Census Report on Civic News Organizations

FUTURE OF LOCAL NEWS NETWORK

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INTRO DUCTION

This report provides an overview of the key characteristics of a selection of local civic news organizations in the United States. By definition, civic media is any form of communication that strengthens the social bonds within a community or creates a strong sense of civic engagement among its residents[1]. That could look like a local newspaper, a Whatsapp group that shares information on the neighborhood or a library project that engages people on mapping information needs of the community. The goal of this report was to understand local news and information producers in this specific context — including their main characteristics, community impact and sustainability needs — in order to grow and support the civic information ecosystem they are a part of.

To complete this report, we conducted online interviews with 18 leaders of civic news organizations between July and September of 2023. The data we collected spans from 2003 to the present day and offers insights into these organizations' operational structures, leadership teams, governance structures, fundraising structures and visions for the future.

1 ZHANGJIA, "DEFINING CIVIC MEDIA", JANUARY 11, 2018.
THE CENTER FOR CIVIC MEDIA AT MIT.
2 HTTPS://ENOISCONTEUDO.COM.BR/
3 HTTPS://AJOR.ORG.BR/
4 HTTPS://WWW.ICFJ.ORG/
5 FUTURE OF LOCAL NEWS: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Who did it and why

My name is Nina Weingrill, I've worked as a reporter for the two of the biggest newsrooms in Brazil. In 2009 I co-founded Énois[2], a non-profit organization that supports diversity in local and civic journalism in Brazil. The organization has trained more than 5,000local journalists and in 2020, created the first program to support civic local newsrooms in the country. I'm also the founding member of the first Association of Digital Journalism in Brazil (AJOR)[3], and a fellow of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)[4], where I research tools and methodologies for the development and strengthening of local information ecosystems and its intersections with local public policy.

As part of the News Futures collective[5] — an independent, peer-led community of practice established in 2018 among newsroom leaders, community organizers, and media researchers — and in collaboration with Darryl Holiday, Sierra Sangetti-Daniels, and Kate Harloe, we initiated this project to explore the patterns and distinctions among civic news organizations. Our aim was to gain insights into the current state of this field and its evolving global landscape. We sought to identify the necessary infrastructure required to support this movement in the near future.

CRITERIA

For this first part of the study, we wanted to examine organizations whose stated goal was to encourage local civic action through the production, distribution and consumption of high-quality, trustworthy information and who shared internal values, ethics and practices that foster democracy. All organizations included in this study meet most, but not necessarily all, of the criteria below:

1 Local news and information producers that activate local civic action, including community organizing and problem-solving, democratic deliberation and political engagement.

2 Organizations that work with under-represented communities, to fill information gaps, including BIPOC, non-english speaking, rural areas, low-wealth communities and news deserts.

3 Organizations that offer publicly accessible community media education and training using established curriculum.

4 Organizations that provide local news and information services in the communities where they are located.

5 Organizations that maintain consistent participatory media practices, such as community listening mechanisms, including, but not limited to, free and public listening sessions and community advisory boards.

6 Organizations that adhere to public standards of equity, nonviolence and editorial independence, including nonpartisan organizations, partisan organizations and organizations that are publicly-funded.

Organizations interviewed

Jiquanda Johnson
FLINT BEAT

Sarah Alvarez
OUTLIER MEDIA

Harry Backlund
CITY BUREAU

Gretjen Clausing
PHILLYCAM

Jean Friedman
RESOLVE PHILLY

Elizabeth Green
CIVIC NEWS

Eric Marsh
WHYY
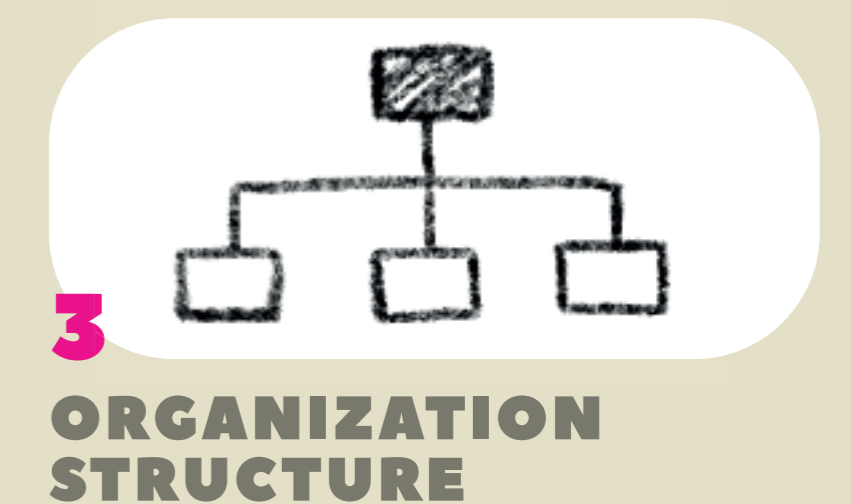
Mazin Sidahmed
DOCUMENTED

Mike Rispoli
FREE PRESS

Tasneem Raja
OAKLANDSIDE

Chad Johnston
CREATV

Madeleine Bar
EL TIMPANO

Richard Young
CIVICLEX

Cierra Hinton
SCALAWAG MAGAZINE

Adrienne Martin
MLK50

Saba Long
ATLANTA CIVIC CIRCLE

Kamille Whittaker
CANOPY ATLANTA

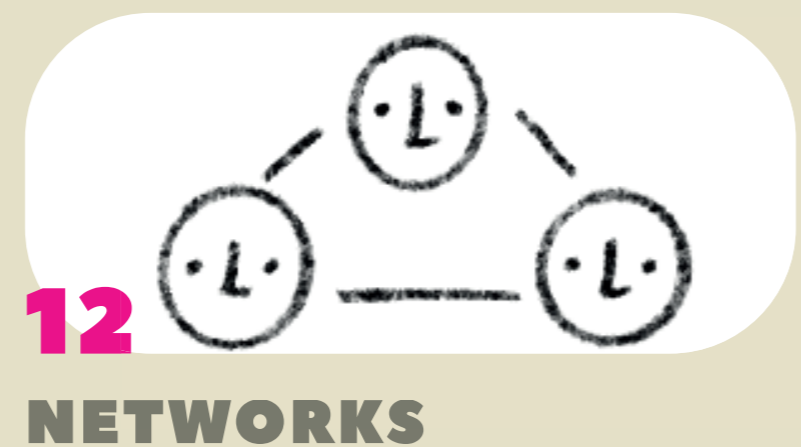Sewell Chan
TEXAS TRIBUNE

METHO DOLOGY

For this research project, we designed a methodology to test the hypothesis that a new movement is emerging within the journalism and local media ecosystem[6]. This movement consists of organizations that center communities in their information and journalism work and identify as civic-minded entities. Our goal was to understand what characteristics and traits these organizations share. Many of the organizations we surveyed are affiliated with the News Futures Collective; others were suggested for inclusion by members of News Futures. We utilized a deliberate sampling method, seeking regional diversity and organizations that used different operational models.

We arranged interviews with the leadership of these organizations, conducting the conversations through a combination of data survey and in-depth discussion. The questions posed were formulated with the intention to capture information across 12 major segments:

1
GENERAL DATA ON PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

2
ORGANIZATION UNDERSTANDING OF PURPOSE

3
ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE

6 HTTPS://LOCALNEWSROADMAP.ORG/

4

PEOPLE | TEAM

5

AUDIENCE/ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND DISTRIBUTION

6

TRAINING RESOURCES

7

BUDGET AND REVENUE SOURCES

8

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL STRUCTURE

9

METRICS AND IMPACT

10

COVERAGE

11

TRANSPARENCY

12

NETWORKS
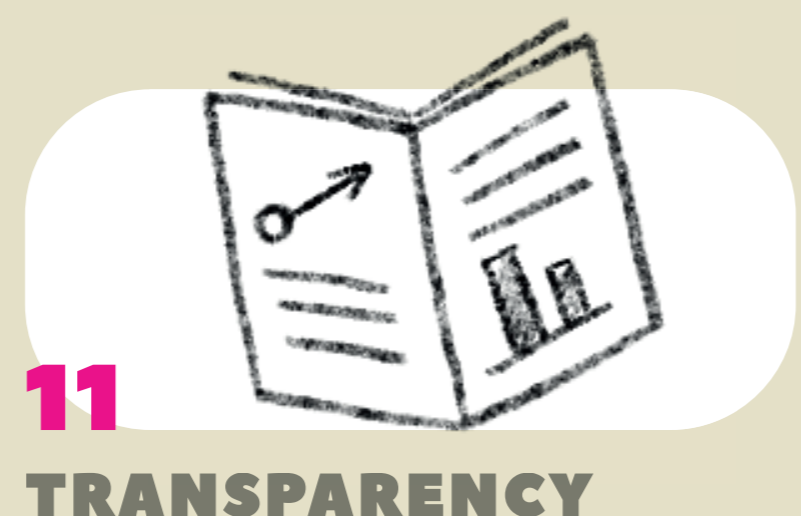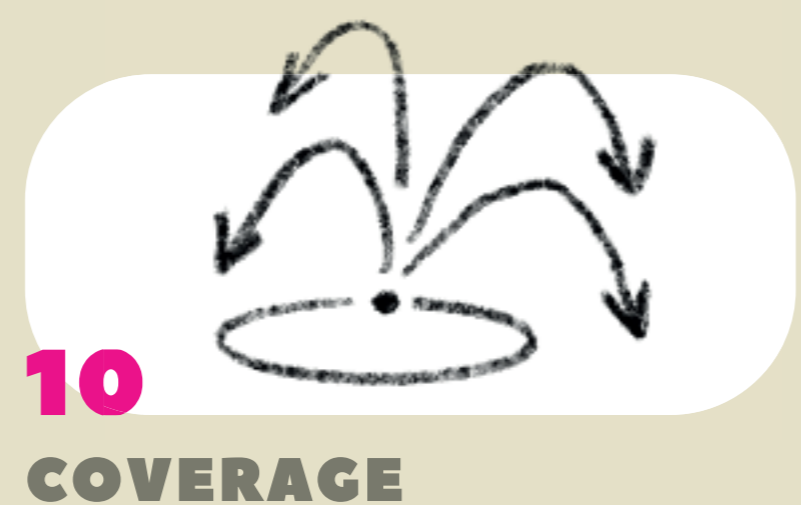
After the interviews, we conducted a statistical analysis of the data collected and performed a content analysis of the interview transcripts. For ethical reasons, all information obtained will be shared here while respecting the anonymity of responders.

This methodology has its limitations, based on the scope of organizations interviewed. We acknowledge that they do not represent the entirety of the ecosystem, especially when considering organizations that have been around for a shorter period of time or are not yet financially sustainable. However, our intention in this initial phase was to focus on the experiences accumulated over a longer period, thereby influencing the findings with this specific temporal focus. We are also aware that there is much more to explore in terms of information and data cross-referencing, which we intend to undertake in the next steps moving forward.

IN SIGHTS

Welcome! Before you start reading the full report, we wanted to share with you a few important insights at how data and discussions connected, while making sense of this material. It's crucial to emphasize that these insights do not necessarily reflect the vision of News Futures but are rather perspectives shared during the discussions, complemented by the author's experiences as a co-founder of a civic media organization. Each insight we find is paired with a few questions. These questions have two goals: first, to get people thinking about how that information relates to their own experience, and second, to encourage everyone to think collectively on how to improve processes and grow shared knowledge in the civic media ecosystem.

Team growth and succession

We requested organizations to provide their team charts, and upon analysis, we have identified recurring patterns that allowed us to create a framework encapsulating the most prevalent team structures among these organizations. The resulting synthesis can be pictured as follows:

- **Board**
  - **Executive Team** — CEO
    - **Operations** — COMMS/MARKETING, FINANCING, MANAGEMENT, ETC
    - **Development** — FUNDRAISING, GROWTH, IMPACT, ETC
    - **Programmatic**
      - **Editorial Team**
      - **Civic Education/ Engagement/ Community Team/ Audience**
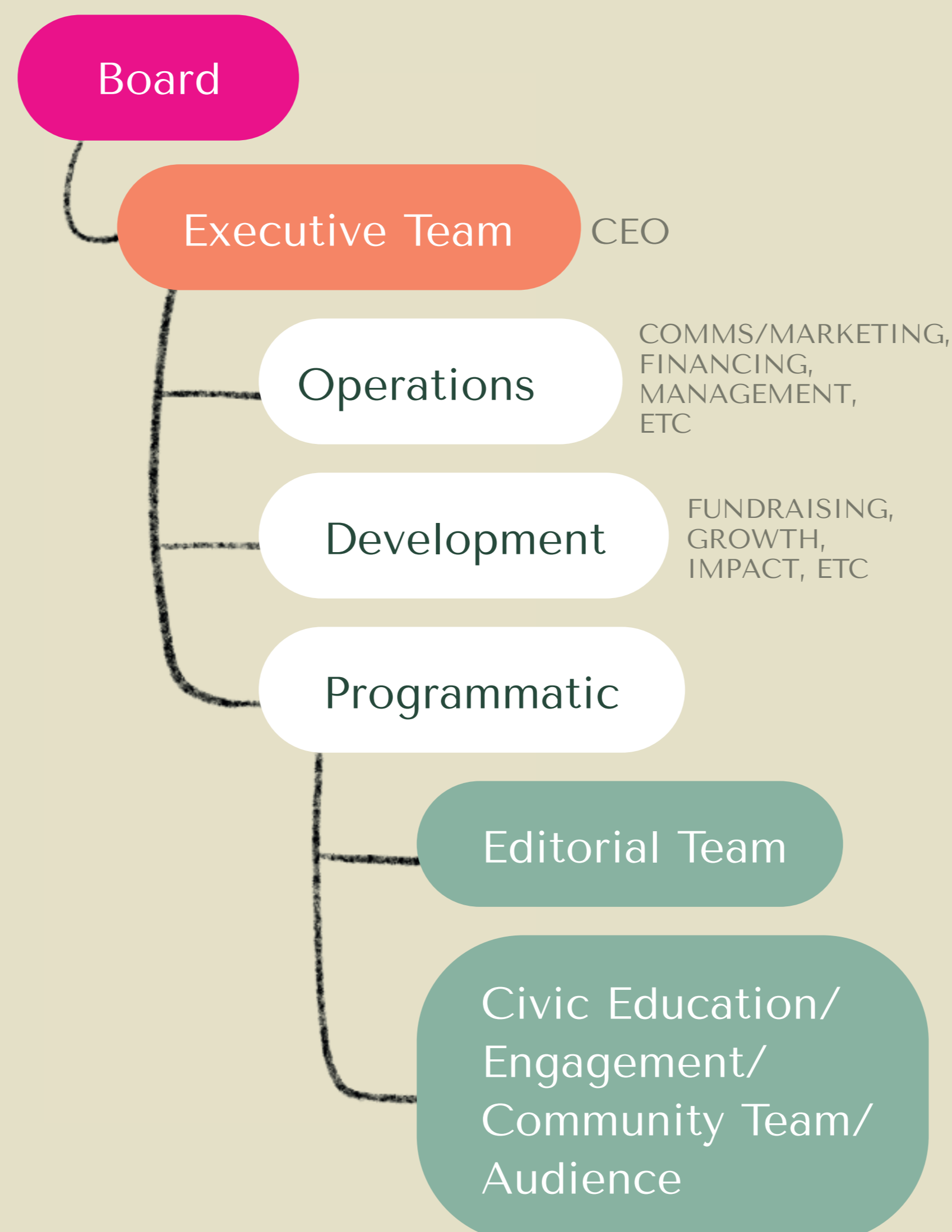
Most organizations adopt a hierarchical structure featuring clearly defined leadership roles, such as CEOs, Executive Directors, Chief Officers, and Department Heads, who oversee various facets of the organization. Collaboration across functions is a common practice, where different teams and departments join forces to pursue shared objectives.

