The broad and varied conversations at,

and specific commitments emerging from,

**Supporting Independent Journalism to Thrive**

*Thinking Out Loud and Exploring Ideas at*

 *The Pocantico Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund*

*Tarrytown, New York – May 14-16, 2015*

As technology and declining business models have forced major changes in the country’s news media landscape, independent journalism and independent journalists assume an ever more prominent and necessary role in providing the country’s news and ensuring public accountability of its political and business establishment.

The decline in private and social investment in journalism has left the news media landscape in crisis. Growing concern about money in politics, income inequality, police brutality and a host of other issues, coupled with the public’s increasing distrust of how journalists are covering the news, has laid bare the urgent need for a healthy news media to serve our communities and our democracy. Trying to pick up some of the slack from legacy media, independent and community journalism is facing a growing challenge.

“Alternative media was always supposed to be supplemental,

but what happens when mainstream news leaves a vast, gaping hole?”

**Jo Ellen Kaiser**, Executive Director, The Media Consortium

Lots of great independent journalism is being done, but many journalists, either through organizations, media outlets or on their own, are working in silos, enjoying successes that don’t scale, or replicating some problems of legacy media that have fostered the public’s distrust. A mix of 30 independent journalists, funders, media association representatives, academics, media outlets, entrepreneurs and media activists gathered over three days at The Pocantico Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund to explore ways to begin answering this complex and challenging question.

---**How can we broaden financial and other types of support so that more fact-based independent media organizations and journalists can not only survive, but collectively grow into a vibrant, powerful and resilient media sector?**

It soon became clear that there is no one solution to a complex challenge such as this. Participants were keen on exploring ideas to solve the overall issue of general sustainability in the independent journalism ecosystem, while also delving into smaller-scale strategies to establish relationships and clear pathways for the various stakeholders to collaborate in ways to make everyone stronger.

All participants expected more conversations to happen in the future with a broader representation of independent journalists, technology experts, and the public as specific action on potential solutions begins to take shape. However, immersed in a rapidly transforming news media environment, nascent business models, and quickly-changing technology, all participants said they felt the urgency to act.

“Yes, there is an expiration date to the current economic expansion.

The industry needs to be in a better place before the next recession hits.

Otherwise the whole field will suffer.”

**Richard Tofel**, President, ProPublica

Those gathered at Pocantico began the discussion by first trying to assess the independent journalism ecosystem, which then led them to explore what questions to even ask as they defined the areas to focus on while trying to hone in on specific action steps to make progress.

Some insisted that many joint projects and collaborations that point to a model for strength or potential solutions are already taking place. Promoting and replicating that success was needed. Others questioned whether to leverage the successes of the larger players as sources for innovation, or if more attention should turn towards strengthening and bringing along those who are still struggling. Or both.

For some, the news ecosystem should be looked at as a “hub and spoke” model functioning like the internet, where if certain elements fail, it keeps functioning and moving forward. Still others saw the independent journalism world as a constellation of entities, all with large differences and varying degrees of subtle successes, who needed to be connected to share ideas and work together to gain strength and influence.

They were quickly confronted with the challenge of how to make survival work for institutions now, while also thinking expansively about the future, the potential solutions that emerge, and how those solutions could benefit some or hurt others at the expense of the overall resilience of independent journalism.

Questions and comments that surfaced in that initial assessment and fleshed out some more during the gathering included:

* The number and size of media associations and how to get them out of the silos that prevent them from offering better service to their members.
* What role does ethnic and community media have or should have in the independent journalism world?
* A recognition of the often exploitative relationship between freelance journalists and legacy media outlets, and an analysis of how to challenge the status quo.
* What kind of impact do philanthropic funders of journalism look for and how do you measure it?
* How the “poverty mentality” and/or the reluctance of editorial folks to embrace and highlight the business side of an endeavor hurts the sustainability of independent journalism.
* How media activists, now sometimes forced to advocate for journalists, can be part of a more strategic push for a more resilient independent journalism.

The conversations over three days crystallized certain guiding principles that led to some specific action steps and commitments on various fronts. But it was clear from the first hours that the “top-down” way of looking at journalism and independent news media – with journalists at the center – needed to change.

For many, “audience” and “community” was, or became, the real center and true heart of the independent news ecosystem.

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**Section 1**

**AUDIENCE AND COMMUNITY AT THE HEART OF IT ALL… AND DIVERSITY IS KEY**

Almost from the beginning, much of the conversation at Pocantico either focused on or ultimately ended up highlighting how the audience, and the broader community that could form part of that audience, was really at the center of the news ecosystem, even if many journalists don’t act like it.

The top-down vision of journalists producing news for their audience or the community, news that they feel the people need, can sometimes hinder engagement with the audience. With journalists fixed in that mindset, this lack of engagement often still happens despite higher participation in social media by the public, which could have the potential of making that connection easier and a more natural dynamic.

Many of the participants felt that it’s from the audience that independent journalism can derive more strength, broaden its power and influence, increase and embolden its allies, and find more ways to gain more revenue and ensure its sustainability.

Replicating some of the same problems as legacy media, the journalists and media outlets that constitute what many consider independent journalism are overwhelmingly white. One clear way to grow the audience and think more comprehensively about independent journalism and its potential for greater influence is to include racial and ethnic diversity, as well as people of all ages, social classes, philosophies, and other forms of diversity, in the tent.

The country’s changing demographics and marketplace dictates that a more diverse pool of people need to be in that tent to ensure a growing audience and more journalistic allies from the community. And it’s essential that they be treated as similar or equal partners in this shared calling for telling stories and producing the news, not as an afterthought.

“It is not just that we need to do it to have more inclusion and

have more people in the mix. It’s good business. If we don’t open the doors…

see who is around us, who this audience is… If we aren’t creating relevant,

resonant products for them, they are going to continue to ignore us.”

**Ricardo Sandoval-Palos**, President, Board of Directors,

Fund for Investigative Journalism

The focus on diversity was not just referring to the audience and the community but also as something to be reflected among the ranks of journalists themselves. One key guiding principle that emerged from that ongoing discussion: **diversifying and democratizing impact**.

Achieving this means ending “white supremacy” in journalism, particularly referring to what and who is covered, and striving for more inclusiveness on equal footing when thinking about who is a journalist, what kind of journalism is produced, and who is considered a trusted source.

Also, journalists who fully represent the country’s myriad realities need to be engaged in producing journalism that fully captures the on-the-ground impact of government policies, corporate misdeeds and other public and social endeavors.

Upon analyzing the challenges to achieving diversity, many settled on these common blind spots.

