grantees are especially effective.
- **Improving the performance of grant recipients.** Grant-makers greatly increase their impact when they offer more than financial support, providing management assistance, advice, and access to networks of funders and other peers.
- **Advancing the state of knowledge and practice.** Foundations produce the greatest value to society when they promote research and support projects that seek to produce increasingly effective responses to social problems.

The common thread in each of these approaches is that each of them requires foundations to communicate what they are doing to a broader

audience, whether that means potential grantees, others working in a particular field, policymakers, or the public.

Foundations communicate in many ways and for many reasons, but it can be boiled down to three basic categories of activity:

- **Efforts to publicize their own work and the work of their grantees.** Foundations routinely publish annual reports and press releases, commission research papers, disseminate information via social media platforms, and communicate with journalists and the public about grants, mission objectives, and an array of other foundation activities.
- **Support for communications projects of grant recipients.** Foundations frequently pay for the publishing, media relations, and advocacy activities of nonprofits, in many cases as part of grant support.
- **Efforts to sustain and create nonprofit media programs and other public interest media activities.** Philanthropy is increasingly backing groups like public television, public radio, documentary filmmakers, local journalism organizations and a range of other nonprofit media projects.

## Using pop culture to send your message

TV, film and social media can be powerful drivers of social change because well-told stories have the ability to resonate with a variety of audiences. AndACTION, a pop-culture hub supported by a number of influential foundations, is channeling this power by giving social-change organizations a heads-up on film and TV shows in production related to their causes. This gives organizations more time to develop effective campaigns designed to drive action and spur change. Go to [andaction.org](http://andaction.org) to learn more.

### Learning About Communications Basics

Knowledge of the basic tools of foundation communications will be useful to you. What you choose to employ will depend on your objectives, but this primer will provide a basic menu from which to choose.

### Understanding the IRS Form 990-PF

Every private foundation must complete and file a federal informational tax return, Form 990-PF. Not only must you file the form with the federal government, you must also make it available to members of the public upon request. Foundations have long had to file 990 forms, but over the past several years, the federal government has tightened its rules requiring foundations to make their reports more readily available to the public. Even without the IRS's new rules, however, many foundations are already publishing their 990 forms online as part of a larger movement toward greater transparency. Knowing that, it's important that you take the time to accurately complete your 990s in order to avoid any information being misconstrued and then publicized.

Guidestar ([guidestar.org](http://guidestar.org)), a website dedicated to advancing transparency in philanthropy, publishes financial information for every single IRS-registered nonprofit organization. You may want to use its resources to stay up to date about accurate reporting.

Given that your financial information is going to be made public to a wide audience, you want to inform

the public about your foundation by using one or more of the following simple methods. After all, while your Form 990 contains important information about your foundation, (and, according to the Urban Institute, it's the most commonly used data source about nonprofits), it certainly does not tell the full story of your grantmaking.

## Making your Form 990-PF public and available

According to federal rules, your foundation must:

- File its Form 990-PF with the IRS by the 15th of the 5th month after the close of the foundation's fiscal year
- Make copies of the form available for public inspection; and
- Provide copies of forms for the past three years to anyone who asks for them. (IMPORTANT NOTE: If the foundation makes the form widely available, on its website for example, it need not respond to individual inquiries for copies.)

## Publishing an Annual Report

Annual reports, which are typically designed to be comprehensive accountings of an organization's activities and financial performance throughout the preceding year, are not legally required. But as the field shifts toward more transparency, annual reports have become a routine practice for many foundations. Annual reports not only help foundations communicate with their stakeholders and supporters, they also help reach new audiences.

The content of annual reports varies depending on the needs of the foundation, but generally they include:

- Introductory essay(s) by governing board members, usually the chairperson, or by lead staff members, if there are any.
- Detailed or summary descriptions of each of the grants made during the year under review and, more importantly, what those activities accomplished.
- A basic financial statement, accounting for assets and liabilities, grant payments, administrative expenses, and other financial activity.
- Grant guidelines.

Family foundation annual reports reflect the full range of publishing options, which vary from high-quality glossy print publications to all-digital editions that employ the use of audio, eye-catching photography and video rather than text-heavy articles, and everything in between.

Many foundations still publish full-color annual reports that are then available in PDF format online.