Many organizations prioritize community engagement and outreach, often designating specific roles and departments for this purpose. Organizations also typically have boards and committees, whose main responsibility is fundraising and providing valuable support to staff members.

However, it's worth noting that only one organization boasts a dedicated People & Culture team, responsible for a human resources department (with a single mention of a Career Development Lead as part of the Leadership Team). This aspect aligns with the data indicating that only 28% have established succession plans.

Despite their strong commitment to their communities, these organizations sometimes struggle to adequately attend to their internal needs. This is not due to a lack of desire but rather stems from limited resources for talent development

and human resources. Additionally, this pattern underscores that many organizations rely on their founders for primary leadership roles.

These considerations lead us to important questions: How do they best prepare the next generation for this important work? What type of organizational culture do they aspire to cultivate? How can they develop effective training programs for leadership roles? Can they create common structures and networks aimed specifically to take care of people?

These considerations lead us to important questions:

HOW DO THEY BEST PREPARE THE NEXT GENERATION FOR THIS IMPORTANT WORK?

WHAT TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE DO THEY ASPIRE TO CULTIVATE?

HOW CAN THEY DEVELOP EFFECTIVE TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR LEADERSHIP ROLES?

CAN THEY CREATE COMMON STRUCTURES AND NETWORKS AIMED SPECIFICALLY TO TAKE CARE OF PEOPLE?

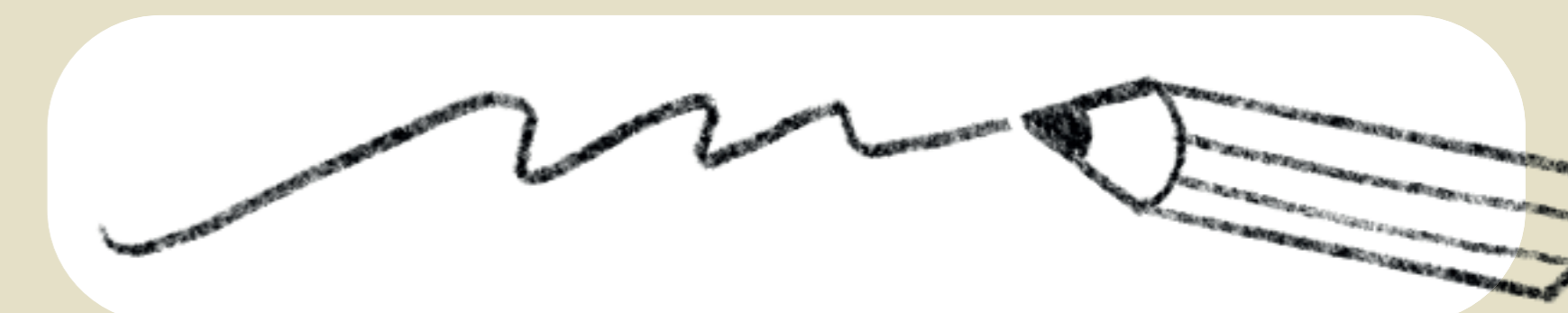# Community engagement and audience reach

2

Only 11% of the organizations have positions within their highest executive tier that encompass roles aimed at directly engaging the public, such as "Community Manager" or "Civic Partnerships Lead." This scenario presents us with multiple possible interpretations and questions. First, it could correspond with the finding that only half of the surveyed organizations believe their audience aligns effectively with the communities they intend to serve. Additionally, these roles, which directly engage with the public, do not appear to hold significant strategic or structural importance within the organizations.

Could the lack of high-level public engagement roles within organizations be a factor in their difficulties meeting the needs of their intended audiences?

This situation also raises questions about these organizations' distribution channels. While the majority of them do distribute content online, this data suggests that some organizations may not be fully harnessing other available distribution channels.

Could expanding their reach to a broader spectrum of platforms, formats and media prove beneficial in reaching a more diverse and expansive audience — including offline?

Below are the roles related to community organizing or community reach that the organizations listed:

Community and Education Engagement: This area focuses on bringing the community together for discussions, suggesting community engagement and outreach activities.

Community Outreach Coordinators: These individuals are involved in building relationships with the community and fostering connections, which are essential for community organizing and outreach.

Audience and Community Team: This team is responsible for community correspondence through tools like social media. It typically focuses on community outreach and engagement.

Civic Education Team: This team is responsible for engaging with civic media and education about community issues.

Development Officer: While primarily responsible for fundraising, a Development Officer often plays a role in community outreach to donors and supporters.

Director of Movement Partnerships: This role involves growing and deepening relationships with communities, grassroots organizations, and social movements, indicating a role in community organizing and outreach.

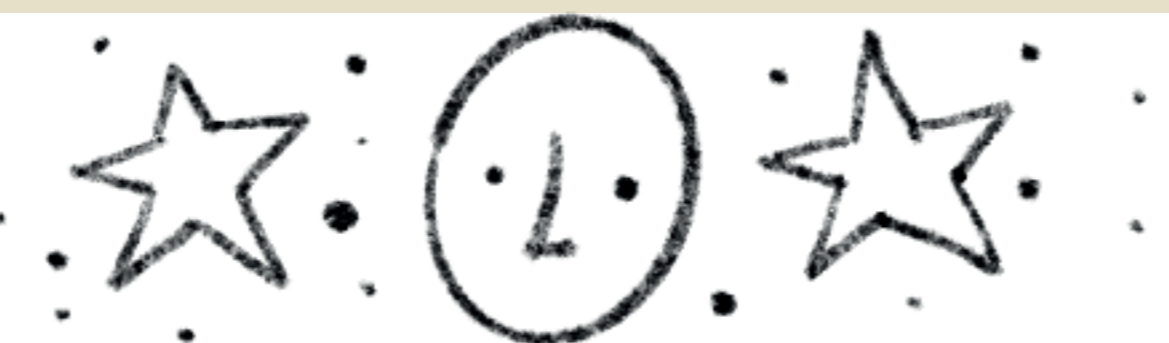**Community Partnership and Outreach Team:** This team handles grassroots community outreach and paid partnerships, as part of community engagement.

Head of Community Partnership and Outreach Team: This role oversees civic partnerships with government agencies and nonprofits, involving community outreach and collaboration.

Impact and Theory of Change

These organizations' Theories of Change frequently revolve around inclusivity and participation, with a focus on serving underrepresented populations, marginalized communities, and historically silenced voices. The majority of these theories place a strong emphasis on inspiring civic actions, actively involving individuals in civic life, and empowering communities.

Furthermore, most organizations firmly believe that journalism should be a driving force for specific outcomes, including policy changes, shifts in narratives, increased civic participation, and transformative social change. Several organizations also mention successful culture shifts within the journalism landscape itself, as well as the effective technical approaches that have led to impactful work.

However, despite having clear objectives regarding the type of impact they aim to achieve, most organizations express dissatisfaction with their current impact tracking methods. They openly acknowledge the challenges of tracking and measuring the long-term impact of their efforts in motivating communities' civic engagement over time

This prompts questions about the need to develop a shared governance framework and Theory of Change that could be structured within the ecosystem.

Could this group share best practices regarding governance structures that evolve organically in response to the ecosystem's demands?

Are there commonalities in each Theory of Change that could contribute to the overall system? Is there a way collective data could inform an impact report on these organizations' presence within these territories? Could this be done without running the risk of backfiring, as its effectiveness varies across different groups, communities, and ecosystems? Is there a pattern of a democratic environment they aspire to create, and whether they should adopt a more direct service-oriented organizational model in order to fundraise?

Participatory journalism common curriculum

4

Most of these organizations aim to directly involve community members in decision-making and news production processes. They emphasize collaboration, understanding, and building trust with the communities they serve. They also aim to set a gold standard for inclusive journalism by showcasing diverse storytellers and perspectives, and prioritize storytelling that resonates with their diverse audience.

With all that in common, they still struggle to systematize their training processes and their innovative journalism practices.

Outside of being an internal need (most organizations teach without a curriculum and that increases time spent and concentrates functions on Editors),

replicating a shared curriculum could benefit other organizations and be useful to other types of institutions, such as journalism schools.

The more institutionalized these practices are, the more we can support the application of these practices in local contexts. While experimentation is also important, it requires that we expend energy on learning instead of on building common practices.

How much would this group benefit from a common structured curriculum built out of the practices of this field?

How important is that to establish the learning process of this ecosystem?

And how would a common curriculum politically impact the curriculum of traditional Journalism Schools?

BACK GROUND DATA

1. Founding of Organizations

The organizations interviewed were founded between 2003 and 2021 — with one exception in 1954. Starting in 2015, more organizations were founded each year. In 2017, there was a peak, with the establishment of four organizations.

