

# FUNDING THE WAY FORWARD FOR AUSTRALIAN NEWS

A REVIEW OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NEWS FUNDING DISTRIBUTION MECHANISMS



Centre for  
Media Transition

## About this report

This report has been produced by the UTS Centre for Media Transition (CMT) and is current at December 2025. The research was conducted as part of a project funded by the Australian Research Council, Valuing News: Aligning Individual, Institutional and Societal Perspectives (Discovery Project DP220100589, administered by the University of Sydney).

## About the Centre for Media Transition

The Centre for Media Transition is an applied research unit based at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). Launched in 2017, the CMT is an interdisciplinary initiative of the Faculty of Design and Society and the Faculty of Law. CMT works across disciplines to explore and develop responses to the dramatic and ongoing movements wrought by digital disruption to the media industry, the role of journalism in Australian democracy and the world more widely, and the business models that support a diverse and prosperous industry.

The project lead for this project is Derek Wilding, a Professor at UTS Law and Co-Director of the CMT. He receives funding from the Australian Research Council.

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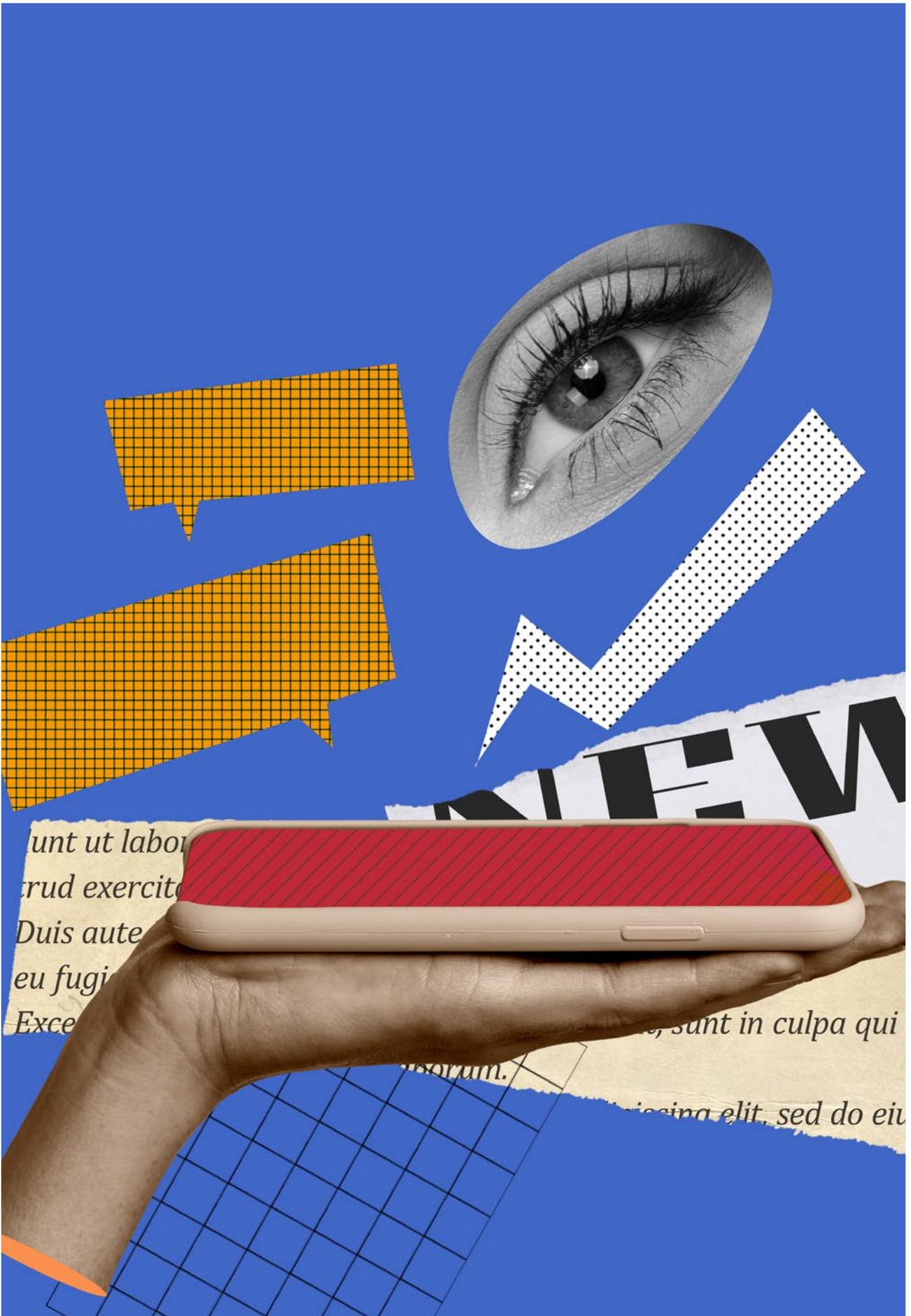
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**D**irect government funding of news organisations is relatively new in Australia, emerging in the late 2010s in response to disruption from the rise of digital platforms as a centre of public engagement, consequential changes in audience behaviours, and diversion of traditional revenue sources. The Australian Government, like others around the world, acknowledges the critical role of public interest media in a healthy democracy, particularly in response to rising misinformation and social division.

In 2021, alongside other news funding schemes, the Government introduced the News Media Bargaining Code (NMBC), enabling certain news businesses to be compensated by digital platforms. In 2024, the NMBC was challenged by Meta's announced withdrawal from the scheme. The Government response was another innovative policy, the News Bargaining Incentive (NBI), which is under consultation at time of writing. Seeking to address the NMBC's shortcomings by extending to larger digital platforms, *whether or not they host news*, the NBI proposes a new charge and deduction system. This aims to incentivise platforms to make agreements with news organisations by offering a more than one-to-one deduction from the charge. While intended as revenue neutral, there are several scenarios where it could generate a substantial funding pool. In November 2025, the Government also opened up the first of two tranches of News Media Assistance Program (News MAP) funding for news organisations.

Direct bargaining may remain important as part of news sustainability policy. However, between present and future measures, a large amount of funding may be available to distribute to Australian news businesses. With Generative AI emerging as a further threat to news sustainability, funding may need to continue longer term. This raises the question of what mechanisms are appropriate to distribute such funds. This report considers comparable existing programs in Australian direct funding for news, Australian news media sector funding, international direct news funding (government schemes), international NGO news funding, and comparable Australian direct funding bodies in academia and culture, with editorial independence from funding sources a key theme. While raising questions to consider in funding design, this report does not advocate for any particular mechanism.

## Australian news funding

Since 2018, there have been seven direct news funding schemes, from the three-part Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package for business innovation, journalism scholarships and cadetships, to the Public Interest Newsgathering Fund, Journalist Fund for training and cadetships, News Media Relief Funding for regional and diverse newsrooms and recent Journalism Assistance Fund for Australian journalism. Their funding mechanisms evolved over time from a legislated scheme with regulator as decision maker on advice from an advisory committee, through to Minister as decision maker on the advice of Department of Communications. More recently, decision making has moved to departmental officials. There has also been a shift away from using advisory bodies.

## Australian public funding for media sectors

While direct news funding is more recent, there is a long history of funding media sectors which include news production. Government-funded public broadcasters operate independently under their enabling legislation. Indigenous media are funded through the National Agency for Indigenous Australians and the Department of Communications, with reviews recommending a First Nations-led model. Multicultural media access different funding sources; a recent grant is administered by the Department of Home Affairs. The community broadcasting sector is funded via the Department of Communications through a distinctive model, with a single Community Broadcasting Program grant to the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), an independent not-for-profit, which distributes grants to licensed broadcasters through specialist committees using peer review.

## International news funding – government schemes

Direct funding of news has been common in many parts of the world for decades. There are current programs in most member states of the European Union, other parts of Europe, Canada, the US, Korea and South Africa. This report covers a diverse range of mechanisms, with many directed at news deserts and underserved audiences, while others offering broader journalism support.

**Austria** has a decades-long history of “maximalist” news media support with at least four current media subsidies and others under consideration. Three journalism subsidies are administered by the Austrian regulator KommAustria. Its administrative arm RTR Media also manages a Digital Transformation Fund, which was partly funded by an advertising tax on digital platforms. All are legislated schemes which use expert advisory boards.

**Canada** has a diverse matrix of news funding programs including:

- **direct government funding programs** either distributed by the Department of Canadian Heritage or, since the late 2010s, through sector-run funds. Referred to as “Initial Recipients”, these industry coalitions represent community, language minorities and news media which develop their own funding structures and guidelines in collaboration with the Department.
- **industry-funded levy programs** including the current Independent Local News Fund (ILNF), established in policy by the regulator (CRTC), which redirects percentages of revenue from licensed terrestrial or direct-to-home broadcast undertakings to private independent television stations for local news. A newer scheme under the Online Streaming Act 2023 imposing a similar charge on online undertakings (such as Netflix and Apple Music) to fund news has been contested by those platforms. While the court decision is pending, the CRTC continues to set rules for these funds to go to the ILNF and other funds managed by industry entities.
- **industry funding through news bargaining** occurs under the Online News Act 2023 which established a form of collective bargaining by eligible news organisations. Google obtained a five-year legislative exemption by agreeing to pay \$100 million per year to be distributed by the industry-led Canadian Journalism Collective created for that purpose. Run by a large representative industry board, the CJC applies a legislated “equitable distribution” formula, and is also required under the legislation to operate independently from its funder, Google.

**The United States** has a number of states which have legislated or introduced bills for different types of news support, with a diverse range of distribution mechanisms:

- **direct government funding of news** exists in legislated models in California and New Jersey which include both government appropriation and philanthropic sources. The California model includes an advisory board of news industry representatives with funding decisions by the Governor; the New Jersey model (since 2018) of a “Civic Info Consortium” includes political appointments from different parties, university appointees and representatives from media and technology, and a legislated requirement for the Board to hold annual public consultation meetings about the funding program in specified regions of the state.
- **funding through a form of digital tax** has been proposed in Hawaii and Washington State bills. The Hawaii version is a tax on social media and search platforms to be distributed through a fund by a government department. The Washington bill proposes a “local journalism investment surcharge” on digital platforms to support a departmental grants program.
- **forms of hybrid news bargaining** with options for collective payments to eligible news organisations directly from platforms or third parties, or for other distribution mechanisms, have been attempted in California (where the bill was withdrawn following a 2024 Google deal) and are in train in Illinois, Oregon and New York state. The California bill involved either a legislated payment by a covered digital platform according to a legislated formula or payment determined through a final arbitration process conducted collectively with all eligible news organisations. Oregon’s proposal offers the option of a single specified payment, arbitration or mediated settlement; platforms who make the payment are required to distribute a specified percentage to newsrooms and another percentage to the Oregon Civic Information Consortium (modelled on New Jersey’s) with a board including representatives of community, the journalists’ union, a professional journalism society, the digital technology sector and two universities. Several schemes include requirements for news organisation recipients to spend minimum percentages on employing journalists and give detailed annual attestations that they have done so.

