



Five Years of The Public Interest News Foundation



Back in the summer of 2019, a group of us got together to talk about the future of independent news in the UK. We were inspired by the Cairncross Review of public interest journalism, which had recommended a new Institute for Public Interest News (IPIN), but disappointed by the Government's refusal to create this institute. We were also determined to ensure that indie news providers should not be left out of any future plans by policymakers, philanthropists and big tech platforms.

And so, rather than wait for someone else to create IPIN, we launched our own organisation: the Public Interest News Foundation. PINF was registered as a company on 18 November 2019 and became a charity the following year.

As an independent foundation, PINF is not dependent on the government or the legacy news industry for support. Instead, we have raised funds from more than 20 generous individuals, companies, trusts and foundations. This has given us the freedom to form our own vision of the future, to build support for this vision around the UK and across the world, and to launch a range of innovative programmes.

In this review, we look back at the first five years of PINF. We still have a long way to go, but we're proud of what we've achieved. This has only been possible because of our thriving network of indie news providers, funders, researchers and journalism support organisations in the UK and beyond. So, this review is dedicated to all of you who have been part of the PINF story so far. We look forward to working with you on the next stage of the adventure.



Jonathan Heawood

Executive Director

A brief history

The Public Interest News Foundation (PINF) was launched in November 2019 as the first charity in the UK to support public interest news - ethical and impartial journalism that informs and empowers the public about the things that matter to all of us. We believe that **everyone in the UK should benefit from public interest news** that speaks to them, for them and with them.

We believe that **indie news providers** with turnover below £2m have a **crucial role to play** in reaching communities that have been let down by other parts of the media and developing new, ethical models of journalism.

So, our mission is to ensure **the social and financial sustainability of indie news providers in communities across the UK.**

As we approach our fifth birthday and look ahead to the next half a decade, join us as we take stock of the first five! Through our various advocacy, capacity-building and research projects, we have:

- 01 Financially and/or practically supported more than 100 indie news providers, laying the groundwork for an innovative and sustainable sector

- 02 Facilitated at least £735,000 of funding into the sector through direct grants, fiscal sponsorship, and building the capacity of providers to generate audience revenue

- 03 Launched a news network of 100 providers that has fostered connection and collaboration across the sector

- 04 Engaged dozens of policymakers from across the political spectrum, making the case for the importance of high-quality independent news and securing amendments to key legislation

- 05 Created the first and only comprehensive map of local news in the UK and produced more than a dozen widely cited research reports, relying on quantitative and qualitative analysis to build a wider understanding of the sector

- 06 Built a wide coalition of news providers, funders, researchers and journalism support organisations in the UK and beyond

Capacity Building

Helping indie news providers become sustainable

Covid-19 Emergency Fund & Development Programme (June-September 2020) [READ MORE](#)

A £60,000 emergency fund established during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, supporting 20 providers to **publish essential public interest news to communities all over the UK** at a time when access to information could be a matter of life and death.

Leadership Programme (September-November 2021) [READ MORE](#)

A learning and coaching programme for fourteen indie providers who reported improvements in **connectedness, support from others, confidence and community engagement** and more.

Indie News Forum (2022-present)

- Leeds (2022)
- Bristol (2024)
- Glasgow (2024)

Through the annual Indie News Forum, held each autumn in a different UK city, we bring dozens of providers together to share experiences, build morale and collaborate. We run open space sessions, develop action plans for the following year and invite guest speakers to discuss salient topics with attendees, including press regulation, public notice spending, crowdfunding and the Local Democracy Reporting Service.

Over the years, the forum has inspired PINF projects such as the Indie News Network and Indie News Week and facilitated collaboration between different providers in the sector.

“ Meeting people doing the same thing and being able to share experiences [was a highlight]. We all tend to work in our own bubbles and so physical events like these are so important and great for the soul.

Feedback on 2023 Forum



Fiscal Sponsorship (2021-present)

Through our fiscal sponsorship function, we have facilitated almost £400,000 in funding to indie news providers, including Watershed, Greater Govanhill and The Ferret. As sponsors with a 501.c.3 equivalency determination, we act as an intermediary between news organisations that provide charitable journalism but are not registered charities, and both UK and US donors.