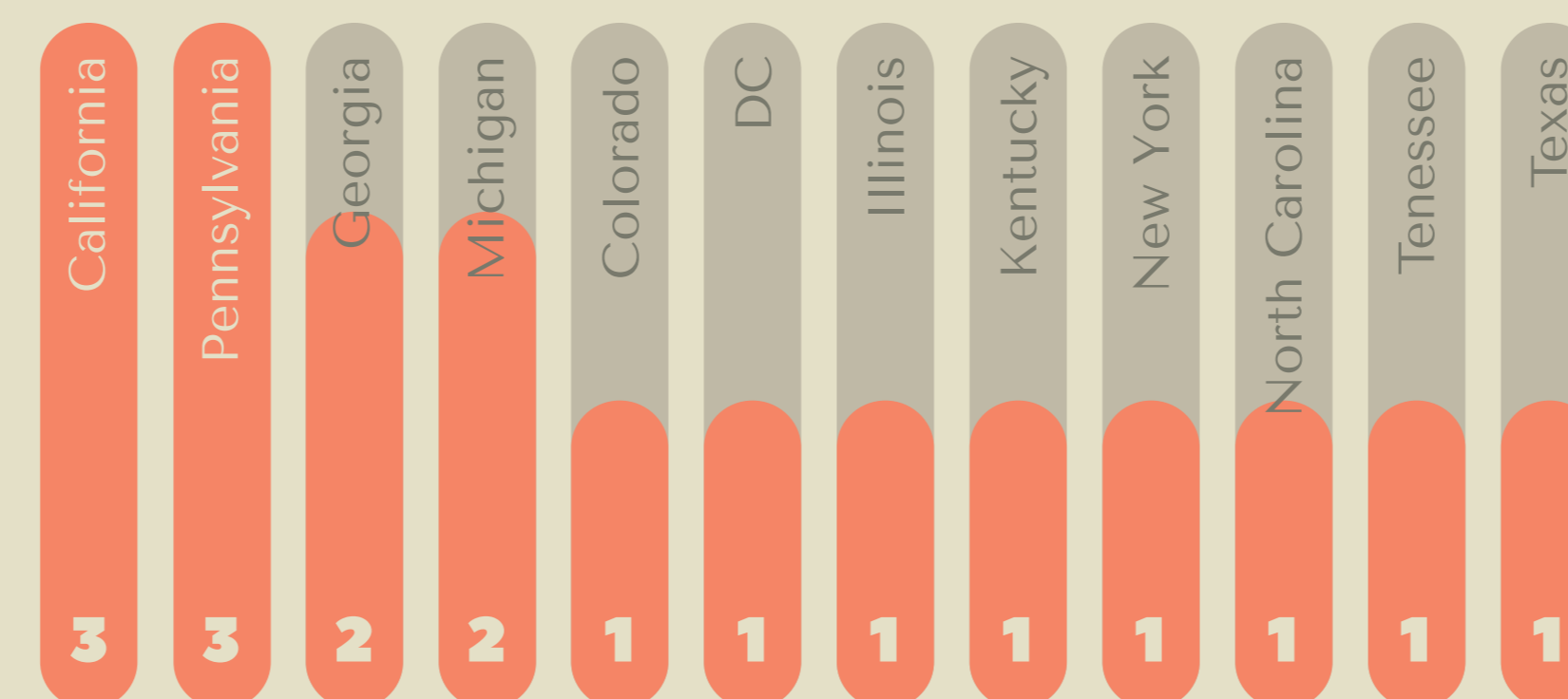| 1954	2003	2008	2009	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2020	2021
1	1	2	1	1	1	1	4	2	2	1
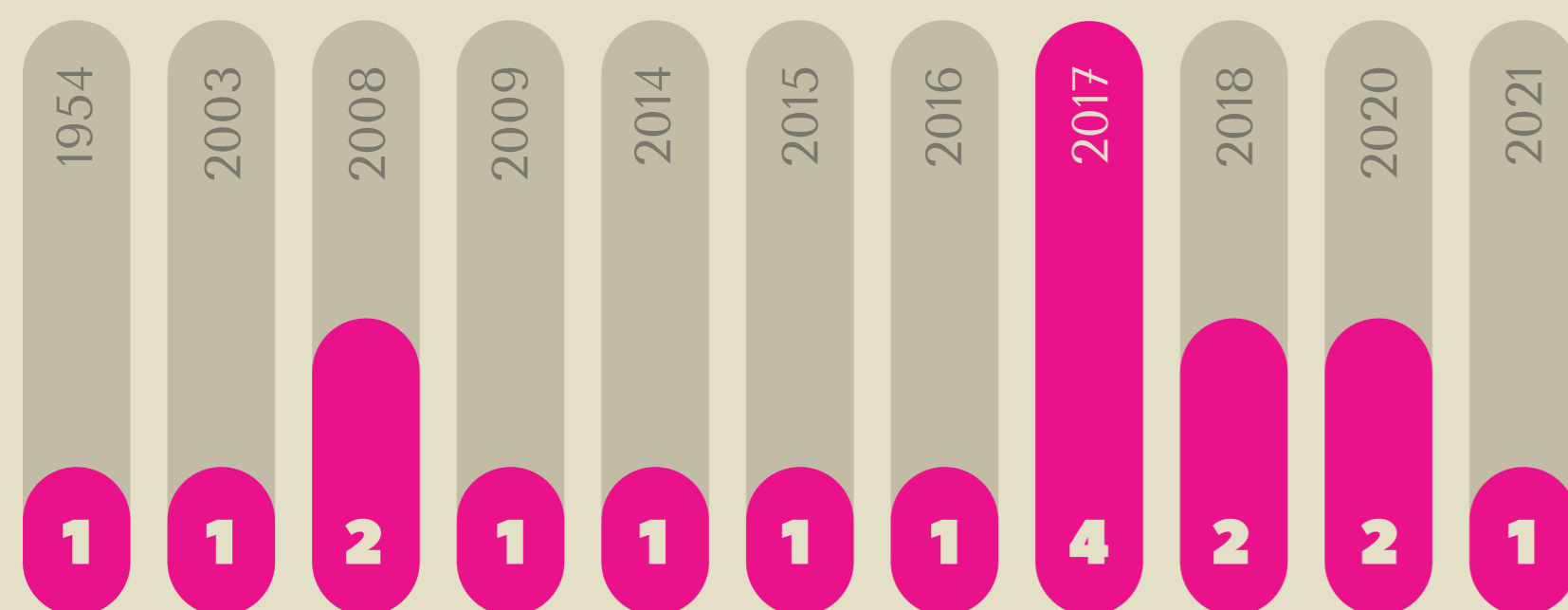
Such patterns in the founding of organizations might be influenced by shifts in the media landscape, changes in funding availability, or alterations in the political climate. It's reasonable to assume that Trump's administration had a significant impact on journalism philanthropy[7]. The political climate during the 2016 election was characterized by heightened polarization, increased scrutiny of the media, and frequent clashes between the administration and various news outlets. These dynamics likely influenced the priorities and strategies of philanthropic organizations supporting journalism, which could explain the rising in civic news orgs in 2017.

2. Geographic Concentration

The concentration of these organizations is more pronounced in Atlanta, Oakland, and Philadelphia — and more broadly along the coasts of the country. Several factors contribute to this fact, including these locations' sizable populations, a history marked by political activism and social inequality, and the presence of a well-established traditional media landscape. These conditions create a fertile ground for civic initiatives and increased accessibility to philanthropic funding for local news and media ventures.

California	Pennsylvania	Georgia	Michigan	Colorado	DC	Illinois	Kentucky	New York	North Carolina	Tenessee	Texas
3	3	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

3. Organizational Characteristics

This next section explores key characteristics and operational structures of the organizations, examining aspects such as legal status, replication efforts, founding and leadership teams, succession planning, employee counts, volunteer engagement, theory of change development, and strategic planning practices, providing insights into their diverse approaches and structures.

Non-profit status:
94% of the organizations operate as nonprofits, while one (5%) operates as a for-profit but follows a non-profit approach, using similar funding sources such as philanthropy and member contributions.

94%

Standalone vs. Affiliated:
83% of the organizations operate as standalone entities, 11% are part of larger organizations, and 6% operate under fiscal sponsorship.

83%

Replication: The work of 39% of the organizations studied has been replicated in other municipalities, either through coverage or by implementing the same work model. Most of the expansion is due to a necessity to have the same structures or coverage elsewhere. Just a few show this is intentional, or part of the organization's strategic plan.

7 HTTPS://WWW.POYNTER.ORG/NEWSLETTERS/2021/THE-TRUMP-BUMP-HAS-DISAPPEARED-WHAT-NOW-FOR-NEWSROOMS/
8 NEARLY 40% OF THE US POPULATION LIVE IN COASTAL AREAS. PRESENTLY, COASTAL COUNTIES ARE STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM INLAND COUNTIES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY (MORE DIVERSE) AND SEX (MORE WOMEN) BUT NOT BY AGE, YET BY 2025, WE EXPECT COASTAL COUNTIES TO BECOME SIGNIFICANTLY OLDER THAN INLAND COUNTIES. HAUER, MATHEW E., R. KYLE SAUNDERS, AND DANIEL SHTOB. "RESEARCH NOTE: DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE ON THE UNITED STATES COAST, 2020–2100." DEMOGRAPHY 59, NO. 4 (2022): 1221–32. HTTPS://WWW.JSTOR.ORG/STABLE/48681686.

Founding team: 61% of the organizations have between one and three co-founders. And the majority (5 out of 11) has only one founder

61%

Leadership team: Leadership teams typically consist of up to three people, with seven organizations reflecting this structure. But 28% hold more than six people in their leadership team. In 83% of the organizations, at least one of the original founders still leads the organization.

83%

Succession planning: However, only 28% have a documented succession plan in place.
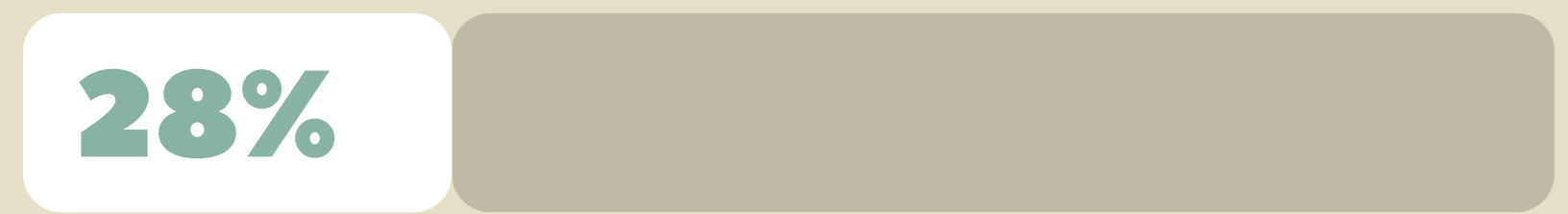
28%

Employee count: The average number of employees in these organizations is 35, with employing up to 32 individuals. The remaining organizations employ above 40 people and only one has 250 employees.

Volunteers: 78% of the organizations do not have volunteers. Of those that do, most engage volunteers for one-off events.

Theory of Change: 67% of the organizations have developed a Theory of Change to guide their operations.
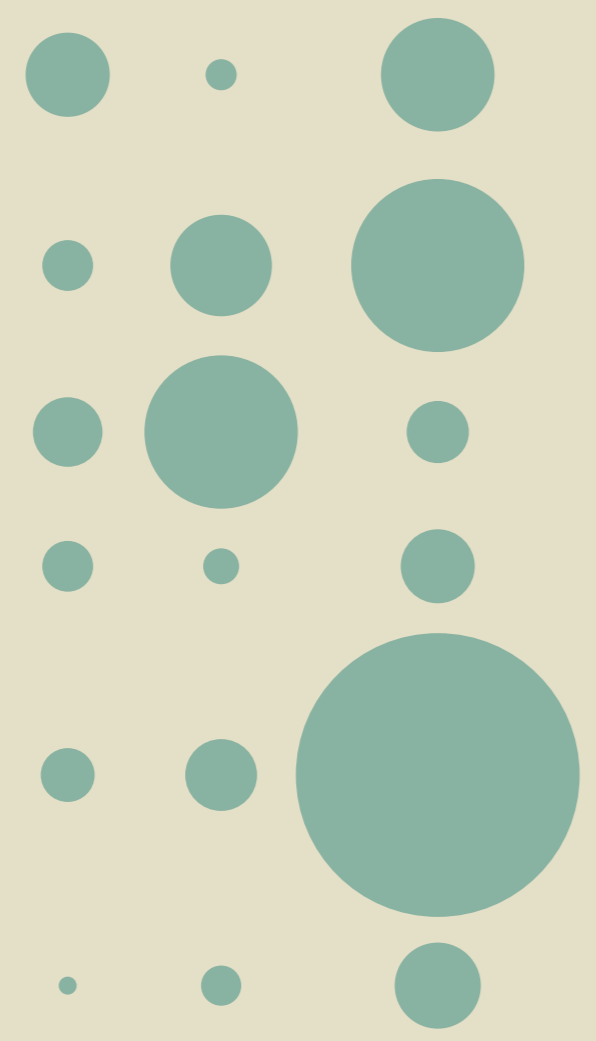
Strategic planning: 77% engage in regular strategic planning, although many have only undertaken one planning cycle due to being less than three years old.

4. Operational Costs

This examination looks into the financial allocations and strategic priorities of the organizations interviewed. The analysis focuses on key budgetary aspects, including journalistic production, marketing, technology, community member engagement, fundraising, and the disclosure of funding sources. By exploring the distribution of resources across these categories, we gain valuable insights into the organizational priorities and challenges shaping the financial landscapes of these entities.

*(FIVE ORGANIZATIONS DID NOT PROVIDE INFORMATION REGARDING THEIR OPERATIONAL COSTS).

> *"We believe that in a democracy, it's everyone's responsibility to build institutions that serve the collective, but we can't achieve this without access to information for making informed decisions."*

Journalistic production: The median of the budget allocated in journalistic production is 50%. This information underscores the importance of content creation and dissemination as a primary focus of the organizations.

Marketing: All organizations allocate up to 10% of their budget to marketing. However, many indicate that this budget may be insufficient to effectively promote their initiatives.

Technology: The majority of organizations (77%) allocate up to 10% of their budget to technology-related expenses. However, there are specific instances where technology costs constitute a more substantial proportion, ranging from 20% to 40% of the budget — used to strategically expand the initiative into other territories and/or to distribute content through SMS service and other online services.
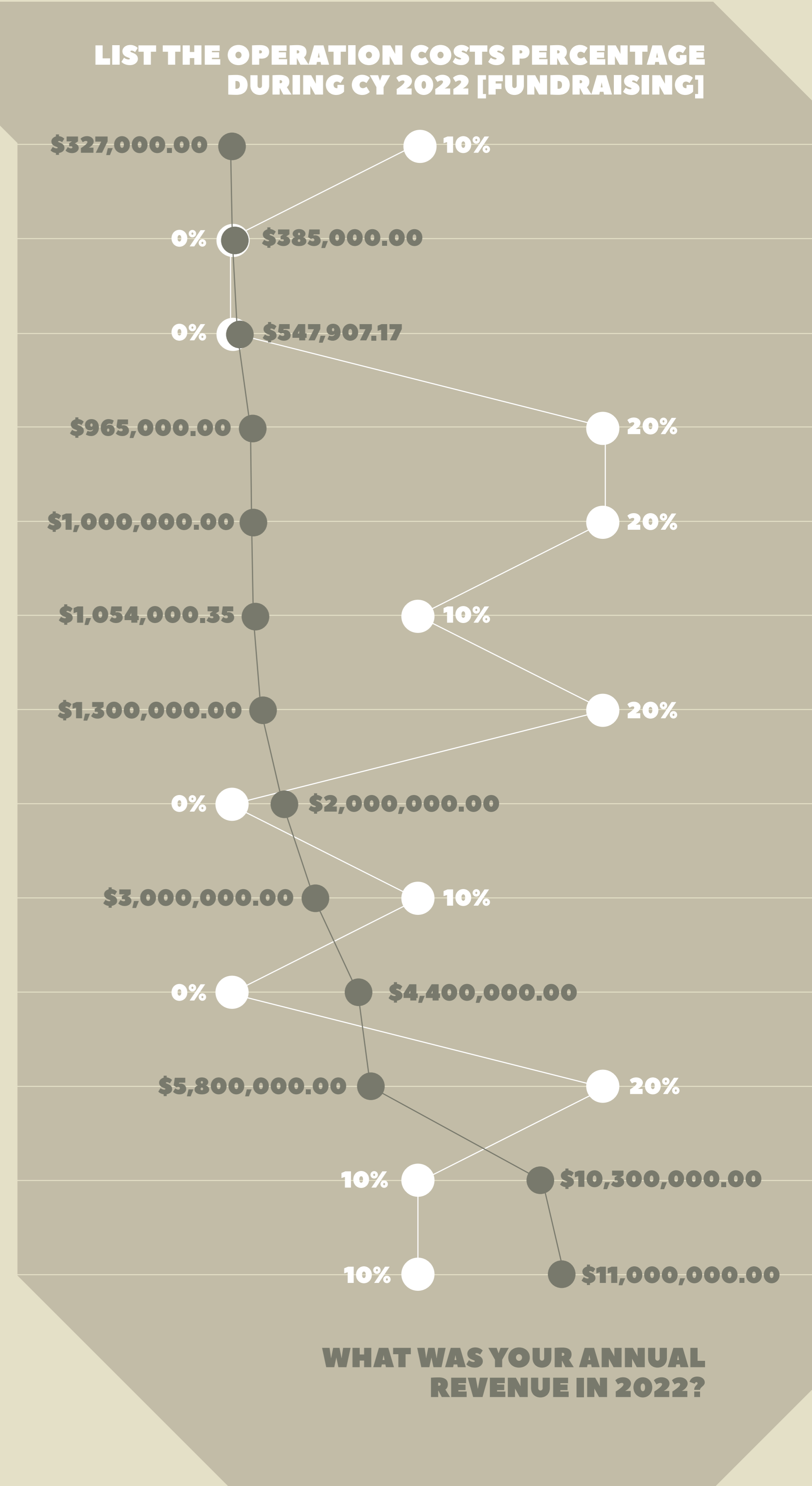
Training: 46% do not spend any budget on training initiatives, although 67% of them do run training programs with or without funding (G1). The remaining spend between 10% and 30% of their budget in training programs for journalism students and community members (G2).