The Hall Family Foundation ([hallfamilyfoundation.org](http://hallfamilyfoundation.org)) in Missouri employs this strategy well. But others are taking a more unique, interactive approach to telling their stories. The Arkansas-based Walton Family Foundation ([waltonfamilyfoundation.org](http://waltonfamilyfoundation.org)) publishes its annual report on a special section of its website. With a simple, easy-to-follow design, the reader seamlessly scrolls down from the introduction to the executive director's message, then to the financials and, lastly, detailed grant activities.

*“Though transparency should be a guiding principle, it's important to convey information in a way that makes sense—especially when presenting financial information. Remember, your report isn't written for an audience of accountants.”*

*— The Chronicle of Philanthropy*

## An Innovative Approach

The Rasmuson Foundation in Anchorage, Alaska, uses personal, web-based storytelling to communicate its work—and its impact—to the public. The foundation first commissioned a series called “Glimpses of Who We Are,” which features artists sharing stories about what the work of the foundation’s grantees meant to them personally. The foundation, recognizing the success of that form of communication, then launched the next iteration of that series: video storytelling.

## Contents of an Annual Report

The contents of your annual report are entirely up to you: no law or regulation requires you to file one. Annual reports typically contain:

- Name and location of the foundation, names of officers and trustees, and name of contact person, and ways to reach him or her (telephone, mailing address, and email address);
- History of the foundation and biographical material about the founder;
- Mission statement and a report of the past year on grantmaking activities undertaken to carry out the mission (grantees and grant amounts are often given);
- Vignettes or longer stories about grantee activities;
- Grant application guidelines, application submission procedures, and grantmaking decision cycles by the trustees;
- Financial statements for the past year; and
- An outlook section previewing the year to come.

## Publishing Grant Guidelines

Though many foundations publish their grant guidelines in their annual reports, many foundations also publish their grant guidelines in a variety of ways for wider distribution to potential grant applicants. Those distribution channels may now include any number of social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Instagram.

You might worry that your foundation will be overwhelmed by proposals, but it’s a rare complaint that a foundation has received too many good proposals. In any event, broadly publicizing what a foundation will support or its geographic restrictions also helps to limit the number of applications, by showing clearly what will fall outside a foundation’s purpose. In fact, publishing your grant guidelines on social media gives you a different view of the process, allowing you to see who’s engaging with your content and giving you the opportunity to answer questions in real time. Publishing your guidelines via social media can also generate more interest and spur competition — as well as collaboration — among potential grantees.

## When Grant Announcements Go Viral

In June 2016, the MacArthur Foundation announced a competition called 100&Change that seeks to award a \$100 million grant to a proposal that addresses one critical problem affecting our world today. The foundation generated quite a bit of buzz from potential grantees on social media by creating a sense of excitement about the grant's possibilities. The foundation used its Twitter account to provide a daily countdown to its deadline, and to link to its grant guidelines and FAQs.



## Press Releases

Press releases are simple, effective ways to inform the press and others about an upcoming event or activity. You may wish to issue press releases concerning major grants by your foundation, but it is more common for the recipient organization to draft a press release describing the project and acknowledging supporters as part of the statement. Either way, you should establish a policy about press releases, including who will write them, who will handle phone calls and emails asking for more information, and who will work with beneficiaries to ensure they have the details they need for their own announcements.

With changes in the way news is now distributed, the role of the press release has shifted, and may or may not be the cornerstone of your public-relations strategy. Organizations used to issue press releases to alert the media of their activities and, in turn, the media would write about them. Today, your foundation can be just as much of a publisher as any other media outlet, and you may find that more of your foundation's announcements can be disseminated through social media channels instead of emailed press releases. Further, you may wish to reserve a section of your website devoted to news releases.

This provides interested parties an easy way to get a sense of your foundation's accomplishments throughout the years.

Many press releases being written today include ready-made content with the idea that recipients will easily share information that they themselves don't have to write. Including sample tweets and Facebook posts with relevant links in your press releases can make sharing your foundation's activities that much easier, not to mention it gives you more control over your own messaging.

