

Funding Media:

Using Film and Electronic Media to Move Your Mission

Key Issues

Media makes a difference. Film and electronic media can reach people and impact issues you care about. Strategic investment in media is a powerful tool for every issue, from health and human services to the environment and sciences. Film, video, audio, mobile applications, and other forms of electronic communication are great ways to connect with and educate key constituencies.

There's no turning back. We are increasingly an electronic media-based culture. Examples include Internet interfaces (webcams, YouTube, iTunes), film in theaters, hundreds of television channels, low-cost video cameras, interactive games (Xbox, online), and social networking (Facebook, Twitter). Even traditional print media is often read electronically.

Small gifts, big impact. In this arena, smaller donors are increasingly stepping in with modest-sized donations and making media happen. Even for large-budget projects, the bulk of income is from funders giving \$25,000 and less.

Terms

- Media refers to both the **content** and the **means** by which we store and deliver information.
- Media content can be **captured** by video, still, and film cameras, as well as audio recording devices and mobile phones. It can be stored on the Internet, hard drives, film, tape, and disk.
- Media content is **delivered** via the Internet, mobile phones, television, theater screens, radio, kiosks, DVD, CD, and other digital delivery systems.
- Media is affected by the **policy** and **infrastructure** that enable or disable information delivery.

Three Ways to Invest in Media

Content. Media content is your *message*. Content is delivered via a medium: film, video, audio, and other forms of electronic media, such as games, television, radio, theaters, websites, mobile platforms, and installations. Funding for content goes directly to development of the message you want to promote.

Policy. Media policy affects media content and who has access to it by establishing rules for media ownership and practices. Such policies are made on local, state, national, and international levels. Donors can impact media policy by funding advocacy organizations and education programs to help ensure representation in the media of a full range of voices and perspectives, access to media infrastructure for underserved communities, and government and corporate behavior in the public interest.

Infrastructure. Projects in this area focus on innovation, development, training, capacity building, and support of small- or large-scale information delivery and telecommunications systems. The projects may include community-based media arts centers; public access television; public or community radio and television stations; or mobile, satellite, or other systems.

Questions to Consider

- What key issue areas do you want to impact?
- Whom do you want to engage or educate? How can a media strategy support this?
- What media best reaches your target audience/constituency? Why?
- What kinds of support do you want to give? Funding happens at many points along the process. You can fund part or all of a media project—from seed to distribution. Consider:
 - **Seed money.** This critical support helps get a project off the ground and is an important point in the process where funders have a unique opportunity to ask questions before the project is underway.
 - **Production.** This stage in a content project occurs when footage is being shot and/or content is being created for a platform such as a website. Production support may take the form of financial support, knowledge sharing, providing networking or information-sharing opportunities, or underwriting travel costs.
 - **Postproduction.** After the footage for a content project has been captured, it needs to be edited and made into a finished piece during the postproduction stage. This stage is important in shaping the final product.
 - **Engagement/Outreach/Distribution.** Once a project is finished, it needs to reach an audience. Gifts for engagement, outreach, and distribution support those connections.
 - **Project support.** Project support may help a media policy or infrastructure initiative. Examples include the creation of a low-power FM station in your community to help support local information sharing; support for a youth media program for immigrant youth; or Internet access for an underserved or unserved community.

Impact—A Few Examples

- The documentary film *Legacy* is the moving story of a grandmother struggling under the burden of poverty to support her children and grandchildren. Thanks to support from a range of donors, this Academy Award-nominated film resulted in the Legacy Act of 2003, a law passed by the U.S. Congress in December 2003, designed to provide housing assistance to intergenerational families. The law was named after the film.
- Through its engagement campaign, the film *Blue Vinyl*, funded in part by the Dorot Foundation, has been instrumental in convincing major institutions, such as Kaiser Permanente, Seattle Parks and Recreation, and Habitat for Humanity, to build with less toxic construction materials.
- In 1998, four major funders came together to support the media policy advocacy work of the Prometheus Radio Project and the Media Access Project to create new kinds of non-commercial, locally-owned and operated radio stations. Despite intense lobbying from major broadcasters, the Federal Communications Commission approved this new class of stations. Today, more than 800 low-power FM radio stations—many started with investments of less than \$50,000—are on the air, serving the unique needs of their local communities.

Action Items

Get started by visiting the GFEM Media Database at <http://media.gfem.org>. This is a free, online database where you can search for fundable media projects that have already been vetted by one of your peers. Projects cover a range of issues, including arts and culture, economics, environment, health, human development, human rights, information, media, peace, conflict, and politics. Some projects are small and require only limited funding.

What Members Are Saying

“Our foundation funds films as a way to support an important part of our region's vibrant artistic community. We find it to be both very satisfying and quite easy to do. Filmmakers submit their applications through a fiscal sponsor organization, a process quite familiar to media applicants. We fund both large and small budget films, documentaries on a range of interesting societal and personal topics, and experimental films.”

–Christine Elbel, Fleishhacker Foundation

“Twenty years ago, we developed a narrow mission to fund documentaries on world religions because we believe that compelling, true stories will impact a wide audience. We give seed grants with fiscal sponsorship, and the grants range from \$7,500 to \$30,000, which may seem like small amounts, but we know our reach is global.”

–Sarah Masters, Hartley Film Foundation

“Today’s media policy decisions will affect everyone’s ability to learn, participate in democracy, and be creative for decades to come. We fund media policy to ensure all perspectives and voices are heard at this critical time. Even funders who haven't worked in media policy in the past are finding it an increasingly important area of interest, and even small investments can have a large impact.”

–Helen Brunner, Media Democracy Fund

Additional Resources

- Grantmakers for Film + Electronic Media (GFEM), www.gfem.org or info@gfem.org
A resource for grantmakers interested in supporting and using media to further their mission, GFEM offers articles and resources for funders at all levels of experience and staff to answer specific questions and support you one-on-one.
- Media Democracy Fund (MDF), www.proteusfund.org/mdf or helen.brunner@gmail.com
A collaborative grantmaking initiative focused on media policy, MDF can help you connect with other funders and media policy experts to pool resources and build relationships. E-mail Director Helen Brunner at helen.brunner@gmail.com.
- *POV: Documentaries with a Point of View*, www.pbs.org/pov
This PBS series offers outreach and education kits to be used with many of its documentary films. Raise awareness and inspire action on a topic that is a priority for you. Contact Executive Director Simon Kilmurry at kilmurry@pov.org or 212-989-8121 x307.

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