Management: Most organizations spend up to 10% of their budget on administrative management expenses and personnel. And only one spends above 50%. Although it is a pattern in most, the organizations are not satisfied with the institutional structure they have to support operational teams.
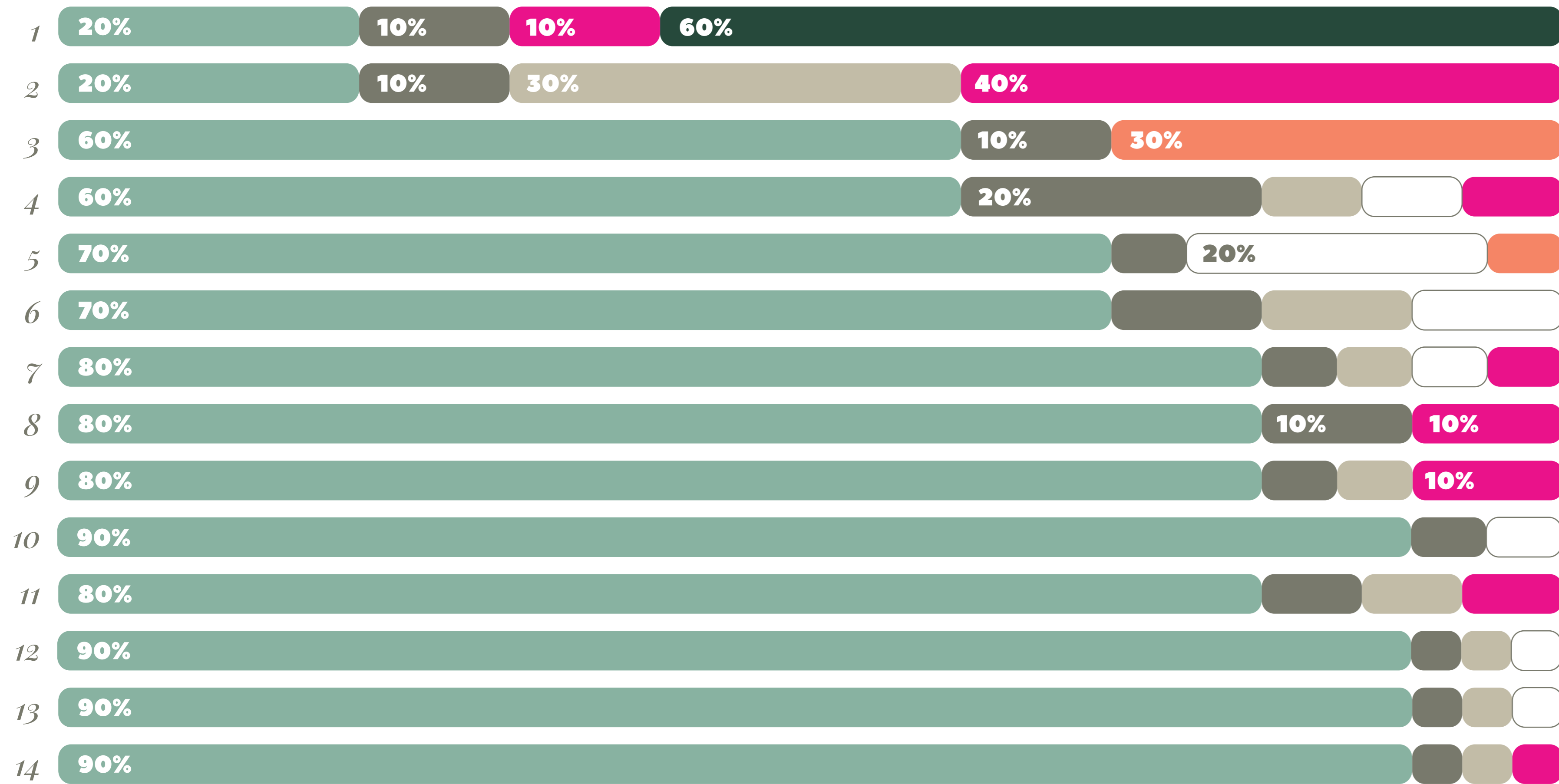
> " *We need a stronger community engagement strategy, better marketing targeting, and improved training. Partnering with a program that can handle the necessary training would be beneficial in getting our team to where we need them to be.* "

Community members: Among the organizations surveyed, only 38% provide remuneration to community members for their contributions. 80% of these allocate up to 10% of their budget for this purpose, while one organization devoted as much as 20%, specifically for a program compensating community members engaged in reporting.

Fundraising: Amid the surveyed organizations, 69% have established dedicated fundraising structures. Each of these organizations allocates between 10% and 20% of their budget to fundraising efforts. Notably, all the organizations investing 20% of their budget in fundraising generated over a million dollars in revenue in 2022. However, this is not a consistent pattern, as some organizations that do not allocate specific resources to fundraising — meaning it is not a distinct area with a dedicated team or person but rather integrated within leadership roles — also generate over a million dollars through fundraising efforts. This indicates a potential for hybrid fundraising models. Organizations can succeed with both dedicated fundraising structures and integrated approaches, showcasing flexibility in adapting their strategies to fit their operational needs.

LIST THE OPERATION COSTS PERCENTAGE DURING CY 2022 [FUNDRAISING]

$327,000.00 — 10%
0% — $385,000.00
0% — $547,907.17
$965,000.00 — 20%
$1,000,000.00 — 20%
$1,054,000.35 — 10%
$1,300,000.00 — 20%
0% — $2,000,000.00
$3,000,000.00 — 10%
0% — $4,400,000.00
$5,800,000.00 — 20%
10% — $10,300,000.00
10% — $11,000,000.00

WHAT WAS YOUR ANNUAL REVENUE IN 2022?

5. Financing Sources

Legend:
- Foundation grants
- Other charitable contributions
- Individual donations: < $1,000 | $1,000-$4,999 | $5,000 >
- Earned revenue
- Other

#	Foundation grants	< $1,000	$1,000-$4,999	$5,000 >	Earned revenue	Other charitable contributions	Other
1	20%	10%			10%		60%
2	20%	10%	30%		40%		
3	60%	10%				30%	
4	60%	20%					
5	70%			20%			
6	70%						
7	80%						
8	80%	10%			10%		
9	80%				10%		
10	90%						
11	80%						
12	90%						
13	90%						
14	90%						

Four organizations did not disclose the sources of their funds on their websites. On their websites, most organizations dedicated more space to describing their mission, impact, and initiatives than describing revenue or funding sources. It is essential that organizations be mindful of the potential impact of failing to disclose funders on public perception. This pattern also underscores a need for improved communication that balances transparency with other strategic considerations. Further research would be needed to understand the specific reasons behind these patterns.

Foundation funding: All of the organizations that responded about their funding sources (14 out of 18) receive funding from foundations, representing a significant portion of their financial support. 57% report that foundation funding makes up between 80% and 90% of their total funding.

Small Dollar Contributions: Among the responders, all receive small dollar contributions. The majority (93%) note that these contributions constitute up to 10% of their funding. One organization reports that small dollar contributions represent a more substantial portion, accounting for 20% of its funding. The operating model of this particular organization suggests that this is a result of their effective community engagement practices.

Mid-Range Dollar Contributions: 64% of the organizations report receiving mid-range dollar contributions, with most indicating that these contributions make up to 10% of their funding. However, one organization stands out, noting that 30% of its funding comes from this specific source, attributed to its large number of subscribers.

Major Gift Donors: Among the organizations surveyed, only 50% receive funding from major gift donors, with contributions reaching up to 20% of their financing sources. This reveals a natural pyramid pattern where the significance of individual contributions diminishes as they increase in amount.

Other charitable contributions: Most organizations do not heavily rely on other charitable contributions, with only one organization reporting that such contributions represent up to 10% of its funding and another one reporting receiving 30%.

Earned revenue: 57% of organizations generate earned revenue, with contributions representing up to 10% of their funding. Only one organization responded to have 40% of their funding coming from this specific source, due to ad revenue.

Personal funds and other sources: None of the responders have personal funding and one organization answered having 60% of their budget coming from local cable contracts.
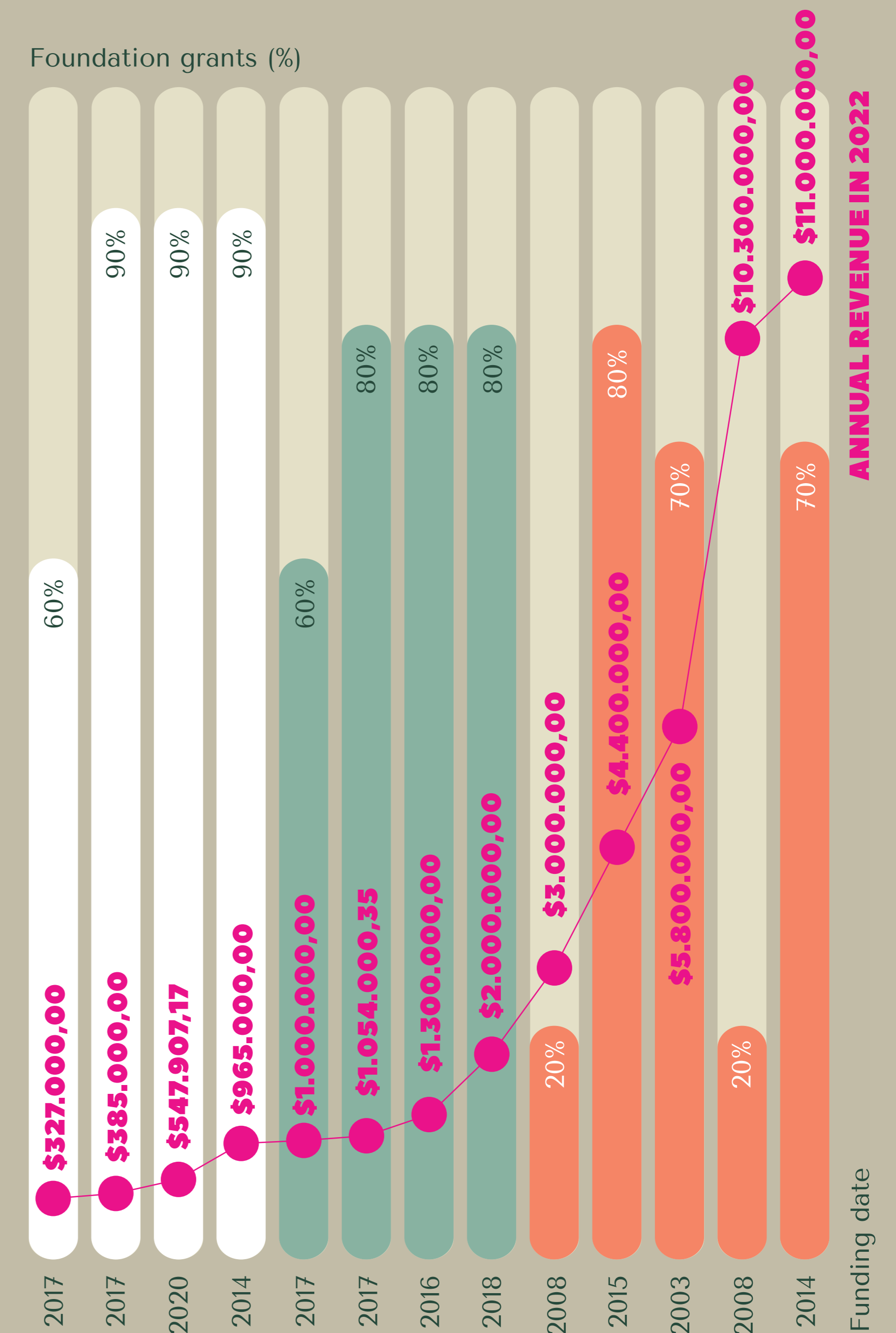
6. Annual revenue

The financial landscape of organizations within this study in 2022 offers insights into revenue distribution, financial dependence on foundations, employee compensation structures, costs per audience member, fundraising dynamics, organizational age, and the correlation between leadership demographics and revenue. Only 13 organizations (out of 18) responded with information on their annual revenue.

Revenue distribution: Among the responding organizations, 77% reported annual revenues from U$ 300.00 to U$ 5 million, while 23% organizations reported revenues ranging from U$ 5 to U$ 11 million. The total combined revenue for these organizations in 2022 amounted to U$ 42 million, with a median value of U$ 1.3 million.

Financial dependence: As organizations raise more funds, they become less reliant on foundation money. While foundation funding remains substantial, often exceeding 60/70% of their budgets, these organizations diversify their funding sources as they grow, including contributions from small, midsize, and major donors.