## Basic Contents of a Press Release

- Date of release and when the media can publish the information;
- Name, telephone number, and email of person for further contact and information;
- Headline that presents the key message;
- Lead paragraph that states the top news elements (the what, where, when, and who);
- Second paragraph that presents the why and how;
- Third paragraph with further details;
- Fourth paragraph with a quote from the founder, a trustee, or other person in authority;
- Additional details, such as the foundation's boilerplate message or mission statement;
- Links to relevant content such as blog posts or news articles for people to learn more;
- Sample social media content such as ready-to-post Tweets or Facebook posts that allows your audience to share the information more easily;
- No longer than 400 words.

## Example of Web-based Press Release

Press Release Announces Grants to Summer Youth Programs

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

OUR WORK | BLOG | ABOUT US | CONTACT US  
KIDS | FAMILIES | COMMUNITIES | LEADERS

BLOG

### The Foundation Awards Over \$850,000 in Grants to Summer Programs for Baltimore Kids and Youth

POSTED MARCH 29, 2016, BY THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

SHARE VIA: [G+](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#)

Above Photo Credit: Bessie Wright/Overhead

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has awarded grants to 43 local nonprofits through its Baltimore Direct Services Grants (BDSG) program, amounting to a combined \$850,000 that will support summer activities and programs for hundreds of Baltimore City's young people.

The Foundation's awards are among a total of \$3 million in grants from several of the city's charitable organizations, all geared toward funding high-quality summer programs that serve city

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## Communicating in Today's Digital World

Not having the time or the extra hands to handle communications work used to be the main reason most foundations did not publish information about their activities. Today, anyone with a computer, tablet, or mobile device can easily share information across a variety of platforms. And with the vast majority of the population now online—close to nine out of 10 Americans (87 percent) use the internet according to the Pew Research Center—now is the time to embrace a digital communications strategy.

The question is: Do you or someone in your family have the basic skills to communicate your foundation's messages effectively? If so, you should consider assigning a board member or a staff member to be the principal official handling all matters of communications.

If you think you need help with determining what exactly you want to communicate and how you want to do it, you may also wish to hire a public relations or communications consultant. They can help with ad hoc tasks such as handling your social media presence, preparing an annual report, generating press releases, developing content, or any other communications task. On a more strategic level, a communications professional can help you implement a more cohesive strategy that reflects your foundation's mission and goals.

Your digital communications strategy can include all of the following:

### 1. A website

With all the choices for communicating to the public, it's no longer necessary for your website to be the sole centerpiece of your digital communications strategy. Many foundations engage with audiences in real time over social media, and designate their website as a destination to learn more about the history, mission, and objectives of their organization. On the other hand, websites are also more interactive than ever before, showcasing innovative storytelling through video, animation, and more.

The first step is to decide what you want to do with your website. Do you want to be a content publisher, curating relevant news in your field or writing blog posts about the work of your grantees? Or do you want to set up your website as more of a resource for grantees and family members?

A number of foundations draw visitors to their websites by featuring original, high-quality content in the form of blog postings—many of which are written by the foundation leaders themselves. Ruth Ann Harnisch, founder and president of the Harnisch Foundation in New York, has taken the lead on communicating her foundation's objectives. On her blog, "Ruth Ann Writes," she shares her insights, her personal opinions, and everything in between.

And Grant Oliphant, president of the Heinz Endowments in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, took to his foundation's blog to issue several powerful statements after a string of police-involved shootings across America. "In my view of the field and institution I am privileged to serve, we have a special responsibility in our work and in our roles sometimes simply to bear witness," he wrote.



## 2. A newsletter

Newsletters can give audiences a snapshot of your foundation's recent work. You may choose to send a monthly or quarterly newsletter, depending on how much you have to report to your key stakeholders. With new material being published every day on the Internet, it's easy to miss a story. Newsletters allow you to repackage your content and present it in an easily digestible format. MailChimp and Constant Contact are two popular, cost-effective newsletter platforms that allow you to track helpful analytics like showing who opened your email, which links were most clicked, who unsubscribed from your list, and more.

## 3. A social media presence

Social media is powerful. It is one of the most effective ways to communicate with your core audience, attract new grantees and gain the attention of influencers who could help spread your mission. If you have a website with a robust selection of content, you can use social media to drive website traffic and, ultimately, elevate the importance of your work.