* White men need to recognize / be reminded of the importance of being more than just passive participants in conversations about diversity.
* Editors can sometimes cultivate ideas through their own subjective lenses and seek a journalist and story to fulfill their vision.
* A lot of editors have the tendency to put reporters in silos (i.e. - the “Latino journalist,” the “Asian journalist,” etc.)
* Journalists/editors should learn how to be on the lookout for and identify unconscious biases across the board.
* Journalists need to examine how they conduct their personal lives and make changes at that level to begin the work of arriving at diversity.
* In many of the above scenarios, editors and outlets can tend to miss or overlook important nuances between peoples and cultures that are indistinguishable to outside observers.
* There is often a lack of honest exchanges about diversity and bias between editors and other stakeholders, and between reporters and the communities with which they should be engaging with.

So how do we recognize unconscious biases and initiate open and honest discussions about this? How do we get editors and hiring managers to buy in to a genuine ideal of diversity? How can we strengthen operations and build relationships in communities where they may not be strong enough?

**Breaking open the silos**. As a start, some suggested dealing with some of these questions by bursting the silos open and tearing down the walls between independent journalism and foreign-language, ethnic and community media.

Unlike the broader detachment from the public that usually characterizes legacy media and some in the predominantly white independent journalism space, most ethnic and foreign language media show a very clear mission. They use journalism to aid their community and maintain a close relationship, which strengthens their connection and engagement with their audience.

There was also much discussion about whether using the term “ethnic and foreign-language media” to describe what is also mostly independent media in nature promotes a conceptual and functional separation of thousands of publications across the country, mostly community news outlets, from the larger media landscape.

Are these journalists being ghettoized? Who is ethnic? Or better still, who is not ethnic? Could these publications that inform immigrant communities and communities of color be an integral yet unrecognized part of independent media? Or are both independent media and foreign- and English-language local publications all community media?

As the answers to those questions continue to be debated in the future, many agreed there is much they can learn from one another now and some potential ways to look at solutions.

* **Community engagement**. Are there lessons to be learned from how these ethnic and community media outlets connect closely with their audience, from where they derive public support and sustainability? Some of these enterprises have various ways of engaging their communities, everything from public appearances to festivals to concerts. Also, editors and journalists who work to inform communities of color and immigrant communities are trusted community leaders and are considered advocates as well as informers.
* **Advocacy vs. activism**. Although advocacy is a common characteristic of many community news outlets, it warrants discussion on how independent media works. Is there advocacy there? There was consensus that activism had no part to play in balanced journalistic practice.
* **Leverage one another’s strengths**. Couple on-the-ground perspectives of foreign-language and minority editors with the journalistic prowess of independent journalists. Establishing collaboration across “ethnicities” can produce coverage that resonates with a broader audience and is more reflective of the true diversity of our people.
* **Mutual respect**. Shift the paradigm and level the editorial playing field by giving equal ownership to independent and community editors in collaborative journalism projects. All are at the table from the start.
* **Culture and language**. Many sustainable community publications have a strong presence online that amplify their local print editions, nationally and internationally, and can do so because they have “a captive audience” defined by culture and language. What is community and culture for “independent” media?
* **Solutions ready to be plucked**. Certain niche media organizations already network with each other to exert influence and gain access. There may already be a lot of answers out there that can be studied and adopted as opposed to looking elsewhere for new solutions.
* **More openness on race**. People are talking about white privilege in the open. This was not the case a decade ago, and it’s a reflection of a societal demand that is both a challenge and an opportunity for change.

So if there was much to learn from one another and much strength and influence to be gained from collaboration, some participants said the logical next step would be to bring folks from these sectors together to spark communication and get the conversation going.

“You create very solid relationships where these things evolve.

We’ve talked about sustainability in terms of funding, but there is

also a need in terms of the flow of information.”

**Juana Ponce de León**, Director, Media Diversity Relations

NYC Council Speaker’s Office

**Action Step: Creating a Convening of ALL Independent News Media**

A committee of the Pocantico participants agreed to **convene a conference of independent, community and ethnic and foreign-language media** in spring 2016 to connect these colleagues, and facilitate, disrupt and create explosive collaborations that will transform what people believe is news and explore how working together can mutually strengthen them all.

Participants committed to this effort and to recruiting others to be involved in making this happen: Jo Ellen Kaiser, The Medium Consortium; Juana Ponce de León, of the NYC Council Speaker’s Office, formerly with the NY Independent News Association; Chris Faraone, Dig Publishing, Boston; and Richard Logan, The Reva and David Logan Foundation.

The conference would be a way to break down the silos most in these sectors are in, strengthen the flow of information between different members of these sectors, smooth the pathways for editorial collaborations, and create a peer-to-peer network for sharing business ideas and funders.

It also seeks to create concrete ways for community media to expand their voices and specific action steps for them to step up to another level in business practice.

The committee envisions a conference that would principally invite editors and publishers of foreign-language, black, Hispanic, and other media associations and outlets by and for people of color, along with editors and publishers who belong to The Media Consortium, the Association of Alternative Newspapers, the Institute for Nonprofit News, the Alliance for Community Media, the National Federation of Community Broadcasters, Local Independent Online News Publishers, and freelance journalists and media associations.

They aspire to get 1) funding to visit several communities around the country to get journalists from these media outlets to buy in to the idea and attend, 2) sponsorship for the actual conference, and 3) funding for post-conference activities, such as editorial collaborations and other joint planning work on infrastructure, training and other areas.

For more details on the convening, please see Appendix xxxx.

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**Section 2**

**HOW TO GET THE MONEY… AND WHO FROM**

The same problems of diminishing resources to produce news that has plagued legacy media has also hit the changing independent journalism ecosystem hard. In some ways, the urgent crisis caused by a lack of revenue to effectively operate and produce the news was even felt more harshly by media outlets, institutions and individual journalists already strapped by smaller budgets and unreliable revenue streams.

The mix of participants at the Supporting Independent Journalism to Thrive gathering have experienced or witnessed these difficulties first hand from various perspectives given their roles in the independent journalism landscape. Over the three days, there was much discussion about building audiences and communities, broadening the size and diversity of audiences, maximizing the impact of the journalism, and getting the public to value and advocate for independent news. However, money was the subtext in many of the conversations and considered key to achieving stability and resilience in the long-term.

The gathering’s participants focused on exploring and broadening a variety of revenue streams for media outlets, institutions and independent journalists or freelancers from three source areas: philanthropy, public support, and individuals/audience/community. (For more details on the perspective of independent and freelance journalists, see Section xxx)

They examined ideas to start securing some broad-based funding mechanisms that would:

* Be recurring and more constant
* Be independent of special government interests
* Be accountable
* Feature democratic distribution
* Be suitable for multi-platform outlets
* Feature contributions small enough to be affordable to the public

As the participants worked to define some micro and macro strategies to broaden and increase revenue, several questions and salient points arose to offer a broader context to the discussions.