**Nordic countries** have funded news for decades under legislated schemes. Denmark’s funds, for example, are distributed by an expert Media Board appointed by the Minister and include media association nominees. A recent review in Denmark on the future of media support recommended replacing separate schemes with a simplified principles-based support model.

**Korea** has at least nine news subsidy schemes. This report considers two legislated schemes: one operated by the Korea Press Foundation and another administered by a Committee for Local Press appointed by the Minister with representative appointments.

**South Africa** has a legislated Media Development and Diversity Agency with grant streams for different media sectors, with a six-member board appointed by the President on the recommendation of the National Assembly. It is possibly the only media funding model of its kind.

## International public interest news funding - NGOs

Australian news media have attracted some philanthropic support but it is more widespread overseas. Digital platforms have set up their own schemes, with funding decisions made independently through adjudication committees. Other overseas NGO funds have varied models of expert decision making.

## Australian statutory funding bodies - cultural and academic

The report considers funding by bodies in comparable sectors with public interest purposes: the Australian Research Council; Creative Australia; and Screen Australia. Each has an organisational structure established in legislation that has undergone review in recent years. All contain elements which could be applied to other distribution models, including for news funding.

## Summary of observations

News interventions in Australia and overseas all reflect similar core values that apply to any use of public funds – a clear link to policy, transparency of administration and decision making processes, and acquittals to ensure funds are used for their intended purposes – but with a heightened need to ensure the mechanisms preserve journalistic independence as a key value. Having regard to the key themes of the report, it is noted that:

- *Decision making* around Australian news funding distribution has evolved considerably into its current departmental model. Internationally, many news funding programs are legislated and delivered through a diverse range of distribution mechanisms and entities. Canada stands out for its diversity of mechanisms and use of industry sector bodies to deliver significant government funding and, along with proposed state schemes in the United States, is interesting for its news bargaining-style programs, which also offer alternative ways for digital platforms to fund news organisations.
- *Transparency* across all jurisdictions generally involves publication of recipients and funding amounts, sometimes as data sets to facilitate analysis. However, consolidated information is less common unless a formal review has been commissioned or there has been academic analysis.
- *Recipient obligations* Programs globally share common principles for recipient accountability, with some moving towards outcomes-based reporting and longer retention of information to enable longer-term evaluation of success. Some US hybrid news bargaining bills include attestation requirements for recipients more commonly seen in direct funding program recipient acquittals.
- *Independence* from funding source manifests both in structures and statements, ranging from statutory provisions for decision making through to funding acknowledgement statements.

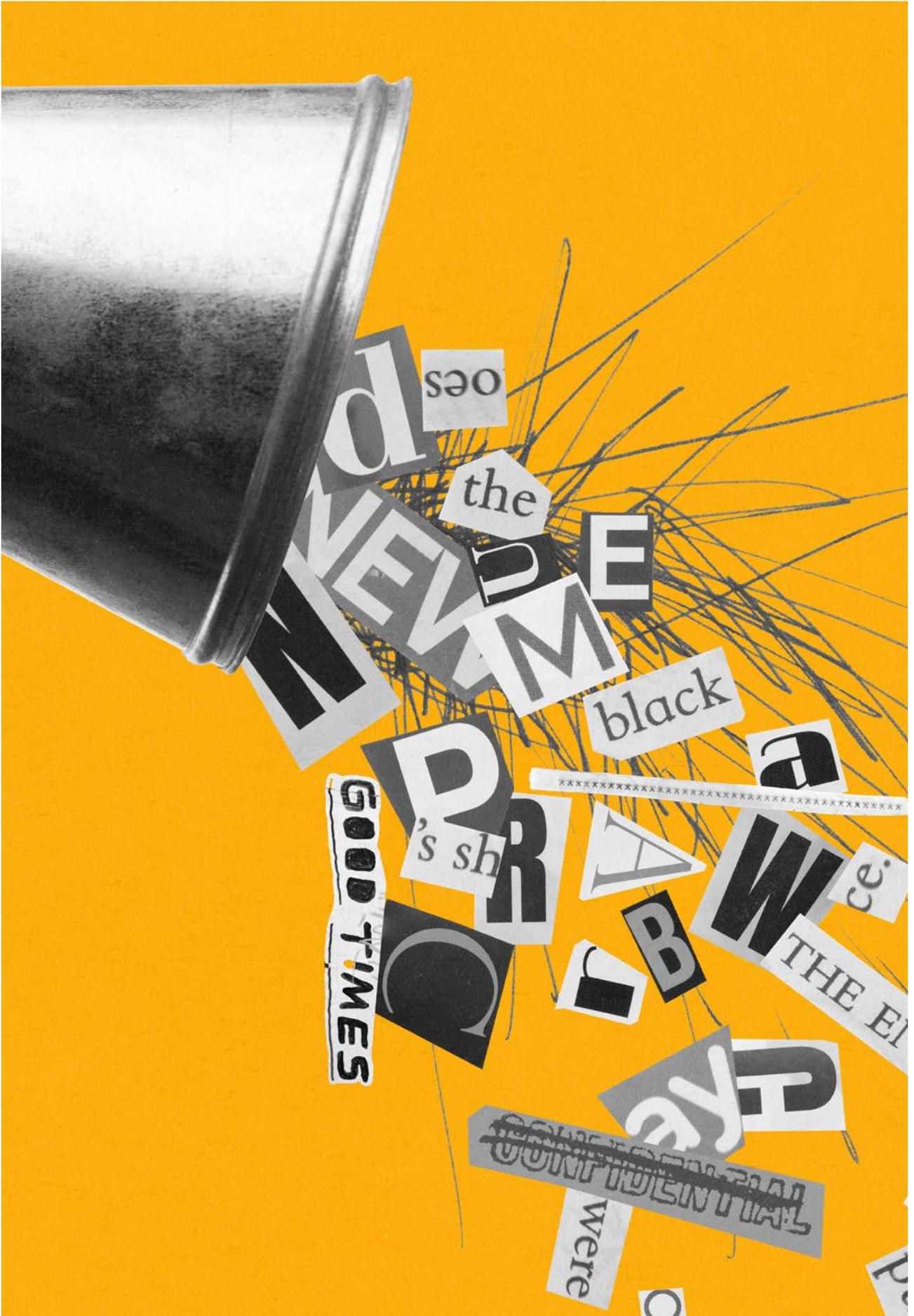
## Where to from here

Australian and global mechanisms for news and comparable funding have evolved in recent years and are likely to continue to evolve as policy makers look to longer term models for news sustainability. This will involve addressing questions such as:

- What entity is the appropriate decision maker?
- What process will ensure independence?
- How will decision making be run?
- How will transparency be ensured?
- How will it be made clear that funds are being spent as intended?

In Australia, current discussions and consultations offer the opportunity to consider the design of future funding mechanisms, in ways which align and unify key policies such as the News MAP framework, the Media Diversity Measurement Framework and the policy objectives of the NMBC and NBI.

The many examples of local and international distribution structures outlined in this report offer a wide range of ideas that can be adapted for the Australian environment. There currently exists an opportunity to design distribution structures for the future in a way that is practical and manageable for all stakeholders, including, Australian public interest news organisations seeking to create sustainable businesses, the government as funder of certain programs, the digital platforms involved in other funding schemes and, most importantly, the public as key beneficiaries of a healthy public interest news ecosystem.



# 1 INTRODUCTION

The question of how to support a sustainable and diverse Australian public interest news media has occupied policy makers since the late 2010s, as digital platforms have carved out a new role in Australian society. Platforms have emerged as the new epicentre of public engagement, but they also divert substantial revenue and audiences from news media, undermining the viability of existing business models. Australia has seen the resulting closure of news media outlets, increased ownership concentration, and the emergence of local news deserts in regional and remote areas. Operating and regulatory environments remain very dynamic; emerging unknowns include the full impact of the rapid uptake of generative AI on all markets, including news.

The well-established policy rationale for government intervention in news markets is that citizens need access to public interest news about matters of local and civic engagement, for a healthy democracy.<sup>1</sup>

Australia has a long history of funding independent public broadcasters, with news as a major part of their remit, but until the late 2010s most public policy and regulation for private media was centred around ownership, concentration and licensing, and did not involve public funding support for news.

In 2018, the Australian Government began the first of a series of direct funding relief programs for categories of news organisations, which were extended following the ACCC's 2019 review of the impact of digital platforms on the Australian news market.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the Government also developed the 2021 News Media Bargaining Code (NMBC), an innovative intervention enacted through competition legislation. Encouraging direct agreements between digital platforms and certain news media organisations, the NMBC redirected an estimated \$200m-250m per year in its first three years to the Australian news industry and, despite some concerns, an initial review found it to be a success.<sup>3</sup> This changed in February 2024, when Meta announced it would no longer enter into agreements with Australian news organisations and threatened to remove news from its platforms if forced into mandatory bargaining under the NMBC's designation provisions.<sup>4</sup>

1 This was most recently stated as: "The Government considers that a strong and diverse news sector is vital for a healthy democracy". Australian Government (2025, November) *News Bargaining Incentive Consultation Paper* <https://consult.treasury.gov.au/c2025-71815> Australia is also a signatory to the October 2025 *Paris Declaration on Multilateral Action for Information Integrity and Independent Media* <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2025/10/29/paris-declaration-on-multilateral-action-for-information-integrity-and-independent-media>

2 Among the inputs was an ACCC commissioned report assessing funding approaches in nine countries: Foster, R., Bunting, M. (2019, April 10) *Public Funding of High-Quality Journalism, A Report for the ACCC* <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/ACCC%20commissioned%20report%20-%20Public%20funding%20of%20high-quality%20journalism%20-%20phase%201%2C%20Communications%20Chambers.PDF>

3 Australian Government, The Treasury (2022, November) *News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code, The Code's First Year of Operation* <https://treasury.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/p2022-343549.pdf>

4 Meta (29 February 2024) "An Update on Facebook News" <https://about.fb.com/news/2024/02/update-on-facebook-news-us-australia/>. It is also reported that that Google walked back from some of its deals in 2025, reducing funding to some Australian news organisations: Buckingham Jones, S. (2025, January), "Google ditches million-dollar deals with publishers amid Labor inaction", *Australian Financial Review* <https://www.afr.com/companies/media-and-marketing/google-ditches-million-dollar-deals-with-publishers-amid-labor-inaction-20250620-p5m94l>

## News Bargaining Incentive

In December 2024, the government responded by proposing another innovative intervention: the News Bargaining Incentive (NBI), a “charge and offset mechanism” designed to incentivise news bargaining deals.<sup>5</sup> Operating in conjunction with the NMBC, the NBI addresses its shortcomings<sup>6</sup> in two ways:

- extending to larger digital platforms that do not host news, thereby removing the motivation for platforms to withdraw news as a way of taking themselves outside the scheme;<sup>7</sup> and
- charging platforms that do not negotiate agreements in line with the NMBC framework.

