

Funding Media, Strengthening Democracy: Grantmaking for the 21st Century

The GFEM Media Funding Tracker



GRANTMAKERS IN
FILM + ELECTRONIC MEDIA

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INT.
INTELLIGENT TELEVISION

Dear Colleagues,

Grantmakers in Film + Electronic Media is very pleased to offer *Funding Media, Strengthening Democracy: Grantmaking for the 21st Century* to the philanthropic sector.

The importance of media and the crucial role played by philanthropy is laid out within these pages. Media, in all its incarnations, influences our decision-making processes, whether personal choices or professional ones, in policy-making, and at the local, national, and international levels. Regardless of how much or how little media one may personally consume, the world is saturated with and driven by media.

Philanthropy, with its mission to improve the human condition, has yet to meet the challenge of keeping pace with the growth and influence of media. We would like to change that. *Funding Media, Strengthening Democracy* continues a critical dialogue on how philanthropy can best harness its resources—dollars and leadership—to meet the needs of a media-saturated world, in an age of increasingly rapid innovation, where media and social uses of media can have revolutionary impact on individuals and, indeed, entire nations.

This report provides a snapshot of media funding by grantmakers—the what, how much, and why. It compares the for-profit and nonprofit sectors, presents tools that some funders are using to assess the impact of their investments and, with great candor, reveals the thinking behind many of our colleagues' media grantmaking.

Grantmakers in Film + Electronic Media is an association of grantmakers committed to advancing the field of media arts and public interest media funding. We serve as a resource for grantmakers and as a collaborative network for funders who wish to learn more about media.

With this commitment in mind, we believed it was consistent with our mission to ask a series of critical questions that we knew, from the outset, could not be definitively answered: Who's funding media? At what level? And what is the impact of that funding? Our aim was to determine the impediments to answering these questions. We also wanted to identify and share best practices in supporting media and, perhaps most importantly, using it to propel philanthropic goals.

GFEM would like to thank Peter B. Kaufman and Mary Albon of Intelligent Television for their extensive research and analysis. We also feel it is necessary to point out one of the most significant impediments we all face in compiling data in the field: the reluctance of foundations and government agencies to respond to questions about their grantmaking. We understand that autonomy and anonymity are valued by many in philanthropy. However, as we move forward in an interconnected environment, we hope to encourage more transparency in this area in order to strengthen our collective ability to track important trends in our field.

To help philanthropy understand its grantmaking in media, and make that grantmaking more effective, the field needs to come together to answer the key questions: Who? How much? To what effect? We hope that what we present to you here will help remove some of the challenges, open the lines of communication—literally and figuratively—and move the field of philanthropy forward. We look to you for comments and input, and invite your future participation in this growing and essential conversation.

Sincerely,
David Haas, Chairman of the Board
Alyce Myatt, Executive Director

▶ Executive Summary

- ▶ *“Ultimately we need to understand how media can lead to real policy or social change that improves the lives of individuals, families and communities. Can it begin to lay the groundwork for increased understanding of entrenched social problems and their possible solutions? Can it move people to individual or collective action on these issues? Can it help strengthen nonprofit organizations and make the advocates’ jobs easier? Can it inspire new programs, civic engagement, and policy solutions?”* **A Survey Respondent**

Media permeates modern life as never before.

From moving image advertisements on city buses to messages on our mobile phones, we are constantly bombarded: video, audio, images, tweets, posts, feeds, and apps cascade across our screens and speakers. By 2013—just 1,000 days from this writing—some 15 billion networked computers, phones, and other devices will be in operation worldwide; the equivalent of 10 billion DVDs worth of media will be criss-crossing the Internet every month; and 11 billion square feet of screens will be in operation, enough to encircle the Earth’s entire surface almost 50 times over.