**Diversify tactics**. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to tackle the problem. A combination of multiple approaches are needed to take into account the varying realities and circumstances of the media outlets and independent journalists producing the news.

**Diversify and broaden the audience**. The audience of too many of what are now considered independent journalism outlets is older and predominantly white, which could end up becoming a shrinking donor base. Independent journalism needs to target and build a younger and more diverse audience of readers, listeners and viewers to grow the pool of donors and members. In addition, embracing a more inclusive universe of independent journalists and a broader audience – for-profit hyperlocal sites, ethnic and foreign-language, community media, and more – helps journalists focus on the needs of the people the content is being produced for, which in turn helps inform future strategies around sustainability.

**Tools and technology**. The next generation of journalists and experts in technology need to be part of this search for the tools that can help distribute and promote the great content that is being created, while securing ways to become more efficient, connect more with the audience, increase revenue, and reflect the changing ways people will get their news.

**Building infrastructure**. To achieve sustainability, some media outlets need to define what it is that they want to sustain. Some need to engage in “right-sizing,” which could entail establishing an infrastructure or merging back-room services with others to survive, and not simply put all their revenue into the editorial product.

The more detailed conversations focused on three areas.

**Philanthropy – Foundations**

Similar to an overall funding or revenue strategy, there is no one way that foundations fund journalism. Some prefer to fund the infrastructure for a small organization, others target their funding on journalism about specific topics or areas of interest, and others prefer steering their money to a particular type of journalism, such as investigative journalism or hyperlocal coverage.

As legacy media dedicates fewer resources to certain areas of news and journalism, some independent media organizations have received funding to pick up the slack, particularly in investigative reporting, or to collaborate with legacy media on larger, long-term projects. However all those present concluded – large organizations, small organizations, freelancers and funders alike – that there is not enough money in philanthropy to meet the urgent need.

Some participants commented on how they often see large foundations funding journalism projects with large organizations or collaborations between independent and legacy media that sometimes do not work, or for which the impact of the journalism produced is not apparent. The point was made that sometimes large foundations were averse to risk and, as part of their big-picture strategy, often naturally tended to fund projects at relatively large organizations or entities.

It was made clear that any organization primarily dependent upon foundation money was going to be unstable given the amounts of funds available. Pledge drives were a good thing, but preaching to the choir. Community engagement is key.

“The more you are working to actually get into the community,

the more sustainable you’ll be over time. What’s hard about that is

the culture shift and the fact that it takes a long time.”

**Molly de Aguiar**, Program Director for Media and Communications,

Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

Several participants offered Democracy Now! as a model for engagement, mentioning that despite its smaller audience relative to bigger outlets, its audience is intensely engaged and loyal and would be more predisposed to support it.

Some funders concluded that measuring impact is very tricky, a longer-term proposition, sometimes just intuitive, and often influenced by the depth and longevity of the relationship. Establishing a good relationship with a program officer is essential for them to gain confidence in the media outlet’s capacity and in the clarity of its journalistic mission.

Several participants raised the concern that sometimes funding specific journalism projects, although important, does not necessarily help independent media become more resilient in the long term. “Funding journalists’ salaries is not sustainable over time,” de Aguiar added. “Funding infrastructure is what’s sustainable.”

Some freelance journalists said they were frustrated by what they perceive to be an elitist, closed system featuring “serial fellows”, people who get a fellowship and then get more fellowships because of the previous fellowships they received. Funders warned that the same kind of journalistic elitism could happen if foundations insisted that grantees pay a living wage to its journalists, therefore having to favor outlets that could afford to do so in the first place or especially when the grant funds run out.

Community foundations emerged as an area within foundation philanthropy that could be tapped for more funding. Since community foundations often focus on many different interests in one geographic area, they often have difficulty sorting out which organizations to support and don’t understand the value of independent and local journalism to their community. Many agreed that the independent journalism sector needs to educate the community foundations’ program staff about what they do and the role they play in the community.

**Action Step**: Richard Tofel of ProPublica and Molly de Aguiar of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation agreed to initiate efforts to **get independent journalism and this gathering’s ideas on to the radar of community foundations**. De Aguiar also agreed to collaborate on messaging. Down the road, the effort might involve delegations of journalists and community leaders.

**Philanthropy - Individuals**

Everyone at the Pocantico gathering seemed to agree that the independent journalism ecosystem in general needs to do a better job of reaching and tapping into the support from individuals, and that this could be a fertile area for revenue growth.

Richard Tofel of ProPublica referenced a report noting that contributions from individuals, not institutions, constitute most of American philanthropy. If one percent of all philanthropy were directed toward journalism, journalism would be funded abundantly. He suggested an effort to persuade Americans to “put journalism on the list” of their reflexive charities, along with schools and the arts.

Several ideas flowed from that:

**Donors to political campaigns**. Some suggested an all-out push to persuade donors to political campaigns, particularly those who are appalled by current campaign spending madness but who don’t feel they can unilaterally opt out, to commit to contributing $1 to “fighting and fixing” the problem (which includes journalism) for every dollar they contribute to political races. A marketing effort to target that specific audience could include:

* Developing a common slogan that could be used by individual media organizations as well as for any collective campaign.
* Coordinating promotion efforts on a common day, such as was done on Giving Tuesday. (First Amendment Day, marked in some places for late Sept., was suggested as a possible date, though it’s not clear that there is a nationally recognized date.)
* Pitching the notion to the Democracy Alliance. (Finding a member of the Alliance to sponsor a presentation of the idea would be needed.)
* Identifying political donors who would publically support the campaign.
* Examining the Gates “Giving Pledge” model to see how we might emulate that success.

Related to this and other possible joint fundraising efforts, there was some discussion of whether we might come up with an acceptable formula for allocating funds contributed into a pool. Some thought it might be worth putting some time into trying to devise such a mechanism, but others cautioned, “there lies madness.”

**Donations through corporate and public platforms**. A systematic effort to persuade companies such as Apple to make donating to media easier through their tech payment platforms, for instance, through a donate button embedded in iTunes.

**Payroll**. Donations through payroll done via a check box during payroll elections.

**Support from high net-worth individuals**. Contacting family officers that handle the assets and in some cases the charitable giving of high net-worth individuals to get then thinking about journalism as a public good.