Employee compensation: If all the budget was spent in salaries, the median annual compensation per employee would be U$ 131,000. Salary ranges would vary from U$ 64,000 (the lowest) to U$ 200,000 (the highest) annually.
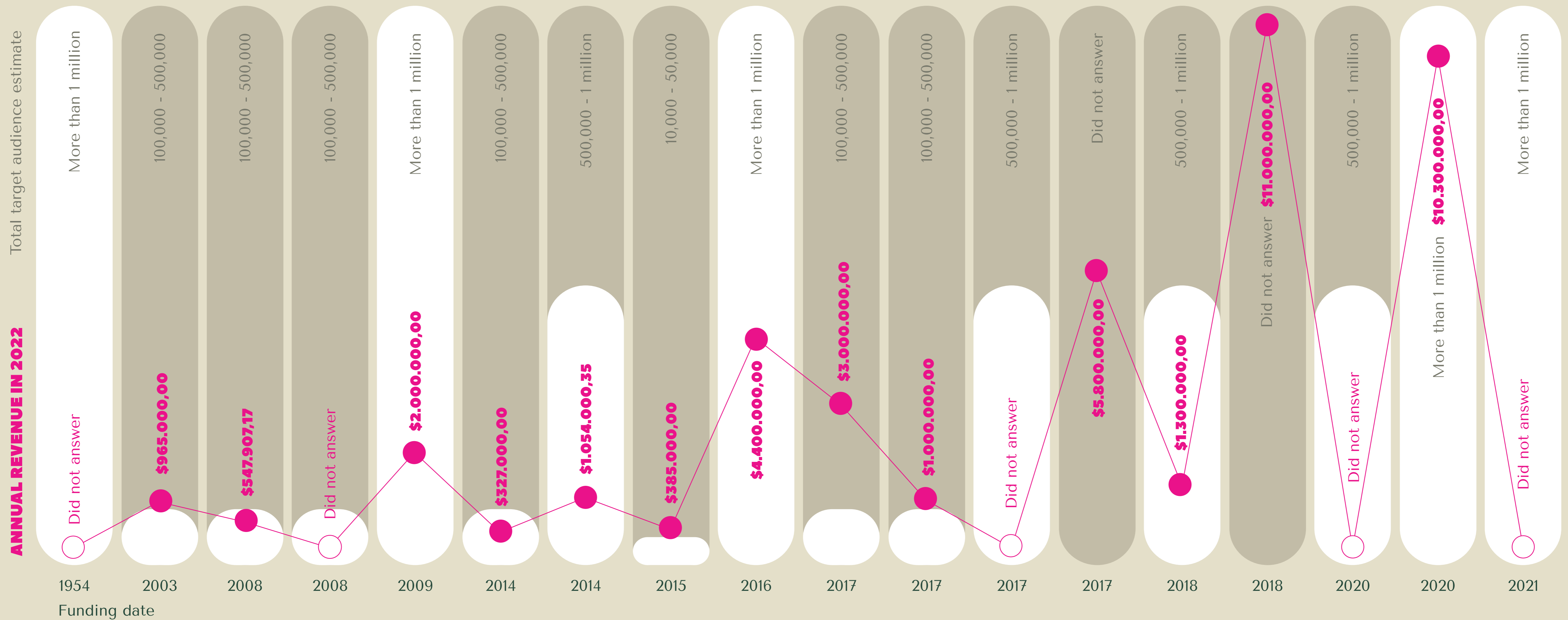
> *While achieving significant growth each year, maintaining that growth has proven incredibly tough. This has impacted our culture, morale, and even our ability to fund essential work. It's possible we may need to scale back on some of our desired initiatives."*

Foundation grants (%)

ANNUAL REVENUE IN 2022

Funding date	Foundation grants (%)	Annual revenue
2017	60%	$327.000,00
2017	90%	$385.000,00
2020	90%	$547.907,17
2014	90%	$965.000,00
2017	60%	$1.000.000,00
2017	80%	$1.054.000,35
2016	80%	$1.300.000,00
2018	80%	$2.000.000,00
2008	20%	$3.000.000,00
2015	80%	$4.400.000,00
2003	70%	$5.800.000,00
2008	20%	$10.300.000,00
2014	70%	$11.000.000,00

Funding date

Cost per audience: The cost per audience member varies significantly, ranging from U$ 0.74 to U$ 10.40, with a median cost of U$ 2.76. There doesn't appear to be a clear pattern regarding investment and audience cost. The organization with the lowest annual revenue has the highest audience cost, while the second-largest budget organization also has the second-highest investment.

Fundraising and organizational age: While organizations founded earlier tend to raise more money, there isn't a strict pattern observed. The organization with the highest annual revenue was founded in 2022, and there's no substantial variance in their fundraising investment. It appears that the percentage allocated to fundraising, typically between 10% and 20%, does not significantly impact revenue, as shown earlier. However, organizations that do not invest in fundraising tend to have lower annual revenue.

Leadership and revenue: Organizations with annual revenues exceeding U$ 3 million have individuals of either White or Asian American ethnicity holding the highest executive title.

Total target audience estimate

Funding date	Total target audience estimate	ANNUAL REVENUE IN 2022
1954	More than 1 million	Did not answer
2003	100,000 - 500,000	$965.000,00
2008	100,000 - 500,000	$547.907,17
2008	100,000 - 500,000	Did not answer
2009	More than 1 million	$2.000.000,00
2014	100,000 - 500,000	$327.000,00
2014	500,000 - 1 million	$1.054.000,35
2015	10,000 - 50,000	$385.000,00
2016	More than 1 million	$4.400.000,00
2017	100,000 - 500,000	$3.000.000,00
2017	100,000 - 500,000	$1.000.000,00
2017	500,000 - 1 million	Did not answer
2017	Did not answer	$5.800.000,00
2018	500,000 - 1 million	$1.300.000,00
2018	Did not answer	$11.000.000,00
2020	500,000 - 1 million	Did not answer
2020	More than 1 million	$10.300.000,00
2021	More than 1 million	Did not answer

7. Diversity in leadership

This overview explores the organizational hierarchy of the responders, shedding light on the distribution of highest executive titles, second-highest titles, and third-highest titles.

CEO is most commonly at the top of the organizations, closely followed by Editor in Chief/Publisher and Growth, usually ranked slightly below in terms of hierarchy. Racial diversity is evident among these executive roles, with notable representation from Black, White, Asian, and Hispanic executives. A closer look at gender dynamics reveals a noteworthy presence of women occupying these highest executive positions.

Moving to the second-highest titles, the organizational landscape encompasses roles such as Editor in Chief/Managing Editor, CFO, COO, and an Education Director. The racial composition becomes more nuanced, reflecting diversity among Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian executives. Remarkably, a significant proportion of these positions is held by women, contributing to a multifaceted leadership structure.

Exploring the third-highest titles unveils a spectrum of roles, including COO, Editors, CPO (Chief People Officer), Creative Director, and Training Director. The racial distribution encompasses White, Black, and Hispanic executives, while the gender diversity is further emphasized with a presence of both women and a non-binary individual in these pivotal positions.

> *We've engaged with funders who often invest in causes that align with their own backgrounds, which has sometimes posed challenges given the lack of Latino representation in the philanthropic community.*

Annual revenue in 2022: $327.000,00 | $385.000,00 | $547.907,17 | $965.000,00 | $1.000.000,00 | $1.054.000,35 | $1.300.000,00 | $2.000.000,00 | $3.000.000,00 | $4.400.000,00 | $5.800.000,00 | $10.000.300,00 | $11.000.000,00

Legend:
- Asian American, East Asian, South Asian or Southeast Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino/a
- White
- ◇ Woman
- □ Man
- ◇ Non-binary/non-conforming

8. Audience and content

Many organizations prioritize specific geographic areas inside the cities or regions where they are based. They often highlight the diversity of the communities they serve, including communities of color and underrepresented groups.

A consistent pattern is the emphasis on serving historically underrepresented, marginalized, and low-income communities. This includes black communities, latinx communities, immigrants, indigenous groups, and working-class neighborhoods. Inclusivity is a common theme, with organizations striving to represent a diverse range of identities, including race, gender, and economic status.

Language barriers are addressed in multiple ways, with a focus on providing information and content in languages other than English. Organizations aim to serve Spanish-speaking communities, as well as groups with distinct languages like Mayan and Creole.

Content focus: 72% of the organizations cover several related topics under a common umbrella, such as government or politics, while 22% of the organizations provide general news or cover a variety of topics that may not be closely related and only 1 (6%) organization specializes in a single topic.

6% Single topic

22% General news

72% Several related topics
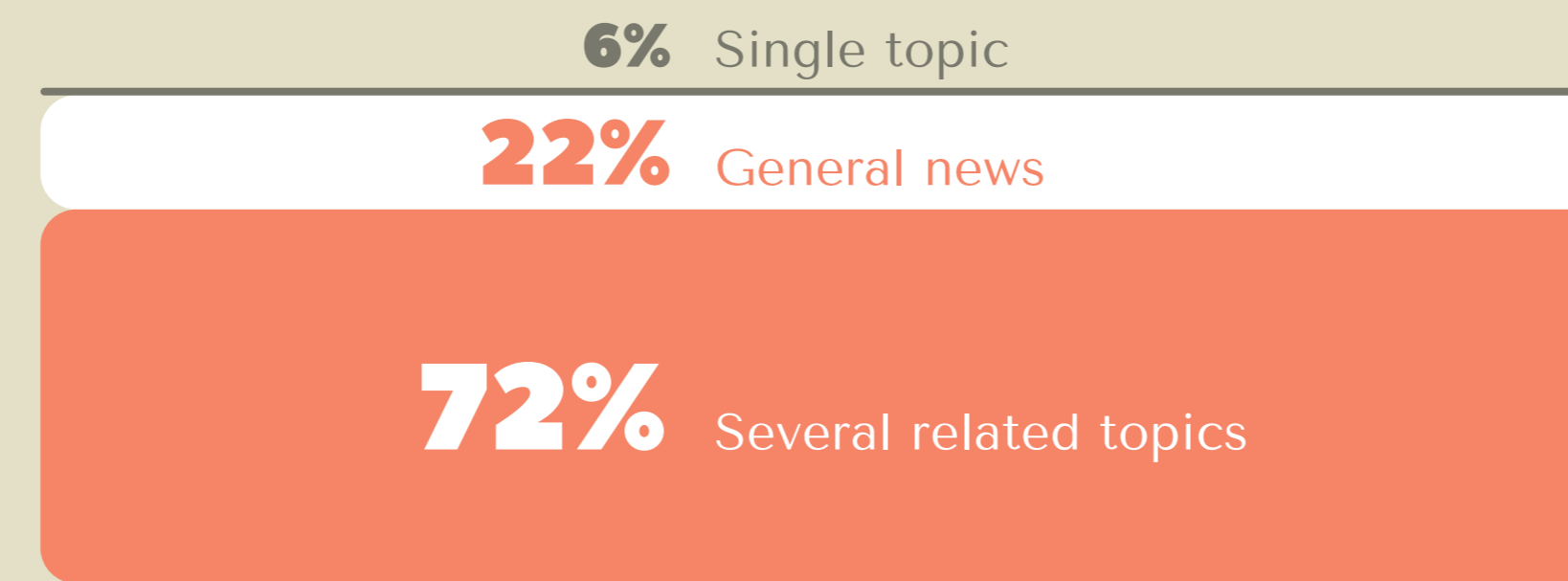
Estimated audience reach: 33% of the organizations have an estimated audience of more than 1 million, 22% reach between 500 thousand to 1 million people and another 22% engage with an audience ranging from 100 thousand to 500 thousand. Only one (23%) responded having an estimated audience of below 50 thousand.

10,000 - 50,000	100,000 - 500,000	500,000 - 1 million	more than 1 million
1	6	4	5
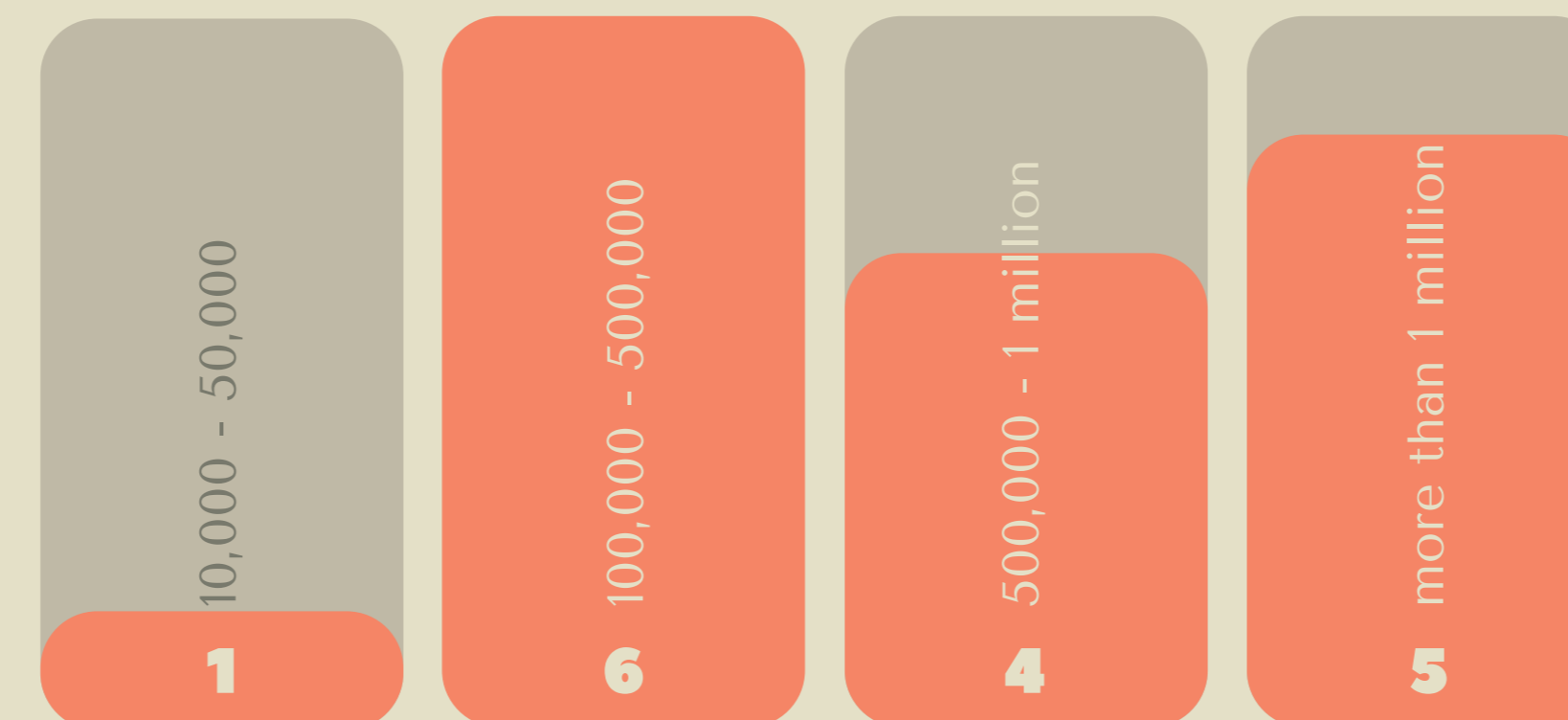
Content distribution: Within the scope of this study, the distribution of content varies across different channels: 61% primarily use online platforms for content dissemination. Additionally, 17% utilize text messaging as a dedicated distribution channel, highlighting the role of mobile communication in their outreach.