Platforms which do bargain will receive an incentivised (more than one-for-one) offset against the NBI charge for “eligible expenditure supporting journalism”, which potentially includes both bargaining agreements and other types of news funding.<sup>8</sup>

To the extent there is a gap between the NBI charges (e.g. if a digital platform chooses not to bargain<sup>9</sup> or the quantum of agreements falls short of the charge amount, or the platform does not host news and so has no basis for bargaining) the scheme may generate a substantial pool of funding.

The consultation paper suggests that if this happens the Government “will consider options to distribute assistance”<sup>10</sup> Although the consultation does not specifically seek input on such a distribution mechanism, any such mechanism would likely need to align with existing public interest news funding policies, as well as the broad principles underpinning the NMBC and the Government’s News Media Assistance Program (News MAP).

## News MAP

In December 2024, the Government also announced almost \$180m of funding initiatives, including \$99.1m in grants over three years through News MAP. The framework’s policy paper states: “the crisis facing journalism demands decisive action”, noting the ineffectiveness of previous ad hoc funding approaches.<sup>11</sup> The first \$67.6m tranche (Journalist Assistance Fund) is for “existing journalists who produce core news content”.<sup>12</sup> It is understood that in late 2025, the Government held an informal stakeholder discussion about distribution of the remaining \$33m tranche.<sup>13</sup> The News MAP framework includes the following policy measure, though there appears to be no public information on its implementation:<sup>14</sup>

The Government will convene an expert panel to provide advice to assist in the allocation of funding and the design and targeting of mechanisms that go to direct support and capacity building, including sectoral capacity in attracting philanthropy and implementing commercial solutions...

### 1.1 Purpose of this report

The above initiatives mean that while direct bargaining may continue to be a contributor to Australian news sustainability, in the coming years there may be an unprecedented amount of news funding through Australian government-sponsored schemes, whether through direct government funding or generated by the offset gap (i.e. non-offset NBI revenue) or as “eligible expenditure supporting journalism”. Given the NBI is being initiated at a time when the Government has established a formal news funding program to support sustainability, News MAP policy might also be seen as a vehicle for guiding the approach to the distribution of these funds.

5 Australian Government, The Treasury (2025, November) *News Bargaining Incentive Consultation Paper*.

6 Jones, S, Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services (2024, December) *Albanese Government to establish News Bargaining Incentive* Media Release <https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/stephen-jones-2022/media-releases/albanese-government-establish-news-bargaining-incentive>

7 Meta removed news from its platforms in Australia briefly before the NMBC legislation and permanently in Canada following a similar scheme.

8 Australian Government, The Treasury (2024, December) *News Bargaining Incentive Fact Sheet*: “Eligible expenditure of \$100 will reduce the liability for the charge by more than \$100”.

9 Google elected to seek an exemption under Canada’s bargaining legislation in return for \$500m over five years distributed through a special-purpose independent organisation, rather than do the deals itself. See Section 4.2 of this report.

10 Australian Government, The Treasury (2025, November) *News Bargaining Incentive Consultation Paper*

11 Australian Government, *News Media Assistance Program: Government’s Role in News and Journalism* (Report, December 2024) page 7. <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/news-media-assistance-program-governments-role-in-news-and-journalism-december2024.pdf>

12 This grant round opened 21 November 2025. Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts (2025) <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/Show?GoUId=FB972683-4F08-42FE-BC0C-8DD3D620C82C> Core news is defined as “content that reports, investigates or explains issues or events that are relevant to engaging Australians in public debate and in informing democratic decision making, or current issues or events of public significance for Australians at a local, regional, state or national level”

13 Bakan, S. (2025, December 2) *News MAP Launch Welcomed, But Room for Improvement Remains*, Public Interest Journalism Initiative [https://piji.com.au/blog/news-map-launch-improvement/?utm\\_source=Public+Interest+Journalism+Initiative&utm\\_campaign=f5dc565981-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2025\\_05\\_21\\_03\\_54\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-d4e7d78fae-480137641](https://piji.com.au/blog/news-map-launch-improvement/?utm_source=Public+Interest+Journalism+Initiative&utm_campaign=f5dc565981-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2025_05_21_03_54_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-d4e7d78fae-480137641)

14 Australian Government, *News Media Assistance Program: Government’s Role in News and Journalism* (Report, December 2024) page 15. <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/news-media-assistance-program-governments-role-in-news-and-journalism-december2024.pdf>

This report considers the design, manner and methods by which funds of these kinds and magnitudes are commonly distributed, through a review of current practices in comparable local and international funding schemes.

## 1.2 Scope of this report

### Context

The Centre for Media Transition (CMT) at University of Technology Sydney has contributed to research and policy discussion on digital platform regulation since 2018 including around the News Media Bargaining Code<sup>15</sup> and alternative mechanisms.<sup>16</sup> This latest research follows on from CMT's *Finding a Way Forward for Australian News* report, which investigated the elements of novel interventions to support news sustainability in the digital platforms environment, with a focus on levy and must-carry style mechanisms, and concluded that a multi-faceted approach was needed.<sup>17</sup> This report is also a component of research conducted for a separate project, *Valuing News*, funded by the Australian Research Council, with researchers from University of Sydney, University of Canberra and Queensland University of Technology, as well as UTS.

Specifically, the work in this report dovetails with a chapter<sup>18</sup> to be published in an upcoming edited collection, *Subsidising the Value of News*,<sup>19</sup> which examines and compares aspects of local and international news subsidy schemes (direct and indirect), including quantum, eligibility criteria, objectives and activities funded (the “front end” of such funding schemes).

### In scope

The focus of this report is on the *distribution methods* for funding programs (the “back end”), having regard to local and international examples of news and comparable funding schemes. To inform discussions about future best practice - including whether international examples could offer useful precedents for the design of Australian news support interventions - this report focuses on the methods used to distribute direct funding by looking in turn at existing mechanisms for:

- Section 2: Australian government funding for news
- Section 3: Australian government funding of media sectors
- Section 4: International government funding for news
- Section 5: International NGO funding for news
- Section 6: Australian government funding by independent statutory cultural/academic entities.

It concludes with an analysis of these varied approaches and their elements, having regard to what might be relevant to the future Australian news funding ecosystem.

It is well recognised that direct funding of media, whether by government or other parties, can raise complex issues, including around actual or perceived funder influence on media content or potential loss of editorial independence for recipients. This is directly addressed in the News MAP policy framework statements that “freedom of the press is an essential part of this framework” and:

Government intervention in journalism carries inherent risks of compromising press freedom and editorial independence, as well as market distortion, which would threaten the benefits provided by news and journalism. These risks are substantial. To balance these risks, any support should enable the sector to adapt to emerging business models, and support the sustainability and capacity-building of Australian news organisations over the short-term. However, these are not the only risks, and the consequences of inaction can also threaten the vital public benefits provided by news and journalism.

A nuanced approach is required. Government must evaluate the costs, benefits and risks of intervention against those of inaction on a case-by-case basis. It must also remain mindful of its unique position and confront the limitations of its role *to ensure measures are carefully designed to avoid undue influence*.<sup>20</sup>

15 See, e.g., Wilding, D., Fray, P., Molitorisz, S. & McKewon, E. (2018) *The Impact of Digital Platforms on News and Journalistic Content* (Centre for Media Transition, University of Technology Sydney) <https://www.uts.edu.au/research/centre-media-transition/projects-and-research/impact-digital-platforms-news-and-journalistic-content>

16 See, e.g., CMT, submissions to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) on its *Concepts Paper for the Mandatory News Media Bargaining Code* (June 2019) and on the Exposure Draft for the *Treasury Laws Amendment (News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code) Bill 2020* (August 2020) <https://www.uts.edu.au/research/centre-media-transition/centre-contributions-policy>

17 Eisenberg, J. (2024) *Finding a Way Forward for Australian News: An Examination of Local and International Regulatory Interventions* Centre for Media Transition, University of Technology Sydney and International Institute of Communications Australian Chapter (IICA) <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2024/11/finding-way-forward-australian-news-examination-local-and-international-regulatory-interventions>

18 Koskie, T., Wilding, D. (2026) “Subsidising the Value of News” in Flew, T., Stepnik, A., Koskie, T., *Valuing News – Digital Platforms and Journalism Futures*, Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, pp97-124.

19 *Valuing News: Aligning Individual, Institutional and Societal Perspectives*. Led by Professor Terry Flew, University of Sydney. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council, Discovery Project DP220100589 (2023-2025). See <https://mediated-trust-arts.sydney.edu.au/programs/valuing-news/>

20 Australian Government (2024, December) *News Media Assistance Program: Government's Role in News and Journalism*, p 6 (emphasis added).

The design of a funding mechanism can be a key mitigating factor by ensuring structural governance and transparency around distribution of substantial amounts of funds, whether from Government, industry or otherwise. It can also include accountability provisions, to ensure that funds are used for their intended purposes. In view of these imperatives, this report focuses on examples of how:

- funding decisions are made (including who makes the funding decision and how decision making is structured to avoid inappropriate influence and independence of funding recipient);
- information is disclosed about the funding decision, and to what extent; and
- funding schemes ensure that funds are spent for the intended purpose.

This report accordingly considers each of the funding interventions under three headings: decision making; transparency; and recipient obligations.

The analysis demonstrates both commonalities and diversity in how these mechanisms operate. While distribution mechanisms here and overseas are generally structured towards independent, arm's length decision making, there are many different ways to do so, through a range of processes, entities and accountability mechanisms. These are explored in the concluding section.

### **Outside scope**

The question of whether particular interventions have achieved their intended impact is outside the scope of this report, however where available, we note mechanisms for analysing outcomes. Other than referencing formal reviews, the report does not comment on efficacy of distribution mechanisms.

Also outside the scope of detailed examination are “front-end” elements such as a comparison of detailed eligibility criteria and quantum of funding, which generally relate to program objectives and can vary significantly both within Australia and internationally. These may include factors such as revenue thresholds, numbers of existing employees and freelancers, nature, type and frequency of publication, geographic location (particularly news deserts) and audiences.<sup>21</sup> The report does include some references to eligibility criteria where relevant to explain the distribution method. (The complexity and diversity of eligibility criteria here and overseas is worthy of separate examination.)

Criteria for eligible news organisations, as well as those for covered digital platforms, are addressed in the Government's December 2024 and November 2025 policy and grant announcements and consultations and the NMBC legislation. Media policy is anchored in the Australian Communications and Media Authority's (ACMA) Media Diversity Measurement Framework and related reporting.<sup>22</sup>

To stay as relevant as possible to potential Australian news funding policies, international examples are generally limited to *direct funding* support mechanisms, whether by government or other entities, while indirect funding mechanisms are out of scope. Measures such as government advertising, though considered direct funding, are not included. There are many interesting international examples of indirect funding (e.g. tax credits for employing journalists, news distribution costs or journalist travel cost relief) which may be useful to revisit as new policy proposals emerge or other mechanisms are explored in coming years.<sup>23</sup> Also beyond scope was a full literature review of governance methods for public funding, which may be relevant for future research.<sup>24</sup>

The intention of this report is to review examples of distribution mechanisms that could be of interest or relevant to the Australian context, but it does not advocate for particular solutions.