**Action Steps to be followed up on by varying committees of participants at the gathering include**:

* **Establish a working group on revenue development** to delve deeper on business development, sources of money, corporate charitable giving, individual giving. Should have their first call in June. Craig Aaron, FreePress; Jay Harris, Public Intelligence, Inc. formerly Mother Jones; Kevin Davis, MakingNews.biz, formerly Investigative News Network (INN); Linda Jue, G.W. Williams Center for Independent Journalism
* **Initiate an effort to connect with the Democracy Alliance** and pitch a match for political spending. Craig Aaron, FreePress; Esther Kaplan, the Investigative Fund, The Nation Institute; Jay Harris, Public Intelligence Inc., formerly Mother Jones; Richard Tofel, ProPublica
* **Develop the idea of a branding campaign** for independent journalism (c.f., the “Red” campaign). Kevin Davis, MakingNews.biz, formerly CEO of Investigative News Network (INN).

**Public/Government Support**

A variety of subsidies already exist for the media. Yet several participants wanted to explore if there already was, and if so, how to broaden a constituency to back a campaign for government support for journalism.

They wished to explore if there were content-neutral ways for subsidies of this type to work and ways to navigate one major sticking point: how to decide what organizations and individuals qualify as “journalists” to benefit from that support.

It was noted that public support models have worked in some parts of Europe, such as the BBC funded by public tax dollars and government funds being used to purchase copies of books published by French publishing houses.

It would be difficult to rally around public support for journalism in the U.S. unless there are mechanisms that journalists would feel comfortable with while not leaving them vulnerable to the political pressures currently battering the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, for example. The postal rate subsidy model used in the U.S. was content neutral and worked well.

Although many saw it as a far-off proposition, some felt that the potential long-term gains made public support an area worth exploring, particularly given the tremendous changes in media policy that have beat incredible odds and prevailed as more of the public begins to understand the importance of media and journalism in our society.

The ideas that arose included:

* tax code revisions or an income tax break for journalists or publications
* taxing 20 percent of the true commercial value of the public airwaves given in subsidy to commercial media and directing those funds to support journalism
* using part of the revenue from broadcast spectrum sales
* a tax on every cell phone to create a trust with those funds

But do people really value journalism enough to support something like this? Maybe not framed solely as “journalism” per se, but information sharing is highly valued and more people are actively participating in media. So some concluded that the question of a public subsidy for journalism is tied to the question of the credibility and democratization of journalism.

Journalists themselves may be skittish of supporting a difficult campaign of this type. But some of the participants suggested that what is needed for this to succeed was a constituency, and pointed to the recent public push for net neutrality as a possible model.

**Action Step**: Some of the participants decided to start a process now of discussing and **advocating for public funding**, acknowledging that it could take 5-10 years to get anywhere.

Craig Aaron of FreePress to lead that discussion.

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**Section 3**

**LISTENING TO THE AUDIENCE … GETTING THEM TO CARE ENOUGH TO SUPPORT JOURNALISM**

As journalists look to broaden their audience, add more voices through diversity and inclusion, and gain more revenue and allies to support what they do, it was clear to most Pocantico participants that all eyes needed to turn to the community as the central focus of it all.

And to truly make that community support deep and true, the following questions emerged.

* How do we listen to what the audience wants? How do we turn the audience into advocates for independent journalism?
* How do we get the community to value independent journalism enough to increase its influence and maximize its impact?

As the group sought answers in several conversations, the various paths forward led to a key ingredient: connecting effectively and engaging substantially with the community. The mindset of a detached watchdog or observer, judging for oneself what the public needs to know, is not enough. Survival in today’s journalism world means more of a conversation, more of a dialogue, some true, meaningful and lasting community engagement.

Some participants recommended the following guideline or principle: **Empower your community**. That means putting the community and its information needs at the heart of the journalism work, moving away from the unidirectional habit of journalists producing and the audience simply consuming the news, and having journalists listen more and assume less.

“Journalists need to go in with more humility. It is a two-way street.

Often it stops at ‘we’re here to do public service’ and we don’t ask what’s missing in

the content and what they want the journalist to do. We need to open up that dialogue.”

**Craig Aaron**, President and CEO, FreePress

Some felt that successful efforts on both these fronts are symbiotic. Journalists create the relationship and learn from the community what they need to make a difference in their lives, which in turn helps the audience to understand the value of independent journalism when they see the results. Understanding that value then paves the way for advocates of that journalism to emerge or be recruited, forming part of the larger discussion about our society’s urgent need for good independent journalism.

Some emphasized the need to talk to the community and particularly to learn how to listen to what it has to say. Suggestions on how to do it ran the gamut, from learning from old newspaper circulation sales people who had the most direct conversations with potential subscribers to focus groups and larger town hall meetings.

But some thought we should flip the current dynamic on its head. Instead of approaching this in crisis mode (as we undoubtedly are in terms of revenue and lack of diversity, for example), independent journalists can try to operate from a position of strength. Media is an important component to democracy, so push that as an asset.

Independent journalism may be less distrusted than the government, public institutions, even legacy media right now. So there may be a unique opportunity to, among other messaging, capitalize on that difference.

“We are at a time when people are disillusioned with a dysfunctional government

and change is not happening through government but through social movements

and through journalism that supports those movements or investigative journalism.

In that broader ecosystem, we are at a historical moment where we could accept

that we have this very fertile, dynamic role that is deeply significant to people

at a time when forms of government accountability are falling apart.”

**Esther Kaplan**, Editor, The Investigative Fund, The Nation Institute

To **grow public awareness of the value of independent journalism**, another of the guiding principles that emerged at Pocantico, it was suggested that the media needed to develop branding and messaging, target particular audiences with potential for growth, and disseminate information about what they do.

There was some debate about having an effective messaging campaign given that there are probably many sectors of the community who don’t see the value of the type of journalism that is being done today. For example, if the community doesn’t want long form journalism, than should we keep doing it?

Some affirmed that journalists still had a responsibility to show the community why journalism matters to them. Getting them to understand this is in the nature of the dialogue. That conversation also evolves as it reflects more nuance and perspectives from a changing audience and various characteristics become more prominent for each group: age, media savviness, ethnic and cultural diversity, technological knowledge, class concerns, etc.

But some well-run independent journalism outlets speak to a particular audience, and that audience might be really small. As in many campaigns out there, some stated that it was alright to start with a small community that “gets it” and understands. As people see themselves or their needs reflected in coverage, they will want more.

Show the community what we do

So how do journalists and media outlets get their message out and disseminate information about what they do? Social media, advertising and public relations, advocacy, community convening and engagement, and media literacy and education were just some of the suggestions, which all could lead to direct and indirect ways of monetizing support.

Journalists have traditionally not been very good at promoting their own work and often forget to make the case on what their reporting accomplished. Efforts with a deeper impact than simply a promotional campaign take more time, but the investment might be worth it.