If you're thinking about establishing a social media presence, here are some considerations:

1. Determine what you want to accomplish by being on social media. Are you trying to gain a wider audience for your content? Do you want to reach potential influencers who can help carry your message? Do you want to engage in real-time conversations? A successful social media presence usually incorporates all three of these elements.
2. Establish what the voice of the foundation will be. If you hire a communications director or a contractor from an outside firm, that person needs to be able to tell your story in a way that represents your mission and your values.
3. Evaluate your staff's skill set and determine who will handle your social media. Can that person communicate about your foundation's work in short, interesting snippets that people will want to click and share?
4. Determine how much time you want to devote to social media. Maintaining these channels is a weekly, if not daily, responsibility.

Popular social media platforms:

**Twitter:** Transforming the way we communicate in real time, this free social networking platform allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets that are limited to 140 characters. Twitter allows you to take part in conversations happening all around the world, and the platform remains our best indicator of what's happening when and where.

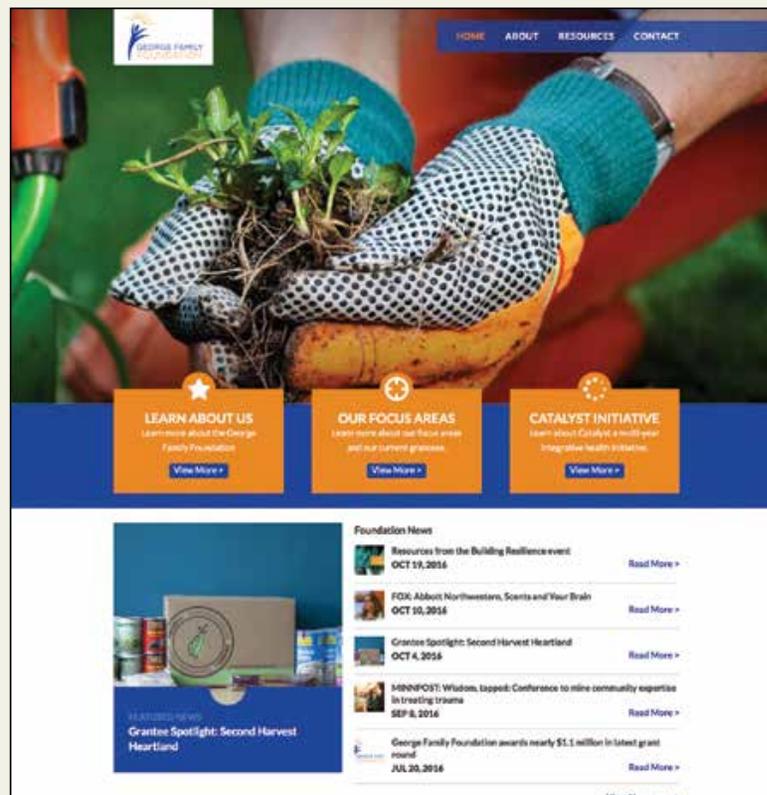
**Facebook:** Facebook remains an excellent tool for communicating your foundation's message and your grantees' activities to a wide audience. With no limits on characters, Facebook posts can include photos, videos, links and more. Some foundations, like the Rockefeller Foundation, use Facebook to showcase documentaries or short video clips that are easily shareable.

**Instagram.** There are so many ways to tell your story, and they don't all need to be through words. If you're interested in bringing the work of your foundation and your grantees to life, consider hiring a photographer/videographer to capture stunning images of your foundation's efforts in action. One example of a foundation using Instagram with great success is the Open Society Foundations. Its

Instagram feed features documentary photographers across the globe who feature a different human rights issue each week.

**LinkedIn:** If you are looking to connect with professionals who work in a certain industry — or expand your thought leadership around a specific topic — LinkedIn offers a number of advantages. Unlike many other social networking sites, LinkedIn is organized around people’s professional activities — and it offers a serious platform for discussing serious ideas. A number of foundation leaders use LinkedIn’s blogging platform to publish their writings and reach new audiences. LinkedIn also includes a number of robust groups that include focused conversations about specific topics, including NCFP’s Family Philanthropy Network.

## Example of a Website Homepage



## Finding Communications Resources

Foundations have a number of resources to help them launch communications activities. The first stop for guidance is the Communications Network, a Washington, D.C.-based affinity group (an organization of foundations with similar interests), whose express purpose is to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of communications in philanthropy;
- Expand and enhance the fields' communications capacities; and
- Provide resources to foundations and their grantees to help them make the most of that capacity.