One organization (6%) relies on training and events as a strategic avenue for disseminating its content, underscoring the importance of direct engagement and 16% embrace traditional media, utilizing radio and TV as their primary distribution platforms.

Among the responding organizations, there is no regular utilization of a printing distribution format. However, these organizations do possess experiences in producing printed editions for specific occasions, showcasing a versatile approach to content dissemination that aligns with the demands of diverse audiences.

Online	Text message	Cable	Radio	Training
11	3	2	1	1
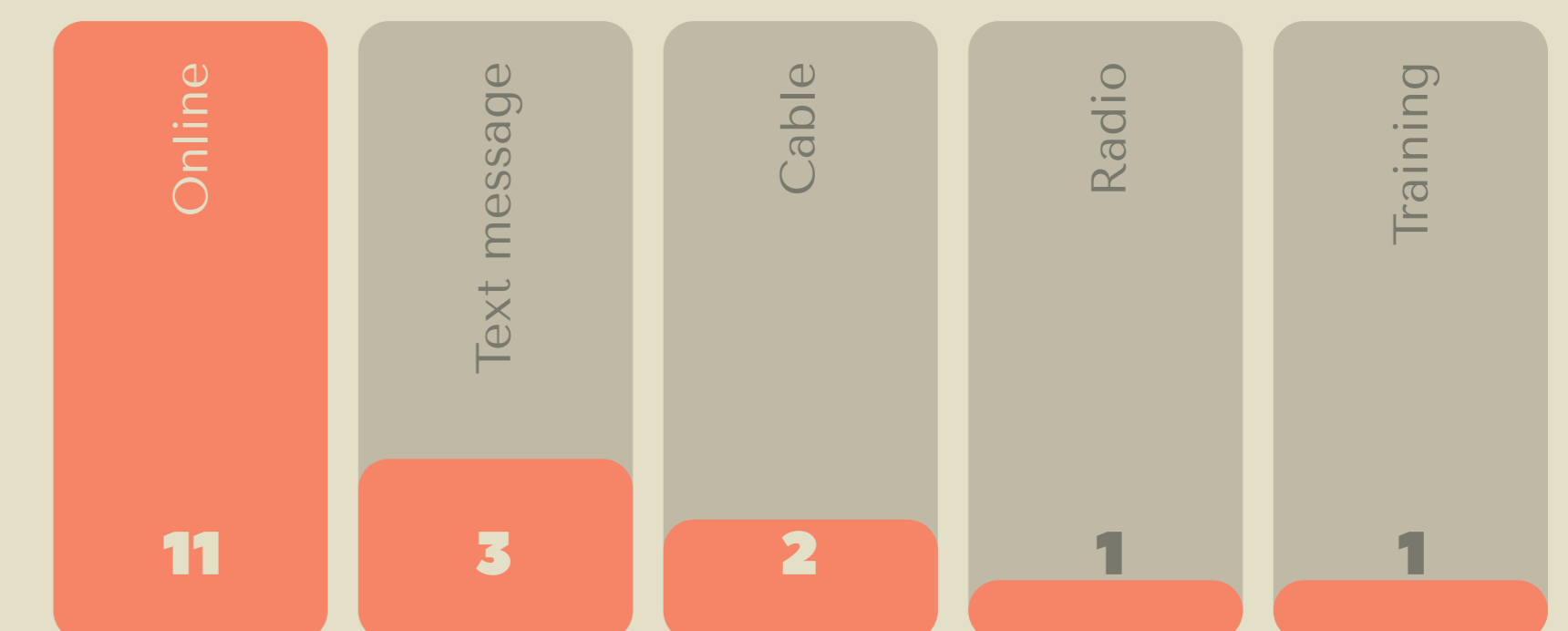
Audience demographics: 28% do not have information on the demographics of their audience profile.

Audience alignment: Only 55% of the respondents believe that their audience effectively matches the communities they aim to serve through their content. This suggests that there may be a disconnect between the intended target communities and the actual audience reached.

9. Training initiatives

Several organizations (67%) offer internship programs as part of their journalism training initiatives. These internships are often open to community college students, undergraduate students, and individuals interested in journalism and media work.

There is a focus on training individuals between the ages of 16 and 24, including high-school students and college undergraduates. In most cases, the training opportunities are given to underserved communities, such as first-generation college students, LGBT individuals, religious minorities, people with disabilities, and residents of specific neighborhoods. The number of people trained each year varies widely, ranging from 5 to a thousand.

In terms of methodology, the majority of the initiatives are hands-on experiences, focused on developing journalism skills, but also address disparities in media representation and ensure greater inclusivity in storytelling. This includes incorporating community perspectives into journalism, collaborating with visual journalists, and fostering constant collaboration with the community. Participants are actively engaged in producing stories, covering public meetings, live-tweeting, and using social media effectively.

Some programs are tailored to specific age groups and topics. For example, one organization created a program for young individuals to cover local elections, aiming to engage peers and provide coverage that resonates with their demographic. Another organization has a unique focus on equipping journalists and news organizations to collaborate with incarcerated writers. This initiative aims to bring storytelling into and out of correctional facilities.

A few organizations offer training programs tailored to specific areas, such as addressing misinformation, fact-checking, and recognizing biases within newsrooms. Other programs are designed for specific topics like voting, education and covering public meetings.

In terms of resource sharing, there are organizations (17%) that provide guidebooks and online communities to facilitate ongoing knowledge sharing, networking, and support among participants.

10. Mission and Vision

The surveyed organizations share a mission characterized by terms like "equipping," "producing," "engaging," and "informing." Their vision focuses on the impact and change they aim to achieve, such as making journalism more democratic and inclusive, prioritizing equitable representation, addressing systemic issues, and contributing to healthier communities. Core values include equity, inclusivity, collaboration, honesty, transparency, and accountability. Additionally, there is a widespread commitment to social justice, community, and addressing information gaps.

inclusivity
informing   equipping
transparency
equity
impact
producing
engaging
change   honesty
accountability
collaboration

Many organizations underscore their compromise to specific communities, emphasizing the importance of community empowerment, engagement, and representation. Their focus extends to empowering individuals, addressing systemic issues, and fostering dialogue.

In pursuit of a more democratic and inclusive journalism, several organizations prioritize diverse voices, [aim to] avoid hero worship, and champion equitable representation. Their goals include informing, educating, and providing valuable insights while promoting media literacy for critical interpretation and active participation in media creation.

Racial equity and justice emerge as common themes, particularly in addressing the misrepresentation and marginalization of communities of color. Organizations actively seek to uplift marginalized voices, challenge harmful narratives, and prioritize racial justice.

Collaborative approaches are emphasized, often involving partnerships with communities, organizations, and individuals. Engaging with residents, working together, and building relationships are key principles of their strategies.

Further, organizations express a commitment to transparency about successes, failures, and processes. They value accountability, learning from experiences, and being responsive to community needs, along with a dedication to high-quality, truthful journalism. Avoiding the dissemination of misinformation and prioritizing research and accuracy underscore their dedication to ethical reporting.

11. Impact tracking

Incorporating robust strategies for information gathering is essential for organizations aiming to serve communities effectively. Engaging with community members, forming partnerships, and staying attuned to feedback are critical steps in this process.

While many organizations are investing in impact tracking mechanisms (61%), there is room for improvement in terms of refining these systems to better evaluate the effectiveness of their initiatives. All organizations with budgets above U$ 3 million/year have an impact tracker, meaning this is either a demand of funders, an advantage to fundraise, or a result of receiving bigger funding.

The main information gathering strategies the responders use to track impact (from most to least commonly applied):

Analyzing metrics and analytics: 83% commonly use analytics, website and social media traffic, and search trends to assess the impact of their work. They track the reach and engagement of their content to determine its effectiveness.
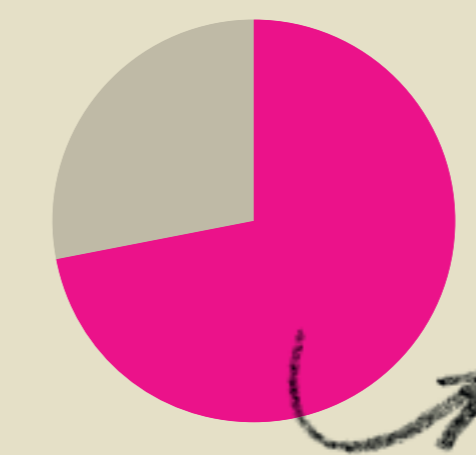
Monitoring feedback channels: 72% diligently monitor comments, questions, and suggestions from community members across various channels such as email, phone, social media, and mail. This real-time feedback helps in adjusting content strategies.
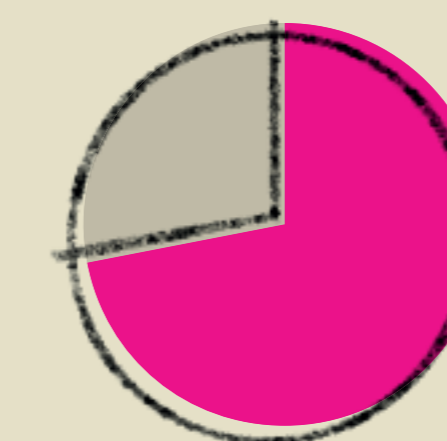
Editorial resource investment: Also, 72% invest their editorial resources in covering topics that communities of color have identified as either missing from coverage or inadequately covered. This proactive approach ensures responsiveness to community needs.

Listening efforts: 61% consistently undertake listening efforts by engaging directly with community members. These initiatives help them understand the concerns and interests of their audience more deeply.

Collaboration with media organizations: Also 61% collaborate with media outlets that have a history of effectively serving communities of color. This approach leverages the expertise and reach of established platforms to disseminate relevant content and better serve their target audiences.
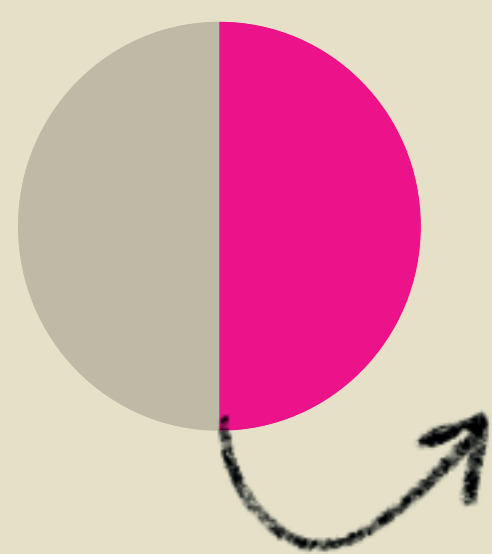

Partnerships with community organizations: 50% have established partnerships and these collaborations help deepen their understanding of the information needs and cultural nuances of the communities they aim to serve.

Survey research: 44% actively conduct survey research to understand the information needs of communities they intend to serve. This approach provides structured insights into the preferences and requirements of these communities, guiding content and strategy decisions.

Another examples of measuring impact cited by the responders:
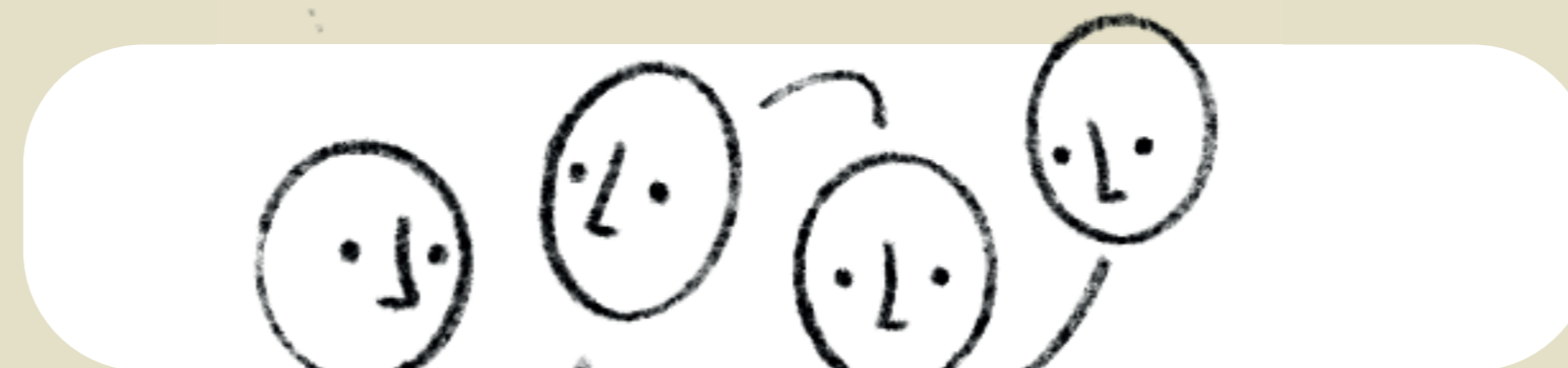
Engagement panels, committees and boards: One organization plans to establish a community panel that meets quarterly to foster meaningful real-life interactions with the community. Another organization has an impact committee as part of their board and is working on defining its functions. One organization has a mission and metrics advisory board to guide their impact tracking efforts and ensure alignment with their goals.