As examples, participants mentioned stories by the Center for Public Integrity that crunched data on and told the story of school cops and disparities in discipline. After publication, activists and journalists in other communities were taught how to use the data in their areas to do new stories and broaden the work’s impact.

Another example. The Fund for Investigative Journalism, which funds journalists who do work in communities of color, is taking some journalists to a different geographic community to show them how the story was done. This is a way to maximize a journalist’s impact while educating more communities about these stories that are important to them. Media literacy efforts for young people have also been proven to grow the ranks of those in the community participating in and interacting with the media.

Some questioned the effectiveness of membership models to measure support and grow revenue, citing NPR, which has a larger audience, but very little real engagement with the community. Small organizations, like The Nation, have their own types of events, like the cruises with authors, correspondents and thinkers.

The Center for Investigative Reporting has done several innovative things to connect with the communities such as hiring a social scientist to measure impact, and working with street poets and playwrights to get youth and others involved in the broader conversation about news in their communities. It also worked with Univision to co-produce a report on the rape of female farmworkers, stories that were exceedingly popular for Univision’s audience.

The response to that collaboration was gratifying and important, but it quickly died down. The nagging question for many was: How do you push out that messaging, get people engaged, keep the engagement going, and then ultimately have it generate revenue?

A mix of suggestions included tips taken from good, old-fashioned community organizing and online advocacy campaigns. Events, meetings in target audiences or geographic areas were worth a try as was online or mail fundraising, explicitly giving potential donors examples of what their moderate or small donations pay for.

Taking a page out of community or political organizing dating as far back as the 1960’s, some media outlets can also try a door to door campaign or visits, particularly when recruiting or cultivating community ambassadors or advocates for your journalism work.

Using the same social media that the community is using now to communicate, connect, organize and mobilize could also be part of independent journalism’s toolkit for its messaging campaign.

“Besides audience and citizenship, there is also, with social media,

a lot of people in media relying on their audience to reach other audiences.

So audience has now become not just a passive role, but very much

 of an active means by which you reach a larger audience.”

**Sarah van Gelder**, Editor in Chief, YES! Magazine

Concerns arose about how to keep the sustained engagement alive when media outlets are usually swamped. And how do we use social media and technology to harvest from and nurture the community? It is clear more answers are needed. Some suggested that more technologists need to be on board to develop more tools to engage the audience, keep the engagement consistent, and get the revenue.

But some suggested that the first steps in what may seem like an overwhelming task would be to harness the power of existing networks and establish or use a core group to keep the relationship going. Building the relationships and interacting with the community is the hard part, but will render fruit. Doing so consistently will give the media outlet a better chance of obtaining funding from philanthropy and from the community itself.

It will also help create an “army” of allies who see the value of journalism, can increase the impact of the journalistic work, and will be advocates for journalism when called upon in the marketplace or in the sphere or public policy.

“I fundamentally believe journalism that invests in the community

will invest in you. They know when you are on their side.

It takes time and effort and it’s a culture shift.”

**Molly de Aguiar**, program director for media and communications,

Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation

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**Section 4**

**WHAT JOURNALISTS, AND JOURNALISM ORGANIZATIONS, WANT AND NEED TO GET STRONGER**

In addition to broader, bigger-picture discussions about funding, revenue, audience and community, Pocantico participants spent some time talking specifics on the challenges facing independent and freelance journalists, and those of associations of independent journalism outlets.

For both groups, participants agreed that assessments of current best practices and valuable resources should be done along with an analysis of what can be learned from failed experiments during this time of much transition in independent journalism.

This offers the necessary context to explore ideas on how to target the major problems independent journalists face today regarding pay, working conditions, and lack of resources, for example, and those of associations struggling with poor infrastructure and/or lack of sustainability.

**Independent and freelance journalists – Tackling the challenges**

Many agreed that journalists, whether staff or freelance, are journalism’s idea machines. Yet working conditions are terrible and freelancers in particular are not organized in any effective way to change this. When considering how to have the work of independent and freelance journalists become more valued in the independent journalism ecosystem, these main concepts emerged.

**Terrain should be assessed**. More research needed to be done or compiled on several issues including the following: the legality of low compensation; the history of efforts to sue aggregators like Facebook and Twitter for stealing content; compensation models from other industries; efforts by the Writers Union and other entities to address these matters; legal and regulatory protections and other mechanisms outside of journalism that govern how people are getting paid.

**Audit to document worker conditions**. A grant-funded audit of journalism workers by an entity with credibility in the journalism industry, such as Neiman or Poynter, needs to be completed to document and expose (1) freelance reporter/producer pay, rights, protections, benefits; and (2) staff reporter/producer pay, benefits, workload/productivity. The level of diversity among freelancers vis-à-vis staff journalists could also be assessed and the reasons for that.

Even as journalism staff salaries have more or less kept pace with inflation, freelance rates have collapsed and staff jobs are being converted into freelance jobs. In the case of freelancers, much of the time spent on research to identify and solidify a story or story ideas is often not factored in to any compensation.

An audit would detail all of these working conditions, which many journalists consider exploitation, as well as document how this situation hampers the quality of the journalism being produced.

**Use journalism to expose journalism sweatshop work**. Several Pocantico participants suggested using independent journalism’s own tools – investigative and journalistic reporting – to expose the poor working conditions many journalists endure, and how it adversely affects the journalism that is produced.

Combined with the audit, reporting on this topic would shed light on the depth of the problem and on some of the worst examples of media outlets exploiting or taking advantage of those who produce the news. It can demonstrate how low pay and poor working conditions adversely affects the journalism that is produced and that the public cares about while also giving some positive visibility to those who are not operating journalism sweatshops.

Some participants felt it was an important way to raise awareness in the community and among journalists’ themselves about the exploitation many of their colleagues feel they suffer in various sectors, including in parts of the immigrant media, for example, where at the end of the day, journalists’ pay ends up being less than minimum wage.

**A Bill of Rights or common set of standards**. A core group of Pocantico participants felt that the independent news sector should work towards creating a Bill of Rights or a common set of standards for freelance journalists and staffers in independent journalism, each reflecting their particular circumstances.

The common set of standards would include guidelines on issues like freelance rates, kill fees, compensation for research and other work not reflected in the actual word counts, guidelines for content aggregators, and other work conditions. For staffers, it could include guidelines on potential caps for production. It was felt two separate bill of rights needed to exist for freelancers and for staffers to reflect their realities and avoid pitting the groups against each other.