## **1.3 Research methods**

This report is drawn from published sources such as legislation, policy and legislative reviews and submissions, scholarly commentary, articles and news stories. It addresses a number of significant news funding interventions internationally but is not an exhaustive compilation; those selected demonstrate elements of relevance to Australia. While there is usually a fair level of transparency in funding schemes – for example, through government grants portals such as GrantConnect – information is often fragmented. It can be difficult to find consolidated descriptions of, or reports on, funding programs, both in Australia and

21 See Koskie, T., Wilding, D. (2026, in press) “Subsidising the Value of News” in Flew, T., Stepnik, A., Koskie, T., *Valuing News – Digital Platforms and Journalism Futures*, Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan.

22 ACMA (n.d.) *Media Diversity Measurement Framework* <https://www.acma.gov.au/media-diversity-measurement-framework>

23 Moon Sehat, C., Mitchell, A., Jens, S. (2024, September) *Establishing a Sustainable News Environment: A Framework for Media Financial Legislation*, Report. Centre for News Technology and Innovation <https://cnti.org/article/enabling-a-sustainable-news-environment-a-framework-for-media-finance-legislation/>

24 See, for example: Centre for Public Integrity (2025) *Transparency Framework for Public Appointments* [https://publicintegrity.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Briefing-paper-Public-Appointments-Framework\\_GD-Update.pdf](https://publicintegrity.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Briefing-paper-Public-Appointments-Framework_GD-Update.pdf)

overseas<sup>25</sup> unless there has been a formal review either commissioned by government or through an academic project.<sup>26</sup> This means that the analysis in this report is not always comprehensive or like-for-like; however, it is still possible to find many interesting commonalities between interventions and appropriate existing mechanisms that could be adapted for the Australian context. The methodology did not include stakeholder interviews or detailed analysis of stakeholder submissions to key consultations. Given the complexity of some of the interventions and their positioning in specific legislative and cultural contexts, especially for the international examples, there may be nuances or practical aspects beyond the published materials which may emerge through further exploration in qualitative research.

## 1.4 Terminology used in this report

**News organisation** is broadly used as a shorthand for news organisations which produce original public interest news or public interest journalism and operate within recognised editorial standards. Australian interventions use a range of definitions to determine which news media will be beneficiaries. For example, the NMBC uses a “professional standards test” as well as a test of primary purpose to create “core news content”<sup>27</sup> and requires that “the news source operates predominantly in Australia for the dominant purpose of serving Australian audiences”. The News Media Assistance Program policy, which references the Media Diversity Measurement Framework released in December 2024, and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission’s (ACCC) Digital Platforms Inquiry may reference varying definitions of news and journalism and public interest news for different purposes. These variations exist both here and internationally.

**News** in the context of the funding programs discussed in this report refers to public interest news in its broadly understood sense as a contributor to democracy, recognising that there are also varying definitions in different jurisdictions and interventions.

**Digital platform** is used broadly to reference large search or social media platforms subject to news interventions, commonly defined by revenue or audience thresholds. The NBI consultation paper suggests that, consistently with the NMBC legislation, “digital platform” will likely not be defined and “it would take on its ordinary meaning”. However, the consultation paper is exploring thresholds around Australian-sourced revenue, type of service (such as definitions around “social media” and “search services”) and what elements make these businesses “large” and “significant” for the purposes of those parameters.<sup>28</sup>

**Eligible news organisation** and **Covered digital platform** when discussing a particular intervention, refer to organisations that meet criteria specific to that intervention.

**Media sustainability** is used interchangeably with “public interest news sustainability” and implicitly refers to the types of news media organisations supported by public policy, and the overall health of the news market. It is not uncommon for policymakers to refer to sustainability in its general sense without defining it. For this report, it is also assumed that sustainability of a healthy Australian news market requires *diversity*, as outlined in the ACMA’s Media Diversity Measurement Framework, which is intended to underpin Australian Government media policies, and that this may inform the design of news support mechanisms.

**Transparency** is intended to capture measures that enable the public to understand important aspects of the funding schemes, including how decisions have been made, who has benefitted and how, and whether funds have been used for stated purposes, in line with any policy goals for a particular intervention. This may include published lists of grants and funds acquittals which include attestations about what funds have been used for. The need for transparency is also described in the News Media Assistance Program framework.<sup>29</sup>

Noting there have been changes in portfolios since the late 2010s, this report mostly uses “**Department of Communications**” or “**the Department**” as the generic term for the department which administers the work of the Minister for Communications.

25 A review prepared for the European Commission of EU media funding mechanisms noted: “A key challenge encountered across most Member States is the lack of consolidated information about the funding mechanisms in place, their budgetary values, the policy approaches to financing, eligibility criteria, implementation, and effects.” Henningsen Consulting and Technopolis Group (2023) *Public Financing of News Media in the EU Final Report*. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4a26df80-bbff-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

26 For example, Myllylahti, M., & Meese, J. (2024) “Public money well spent? Unintended consequences and challenges arising from Trans-Tasman public journalism funds”. *Journal of Media Business Studies* 22(2), 169–186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2024.2404300> and Kammer, A., Blach-Ørsten (2025, July 2024) “Subsidized news-media innovation: outputs, outcomes and impact”, *Frontiers in Communication*, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2025.1578463>

27 Under s 52A of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth), “core news content” means content that reports, investigates or explains issues or events relevant in engaging Australians in public debate and in informing democratic decision making or current issues or events of public significance at a local, regional or national level.

28 Australian Government, The Treasury (2025, November) *News Bargaining Incentive Consultation Paper*. The fact sheet released at the time of the NBI announcement in December 2024 also said “It is expected that few services will fall within the scope of the incentive. We anticipate Meta, Google and TikTok would fall within the scope of the incentive.” Australian Government, The Treasury (2024) *News Bargaining Fact Sheet* <https://share.google/Wu2YjwJwU0szXudUF>

29 Australian Government (2024, December) *News Media Assistance Program: Government’s Role in Funding News and Journalism* <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/media/publications/news-media-assistance-program-governments-role-news-and-journalism>



# 2 AUSTRALIAN DIRECT FUNDING FOR NEWS

## 2.1 Context

The Australian Government has provided direct funding programs for public interest journalism since 2018 when the *Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund* was established under legislation. The pandemic led to separate non-legislated policies, including the *Public Interest News Gathering Grant*; subsequent programs include the *Journalist Fund* and most recently the *2024 News Media Relief Program (News MAP)*. The Government has also directly funded the Australian Associated Press news agency. Most recently, the *2025 Journalism Assistance Fund* implements the first tranche of the *2024 News MAP*, with a further tranche due to follow.

This section revisits the different mechanisms used to distribute Australian news-specific funding and how particular elements have evolved since the initial grants. An ongoing criticism of the NMBC is a perceived lack of transparency around the amount and use of funding. In contrast, it is common for government grants to involve detailed acquittal, though requirements vary between programs.

Non-corporate government entities are required to follow the *Government Grants Rules and Principles*; these do not apply to other methods of funding distribution (e.g. public broadcaster accountability mechanisms for funding exist under their own legislation, as outlined in Section 3).<sup>30</sup> While government grants rules contain requirements and principles around, for example “a transparent and systematic application and selection process,” they do not specify particular mechanisms or decision makers.<sup>31</sup>

Design elements may reflect the simplicity/complexity of determining eligibility and the type of activity supported, and should generally be proportionate to the likely risks attached to the funding. Individual grants are generally readily accessible, though this is not usually the case for acquittal documentation. While consolidated reports around the entirety of a program are not common unless specifically commissioned, successful grants lists are generally available as data sets for analysis.

Although many news funding programs contain common elements, there are key differences in the ways they are administered, who makes decisions and other procedural aspects.

<sup>30</sup> While public broadcasters are independently funded, since 2022 the ABC has received the Enhanced Newsgathering Fund which is reported on separately. See Section 3.1 below.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Government *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024*. <https://www.legislation.gov.au/F2024L00854/latest/versions> See also Australian Government, Department of Finance, “The grants process” <https://www.finance.gov.au/government/managing-commonwealth-resources/commonwealth-grants-rmg-410/grants-process>

## 2.2 Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package

This \$60 million funding program (Jobs and Innovation Package), initiated in 2018 under the Turnbull Coalition Government, was the first of the Australian news funding programs. Launched in the context of broader media reform legislation addressing ownership rules and other matters, its programs were framed in recognition that Australian media was “in significant transition.”<sup>32</sup> Intended as a one-off arrangement<sup>33</sup> to help publishers “transition, compete and innovate more successfully in a changing media environment,”<sup>34</sup> its three programs were:

- Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund;
- Regional Journalism Scholarships Program (Scholarships Program); and
- Regional and Small Publishers Cadetships (Cadetships Program).

### 2.2.1 Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund (Innovation Fund)

In 2018, the Government’s new Part 14F of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (Cth) (BSA) enacted Australia’s first legislated program of direct investment in public interest journalism (outside the public broadcasting independent funding framework). It is the only such legislated program to date. In total, \$50.1m was allocated across financial years between 2018 and 2021.

Grants were to be used to “support the continuation, development, growth and innovation of Australian civic journalism, including initiatives that explore and expand the journalism funding model.”<sup>35</sup> Around 125 recipients were funded to digitise, train staff, adopt new business models and improve sustainability, efficiency and audience reach.