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I have every confidence that PINF will achieve all its (and our) ambitions in time, but even if it didn't, just bringing all of us together here has been a fantastic achievement and I'm sure most or all of us feel as I do that just being able to connect with others doing the same thing and sharing similar experiences has been a fantastic support. I genuinely think I may have given up months ago if I couldn't just visit this place and get the gee up I needed from time to time. Thanks all for just being here and sharing.

Archie MacKay

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Indie News Network (September 2023-present)

A vibrant and growing WhatsApp group we launched and facilitate as a space for providers to connect with each other. Since launching just over a year ago, it has grown to 100 members who regularly collaborate, commiserate, and support each other on big ethical questions as well as minute, technical issues.

The community, made up of different groups based on provider interests and geographic location, is also an invaluable source of insights for PINF, and directly informs our work to ensure it is grounded in the real needs of the sector.

Indie SkillShare (January 2024-present)

We have worked with members of the Indie News Network to identify a number of core skills needed in order to develop sustainable operations, and work to source pro bono training or host peer-to-peer exchanges to facilitate that learning. This has so far included successful sessions on fundraising, editorial analytics, charitable journalism and TikTok.



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PINF has been the most active and most useful media organisation I've interacted with as an indie media publisher. What you've offered in terms of online and in-person events, as well as the willingness to sort out problems, is really appreciated.

Amanda Eleftheriades-Sherry

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Indie News Fund (2024-present)

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Running in tandem with the first ever Indie News Week in June, this match fund generated almost £130,000 in new revenue for the sector. PINF supported 27 participating providers to raise nearly £78,000 from donations and new subscriptions, of which £50,000 was matched from the Fund.

Providers saw an average 60% increase in reader revenue, which has allowed providers to commission and mentor reporters from marginalised, underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds, commission freelance reporters to cover housing and elections, print a whole year's worth of issues, upgrade IT infrastructure and so much more.

I have been amazed and surprised by the willingness to support the community newsletter. I also learned the value of a campaign for raising awareness as much as money. Will have to learn more about grant/fundraising as this is a confidence-booster for future planning.

Wendy Robertson, The Bridge



Research

Building a wider understanding of the sector

[PINF Index of Independent News Publishing \(July 2021-present\)](#) [READ MORE](#)

The PINF Index is our flagship annual report, a comprehensive annual survey of the indie news sector which has helped us understand the sector we exist to support. Hundreds of providers have responded to the survey over the years, offering us a unique and detailed insight into the sector.

The Index, now in its fourth edition, has allowed us to chart the changing fortunes of the independent news sector in the UK. We have shown how small news providers are punching above their weight and playing a crucial role in their communities—amplifying the voices of underrepresented groups, creating a forum for debate and driving democratic change.

The reports have been cited in numerous news publications, parliamentary speeches and are an invaluable tool in our advocacy with policymakers and funders.

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It was a fascinating session yesterday and some really interesting figures. Really appreciated the range of speakers you gathered too - range of experiences and hearing other people doing inspiring stuff was a nice shot in the arm on a tough deadline day.

What I love about the sector - and why I'm so passionate about it - is there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Each area needs something very different, and will have different metrics. Being able to work on what unites us while celebrating the variety is so important. Thanks for all you are doing in this regard.

Feedback on Index report and launch event

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Transformation Programme (August 2021 – April 2022)

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In 2021, we designed a pilot programme to transform the media, one newsroom at a time. In the context of research indicating that the news industry lacked representation of diverse groups, we decided to match people from underrepresented backgrounds (whom we called Transformation Editors) with national and local newsrooms. By giving the former meaningful control over the latter for a limited period of time, we wanted to see if new voices would be given a platform and have stories that might otherwise be missed or messed up by more privileged editors.

The results were promising. Despite the limitations of a small, time- and resource-limited pilot, the Transformation Editors reported seeing considerable change in how their host newsrooms understood the issues facing their communities. They themselves came away with a better understanding of how newsrooms work and reported higher trust in journalism. Editors who took part said they wanted to continue engaging more meaningfully with underrepresented communities.