The Communications Network carries out its goals by publishing guides, conducting workshops, and offering technical assistance and a wide range of other services, mainly for foundation trustees and staff. Go to [comnetwork.org](http://comnetwork.org) to learn more about this valuable group.

The Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR), published by the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society at Stanford University, is a powerful resource for finding the latest research and practice-based knowledge on a range of topics such as communications strategies for maximizing impact and more. Go to [ssir.org](http://ssir.org) to learn more.

Working Narratives is a group that focuses on the importance of storytelling for social change. The organization provides training in:

- How to tell effective stories;
- Technology to produce and disseminate those stories;
- Production of compelling stories to serve as model projects for the grassroots; and
- Networking to build power in and among social justice individuals and groups that use narrative forms.

Download its “Storytelling for Social Change Guide” by Paul VanDeCarr to learn more about telling stories across a variety of platforms for various audiences. Go to [workingnarratives.org](http://workingnarratives.org) to learn more.



# Supporting Media That Matters

Foundations are in the business of making the world a better place. Preserving the environment, reducing violence, and improving education are a few examples among the many philanthropic objectives that foundations may pursue. But are we applying ourselves as effectively as we might?

In every case, popular debate shapes the public policies that will determine whether or not we make progress on these big issues. Certainly, foundation-funded basic research, direct service, and demonstration projects can be building blocks in making the case for policies that improve communities and advance the public interest. But ultimately, success in the policy arena depends to some degree on media and communications. And while it's true that foundations already support a broad array of media activities, grantmakers could be—and should be—investing far more resources into strategies that inform and persuade. There's no question that philanthropy can support independent expression that carries out the mission of the organization.

Take, for example, the issue of climate change. Over the past decade, while scientists have been sounding increasingly frantic alarms that we are nearing a point of no return in climate change, public opinion support for those views has declined.

According to the Pew Research Center, there's a big gap between what scientists believe and what the general public believes — 87 percent of scientists say that climate change is occurring because of human activity, while only 50 percent of the general population believes that humans are causing climate change.

And the sharp decline in reporting on these issues and more that resulted from the collapse of the newspaper industry and traditional media as a whole is not helping. In response to the lack of environmental coverage, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund helped to establish a new independent journalism initiative called InsideClimate News to ensure that there would be a watchdog keeping tabs on the extractive industries. The news organization has had a huge impact on the energy industry, winning a coveted Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of a massive oil spill into the Kalamazoo River.

In many other areas, media makers and the foundations that support them are seeing breakthroughs on important issues where there is competent and sustained media attention.

The California Endowment, for example, commissioned a recent report, called *Communications Strategies that Fast Track Policy Change*. In case studies covering documentary film, journalism initiatives, and strategic communications projects, the Fast Track report lays out 10 key elements of success. Among them:

- **Solutions:** The majority of these initiatives contained messages not just about the problem, but about a range of potential solutions.
  - **Policymakers:** Identifying policymakers explicitly as a target audience and devoting appropriate resources to outreach is key. One of the remarkable examples of this approach is the documentary film *The Invisible War*, which depicts the epidemic of rape in the military. Reaching high-ranking American military leaders resulted in dramatic policy changes.
  - **Repetition:** The continuity of coverage that comes from a journalistic series on a topic or a paid advertising campaign results in a multiplier effect on awareness building.
- **Humanity:** Engaging community voices can be a powerful way to give an issue a human face.

Support for media activities can be broken into three major categories:

1. **Journalism.** For many years, foundations have supported independent nonprofit journalism organizations like the Center for Public Integrity, the Center for Investigative Reporting and the Fund for National Progress (Mother Jones). In recent years, many nonprofit news organizations have sprung up, in large part responding to the decline of the newspaper industry.
2. **Documentary film.** Foundations have long supported the work of documentary filmmakers. The breadth and depth of foundation support for film has expanded to a point where some filmmakers regard the current era as a golden age for documentary films.
3. **Nonprofit media activities.** Increasingly, nonprofit organizations are themselves taking on media activities by publishing directly to their audiences. With the help of the Ford Foundation, the ACLU of Michigan hired its

first investigative reporter to look into the emergency manager law in Michigan. What the organization uncovered was a poisoned water supply in the city of Flint and a massive government scheme to cover it up.