#### Decision making

The BSA specified that grants were to be administered by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (the ACMA).<sup>36</sup> The assessment process involved several steps:

- The ACMA first determined eligibility by assessing applications against BSA criteria that applicants be a “constitutional corporation that publish[ed] a newspaper, magazine or other periodical” or “content service provider.”<sup>37</sup>
- It then assessed eligible applications against merits criteria, which varied between grant rounds depending on specified objectives.
- An independent Advisory Committee appointed by the Minister for Communications under section 205ZK of the BSA then reviewed the business case of eligible applications. Committee members were appointed “based on their publishing, journalism and business experience” and included “nominees from the Australian Press Council, the Walkley Foundation and Country Press Australia.”<sup>38</sup> The Committee was expected to “carry out its duties consistent with Commonwealth Grant Rules and Guidelines.”<sup>39</sup>
- The Advisory Committee made recommendations to ACMA’s assessment team, who were required to have regard to that advice but had the final decision on successful grants and amounts. There was no process for review of its decision.<sup>40</sup>

#### Recipient obligations

Section 205ZJ (4) of the BSA requires the grant agreement between the ACMA and recipient to include a condition “to the effect that that recipient will spend the amount of the grant in connection with a matter specified in the agreement.” In practice, standard grant agreements had significantly more detailed acquittal obligations: payments were conditional on evidence that respective milestones had been achieved alongside satisfactory progress reports, approvals and other

32 See e.g. Australian Government, *Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund* <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-centre/publications/regional-and-small-publishers-innovation-fund-0>

33 Reflected in the four financial years set out in section 205ZH Broadcasting Services Act 1992 (Cth) (BSA).

34 Explanatory Memorandum, Communications Legislation Amendment (Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund) Bill 2017 (Cth) [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=id%3A%22legislation%2Fems%2Fs1107\\_ems\\_091a9fdb-8b4b-4e67-b739-550c02440459%22](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=id%3A%22legislation%2Fems%2Fs1107_ems_091a9fdb-8b4b-4e67-b739-550c02440459%22)

35 Explanatory Memorandum, Communications Legislation Amendment (Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund) Bill 2017 (Cth). [https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=id%3A%22legislation%2Fems%2Fs1107\\_ems\\_091a9fdb-8b4b-4e67-b739-550c02440459%22](https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=id%3A%22legislation%2Fems%2Fs1107_ems_091a9fdb-8b4b-4e67-b739-550c02440459%22)

36 BSA, Section 205ZH.

37 BSA, Section 205ZH (1). Under Schedule 7, a content service provider is a person that delivers or provides access to content via a carriage service (like the internet or telecommunications), but it excludes traditional broadcasting, datacasting, exempt services, and standard communication tools such as voice/video calls, email, instant messaging, SMS/MMS, or fax.

38 Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2019). *Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund Regional Grant Opportunity*, p 15 <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/Show?GoUId=638883B6-04FB-AF46-2638-FD3BD010666A>. See also BSA s 205ZK and Explanatory Memorandum, *Communications Legislation Amendment (Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund) Bill 2017* p 8.

39 The Committee ceased to exist at the end of 30 June 2021 under subsection 250ZK(8) of the BSA in line with the end of the grant program.

40 This is outlined in each set of guidelines across the three years the program was in action.

documentation.<sup>41</sup> It was mandatory for recipients to provide a final acquittal report, including expenditure, activities, project performance, and how the project contributed to the Innovation Fund's objectives. Larger grant recipients were required to provide an independently audited financial acquittal report.

Innovation Fund guidelines, published each year of the program, outlined what the grant money could and could not be used for. For example, the 2020 guidelines required "activities to support the outcomes of the Innovation Fund" and that funds only be spent on agreed project activities.<sup>42</sup> Eligible expenditure had to be incurred within the grant period, with detailed project plans and costings required in the final report. ACMA was required to monitor progress activities, and had the power to conduct necessary site visits. The program guidelines also required that promotional material about funding include the following acknowledgement:

This project received grant funding from the Australian Government, through the Australian Communications and Media Authority, under the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund.<sup>43</sup>

### Transparency

Section 205ZL of the BSA required the ACMA to include specific information in its annual reports, such as recipient names, total amount of grants received, purpose of each grant, and any advice provided to ACMA by the Advisory Committee.

There have been no further legislated news funding programs of this kind, with the following programs created and administered as policy measures.

### 2.2.2 Regional Journalism Scholarships Program (Scholarships Program) and Regional and Small Publishers Cadetships Program (Cadetships Program)

Alongside the Innovation Fund, the other two components of the Jobs and Innovation Package were:

- \$2.2m *Scholarships Program*, which funded 66 applicants across 16 universities; grants went to journalism schools at universities and media training institutions to support students living or connected with a regional or remote area; and
- \$1.8m *Cadetships Program*, which provided 41 cadets with regional journalism experience.<sup>44</sup> Cadetships were supported by a wage subsidy, with criteria for eligible organisations including having a primary purpose of producing civic and public journalism with an Australian perspective, Australian residence and tests on independence test, complaints process and editorial guidelines.

### Decision making

Both programs were administered by the Department of Communications, which was required to work cooperatively with the ACMA to "assess demand for program funds" and other matters within the Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Package.<sup>45</sup>

The **Scholarships Program** was expected to be consistent with "other such arrangements administered by the Department of Education and other Government departments".<sup>46</sup> Merits-based assessment was by an Assessment Committee including Department of Communications staff, with the option for Department of Social Services staff "and external advisers". The Committee made recommendations to the Minister for Communications as final decision-maker, with no appeal mechanism. There was a condition that the Minister "not approve funding if he or she reasonably considers the Program funding available for the particular funding round will not accommodate the funding offer and/or the application does not represent value for money".<sup>47</sup>

The **Cadetship Program** was also assessed on merits against published criteria by an Assessment Committee of four non-Senior Executive Service Department of Communications employees. An advisory panel gave advice to the Department on assessment of applications, with members selected from industry and appointed by the Minister for Communications. Grant decisions were made by the Minister on consideration of recommendations of the Assessment Committee, with no right of appeal.

41 Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2018-2019). *Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund Regional Grant Opportunity* p19.

42 ACMA (2020) *Grant Opportunity Guidelines Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund: 2020 Round* pp 9-11 <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/ViewDocuments?GoUId=0e75d32a-f763-10d9-8c08-8246b1778a43>

43 Ibid, pp 20-21.

44 ACIL Allen (2022) *Independent Evaluation of RASPI and PING* (Final Report) p iv.

45 Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts (2017) *Regional and Small Publishers Cadetship Program* Information Sheet <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/regional-and-small-publishers-cadetship-program.pdf>

46 Australian Government Department of Communications and the Arts (2017) *Regional Journalism Scholarships* Information Sheet [https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/regional-journalism-scholarships\\_1.pdf](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/regional-journalism-scholarships_1.pdf)

47 See for example, Department of Communications and the Arts (2018, 27 June) *Regional Journalism Scholarships Program – First funding round guidelines* [https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/regional-journalism-scholarships\\_1.pdf](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/regional-journalism-scholarships_1.pdf)

## Transparency

Grant recipients of both programs were published by the Department of Communications.

## Recipient obligations

Both programs required recipients to enter into Grant Agreements with specific terms of use, including what the funding could not be used for. Under the Scholarships Program, higher education provider recipients were required to provide an official acquittal report that outlined the proportion of funding allocated to tuition and study-related expenses. Recipients of both programs were required to deliver six- and 12-month performance reports to release funding.<sup>48</sup>

## 2.3 Public Interest News Gathering Fund (PING)

In early 2020, the Government announced the *Public Interest News Gathering Grant* scheme, a demand-driven program “to support regional broadcasters and publishers to maintain or increase their production and distribution of public interest journalism in regional Australia” during the pandemic.<sup>49</sup>

PING was designed for immediate relief regardless of whether applicants had applied for Innovation Fund money in 2020.<sup>50</sup> The program was part of a response to the ACCC Digital Platforms Inquiry’s recommendation to replace the Jobs and Innovation Package “with a targeted grants program that supports the production of original local and regional journalism.”<sup>51</sup> Allocated across three streams - regional commercial television, regional commercial radio, and regional publishers - funding was based on the certified revenue from the previous financial year. \$50m went to 107 organisations across 2020.<sup>52</sup> An eleventh hour grant to Australian Associated Press extended this to \$55m.

## Decision making

PING was administered by the Department of Communications against published eligibility criteria.<sup>53</sup> Decisions were made by a “panel consisting of officials from the Department”, which reported its recommendations to the Minister who made the final funding decisions, with no appeal mechanism.<sup>54</sup>

## Transparency

The Department published details of successful recipients to GrantConnect within 21 days after the date of effect (signing date or a specific starting date).<sup>55</sup>

## Recipient obligations

Recipients entered into a grant agreement; funds were received in two instalments following execution and a six-month interim report.<sup>56</sup> During the grant period, recipients were required to maintain existing levels of journalism production and distribution and mandated to inform the Department of any key changes to their activities or organisation.

The PING guidelines outlined what the grant money could and could not be used for.<sup>57</sup> Eligible expenditure had to “primarily be for the applicant’s production and distribution of public interest news journalism during the Grant period”.

Grantees had to comply with reporting requirements set out in their funding agreement, including an interim report submitted before the second payment, which had to detail expenditure, total public interest journalism-related and labour costs, updated application data, and statements on how the grant supported program objectives and the grantee’s operations. A final report was due 12 months after the agreement and included updated information and a full acquittal of all grant funds. The Department monitored progress through these reports and had the power to request extra information, audits, or conduct site visits.

48 Department of Communications and the Arts (2018, 27 June), p. 19 and *Regional Journalism Scholarships Program - First funding round guidelines* p.16.

49 Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2020) *Public Interest News Gathering Program* p. 5 [https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/Estimates/ec/add2122/tables\\_docs/DITRDC\\_PING\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/Estimates/ec/add2122/tables_docs/DITRDC_PING_Guidelines.pdf)

50 Recipients from PING were published to GrantConnect: <https://www.grants.gov.au/Ga/ListResult?Type=Ga&AgencyStatus=-1&Keyword=PING+Grant+Program+2020&KeywordTypeSearch=AllWord&DateType=Publish+Date&page=1> They were compared to the recipients of the Innovation Fund as published in ACMA’s annual reports. At least 22 applicants received funding via both.

51 Answers to Written Questions on Notice: Inquiry into the Australian Government’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic – Public Interest News Gathering Fund (25 May 2020) Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 1; Recommendation 10 in Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, *Digital Platforms Inquiry* (June 2019), p33.

52 Australian Government Grant Award List for PING Grant Program 2020, available here: <https://www.grants.gov.au/Ga/ListResult?Type=Ga&AgencyStatus=-1&Keyword=PING+Grant+Program+2020&KeywordTypeSearch=AllWord&DateType=Publish+Date&page=1>

53 Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2020) *Public Interest News Gathering Program* p. 7.

54 Ibid, p.13.

55 Grant Opportunity Guidelines (2020) *Public Interest News Gathering Program* p. 14.

56 Ibid, p. 14.

57 Ibid, pp 8-10.

## 2.4 Review of the Jobs and Innovation Package and PING

In December 2022, consulting firm ACIL Allen released an independent evaluation of the *Jobs and Innovation Package* and *PING*.<sup>58</sup> Commissioned by the Government, it was based on publicly available information, program data accessed via the government and stakeholder (i.e. applicant) engagement through surveys and targeted consultations. It found that the programs were generally well-designed and delivered, with a clear rationale to support the media industry in providing public goods, namely public interest journalism, through innovation, employment, training, and crisis funding.

However, it identified several challenges and opportunities including:

- a recommendation to better coordinate programs, including the *Scholarships, Cadetships, and Innovation Fund*, to create clearer career pathways and support businesses along a continuum toward financial sustainability for individuals and organisations, strategically linking programs rather than delivering them in isolation.
- the need to clearly define and engage with target groups and address inconsistencies in understanding of key definitions.
- future schemes should also align funding formulas, payment structures, and acquittal requirements with the program's purpose. For example, PING's revenue-based model prioritised speed during the pandemic but overlooked smaller outlets most in need. Flexible payment terms and proportional reporting requirements would better match program intent and reduce administrative burdens.