Survey on trust in local news (December 2021)

[READ MORE](#)

This survey of 2,000 adults showed that UK residents overwhelmingly trust truly local news more than news produced by organisations based outside their area. This research has been crucial in our advocacy for the indie news sector and has helped us impress upon policymakers the importance of news that is reported by indie providers who also have a stake in their communities.

Impact Fund (September 2021 – July 2022)

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In our first attempt at experimental research, PINF provided an £8,000 grant to five newsrooms to boost their election coverage and measure the impact of increased coverage on democratic engagement. The research **yielded some evidence of improved turnout in the subject wards**, and showed the need for more comprehensive research into the impact of journalism on democracy in the UK.

Local News Plans (September 2022 – January 2023)

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In order to strengthen public interest news in local communities, we travelled around the UK and spoke to residents in six locations to find out what people want and need from local news in Bangor, Bristol, Folkestone, Glasgow, Manchester and Newry.

Through these conversations, we found that: **People believe that local news should be truly local, local news providers are struggling to meet this need** despite their commitment and passion, and **local residents are keen to support new funding models for local news.**

The findings confirmed the scale of the challenge facing local news, but also contain the seeds of a new approach to local news. One of those seeds has developed into the Local News Fund for Newry (see under Capacity-Building).

Local News Map (June 2023-present)

[READ MORE](#)

We developed one of our most ambitious projects because we wanted to find out how well (or poorly) every community in the UK is provided with local news.

In June 2023, we launched the first version of the Local News Map, in which we attempted to identify every professional text- and audio-based news outlet (the definition of which relies on continuously evolving criteria) in the UK. In 2024, we released an updated report with new findings, definitions and analysis. We hope to continue updating the map, which we see as a living resource.

Using this data, we were able to identify 'news deserts', 'news drylands' and 'news oases.' Particularly striking is the finding that 4.7 million people in the UK live in news deserts without any dedicated news source for their local area (as of May 2024).

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A very striking finding about the link between deprivation and low news provision.
Feedback on the map
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The map shows the news provider's location, medium (print only, online only, both, radio), owner (corporate, independent) and location of owner.

While every map—including ours—is an imperfect approximation of reality, the Local News Map has proven a real asset to PINF and other infrastructure organisations in understanding the sector and communicating about it to funders and policymakers. It has also been useful to academics and researchers studying the sector, referenced in trade, local and national press, and cited in Ofcom's review of local news.

Driving Disinformation (September 2023 – September 2024)

How does public debate become toxic, and how much of a wedge can disinformation drive between government and local residents? These are two of the questions we set out to answer in a collaborative research report with the cross-party thinktank Demos, examining the debate that unfolded in UK cities where Low-Traffic Neighbourhoods were introduced.

Working from the assumption that disinformation was the main driver of the social divisions around this policy, we analysed more than half a million online posts and engaged more than 70 stakeholders, including local journalists, community leaders, activists and politicians in Enfield, Oxford and Rochdale.

The working assumption was turned on its head. We found that democratic deficits at every political level and barriers to the robust provision of trusted independent local news enabled the weaponisation of disinformation in the first place.

Honourable mentions:

- Community Health Reporters – a new role for local journalism? (May 2023) [READ MORE](#)
- How to design a £100m/yr UK journalism fund (September 2023) [READ MORE](#)

Advocacy

Driving support for independent public interest news

News for All (July 2022-present)

[READ MORE](#)

Our campaign to unlock fair compensation for indie news providers from Big Tech using a new regulatory regime established by the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act.

The campaign has a simple premise: News providers publish content that fuels tens of billions of pounds of advertising transactions in the UK every year, but two companies, Alphabet and Meta, hoard the lion's share of this revenue while the journalism industry struggles to survive.

To remedy this, we have built a coalition of more than 100 news providers, regional and national organisers, researchers, journalism support organisations and funders with a common goal: to ensure indie news providers are able to thrive in the UK's digital marketplace.



Through this coalition, we have secured and supported several amendments to the legislation to confirm that collective bargaining will be available for smaller players, increase regulatory transparency and limit political interference in the new regime, in addition to securing on the record assurances from ministers about several key issues.