Questions arose about how to determine what fair standards are in terms of working conditions, and also specifying what is fair in other areas – such as what rights journalists preserve to what they create, what billing they get, royalties or revenues off of ads sold on a journalists’ copy, etc.

Other industries, such as pro sports and entertainment, have minimum rates and standards that are written out. With photos, music, and other forms of creative content, the creator nominally retains control to a certain point and in the case of musicians, they are still figuring out how to secure that they get paid for their work. But journalism seems to be the exception in these national conversations about working conditions and basic protections.

**Possible leverage of enforce a Bill of Rights**. Questions about how to make any new Bill of Rights enforceable quickly emerged. Several ideas surfaced, but it became clear that any discussion of this would have to continue in the future, particularly after the details of the current working conditions were exposed in the audit.

Some suggested instituting a possible “Good Housekeeping stamp of approval”, which would identify to journalists and to the public those media outlets that are doing right by their staffers and freelance contributors. Highlighting the outlets that are already doing this now could be one way to start the ball rolling.

Funders were also seen as another pressure point. Support from foundations, which mostly fund projects or coverage on a certain issue, could be limited to those media outlets that have agreed to accept the protections in the Bill of Rights. To get grants, media outlets could be required to follow best practices regarding their journalists’ working conditions. Some brought up Nike as an example of having to improve pay and working conditions for their subcontractors’ employees in Bangladesh once retailers said they would not stock products made in sweatshops.

Some cautioned that some major media outlets could respond to this pressure by eliminating the use of freelancers entirely, which happened with some internships. Some funders who lack the desire or the expertise to monitor media’s treatment of journalists may also not want to participate.

Lawsuits, public pressure or shaming, and organizing journalists to boycott outlets that refused to improve working conditions were suggested. The legal basis for any lawsuits would have to be explored and it was unclear if public shaming would work at some outlets when they had such little resources to begin with.

Trying to organize journalists, including journalists on staff who could show solidarity, might be more promising and the question arose about how to get journalists to the table. Some labor actions in the past have been beneficial and the audit and its results could be the disruption needed in the market and among journalists to get them more open to taking action to force change. It also made sense to contact and collaborate with, if possible and/or feasible, the Writers Guild, the Newspaper Guild, the Writers Union, the Authors Guild and others.

“It’s time for journalists to articulate the value that journalists bring to the table.”

**Martin Reynolds**, Senior Editor, Community Engagement,

Editor of the VOICES Project, Bay Area News Group

Some participants pointed out that the movement between platforms can also offer some leverage. Media outlets may increasingly be moving off websites to apps, which need a lot of content, offering a chance to increase the content producers’ value and potentially giving journalists more leverage.

Still others questioned the app idea as a specialty item that would fade away, particularly since many folks are still clicking through to get news for free through social media. But some said the fact that Facebook is paying The New York Times and a few other outlets to have original content reside on Facebook proves this is an “interestingly disruptive moment” ripe for action on this. That’s why it’s the right time for an audit to be done.

Another part of the solution, some concluded, was to get enough major media outlets to follow certain working conditions so that there’s the potential to create an industry standard. The more that do it, the easier it is for more journalists to boycott the others in solidarity, building up the pressure for more outlets to accept the minimum standards.

**Action Step**: Plan and see through the completion of an **audit of independent journalism workers**, both staff and freelance, to document and expose pay rates, workers’ rights, protections and benefits, workload and diversity issues by late 2016.

Jeff Yang, columnist with Wall Street Journal Online, is leading the effort with the following Pocantico participants committed to aiding in various parts of the project: Esther Kaplan, Editor, The Investigative Fund, The Nation Institute; Valeria Fernandez, independent journalist; and Ricardo Sandoval-Palos, President, Board of Directors, Fund for Investigative Journalism.

**Independent and freelance journalists – Resources and ideas for more**



Some of those gathered discussed some existing resources out there for independent journalists and best practices by media outlets to grow and get their work known by a broader audience.

On a continuing basis, journalists can identify the services, and very different entities and networks that can share information, communicate and collaborate, such as the Freelancers Union, The Media Consortium, the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, for example. Journalists should foster peer-to-peer networks where they don’t already exist and bring newer players to this discussion, such as millennials, hackers and community members.

This was discussed in the spirit of recognizing that there is a lot of good journalism, resources and collaboration already in the news ecosystem and any future action should not reinvent the wheel, but rather complement or build on what’s already available.

The main questions addressed were:

* How can we help and boost those who are already doing?
* How do we get people to care about stories they wouldn’t ordinarily care about?
* How do we make money in new ways?
* Why couldn't (or how could) a collective of independent journalists and editors and publications negotiate a deal with Facebook like [the one that the NYT just secured](http://techcrunch.com/2015/05/14/the-new-york-times-and-the-faustian-pact-with-facebook/)?

The general best practices explored included:

* Mentoring programs
* NOT introducing every facet of a project at the same time
* Collaborations
* It's the marketing, stupid!
* Upselling for media outlets, like PBS, but with print and web as well, and with new ideas incorporated (Giving people products that they want – not just tote bags and T-shirts)
* Trade and worker organizations that work differently, creatively (i.e. [SAG-AFTRA](http://www.sagaftra.org/))

For examples and an analysis of some specific best practices, those discussed included the following:

* [San Francisco Public Press](http://sfpublicpress.org/) , a broadsheet community newspaper combined with a heavy web presence
* **ProPublica**, an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest
* [**Maximum Fun**](http://www.maximumfun.org/) **Podcast Network,** where independent podcast makers can upload and market their work
* [**The Chauncey Bailey Project**](http://www.chaunceybaileyproject.org/), a collaborative one-off project that led to many new and tight relationships and to the development of other projects
* [**Intersections**](http://danielhernandez.typepad.com/), a blog by Daniel Hernandez, which successfully streamlines work from different places and areas of interest
* [**AAN + TMC teaming up**](https://www.rebelmouse.com/BlackSpringIndyMedia/) , the teaming up of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies and The Media Consortium to share all #BlackSpring coverage
* **Boutique Products / Special Magazines / Collectible Deliverables** ,the repackaging old projects with artistic packaging and lots of bells and whistles (i.e. GZA [Chess Board for *Liquid Swords*](http://www.amazon.com/Liquid-Swords-Chess-GZA-Genius/dp/B008861R7S), [Visionaire Magazine](http://www.visionaireworld.com/issues), [Frank 151](http://www.frank151.com/book/), [HRDCVR](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/danyelliott-hrdcvr/a-book-shaped-magazine-by-and-for-the-new-everyone-0))

Tools and potential resources for distributing and promoting independent journalism, for funding and crowdfunding were also discussed. It included a critique and analysis of:

* [**Contributoria**](https://www.contributoria.com/), “The Independent Journalism Network”, a crowdsourcing site that helps promote projects by individual journalists.
* **Medium**, popular blog and social media hybrid for individuals, which news organizations are also using to tease articles and drive traffic
* [**Blendle**](https://launch.blendle.com/), which The Guardian called the “[iTunes of journalism](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2014/oct/29/blendle-itunes-journalism-dutch-new-york-times-axel-springer)”
* [**Slack**](https://slack.com/), a tool being used to organize some stories and projects in newsrooms
* Kickstarter campaign by [**Scott Carney**](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/767033302/wordrates-and-pitchlab-fixing-journalism-since-mid), a publishing platform for journalists to share payment structures, rate editors and sell pitches
* [**Hacks and Hackers**](http://hackshackers.com/), which organizes and hosts good meetups for journalists and technologists

For more details on the discussion, critique and analysis of the specific best practices and of the tools and potential resources, go to Appendix (?)