External research: One organization is interested in having an external researcher conduct a comprehensive study of their work and its impact. They aim to gather more in-depth insights beyond their internal assessments.
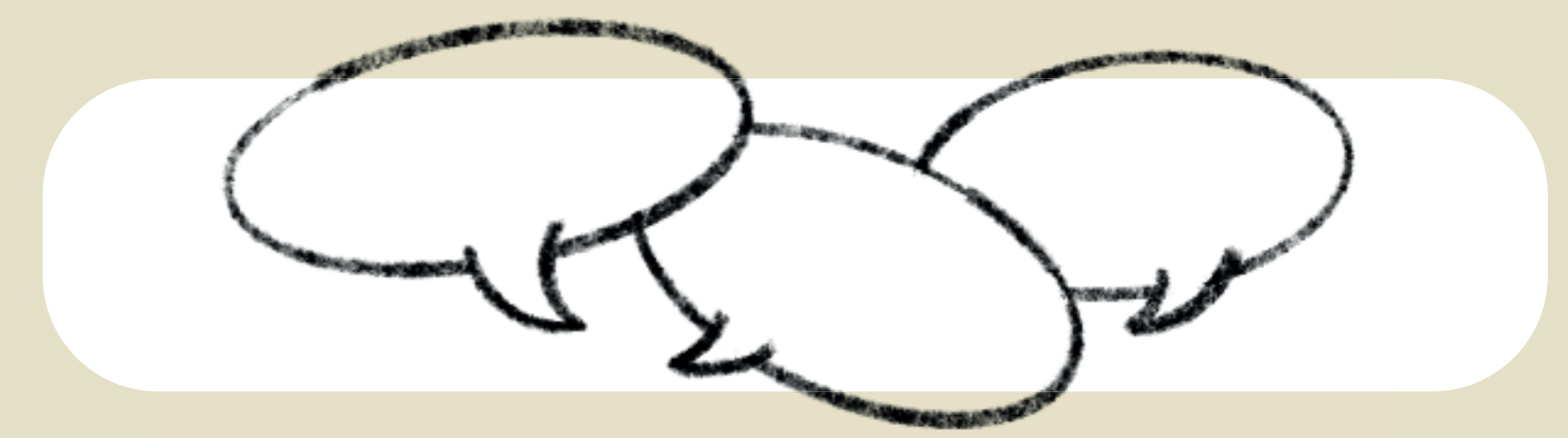
Community ambassadors: One organization partners with community ambassadors to gather qualitative data and feedback. This approach involves collaboration with individuals who provide insights and perspectives from the community.

Publication replication and inspiration: Organizations track the impact of their work by observing how other media outlets replicate their content or are inspired to incorporate similar approaches. This indicates the influence their work has on the broader media landscape.

Although 11 (61%) organizations have introduced impact tracking mechanisms, this strategy ranks lower in terms of common usage, with some organizations still in the process of refining their systems.

What are they measuring?

IN THE COURSE OF THE INTERVIEWS, THE TERM 'IMPACT' EMERGED PROMINENTLY, BEING MENTIONED 72 TIMES. THIS SURPASSED REFERENCES TO 'MEDIA' (68), 'JOURNALISM' (48), AND 'CIVIC' (39), ALTHOUGH IT FELL SHORT OF THE FREQUENCY OF 'COMMUNITY,' WHICH WAS USED 124 TIMES.

Access to information: The cornerstone of an informed community is access to equitable, accurate, timely, and relevant information that empowers individuals to make decisions.

Civic engagement: Informed communities are engaged in civic life, participating in decision-making processes, and utilizing information to advocate for their needs.

Awareness of local resources: Community members are aware of the resources available to them within their local context, allowing them to address challenges and improve their lives.

Representation and acknowledgment: Informed communities see themselves represented and acknowledged in media and information sources, fostering a sense of self-awareness and empowerment.

Holistic understanding: Being informed means having a comprehensive understanding of inequities, systems, and challenges, particularly from the perspective of those most impacted.

Participatory journalism: Some responses highlight the importance of participatory journalism, where community members actively engage in the journalistic process.

Training programs evolution: Organizations conduct surveys to understand how their training programs have influenced participants' perspectives and skills over time. This involves tracking the growth and evolution of participants' understanding.

Decision-making and action: Individuals in informed communities use information to make educated decisions, particularly in areas like voting, and are equipped to take action.

Multi-channel access: Individuals can access information through multiple channels and sources that meet them where they are.

12. Community listening and participation

All organizations emphasize engaging directly with the community through 4 main strategies (from most to least applied):

1
Events, surveys, information needs assessments, listening sessions, editorial boards and community mapping. This is done to understand their interests and concerns, and also to shape stories based on inputs.
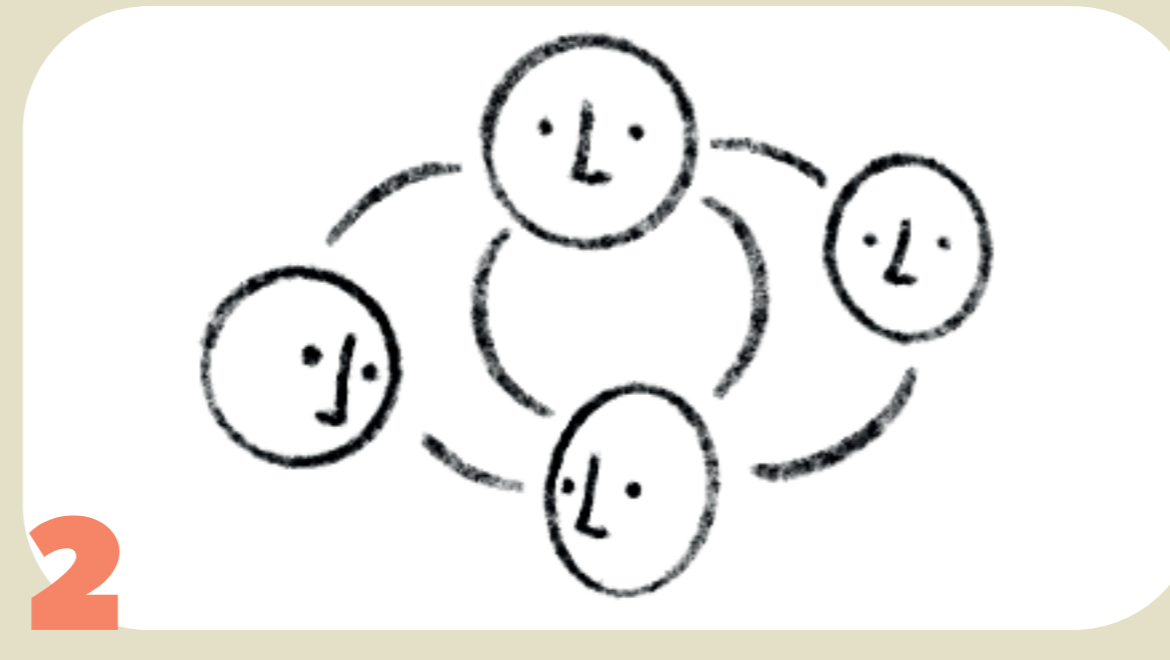
2
Collaborative relationships with community groups, non-profits, and local organizations play a key role in story sourcing, as they often provide insights, tips, and potential subjects.
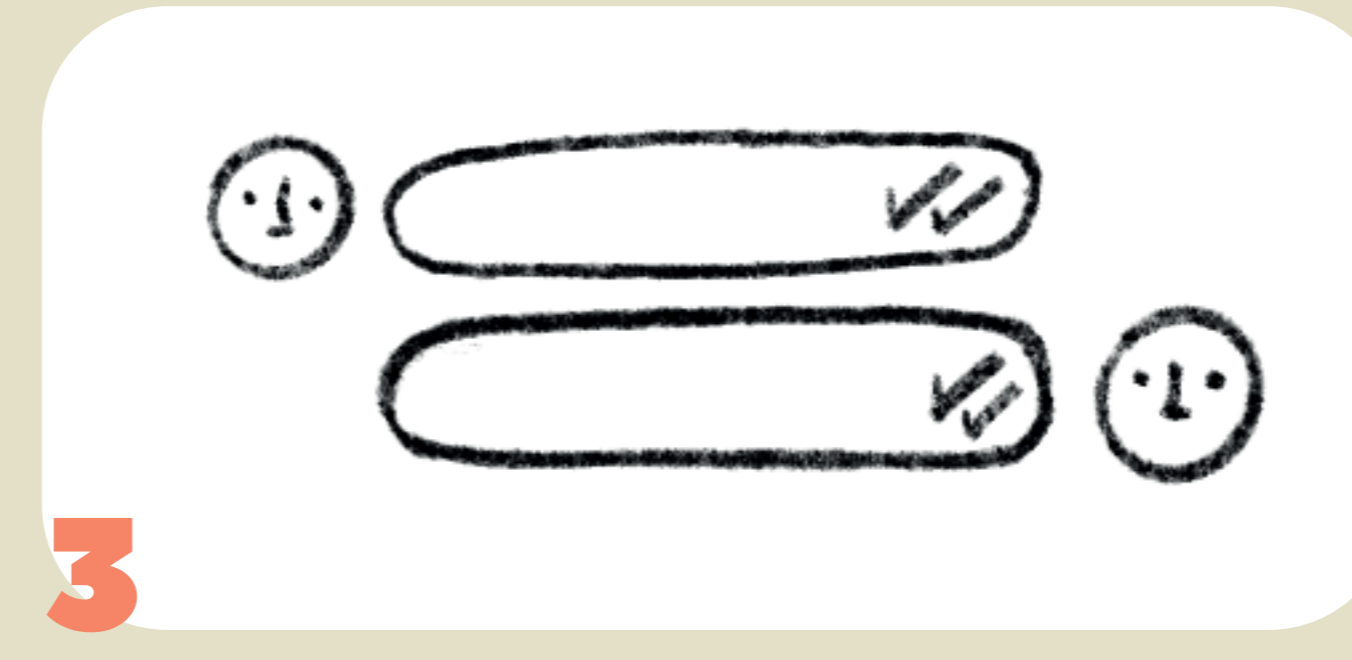
3
Some organizations use technology like SMS services, WhatsApp, and social media to engage with the community, gather insights, and receive questions that inform their coverage and keep the channel open.
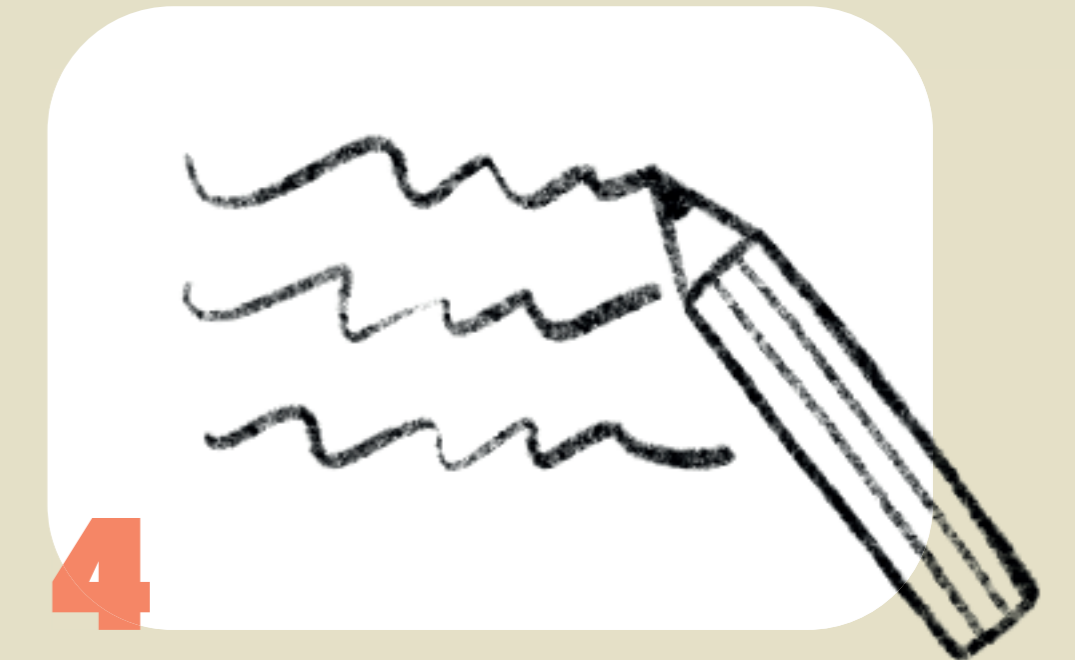
4
A few organizations train and empower communities to produce their own content and stories, prioritizing the community's voice.

In terms of the relationship building methodologies, organizations reported:

1
Hosting events aimed at connecting with the community, fostering relationships, and gathering insights. These events often focus on cultural celebrations, workshops, or discussions related to local issues.

