# Supporting Independent Journalism to Thrive

*How do we cultivate a vibrant, powerful, and resilient independent journalism ecosystem?*

*An in-depth exploration of this question led to a striking finding: embracing diversity and knowing more about audience and mission are OUTGROWTHS of the uber concern of financing and sustainability.*

On May 14-16, 2015, [Journalism That Matters](http://www.journalismthatmatters.net) brought a diverse group of 30 journalists, funders, editors, publishers, and others out of their functional silos to grapple with the present and future of independent journalism. Our intent was not to find answers to a narrowly focused convening on revenue, but to open up questions for a multi-faceted exchange fed by perspectives of all who have a stake in the future of the sector.

Out of a rich and sometimes contentious dialogue, including intense conversations about race, potential solutions emerged for revenue and infrastructure. In fact, conversations about funding, community, and race spurred a visceral understanding that the real heart of the work is fostering an *inclusive independent journalism* sector centered on the full spectrum of community and audience.

We knew the future of independent journalism would involve a rethinking of revenue. The initial impetus for this convening was [Bill Moyers’ musing](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-dreier/bill-moyers-departure-fro_b_6401620.html) that our democracy would be profoundly strengthened if large foundations could devote a tiny fraction of their budgets to a trust fund for independent journalism. Moyers has been a longtime champion of feisty journalism free from the influence of government, corporations and other big money interests - the basic definition of independent journalism.

So while his idea of a trust fund was somewhat utopian, it led us to ponder the urgent question of how to help this sector survive and grow during these troubling economic times. Further, with mainstream media undergoing a radical reshaping, we had to ask what role independent journalism should and could play in the evolving news and information ecosystem.

Because the Pocantico Conference Center could only accommodate 30 people, we worked extra hard to invite an exceptionally diverse mix of individuals who identified with the independent news sector: diverse not only in the type of organizations they represented -- from foundations to associations to small news outlets -- but also by race, gender, and role within media. To work with this range of perspectives, the meeting used Journalism that Matters’ preferred convening methodology, [Open Space Technology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology), a process in which participants at Pocantico created the agenda based on what mattered most to them. This approach interrupts habits of thought and encourages cross-fertilization to spark innovative, collaborative thinking that inspires new ideas.

While we didn’t definitively solve the revenue question, we did put it in a broader, more promising context. A more inclusive view of independent journalism and why it matters became a foundation for further work in three principal areas:

* Putting audience and community at the heart of it all
* How to get the money… and who from
* Building infrastructure to support individual journalists, outlets, and the sector.

In essence, we came away with a redefined roadmap for independent journalism centered around diverse audiences, community information needs, and audience/community engagement as the primary drivers of the news system rather than just content production and distribution. Many participants also gained a deeper appreciation for the potential synergy of collaboration between independent and community and ethnic/foreign-language journalists. This synergy can shape a broader, more inclusive identity for independent journalism that brings together new allies for action.

To support this shift in thinking, ideas on ways to strengthen the sector’s infrastructure emerged, with people from different subsectors of the independent journalism space talking to each other for the first time; thoughtful discussions arising on how to brand the sector overall, making it more distinct and visible to a wider audience; and freelancers organizing to use their reporting skills to document their abysmal pay industry wide.

The promise of the Pocantico meeting is that this foundation, with a broader, more inclusive sense of identity and a more multilayered approach to infrastructure, paves the way to new sources of support and revenue.

We wish to build on that promise by extending the conversation beyond the narrow confines of a retreat center. Got an opinion? We invite you to use this space to share it.

The organizers

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*For more information, visit* [*Supporting Independent Journalism to Thrive*](http://journalismthatmatters.org/pocantico/)*.*