**Independent Journalism Associations – Better Together?**

At least 14 associations that support independent journalism exist and it was stated that they are either too small in terms of membership or so big that they don’t pay enough attention to the independent journalism organizations they purport to support.

Some of the journalists at Pocantico spent some time exploring whether these organizations can work together more, and if so, in what way. This conversation sprung from the presumption that pursuing organic growth based on where the organizations are now, and just hanging on, is not going to succeed and is not sustainable in the long term.

Yet, although they are a relatively small part of the independent news ecosystem, they serve important functions that should continue. Peer-to-peer networking, train and resource sharing through the associations is essential for many of the smaller media outlets. Associations are also useful in helping foundations distribute smaller portions of “block grants” to media outlets and individuals among their membership, a bureaucratic process that some foundations would not undertake individually for small allocations.

The journalists and association leaders considered whether the associations could be merged, would form a federation of some sort, or could work together in some other kind of arrangement.

**Benefits of working together**. If the organizations came together in a federation or under some other kind of agreement, one of the obvious benefits included sharing the services they now offer to their memberships with other members.

Examples: The Institute for Nonprofit News (formerly Investigative News Network), Project Largo, a free WordPress theme developed for news production and presentation for its smaller members with little tech capacity in house; The Media Consortium, many collaborations such as Climate Desk and transitions to new databases for subscriptions and donors; Independent Press Association, a good peer network; The Association of Alternative Newsweeklies, an ad exchange program; and others.

Some suggested that organizations could merge if they do so on the basis of a business model, but even if they don’t merge, there are scalable services that they can share to lower costs and gain efficiency. The shared back-end functions or services could include: underwriting, payroll, technology, fundraising business functions, joint conferences, tax functions, purchasing health insurance in bulk, some accounting and accounts payable, and more.

Advertisers also look for efficiency, so offering them a bigger ad buy across publications and platforms could bring in more revenue. Federating the associations would also enable bulk discounts on technology tools, establish lines of credit, and become more efficient by standardizing contracts.

This kind of shared services model could also be adopted by independent media outlets which, although editorially independent, could also cut costs or gain resources not otherwise available to a publication or website their size.

What values can be shared? For example, the Institute for Nonprofit News, The Media Consortium, the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies and the Local Independent Online News Publishers have much in common: investigations; culture of standing apart and questioning power; never taking public relations at face value; all offer services others can benefit from, such as PR databases, content management systems, etc.; and all need advocates and are interested in fundraising.

**Current and future challenges to working together**. Despite the associations struggling to remain sustainable, they all have membership directors, boards of directors, and all the bureaucracy that comes with that 501(c)3 non-profit structure. With memberships ranging from 50 to 120 or so, many are too small to support this structure.

Business models are similar, but not quite the same. For example, The Media Consortium is given grants on issue areas for anywhere from three to 50 media outlets to do beat reporting, while INN specializes in offering services directly to members and encouraging best practices.

And there are cultural issues and differences in circumstances and mission to consider. For example, The Media Consortium tends to seek to further journalism that is serious and dedicated to the cause of what is right. The alternative weeklies steer toward long-form investigative work and likes to be local while having a more fun-loving and rebel identity. The alternative weeklies also have a reserve of cash, but the number of publications is declining.

Culture clashes can erect walls or perpetuate silos and one potential problem with federations is no one lets go of special interests. However some could lead the way. The Media Consortium and the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies are now in talks to explore merging, having a joint conference, and breaking down those silos.

**Counsel on how to proceed**. Some suggested there was a need to start convening these associations to discuss if and how to move forward. Starting the process slowly by successfully pooling resources one by one, which pushes the membership to ask for more collaborations, might be the way to go.

It was also worth exploring jointly purchasing insurance and employee benefits through the same service as a way to cut costs now. Some associations may want to get more comfortable with the idea by starting specific kinds of collaborations or by having joint conferences.

However, some cautioned that the current economic expansion could end and the news industry needs to be on more solid, sustainable footing before the next recession hits. So there was some urgency to making progress on this front, in whatever model or form is settled on, sooner rather than later.

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**Section 5**

**BOOSTING NUMBERS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA VOICES… AND MAKING MORE VOICES LOUDER**

Whether it’s doing a great story, creating a solid media startup, or establishing a media outlet focused on independent journalism, it all starts with a good idea.

But to survive and last, so much more is needed. To increase the impact of independent journalism in a fractured and specialty-driven news media environment serving an extremely diverse community, not only do startups need to have solid foundations, but large national “brands” of independent journalism should be developed and promoted to the public.

Some journalists gathered at Pocantico felt that developing media brands with significant national audiences and impact would not only compete with the larger audiences of legacy media. It would also help create more awareness of and bring larger audiences to independent journalism as a disillusioned public looks for alternatives to get and share their news and information.

One step in this direction was not to start from scratch, but rather identify existing organizations with the right talent, leadership and strategy whose weaknesses can be addressed.

Some of the participants questioned some elements of this strategy, particularly since the media industry was in the midst of such change and larger independent media outlets could suffer some of the same problems with sustainability that have bedeviled legacy media. In the midst of transformation, some felt focusing on preserving what exists was not forward looking enough.

However, the case was made that existing institutions currently employ many people in independent journalism and failing to preserve them would be devastating to all. These allies need to be supported and targeted for growth, preferably into successful national brands, which can help increase the impact of everyone’s journalism work.

Some of the journalists added that there are examples of sustainable models of national publications with a strong local base. But still others clarified that their reluctance to the way the concept of “branding” was presented was more rooted in the notion of simply preserving what is out there now. Instead, what is needed is a transformation and growth strategy for the sector that can sweep up entire new audiences and, in this way, gain more revenue.