We have built excellent working relationships with the regulator and key policymakers and continue to build on those relationships to advocate for the sector at every stage of legislation, regulation and Big Tech negotiations.

Indie News Week (June 2024-present) [READ MORE](#)

Big Tech greed and corporate takeovers are strangling local news, and the indie news providers that bring you the news you need are struggling to keep the lights on.

That's why, in 2024, PINF launched the UK's first awareness-raising and crowdfunding campaign for independent news, with the slogan No News is Bad News™.

The campaign ran in tandem with the Indie News Fund (see under Capacity-Building) and was designed to raise the profile of indie news providers while supporting them to increase their engagement with the communities they serve.

40 independent news providers signed up for the campaign, from Shetland to Eastbourne, Belfast to Bethesda and Norwich. Participants held more than 40 in-person and online activities, attracting diverse audiences to newsrooms, cafes, schools, pubs, art galleries and more.

'It was fantastic and one of the most supportive I've been a part of – really appreciate the team's efforts and delighted to have met so many peers and potential collaborators through the campaign.'

Feedback on Indie News Week



In addition to the financial value of the Indie News Fund, participants in Indie News Week also overwhelmingly reported increased confidence and capacity to continue community engagement and fundraising. We believe that this initiative has created a virtuous cycle of sustainability, which we can build on in future years.

An overwhelming majority of participants told us that the campaign has inspired them to hold more in-person activities and think about new ways to engage their audiences.

Besides what you've achieved in the real world (which is what really matters), it's also very gratifying from [our] perspective to be able to approve a grant report where so much progress has been made. Kudos to you and the PINF team, as well as the wider network that you've built!

A funder

Local News Commission (July 2024-present)

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Policymakers from all sides of the political divide have said localism is a priority, but unfortunately have not yet made the connection between the localism agenda and the local news agenda.

Drawing deep expertise from different UK sectors, PINF has assembled a Local News Commission made up of more than a dozen leading thinkers and doers. Commissioners include leaders in UK civil society, local and national politics, trade unions, business and entertainment. They are exploring the challenges facing local news, hearing from expert witnesses across the sector, and producing a list of policy recommendations for the Labour government.

Commissioners will also act as ambassadors in high-level political and funding networks, making the case for these recommendations and driving home a key message: we need vibrant local news to create pride in place and ensure that local power responds to the concerns of local people.

Through this Commission, we will break out of the silo that encloses the debate about local news and build a new coalition.

National and International Conferences

PINF regularly attends conferences and other major events to ensure the indie news sector is represented in the rooms where conversations about the future of journalism, technology and democracy are taking place.

Through these appearances, we have contributed to and built international coalitions, captured the attention of UK policymakers, and made the case for indie news and policy reform in Europe, Africa and North America. Some recent examples include:

- International Journalism Festival (Perugia, 2022-present)
- Media Democracy Festival (2022-present)
- Big Tech and Journalism (Johannesburg, July 2023)
- Green Party Conference (September 2024)
- Labour Party Conference (September 2024)

[READ MORE](#)

National and International Conferences

PINF takes every opportunity to make submissions and offer testimony to select committee inquiries, drawing on our comprehensive research and expansive network of news providers and infrastructure organisations to ensure that policymakers understand the value of having a robust (and robustly supported) news sector, and the sweeping challenges this sector faces today.

Our submissions have been widely referenced in reports published following these inquiries. Notable examples include the DCMS inquiry into the 'Sustainability of local journalism' (March 2022) and the Communications and Digital Committee's inquiry into the 'Future of UK Journalism'.

Who's funded PINF's first five years?

Ashken Family Charitable Foundation

NHS England

Benjamin Goldsmith

Oak Foundation

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Open Society Foundations

European Media and Information Fund

Paul Hamlyn Foundation

Flotilla Foundation

Reset

Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust

Reva & David Logan Foundation

Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust

Sigrid Rausing Trust

JRSST Charitable Trust

Stone King LLP

Lankelly Chase

Struan and Jana Bartlett

Luminate

Tinsley Charitable Trust

Neal and Dominique Gandhi

The Cobalt Trust

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Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or would like to find out more, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.

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