The centrality of media in almost every field of human endeavor, and the increasing prevalence of new technologies of communication, present new opportunities for philanthropists to promote democratic values. For centuries—in the American Revolution, the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution—media has been intertwined with freedom and the exercise of power. Today too, technology heightens the potential for grantee civic engagement; for voice to be given to new and often marginalized sources of information and opinion; for collaboration and networking; and for individuals and groups to come closer to the formerly expensive means of media production. At the same time, the proliferation of the messages and the ideas that media—commercial and noncommercial—carry poses new challenges for philanthropists who work at the vital intersection of media, technology, and social change.

In 2009 Grantmakers in Film + Electronic Media (GFEM) asked Intelligent Television (INT) to help it design a research agenda and survey instrument for capturing the types and amounts of funding that U.S.-based foundations, government agencies, and other charitable organizations put toward media—media content, infrastructure, and policy—today. GFEM asked INT to

provide an analysis of that data, along with recommendations for how GFEM and media grantmakers as a whole might best collect and sort this information on an ongoing basis, and use it to help rationalize grantmaking in the field.

The GFEM Media Funding Tracker that we developed was sent out to foundations and government agencies large and small across the country, breaking down media as follows:

- ▶ Media content refers to “information, knowledge, and artistic material conveyed through all types of media, including film and video, television, radio, print publications, and online channels.”
- ▶ Media infrastructure comprises “not only the physical bricks and mortar installations, equipment and technology that enable media outlets to operate, but also the capacity of individuals (e.g., journalists, scholars, artists), institutions (e.g., journalism schools), associations and networks to produce, distribute and communicate media content.” Projects in this area often have to do with innovation, development, training, capacity building, and support of small- or large-scale information delivery and telecommunications systems, and can include community-based media arts centers, public access television, public or community radio and television stations, mobile, satellite, or other systems.
- ▶ Media policy “broadly refers to the regulations, legislation, judicial oversight, and institutional practices that shape our information and communications systems, including control and organization of culture industries, news and journalism, advertising, Internet and telephone services.”

We conducted extensive background research on major media funders and trends; worked with GFEM to prepare a detailed survey and invited over 900 executives and program officers at foundations and funding agencies to complete it; processed initial feedback at two roundtable discussions and one two-day seminar hosted by funders; conducted telephone and in-person

interviews with program officers; and shared and compared our data with other researchers and journalists. Some foundations also supported our information gathering by coordinating and collecting, at our request, internal data dispersed among their different programs and departments. Building upon the results of this research and the information that GFEM already has collected—specifically in GFEM’s ongoing media projects database at <http://media.gfem.org/>—we present this report as the result of that initiative.

All told, to the best of our calculations, grantmakers public and private put an estimated \$3 billion toward the support of media—media content, infrastructure, and policy—in 2008. With economic stimulus funding devoted to broadband and other technologies, that amount may have risen to \$10 billion by the time tallies can be completed for 2009.

Despite the size of this figure, and the growing importance of media both to the daily life of the planet and the success of grantmaking in other fields, there has been, up to now, no clearinghouse of information about media grants; no comprehensive database of media funding opportunities; no established taxonomy for defining media grantmakers, grantees, and their grants; no broadly accepted terminology related to media; and no system of classifying how funders in the field determine their entry points and ultimate goals for social improvement.

Media grantmaking remains a long way from establishing a place where media grants can be searched for and found by grantors and grantees alike as quickly and as easily as products can be found on eBay and Amazon. The field needs to become more intelligent—more self-aware—and more knowledgeable in real time about the grants being made within it, the resources of grantors, the needs of grantees, the leverage and impact points to be affected, and the larger trends across the social, economic, and technological forces that affect all of media content, policymaking, and institutional sustainability. We believe that grantmakers will benefit from a more comprehensive

understanding of how important media is for basic values of freedom and democracy, and thus of how media grantmaking can be used as a tool to further those values.