The report recommended an outcomes-focused design prioritising impact over process, measuring success by outcomes - such as improved sustainability and community reach - rather than by compliance metrics. It proposed that incorporating longitudinal evaluation and performance tracking would help capture long-term benefits and targeted promotion, better coordination. Further, outcome-driven reporting would help ensure future initiatives deliver stronger public value and lasting impact for the media sector. Some subsequent programs appear to have adopted more outcomes-based reporting, a trend also reflected in some of the more recent overseas funding programs.

### Other concerns

Though not addressed in the evaluation, academic analysis raised concerns that the Department was responsible for issuing the grant money directly for PING, creating questions about independence and impartiality of media grant recipients.<sup>59</sup>

## 2.5 Journalist Fund

Announced in 2022, the Journalist Fund was a new Albanese Labor Government grant program designed to bolster public interest journalism in regional Australia, with \$10m allocated over two years via two streams:<sup>60</sup>

- Stream 1: \$8m to co-fund two-year journalism cadetships with packages up to \$150,000 per cadet, with the Government contributing 70% or up to \$105,000 each, and with \$500,000 set aside for a First Nations Cadetships round;<sup>61</sup> and
- Stream 2: \$2m for training and upskilling existing journalists in regional areas.

### Decision making

The Department of Communications administered the Journalist Fund, with decisions made through a competitive merits-based selection process. Applications were assessed against published criteria by an assessment committee with a Chair and three non-Senior Executive Service (SES) Department employees. This included considering the applicants' ability to deliver on the grant activity and their capacity to employ and/or train journalists.<sup>62</sup>

58 ACIL Allen (2022) *Independent Evaluation of RASPI and PING (Final Report)* p i. <https://acilallen.com.au/projects/public-policy/independent-evaluation-of-raspi-and-ping>

59 Myllylahti, M and Meese, J. (2023) "Public Money Well Spent? Unintended Consequences and Challenges Arising from Trans-Tasman Public Journalism Funds" 22(2) *Journal of Media Business Studies* 169, 180. And Attard, M., Dickson, G., Jehangir, A, Radford, T. (2022) *Report: Regional News Media 2022* UTS Centre for Media Transition <https://www.uts.edu.au/research/centres/centre-media-transition/projects-and-research/regional-news-media/report-regional-news-media-2022>

60 Australian Government Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC) (2022) *New Grant Program: Journalist Fund – Factsheet*. <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/ViewDocuments?GoUId=a7a3ce72-ada9-43fd-b543-daadd315fcdf>

61 Australian Government DITRDC (2023) *Grant Opportunity Guidelines Journalist Fund: First Nations Cadetships Round*. <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/Show?GoUId=ab5d2025-6cc1-451f-b077-92c9da997ec9>

62 Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (2022) *New Grant Program: Journalist Fund Factsheet*. p.1.

An advisory panel of industry members selected by the Minister could provide advice on assessment of applications. The Minister was final decision-maker, taking into consideration the Department and the advisory panel's advice. The Department also consulted with four First Nations news organisations to support engagement of five First Nations Cadets. Similar to the main cadetship round, the assessment process involved a committee selected from non-SES within the Department of Communications.

They assessed “each application on its merit and compare[d] it to other applications before recommending [to the Minister] which grant applications should be awarded a grant”. The committee could receive advice from an industry advisory panel on the merits of some applications; the advisory panel's composition was not specified.<sup>63</sup>

### Transparency

Grant recipients were published on GrantConnect 21 days after each agreement was executed.

### Recipient obligations

Reporting and transparency requirements included submitting progress reports 12 months into the agreement and a final report at the conclusion of the grant period, which detailed progress against agreed milestones, participant contributions, and expenditure.

Guidelines provided the grant money could be used for “the selection and onboarding of a new cadet journalist” and “the employment of a new cadet journalist”.<sup>64</sup> Recipients were required to provide a final report including financial acquittal of grant funding and outcomes achieved. As with PING, the Department monitored progress through these reports and could conduct site visits or request independent audits. Recipients who made “a public statement about the cadetship opportunity funded under the program” were required to acknowledge the grant with the wording “[t]his Journalist Cadetship received grant funding from the Australian Government”.<sup>65</sup>

## 2.6 News Media Relief Funding

Announced in November 2024, this one-year (2024-2025) funding program totalling \$15M for regional, local, suburban, multicultural and First Nations news publishers across Australia was to directly support journalist positions and newsroom capacity. Grants were for \$13,000 per eligible full time equivalent journalist producing core news for news organisations in “eligible geographic communities”, which included regional and local suburban communities in major cities, or for news organisations serving “eligible audiences” which were First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

### Decision making

The policy entity was the Department of Communications, with Department of Industry Science and Resources as the administering entity which reviewed applications and could seek technical expert advice on eligibility from Department of Communications. The “program delegate” decision maker was defined as a manager in the administering department, and their decisions were final.

### Transparency

Grants were required to be listed on GrantConnect 21 days after execution. A full list of grants was published in September 2025.

### Recipient obligations

Recipients entered into a grant agreement through exchange of letters, with specific conditions determined by the program delegate. Guidelines outlined what the grant could and could not be used for. Eligible activities involved employing journalists who produce “core news content” for digital distribution, and all spending had to relate directly to the agreed project and be “incurred for the required project audit activities”.<sup>66</sup> Eligible expenditure was limited to journalist salaries, incurred within the project period, with final eligibility determined by the program delegate.

Recipients were required to keep the Department informed “if anything is likely to affect your project or organisation” and key changes in organisation or business activities, especially if they affect completion of the project or business. Reports under the grant agreement included progress against agreed outcomes, project expenditure, with detail relative to project size, complexity and grant amount. Grants administrators were able to conduct site visits, require independent audits and ask for ad hoc reports. Recipients were required to submit an end of project report, including a declaration that they had spent the grant money in

63 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (2023) Grant Opportunity Guidelines Journalist Fund: First Nations Cadetships Round. p. 12.

64 Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (2022) Grant Opportunity Guidelines Journalist Fund: Cadetship. pp. 8-9. <https://www.grants.gov.au/FO/Show?FoUId=98f9600f-8724-46c2-9f86-db7a8df76b8&keyword=JFC2022>

65 Ibid, p. 15.

66 Australian Government, Department of Industry Science and Resources (DISR) and Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA) (2024) *Grant Opportunity Guidelines: News Media Relief Program*. pp. 8-9. <https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs/news-media-relief-program>

accordance with the agreement and that they may be asked for an audited financial acquittal report. When referring to support received under the program, recipients were required to acknowledge the grant with the following wording:

This publication received support from the Australian Government under the News Media Relief Program. Support from the program covers part of the cost of employing journalists, but does not influence the production of specific content.<sup>67</sup>

This latter part is noteworthy as it appears to be the first Australian example of this kind to specifically reference editorial independence.

## 2.7 Journalism Assistance Fund

This Journalism Assistance Fund (JAF) is a three-year \$67.6m program designed to run from 2025-28, with the initial round launched on 21 November 2025. It funds salary costs of journalists. Its stated purpose is to “support the sustainability of Australian news publishers in the face of significant disruption to the media sector”. Eligible organisations are Australian-based entities which produce and publish “core news content” that reports, investigates or explains “issues or events that are relevant to engaging Australians in public debate and in informing democratic decision making; or current issues or events of public significance for Australians at a local, regional, state or national level”.<sup>68</sup>

### Decision making

Similar to News Media Relief Funding, JAF is a demand-drive scheme and will be administered by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR) with the Department of Communications as the policy entity. DISR will provide a first review, and in doing so may seek “technical expert advice” from the Department of Communications.<sup>69</sup> The Program Delegate – a Manager within DISR’s Business Grants Hub responsible for JAF’s administration – makes final, non-reviewable decisions on which grants to approve, funding amounts, and any other conditions attached to the offer.

### Transparency

Details of successful grants, which include recipient names, ABNs, project descriptions, and funding amounts, are to be published on GrantConnect within 21 days of agreement execution.

### Recipient obligations

Recipients must maintain eligibility by continuing to employ the agreed number of full-time equivalent journalists producing digital core news content and notifying DISR of any organisational or staffing changes. During the grant period, they are required to submit regular progress, ad hoc and end of project reports detailing project milestones, expenditure, and staffing, as well as provide audited financial acquittals if requested. DISR may review ongoing compliance with the grant agreement, including through compliance visits. Recipients are required to comply with all relevant legal and ethical obligations, and promptly report any breaches or changes in circumstances to DISR.

When referring to program support, recipients must give the same acknowledgment as for the News Media Relief fund above.<sup>70</sup>

### Comparative table

The following table summarises key elements of the above direct funding programs, highlighting the diversity of assessment processes, decision makers (some of whom are different to the entity responsible for the related policy) and other aspects.

67 Australian Government DISR and DITRDCA (2024) *Grant Opportunity Guidelines: News Media Relief Program*.

68 Australian Government, DISR and DITRDCA (2025). *Grant Opportunity Guidelines: Journalism Assistance Fund Program*. p.19. <https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs/journalism-assistance-fund#key-documents>

69 Ibid. p.10.

70 DISR (2025). *Grant Opportunity Guidelines: Journalism Assistance Fund Program*. p.15. <https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs/journalism-assistance-fund#key-documents>

## TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF NEWS FUNDING GRANTS PROCESSES

Name	Administering entity	Assessment process	Grant decision maker	Transparency
<i>2018 Regional and Small Publishers Jobs and Innovation Fund</i>	ACMA	ACMA determined eligibility Independent Advisory Committee advice	ACMA assessments team (on advice of Independent Advisory Committee)	ACMA annual reports required under BSA – names, amounts, purpose, Advisory Committee advice
<i>2018 Regional Journalism Scholarships Program</i>	Department of Communications (consistent with Department of Education)	Assessment Committee (Dept of Comms and option for Dept of Social Services staff and external advisers)	Minister for Communications	Recipients published by Dept of Comms
<i>2018 Regional Publishers Cadetships Program</i>	Department of Communications (working with ACMA)	Assessment Committee (Dept of Comms staff)  Advisory panel of industry members appointed by Minister	Minister for Communications on recommendation on Assessment Committee	Recipients published by Dept of Comms
<i>2020 Public Interest Newsgathering Fund</i>	Department of Communications	Panel of officials from the Department	Minister for Communications	Recipients published on GrantConnect
<i>2022 Journalist Fund</i>	Department of Communications	Assessment Committee (Chair and non-SES)  Advisory Committee of industry members selected by Minister	Minister for Communications, taking into consideration advice of Department and Advisory panel	Recipients published on GrantConnect
		First Nations Cadet component: could consult an industry advisory panel on merits of some applications	As above	As above
<i>2024 News Media Relief Fund</i>	Department of Industry, Sciences and Resources	DSIR reviews applications and can seek technical expert advice from Dept Comms	DSIR Program Delegate	Grants published on GrantConnect
<i>2025 Journalist Assistance Fund</i>	Department of Industry, Sciences and Resources	DSIR first review and can seek technical expert advice from Dept Comms	DSIR Program Delegate	Grants published on GrantConnect.