2
Tailoring their communication approaches to resonate with different groups. This includes distributing materials through schools, churches, and community centers.
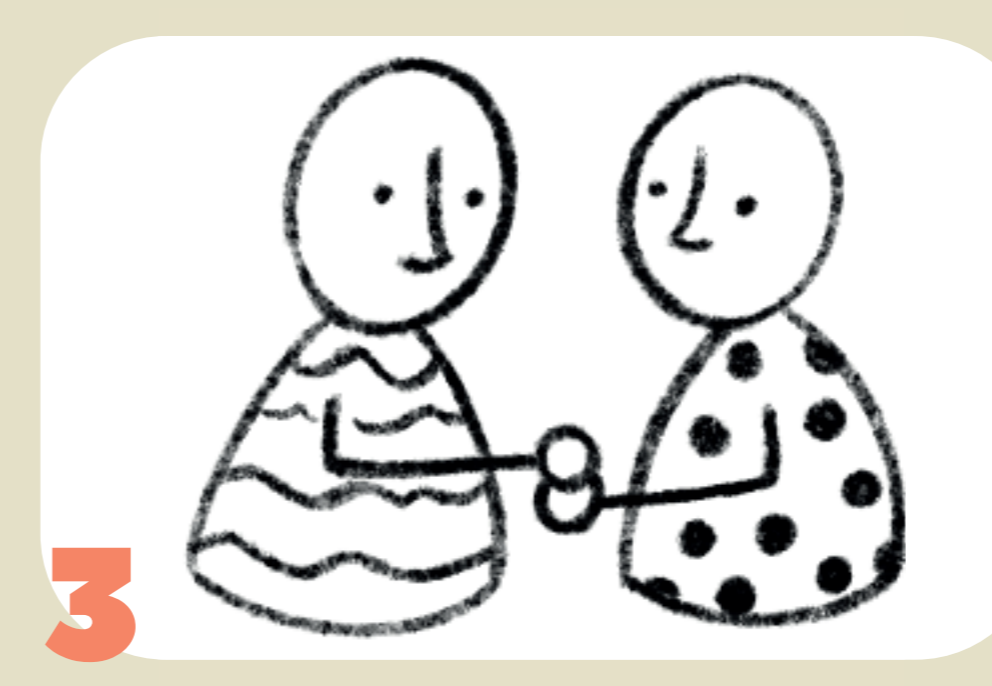
3
Face-to-face engagement, door-to-door outreach, and personal interactions to build trust and create connections within the community.

4
Establishing membership programs that encourage ongoing participation and feedback, creating a direct feedback loop with the audience.

13. WBA We requested organizations to share their significant achievements, challenges, and requests for 2022/23. The responses were categorized to reveal patterns, and the provided framework illustrates the interconnectedness of each theme.

WINS | BARRIERS | ASKS

1

WINS: Organizational growth and adaptation, internal culture shift and evolution, representation and diversity

BARRIERS: Capacity and resource allocation, training and skill gaps, turnover and morale

ASKS: Capacity building funds, investment in non-reporting roles, improved business operations, marketing targeting, and community engagement strategy

2

WINS: Funding and financial achievements

BARRIERS: Financial constraints, intersectionality and representation, structural and systemic barriers, philanthropic landscape (low diversity)

ASKS: Increased diversity in the philanthropic sector, encouraging funders to adopt inclusive practices and allocate resources to initiatives that target systemic issues. Building a collaborative network that amplifies diverse voices and perspectives can enhance the resilience and sustainability of these organizations

3

WINS: Impactful reporting and engagement, innovative reporting and agenda-setting

BARRIERS: Overcoming traditional models, media consumption trends

ASKS: Invest in digital platforms, and technology. Foster collaboration with tech partners. Adopt a data-driven approach to understand audience behavior

4

WINS: Recognition and awards

BARRIERS: Lack of templates

ASKS: More recognition and support (financial too) to different models of journalism making, and branding for this field

5

WINS: Local influence and solidification

BARRIERS: Specific regional challenges

ASKS: Slow and equitable democratic processes, including community decision-making and consensus-building, listening to communities

6

WINS: Collaborative initiatives

BARRIERS: Industry-wide challenges

ASKS: Community engagement and partnerships, sharing insights, networking, better understanding of the relationship between media and social movements

7

WINS: Media impact on legislation and public figures

BARRIERS: Limited access to reliable and comprehensive information, political pressures, limited resources to follow up public policies and polarization

ASKS: More political engagement, more political power, advocate for policies that address community needs

Legend:
- ● People and culture
- ● Technology and innovation
- ● Money
- ● Politics

The recommendations provided underscore a comprehensive strategy for the growth and sustainability of the organizations. By emphasizing capacity building, diverse philanthropy, technological investment, and community engagement, these suggestions show a multifaceted nature of challenges facing local civic news. The focus o n diversity, both in terms of voices represented and funding sources, still speaks to the need for inclusivity in shaping the future of civic media. And the call for slow and equitable democratic processes aligns with the importance of community-driven decision-making and consensus-building.

14. Networks

We asked survey respondents to tell us what networks—both journalistic and non-journalistic—that they are a part of. We were especially interested in the types of non-media networks these organizations were a part of. Although most of the organizations indicated that they are part of local, non-journalistic networks, the majority cited in the survey represent initiatives within the media landscape. Among them are national, regional and local alliances, specialized groups and ecosystem-focused entities. Additionally, there are professional associations, community networks and collaborative platforms:

Journalism and media associations
Atlanta Association for Asian Journalists
Atlanta Association of Black Journalists
Atlanta Press Club
Chicago Media Alliance
INN (Institute for Nonprofit News)
Investigative Reporters Group
Lion
Local NABJ chapter (National Association of Black Journalists)
National Association of Hispanic Journalists
News Futures
Online News Association (ONA)
Solutions Journalism Network

Advocacy organizations
Community on Gun Violence Advisory Community
Media Justice Network
Movement Collaborative Borealis

Community initiatives
Alliance for Community Media
Community Media Centers
Documenters Network
Georgia News Collaborative
Listening Post Collective

Education
Education Writers Association
Youth Education Network

Funding and support Organizations
Democracy Fund
Ecosystems Builders

Conclusion summary

These organizations are part of what is a relatively new and emergent ecosystem. Although they have achieved significant milestones, quantifying impact remains a challenge, as only a few have established consistent patterns for impact tracking.

Their unique Theory of Change positions journalism as a catalyst for transformative impact in democracy building, reflecting an approach that, unlike traditional journalism, embraces advocacy as essential to its mission. Instead of merely documenting events, most of these organizations aim to tell stories that inspire change and shape the world in constructive and generative ways. And this is NEW!

Teams are gradually becoming more professional, but are also experiencing changes in leadership. The team structure also reflects some inherent challenges, such as the absence of dedicated HR personnel and lack of succession planning and career development.

These organizations are aware that their existing audience may not perfectly align with the intended target demographic. This misalignment could be attributed to the lack of community engagement or participatory teams actively involved in decision-making within the organization.
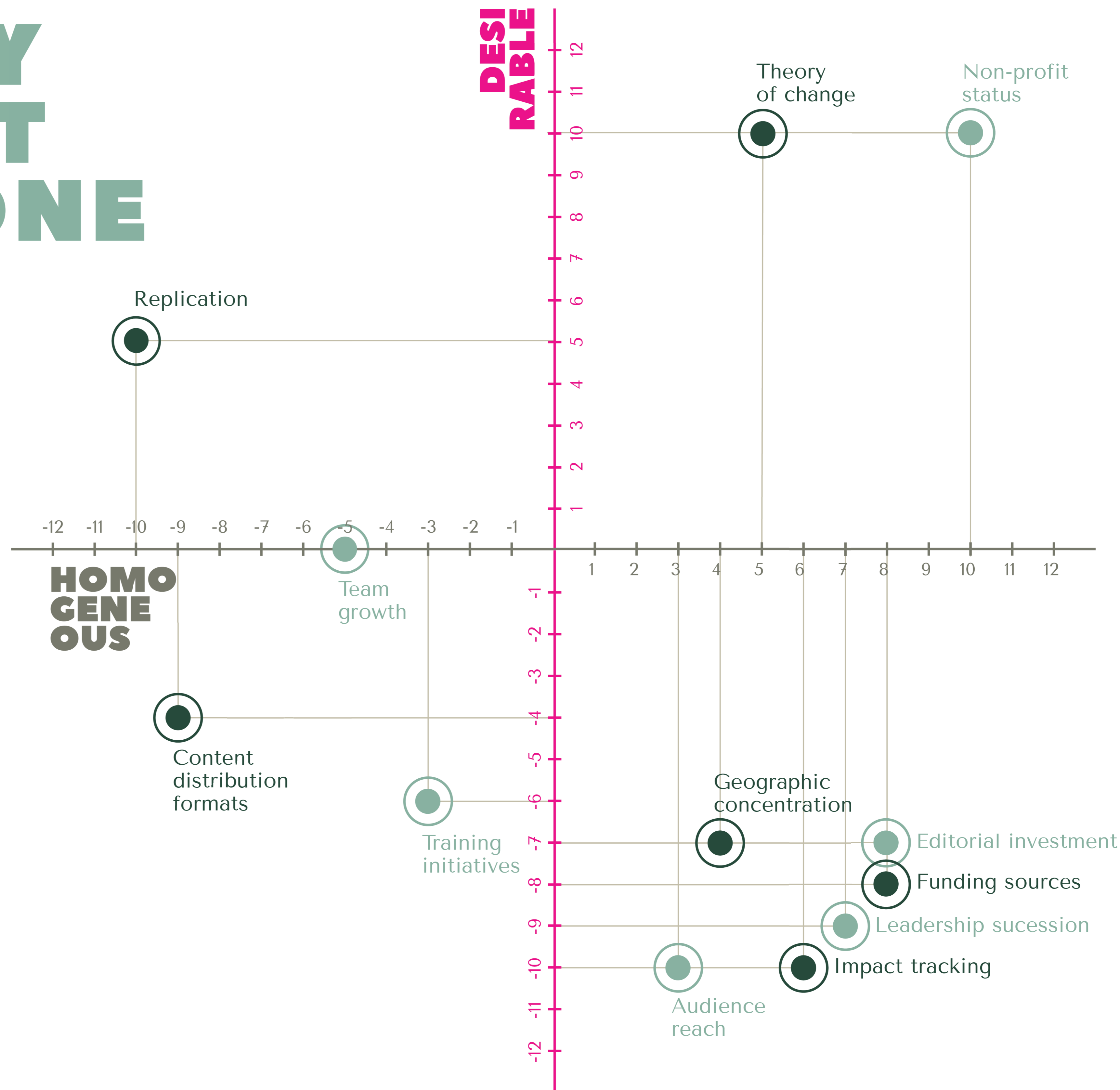
While revenues are somewhat constrained, the group acknowledges the need for a deeper examination of external factors influencing financial sustainability, especially when compared to other direct service investments. And this might have to do with the lack of impact tracking tools and methodologies that recognize the influence they have in communities.

Regarding training methods, they recognize the importance of nurturing the next generation to further enhance the work. However, it's worth noting that training individuals and fulfilling other responsibilities can be time-consuming, requiring careful consideration for efficiency and effectiveness.

THERE IS ONLY ONE GAIA, BUT GAIA IS NOT ONE

Considering the civic media ecosystem as a whole — beyond the organizations we studied — we see a mix of unity and diversity. This ecosystem aims to inform and engage communities, made up of many voices, platforms, and viewpoints. It promotes public discussion while celebrating the variety of its participants and their contributions. This balance encourages us to explore how shared systems and diverse ideas interact. Embracing both similarities and differences helps us create a strong and inclusive community that enhances our collective impact and strengthens civic life.

The representation below highlights where these similarities are most evident amongst the organizations and where they are least noticeable. Evolution, when homogeneous, is related to best practices. These collective structures enable us to address problems more effectively by leveraging our unified efforts. Conversely, in more heterogeneous environments, the focus shifts to the exchange of knowledge and learning from one another. This calls for the creation of common spaces, such as the News Futures Initiative, where diverse experiences and insights can be shared and utilized.

DESIRABLE

HOMOGENEOUS

Theory of change

Non-profit status

Replication

Team growth

Content distribution formats

Training initiatives

Geographic concentration

Editorial investment

Funding sources

Leadership sucession

Impact tracking

Audience reach

A few examples using the research findings where we understood there's room for improvement (non-desirable situation):

Homogeneous

Impact tracking: All organizations use a similar approach to impact tracking, but said that the approach needs to be improved. . A recommendation moving forward: The ecosystem could develop and design an impact tracking framework that could be adapted by each initiative based on specific needs. The data collected in this report could provide a foundation for studying how the field is impacting communities across the country as well as how civic media fills a civic information gap left by the market failure of journalism.

Leadership succession: Most organizations said that they have trouble thinking about and investing resources into how to prepare the next generation for their leadership roles. Only a small minority (2) have internal HR structure to work on career development. One possible common structure the ecosystem could benefit from here would be a Human Resources partner that provides training and advisory/ consultation services to the field at a low cost but with very specialized knowledge.

Heterogeneous

Training initiatives: There's an embodied need in every organization to focus on training people to work in different roles of the civic media environment, but only a few were able to establish a tested and validated curriculum. Although the necessity of having training initiatives is common, the needs, methodologies and roles are different. For this approach, it is recommended that organizations could foster a community of practice to exchange experiences and challenges that could help build a diversified body of knowledge.

Content distribution formats: The same happens in the case of content distribution. Organizations reported having difficulties understanding how to improve strategies to connect better with their communities. In this case, there are different contexts that need to be analyzed. Therefore, a community dedicated to experimenting with and tracking results of distribution practices could create a common but diverse base of knowledge that would be useful to many different kinds of civic media organizations.

This dual approach, as illustrated by the proposed matrix, serves as a valuable tool for identifying areas that benefit from joint efforts and those that thrive on individual contributions and collaborative learning. By recognizing where similarities and differences lie, we can tailor our strategies to foster both structured cooperation and dynamic knowledge exchange. Ultimately, this balanced method enhances the overall development and desirability of practices and models within the field.

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