### Mapping the field of media and philanthropy

Media is one of the most powerful tools for social change, and philanthropy is using media to address pressing global challenges in remarkable and myriad ways. And today, the term “media” now means so much more than just journalism and newspapers. It encompasses a vast array of activities from developing mobile phone apps to launching advocacy campaigns to strengthening the policies and infrastructures involved in media creation, transmission and access.

The field of media and philanthropy is growing rapidly, and it now extends beyond activities tracked by previous research. New data show that in 2009, U.S.-based funders made \$921 million in media grants, but in 2013, funding topped \$1.2 billion—an increase of over \$315 million.

With that broad framework in mind, Media Impact Funders—a growing network of funders using media and tech to address social issues head-on—has released a comprehensive media grants data mapping tool, Foundation Maps for Media Funding. The tool allows users to dig deep into the numbers, networks and trends surrounding media and philanthropy.

Foundation Maps for Media Funding gives users:

- Grants data from 2009 to present, with most complete data through 2013;
- Data with a more global reach;
- Downloadable information and charts;
- Details on types of grantmakers and grants, including corporate giving and program-related investments; and
- A powerful “Constellation” feature that highlights relationships between funders, grantees and grants.

Benefits for family foundations:

- Understand who is funding what, where and how much, and how your organization fits into the big picture;
- Be more strategic in decision making, planning and evaluation;
- Reduce duplication of effort and foster successful collaborations among other funders with shared goals;
- Facilitate effective partnerships with grantees and other foundations; and
- Help staff get up to speed on the field, relationships, and the work of peer, regional and local institutions.

**Go to [mediainpactfunders.org](http://mediainpactfunders.org) to learn more.**

## A Closer Look: Journalism

The data we have on U.S. funding for journalism show significant growth since 2009, when totals were \$162 million, including \$52 million for the Newseum in Washington, D.C. A spike in the number of grants and overall funding in 2011 shows the philanthropic response to the financial woes plaguing traditional media companies, when total journalism grants from U.S. funders reached \$223 million. However, these figures also include \$80 million in funding from only two grants that year: \$30 million for the Newseum and \$50 million for the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. In recent years, funding has decreased slightly from that high point and the latest trends available from 2013 show funding levels at \$189 million.

*Source: Foundation Maps for Media Funding: Introducing a New Tool for Unlocking the Power of Media Grants Data*

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### Ethical support of media

Philanthropy provides increasingly important support for nonprofit journalism, for varying reasons.

Some support journalism as a fourth estate—a necessary check on government. Other foundations are interested in journalism as integral to their work on democracy and civic engagement. And still others may be most interested in the content itself as a means to move the needle on particular issues. In recent years, foundation support has helped launch award-winning, high-impact news organizations like the Marshall Project, which covers the U.S.

criminal justice system. And many others in the nonprofit sector have had an enormous impact on important issues.

But this increased foundation interest in journalism has sparked a growing consensus that nonprofit news organizations should adopt a universal set of ethical guidelines to help guide foundations and organizations in decision-making. The American Press Institute—an educational nonprofit that helps advance news media in the digital age—has been exploring that ethical terrain. “The ethics of taking grants from foundations

and gifts from donors to produce news is still evolving and not without controversy,” reads the report, titled *Charting New Ground: The Ethical Terrain of Nonprofit Journalism*.

For traditional commercial media outlets, the Society of Professional Journalists is a leading voice on the subject of editorial standards and ethics, and many outlets abide by SPJ’s Code of Ethics. In it are guiding principles on minimizing harm, being accountable and acting independently. But nonprofit news organizations—whose ethical issues include grant transparency and funding for specific coverage areas—do not have a set of universally accepted guidelines that can help them make decisions about such quandaries. Many argue that the institution of such a code is way overdue, especially with more nonprofit news outlets picking up the slack left by failing and/or shrinking commercial ones.

Supporting nonprofit news media is a role foundations have embraced head-on. In response to the decline of newspapers, nonprofit news organizations are taking the lead on in-depth, explanatory and investigative reporting. But philanthropy must also recognize the limits of its influence. It must acknowledge the importance of editorial independence for these news outlets because, ultimately, there is no point supporting the work if the support itself threatens to undermine it. ■