At the same time, it is important for the grantmaking field to recognize that relative to the size of commercial media financing from banks, markets, advertising, and sales, media grantmaking is minuscule. Often the budget of a single Hollywood feature film eclipses the total annual media spending of the largest U.S. philanthropies. Global entertainment and media spending in all its forms, already over \$1 trillion annually, will reach \$1.6 trillion by 2013. The money invested in media annually through grants from the nonprofit sector amounts to about 1 percent of the money invested by commercial and noncommercial sources as a whole.

For media grantmakers whose funds constitute only a small piece of the total media ecosystem, leverage, necessarily, is key.

We recommend that the grantmaking field itself take advantage of media and technology to build a more comprehensive framework for media grantmaking and for measuring its impact. We highlight 10 recommendations from our surveys, interviews, meetings, and research:

First, acknowledge the prevalence and impact of media.

Foundations and government agencies of all sizes and in all fields will benefit from recognizing the growing importance of media, and screen-based media in particular, to the future of every field—education, health, the environment, and more.

Second, funders should identify additional common traits across philanthropy. Funding for media has many traits in common with funding in other fields, and it will behoove media funders to exchange information with funders in other sectors on a more regular basis. Best practices and tools from one grantmaking sector may have applications in another.

Third, philanthropists should create and support new and flexible funding structures. There have been calls for new structures to support media funding in this age of fast-moving change: many of these are worth listening to. As tectonic shifts take place in the media landscape, rapid-response teams of media funders will need to be assembled to provide for the nimble, strategic, possibly collective allocation of funding.

Fourth, funders should support the development of new networked media production and distribution systems. There is now greater emphasis being placed on the potential for networked collaboration among funders and grantees alike. Opportunities now exist for exploring new types of networks, studios, and laboratories—initiatives that themselves may prove to be demonstrations of cost-effective grantmaking.

Fifth, funders and grantees alike should utilize and advocate for open technology. There is the opportunity to encourage philanthropy to become more intelligent and self-aware, utilizing some of the tools that the commercial media and information sector has been deploying to good effect. This involves beginning to establish and inculcate among foundations as a whole, and media funders in particular, preferences toward open technology standards and open source solutions for data collection.

Sixth, communicate and collaborate with your colleagues within your foundation and across the philanthropic sector. Perhaps the most important survey question and answer in the GFEM Media Funding Tracker concerned whether stakeholders in the future of media grantmaking would be open to further discussion regarding the issues covered in the survey. The overwhelming majority said yes. This interest in engagement opens the door to collaboration that extends beyond the sharing of common concerns into initiatives on a broader scale.

Seventh, funders should collaborate to create a comprehensive platform for information sharing. Given the centrality of media funding for all sectors, it would seem beneficial for media funders to establish a version of, or strengthen existing versions of, a media grantmaking database in particular—a living, searchable archive, one that welcomes and processes data on a rolling, ongoing basis.

Eighth, the pervasiveness of media funding must be acknowledged. Funders and grantees should recognize that media is funded in many grants that do not explicitly highlight media—content, infrastructure, or policy—as the primary object of funding.

Ninth, the impact of media grantmaking should be measured, and the field should undertake new efforts to do so. The social impact of grantmaking can now be more specifically measured and tracked across each dimension of progress using technology and tools that the web provides. Indeed, media grantmakers may be able to develop systems—for their own grantmaking as well as grantmaking in other sectors—that track where media has been instrumental in increasing public awareness and engagement, strengthening social movements, and effecting social change.

Tenth and finally, funders should recognize that media reinforces their missions. If the public and government are going to understand and appreciate the work of philanthropy, they are going to be looking, or listening, or watching, or gaining and expressing these attitudes through media.

The GFEM Media Funding Tracker project was built to help position media philanthropy in this ecosystem. We try to show why media grantmaking matters, how it can have an impact, where its impact can be greatest, and what steps funders might take to strengthen their work. The information and conclusions presented in this report can help funders to understand how media can be used to enrich their strategies and advance their goals.