## 2.8 Key takeouts

- Australian direct government funding for news has been undertaken for less than a decade.
- The mechanisms for deciding on funding distribution have changed over this time.
- Early programs involved the regulator, Minister and/or the use of advisory committees.
- Most recent funding programs are managed at departmental level with an option for expert advice.
- Recipients and amounts are public and acquittal obligations are broadly similar.



# 3 AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC FUNDING FOR MEDIA SECTORS

While direct funding to support news is relatively recent, the Australian Government has a long history of funding the public broadcasting and other media sectors which include news production among their activities.

Public and community broadcasting is funded through the Communications portfolio; Indigenous Media is funded in part through the National Agency for Indigenous Australians and partly through the Communications portfolio (including through the Community Broadcasting Program); and multicultural media can receive funding through the Department of Communications and the Department of Home Affairs. These programs involve a diverse range of policy objectives and varied models of governance, transparency and independence, which may be relevant to the design of future funding mechanisms.

## 3.1 Public broadcaster independence mechanisms

Public broadcasters are provided with substantial untied Government funding to carry out activities under their respective Charters, and provide news as part of this. The ABC has received funding through the *Enhanced Newsgathering Fund* since 2013 to strengthen local public interest journalism outside major city centres.<sup>71</sup> Both establishing Acts contain provisions ensuring their *independence* from government, which is a cornerstone of public broadcasting.<sup>72</sup> The former three-year triennial funding cycles for public broadcasters have been extended to five years; relevantly, this is to “help prevent political interference”.<sup>73</sup> Proposed changes to their legislation are yet to be enacted.

Though not a grant-funding body as such, the current board appointment process for public broadcasting may be a relevant reference for arm’s length and independent governance of public funding.<sup>74</sup> Public broadcaster boards have had merit-based appointment since 2010.<sup>75</sup> Board members are formally appointed by the Governor-General on recommendation of the Minister for Communications, with requirements around expertise.<sup>76</sup> Current and past politicians

71 An amount of \$45.8m was allocated over 3 years to strengthen local public interest journalism outside the major city centres. See Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2025) *Annual Report*, Appendix 10. <https://live-production.wcms.abc-cdn.net.au/350ba8c4fc4e8674d3477db4272d3e3f>

72 *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cth) s78(6) and *Special Broadcasting Service Act 1991* (Cth) s13.

73 Australian Government, DITRDCA (2024, December) *Review of Options to Support the Independence of National Broadcasters – Australian Government Response to Key Issues Raised During Consultation* <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/review-of-options-to-support-the-independence-of-the-national-broadcasters-australian-government-response-to-key-issues-raised-during-consultation-december2024.pdf>

74 Similar issues were considered by the Leveson Inquiry in the UK which led to the establishment of an independent Press Recognition Panel, members of which are appointed by an Independent Appointments Committee. See Press Recognition Panel website, <https://www.pressrecognitionpanel.org.uk/creation-of-the-press-recognition-panel/#leveson-report>

75 *National Broadcasting Legislation Amendment Act 2012*. See also Australian Government DITRDCA (March 2023) *Appointments to the ABC and SBS Boards* <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/information-about-the-merit-based-appointment-process-appointments-to-the-abc-and-sbs-boards-march2023.pdf>

76 Other than the staff-elected ABC Board member and the Managing Director.

and senior political staff members are not eligible to serve for twelve months after ceasing in that role.<sup>77</sup> Appointing the ABC chair involves a bi-partisan process with the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Board candidates for both public broadcasters are put forward through an open application process managed by an independent Nomination Panel, and assessed by reference to mandated selection criteria.<sup>78</sup> Nomination Panel members are appointed by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

The Government's response to the 2023 review of public broadcaster independence<sup>79</sup> affirmed its support for members of the Nomination Panel "being made at the highest levels of the Australian Public Service to protect against political interference". It indicated it would consider "whether changes should be made to the existing framework to improve the effectiveness of the Nomination Panel appointment process and to ensure appropriate skill requirements are met" and would "consider establishing selection criteria for the Nomination Panel to improve transparency in the appointment process."<sup>80</sup>

### 3.2 Community Broadcasting Program – arm's length sectoral mechanism

Australia's community broadcasting sector includes more than 500 radio, television and online services across all parts of Australia and receives funding from the Government's Community Broadcasting Program (CBP)<sup>81</sup> allocated by the Department of Communications as a single grant to the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF), an independent, not-for-profit company established in 1984 for the purpose of distributing government funding to the community broadcasting sector.<sup>82</sup>

The CBP's funding objectives are "to support an innovative and resilient community broadcasting sector" to help ensure "a plurality of voices and perspectives that may not be adequately represented in mainstream media, create hyperlocal, local and regional content that reflects the interests and needs of communities", and to contribute to sector resilience and "develop media skills, such as broadcasting, journalism and technical skills", with the outcomes of contributing to media diversity, social cohesion and an upskilled media sector.<sup>83</sup> CBF distributes grants to community television, radio and digital outlets through a competitive grants program, which in 2023-24, totalled \$20.53 million.<sup>84</sup>

#### Decision making

**Departmental level:** The Government's CBP grant is offered exclusively to the CBF. The Grant Agreement obliges CBF to provide grants to the community broadcasting sector including development and operations funding, content funding and sector investment projects (including strategic, seeding/sustainability/special purpose) and training programs for sector personnel. An Assessment Committee of three representatives from the Department of Communications' Media Industry and Sustainability Branch determines the merit of CBF's application and makes recommendations to the Assistant Secretary of the Branch, the Program Delegate with final decision-making authority.

**CBF:** CBF's governance is designed to be sector-based and arm's length from government. Five of its Board members (the majority) are appointed from nominations provided by community media and sector organisations and the Board may also recruit up to three independent directors "to optimise leadership and governance skills". A President Nomination Advisory Group provides "strategic and sector-based advice to the Board with regards to appointing the President". The CBF states that it has a commitment to "recruiting Board members who reflect the diversity of our community and the sector, as well as achieving an optimum combination of experience, skills and attributes"<sup>85</sup> and that it appoints Board members with reference to a published Board Skills Matrix and Board Diversity Matrix.

77 For the ABC, the Minister for Communications must first be satisfied the person is suitable due to their experience in broadcasting, communications or management, expertise in financial or technical matters or their having relevant cultural or other interests. For SBS, the Minister must be satisfied the Directors collectively possess expertise including understanding of Australia's multicultural society and SBS audience, they collectively have a diversity of cultural perspectives, one member has appropriate understanding of employee interests and at least one director is an Indigenous person. "Senior political staff member" is defined in a legislative instrument determined by the Minister.

78 The latest are the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Selection Criteria for the Appointment of Non-Executive Directors) Determination 2024* and *Special Broadcasting Service Corporation (Selection Criteria for the Appointment of Non-Executive Directors) Determination 2024*.

79 Australian Government DITRDCA, (2024, December) *Review of Options to Support the Independence of National Broadcasters – Australian Government Response to Key Issues Raised During Consultation*.

80 In 2023, the Government appointed Lynelle Briggs to lead a broader review into Public Sector Board Appointments to ensure appointments are based on merit. The report was given to the Government in 2023 and published in December 2025: Lynelle Briggs (2023, August) *No Favourites: Report of the Review into Public Sector Board Appointments*. <https://www.apsc.gov.au/publication/review-public-sector-board-appointments-processes>

81 Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (2025, April 3), *Safeguarding Community Voice in Australian Media* <https://www.cbaa.org.au/news/cbaa-commms/2025/04/02/safeguarding-community-voice-in-australian-media?hlmlt=BL#:-:text=Australia%20has%20a%20proud%2C%20bi.revenue%20for%20community%20broadcasters.>

82 While the Community Broadcasting Program includes funding for Indigenous community broadcasters, operational support to First Nations media is also delivered through the National Indigenous Australians Agency under the Indigenous Broadcasting and Media Program.

83 Australian Government (2025) *Grant Opportunity Guidelines, Community Broadcasting Program* <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/ViewDocuments?GoUId=e221a403-e3cc-4885-98dd-2139067cbbec>

84 Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) (2024) *Annual Report*, <https://cbf.org.au/documents/2025/02/2024-cbf-annual-report.pdf/>

85 CBF (n.d.) *Community Broadcasting Foundation Board*, <https://cbf.org.au/about/our-people/board/>

The Board appoints three advisory committees to advise on different grants categories: Content Grants, Development and Operations, and Sector Investment. Each Committee has skill set and selection criteria for appointees.<sup>86</sup> Grant operations are supported by a “peer-to-peer” review process of volunteer grant assessors appointed by the Board through a nomination process; they “independently review, score and provide advice on grant applications” to the Committees.<sup>87</sup>

### Transparency

Grant opportunity documents for the CBP are available on GrantConnect. As grants administrator, CBF publishes reports of recipients on its website and in annual reporting. The CBF itself is required to report annually to Government and publishes a list of grant recipients.

### Recipient obligations

Broadcasters that receive grants from the CBF are required to enter into Grant Agreements which require Progress Reports (for grants with multiple payments), a final report demonstrating the grant’s success and, for grants exceeding \$80,000 in a financial year, an Auditor’s Financial Certificate, which certifies that funds were spent as per the approved budget.<sup>88</sup>

### Community Broadcasting Program review

In 2022, a CBF-commissioned review of its 2016 restructure<sup>89</sup> found its administration to be “effective in meeting the expectations of a very diverse sector”. Its recommendations included enhanced evaluation of the grants program and improved access to the evidence base for decision makers.

In 2023, the Department of Communications commissioned a review of the Community Broadcasting Program to evaluate the effectiveness of the grants program. It determined that grant making processes were “found to be mostly efficient and effective”. Recommendations included streamlining some application processes and involving professional assessors in sector-wide initiatives. The sector’s Strategic Plan, *Roadmap 2033 Community Broadcasting’s Plan for Greater Impact in Every Australian Community*, includes a strengthened focus on measuring outcomes and impact.<sup>90</sup>

## 3.3 Indigenous media funding

Indigenous media funding is currently overseen by two portfolios: the National Agency for Indigenous Australians (NAIA) and the Department of Communications. Its government funding sources are the Indigenous Media and Broadcasting Program and the Community Broadcasting Program. There have been multiple reviews<sup>91</sup> calling for the consolidation of Indigenous media funding into one portfolio “to maximise impact”. The Report on the Sustainability of Community Broadcasting<sup>92</sup> noted mixed views in the First Nations broadcasting and media sector on portfolio consolidation, but “general support to establish a First Nations funding model that reflects principles of self-determination and shared decision making, with funding allocation directed or recommended by First Nations stakeholders”. The report noted such a model for the IBMP could share features of the CBF model including:

- establishing processes to support delivery of IBMP funding to the First Nations sector (i.e. allocations, applications, assessment, decision making and reporting);
- operating separately to sector bodies representing individual members’ interest to mitigate perceived or actual conflicts if its members are also applicants; and
- granting arrangements with the Commonwealth via a closed, non-competitive grant.