It actually turned out, for many in the room, that both approaches were not incompatible and that they both have the same ultimate goals.

 “Branding was a trigger word perhaps (for some), but branding for me is simply

a business strategy, and we need to take business strategies more seriously

in this sector. We’re not talking about pulling in and contracting and forming

more silos -- we’re talking about getting out there and having more impact.”

**Linda Jue**, Executive Director/Editor

G.W. Williams Center for Independent Journalism

**What Does it Take to Start Up and Sustain an Independent News Enterprise?**

As more independent journalists strive to establish their own voices in this relatively new and transforming news ecosystem, the many successes and failures certainly offer lessons to be learned.

Some of the journalists gathered at Pocantico, keen on seeing independent journalism outlets grow locally, regionally and nationally, sought to shape what has been learned from these experiences into some essential advice on what prospective commercial and non-profit independent media operations need before they turn on the lights for the first time.

Here are their six key points:

**For truth, look in the mirror**. Understand what you don’t know about your potential business, and about people, money and time management. For those looking to start something more than a home-based freelance enterprise, they need to know more beyond journalism. Someone in house needs to be able to answer questions about all manner of insurance and business basics like accounting, managing budgets, and all the administrative duties that come with that.

**Plug in the holes**. Once that self-assessment is done, be ready to learn some of the skills or rent or hire people with those skills to be a natural part of the original team. Someone needs to be on board from the start who has the business acumen and other needed skills. For example: a CFO who can identify revenue streams; and a communications expert to promote the journalism while helping on the development side to reach donors, who are the people who care about public service journalism, for example.

**Learn how to lead**. The right CEO, not necessarily the journalist/founder or original investor, needs to be someone who runs the entire organization, someone who knows how to get their hands dirty on all fronts. It should be someone able to meet with donors and investors and then apply the funds to the right enterprise; someone who can attend and be comfortable in editorial meetings and who is responsible to the auditor and a board; someone who can close the loops in the operation and do some fill-in work when needed.

There is no one answer to how people lead an enterprise of this type successfully. The person must be open to collaboration in the key areas of journalism, business wisdom and technology, supported by and in synch with a board that has the leadership skills to help the media outlet’s mission.

**Messaging and social media**. It is essential that someone on the team needs to be PR savvy and knows how to market, promote and communicate the product, the stories and the overall mission.

In the realm of development, there should be people working on public relations, marketing, communications or someone who can do all three. Editorial people should not be trying to do this part-time for their own stories and projects and the business staff is not likely able to do the job with the focus it needs. But it’s vital so the journalism and the media outlet gets onto social media, radio, TV and print; bringing eyes and ears back to the site or the outlet. This is essential when talking to investors and donors about the impact stories have generated.

Many journalists think they know how to do social media and don’t pay as much attention to it as they should. The continuous changes and growth in social media bring up new opportunities that can pass the journalists by as they struggle to keep up with what’s new or with new ways of using what’s already out there. Someone needs to be on social media around the clock, which is a challenge for independent media outlets that often cannot compete for talent that opts for higher pay somewhere else.

**Understanding the audience/community**. The leaders of any outlet must first know and intimately understand their audience/community. Who are they targeting? Why? Are they limiting their options/possible revenue by not fully understanding their community?

Some of the outlets’ own marketing today seems to be aimed squarely at foundations or funders, some of whom are interested in coverage of particular topics or issues, for example. But many funders actually want to know how the outlet is targeting and serving the community and the audience, and, importantly, who they have identified as their audience.

Small mom and pop operations may not need as many resources to be sustainable, especially if they are intimately connected with their audience. But media outlets aspiring to be larger need to figure out how to grow their audience and think of their audience as sources of revenue that can help sustain them.

Engaging the audience continuously is key, which can be difficult based on internal capacity. But the media outlet should be able to show the impact it is having on its audience and how it is making a difference in their lives. That resonance with the community and the audience is an important part of becoming sustainable.

**Revenue, revenue, revenue**. With all these pieces in place, three solid lines of revenue must be identified. As a safety margin, each of the three lines needs to be robust enough to support 100 percent of the total operational costs. This seems too obvious to overlook, but there are too many folks going into ventures just with great ideas. And that’s not enough.

In non-profit news operations, for example, a good developer or development team – someone with a good list of contacts in philanthropy and wealthy donors – is essential. It should be someone who can own the challenge of finding money to keep the enterprise going, and usually journalists will have no clue how to function on that end of the business side.

In a non-profit outlet, the leaders also need to identify how collaborations, products, and stories will general separate revenue streams, each one robust enough to cover all operational costs. That’s why a CFO who can identify those revenue streams is important and it’s essential he or she be part of the team from the start.

More to discuss

In conclusion, the independent journalism world needs to attract more expertise in business and marketing in its ranks, and needs to generate more market dynamics so that competition continues to push innovation. Some high priorities for more discussion: out-of-the-box thinking on revenue streams and on ideas that will lead to revenue; taking more advantage of technology to help spread the journalistic work and develop ideas and stories that drive up impact.

**Independent Media Acquiring Legacy Outlets**

Aside from working for established and new independent media outlets or creating start-ups in these times of much change, some of the participants at Pocantico wanted to look at possibly increasing the number of independent voices by taking over some of what is now legacy media.

Some agreed to explore the acquisition of legacy media outlets that have continued to be profitable even though there have been year-over-year declines. They will initially focus on a local newspaper with deep roots in a community, but there could be other opportunities.

“Independent media is pretty much all small ball. We can play big ball

and still keep our morals. We tend to get really caught up in minutia,

but we need to think big and bold.”

**Martin Reynolds**, Senior Editor – Community Engagement

Bay Area News Group

This is about assessing the viability of this approach and doing the necessary research to see what might be a legacy media outlet ripe for this, why previous proposals of this type succeeded or failed, and what information and potential funders or investors would be needed to come up with a plan. While doing the assessment, the journalists looking into this said they would be consulting with community foundations, unions, media finance consultants, tax professionals, large donors, and others who could offer information, context or advice.

The goal is to improve the quality of local news by changing the mission from just making money to enrich for-profit companies to supporting and sustaining journalism and community information, more in line with parts of the independent journalism ecosystem.

**Action Step**: **Martin Reynolds** of the Bay Area News Group and **Michael Stoll** of San Francisco Public Press will take the lead of completing the assessment regarding acquiring a legacy media outlet.

**Kevin Davis**, formerly of Investigative News Network, **Craig Aaron** of FreePress and **Ricardo Sandoval-Palos** of the Fund for Investigative Journalism pledged to help with this effort. **Michelle Garcia**, freelance journalist and filmmaker, also agreed to assist where she could in some of the research.