The report proposed that if the IBMP were consolidated into the Communications portfolio before establishing a funding model, the CBF could become the *interim* funding body in line with the existing longstanding arrangement; longer term, it would be more appropriate for overseeing body to be First Nations-led.<sup>93</sup>

86 CBF (n.d.) *Committee Roles and Responsibilities*, <https://cbf.org.au/about/our-people/grants-advisory-committees/> and <https://cbf.org.au/volunteer/committee-roles-and-responsibilities/>

87 CBF (n.d.) *Join our Grant Assessor Team*, <https://cbf.org.au/volunteer/grant-assessor-team/>

88 CBF (n.d.) *Reporting*, <https://cbf.org.au/reporting/>

89 Tony Grybowski and Associates in partnership with Think Insight and Advice, *Review of the 2016 Community Broadcasting Foundation Restructure* <https://cbf.org.au/documents/2023/03/report-on-review-of-2016-cbf-restructure.pdf>

90 Community Broadcasting Association of Australia and Community Broadcasting Foundation, *Roadmap 2033: Community Broadcasting’s Plan for Greater Impact in Every Australian Community* <https://cbf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FINAL-Roadmap-2033-digital-for-printing.pdf>

91 This including those summarised in ATSIIC (2023) *Digital Dreaming: a National Review of Indigenous Media and Communications* <https://firstnationsmedia.org.au/sites/default/files/files/DigitalDreaming.pdf>

92 Australian Government, DITRDCA (2025, March) *Community Broadcasting Sector Sustainability Review* <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/media/publications/community-broadcasting-sector-sustainability-review-findings-report>

93 Ibid.

### 3.4 Support for multicultural media

In early 2025, the Government announced a \$10m one-year one-off grants program for multicultural media, to be administered by the Department of Home Affairs, which opened for applications in November 2025.<sup>94</sup> Funding is allocated based on organisation size, with different monetary caps for different sizes of organisations.

Program objectives include building capacity to strengthen and increase the resilience of Australia's independent multicultural outlets, to support activities and projects that increase their sustainability to deliver media content and to assist with "the delivery of media content that facilitates constructive collaboration, builds trust and strengthens social cohesion, while increasing tolerance and understanding between individuals and groups in Australia".<sup>95</sup>

Grants are open to "small to medium Australian independent multicultural media outlets"; which are defined to include those "providing content focused on news, experiences, perspectives and interests of at least one community defined by their cultural or linguistic background".

The grant excludes music and lifestyle media with no news content and requires that applicants be:

- members of Independent Multicultural Media Australia;
- members of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia with 100% of produced airtime to be dedicated to at least one language community or culture community; or
- independent multicultural media outlets, with 100% of their media services dedicated to at least one language/cultural community. They must provide evidence of private ownership and operation within Australia and continuous operation since July 2023 with recent revenue less than \$4m per annum. Their main purpose must be to provide media content (print, radio, television and/or digital news sites) which "does not undermine social cohesion".

If the applications received exceed available funding, the first two categories will be prioritised. The grant is not open to public broadcasters, social media only platforms, or international, government or other specified entities.<sup>96</sup>

#### Decision making

The program is managed within the Department of Home Affairs.

After initial eligibility/compliance review by the Government's Community Grants Hub (with final determination by the department's delegate), eligible applications proceed to assessment by the Department against published criteria, how they compare to other applications and whether they provide value (based on scoring and other criteria in the grant documents). The guidelines note that, where possible, "funding will be allocated proportionately across all cultural and ethnic groups".

A Selection Advisory Panel (which "may include a mix of employees of the department, experts from the sector, and other Commonwealth officers with relevant specialist expertise") convened by the Department reviews applications and makes recommendations. The Department may ask external experts "to inform the assessment process". The decision maker is the Deputy Secretary of Immigration Programs, based on recommendations of the Selection Advisory Panel, with no appeal.

#### Transparency

Grants are published on GrantConnect within 21 days of the date of effect.

#### Recipient Obligations

Recipients are obliged to enter into a grant agreement and submit progress, expenditure and activity reports (with required detail relative to the size and complexity of the grant), ad hoc reports as requested and final reports. The latter must identify outcomes, agreed evidence and expenditure.

Grant acquittals are required and the Commonwealth may recover grant funds if there is a breach of the agreement. Recipients are required to inform any changes to the organisation or its business, particularly if it affects the ability to carry out the grant.

94 Hill, J, Assistant Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs and Rowland, M, Minister for Communications (2025, February) *Supporting Australia's Multicultural Media Sector* Joint Media Release, <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/JulianHill/Pages/supporting-australias-multicultural-media-sector.aspx>

95 Australian Government (2025, November 7) *Critical Support for Multicultural Communities – Independent Multicultural Media – Transformation and Sustainability Grant Opportunity Guidelines*, <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/ViewDocuments?GoUId=1236cb4b-8334-4b41-a977-44bbf41314e1>

96 Ibid, Section 4.3.

### 3.5 Key takeouts

- There is considerable diversity in the mechanisms for deciding on and distributing funding to public, community, Indigenous and multicultural media sectors which produce news.
- In part this reflects the nature of the different types of funding; however, there are elements of those mechanisms which could apply equally across any of them.
- Other than for the public broadcasters, funding support generally comes through policy measures rather than legislation.
- Public broadcasters have legislated independence from government.
- Among the other types of sectoral media funding, the community broadcasting funding model is distinctive as a mechanism for funding individual grants at arm's length from government.



# 4. INTERNATIONAL JURISDICTIONS: GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR NEWS

Concerns around the future of public interest news are shared globally; many countries have a long history of supporting news through a range of schemes that fund news organisations. Direct funding of news/journalism commonly sits as part of a package of other measures such as tax relief.

There are dozens of examples and varied forms of support across the world. These have been particularly prevalent in the European Union where “most member states have some form of direct support”<sup>97</sup> (and more than 70 EU-authorised media support schemes have been approved since 2004<sup>98</sup>) as well as in other parts of Europe,<sup>99</sup> Canada,<sup>100</sup> Nordic countries, Korea, US states and a range of countries not covered in this report, including New Zealand.

These interventions range from long-standing direct subsidies to innovative new models driven by the evolving digital landscape and platform dominance. All are shaped by their specific media and cultural concerns and sometimes their geography. Examining these approaches reveals interesting points of difference in design, independence mechanisms, governance and transparency.

This section looks at a variety of diverse funding distribution mechanisms used in a selection of countries, and which are often based in legislation, and identifies the insights they may offer for Australian distribution structures:

- **Austria:** long time public funding models for news mostly led by an independent regulator.
- **Canada:** long time public funding for news through direct government funding (distributed by government and sector-led funds), industry funding and news bargaining-style measures.
- **USA:** various state-based legislation implementing or proposing direct funding, news bargaining-style measures and public/private distribution models.
- **Korea:** public funding measures through industry-led funding bodies.
- **Nordic countries:** legislated direct funding schemes with legislated decision makers.
- **UK:** government funding and proposals for citizen engagement.
- **South Africa:** government funding through a special-purpose statutory agency.

97 Henningsen Consulting and Technopolis Group for the Publications Office of the European Union (2024) *Public Financing of News Media in the EU – Final Study* (Final report). p 53 [https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4a26df80-bbff-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en; European Commission Competition Directorate-General. \(2024, September 16\). p 74](https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4a26df80-bbff-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en; European Commission Competition Directorate-General. (2024, September 16). p 74).

98 European Commission Competition Directorate-General (2024, September 16) *Commission Decisions on State Aid to Publishing and Other Media Outlets* [https://competition-policy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/stateaid\\_decisions\\_to\\_media.pdf](https://competition-policy.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/stateaid_decisions_to_media.pdf)

99 News Media Europe (2022) *Europe – State Aid for the Media in Europe – Last Updated April 2022*, <https://www.newsmediaeurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/State-aid-for-the-media-in-Europe-News-Media-Europe-April-2022.pdf>

100 For example, see: Snow, D. (2025, April 21) “DeepDive: Government subsidies for Canada’s media were supposed to be temporary, but they keep on growing—and could be here to stay” *The Hub* [https://thehub.ca/2025/04/21/deepdive-government-subsidies-for-canadas-media-were-supposed-to-temporary-but-they-keep-on-growing-and-could-be-here-to-stay/?utm\\_source=The+Hub&utm\\_campaign=bd05d43eb8-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2024\\_06\\_07\\_10\\_31\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_0e9056dd2c-569997575&mc\\_cid=bd05d43eb8](https://thehub.ca/2025/04/21/deepdive-government-subsidies-for-canadas-media-were-supposed-to-temporary-but-they-keep-on-growing-and-could-be-here-to-stay/?utm_source=The+Hub&utm_campaign=bd05d43eb8-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_06_07_10_31_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0e9056dd2c-569997575&mc_cid=bd05d43eb8)

## 4.1 Austria

Austria has been described as having a “maximalist model” in which private sector media receives “blanket or semi-blanket support measures”, supporting print media, digital and innovation projects.<sup>101</sup> These measures, some developed over decades, combine subsidies for legacy press activity, distribution support, and innovation grants.

Some are underpinned by legislation, while others are distributed by other bodies. Austria’s framework includes direct financial contributions for printed press, publishing, and a quality journalism scheme, as well as funds for public and private broadcasting and digital transformation (including digital journalism). Its long-running press subsidies were first introduced in 1975 under the Social Democratic Party as financial compensation for a new value-added tax system that imposed additional costs on newspapers,<sup>102</sup> and reflected financial issues faced by Austrian print media companies and a decline in the number of daily newspapers.<sup>103</sup>

This section outlines four of the main measures for current statute-based schemes directly funded by the Austrian Government, as set out in their respective acts, and in guidelines<sup>104</sup> published by KommAustria, the “independent and autonomous regulator” established under the *KommAustria Act* (KOG Act).<sup>105</sup> The responsible Minister has reportedly indicated that there are current discussions in the Government on two new types of news subsidy scheme, which will require EU approval.<sup>106</sup>

### Summary of decision making across news media subsidies

**KommAustria** administers and allocates subsidies for printed media, the press subsidy and the journalism subsidy as detailed below.<sup>107</sup> Its seven full-time members must have “completed a law degree course or any degree course of law and political science” with “at least five years of legal work experience”.<sup>108</sup> Government officials, political party employees, and those with ties to Austria’s public broadcaster or other media entities are prohibited from serving as members.<sup>109</sup> In making decisions, KommAustria is required to consider the advice of advisory bodies set up for each scheme.

KommAustria receives operational support from the Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications (RTR Media). RTR Media’s staff are experts in the “field of law, technology, frequency management, business, subsidies, and communication”<sup>110</sup> and which is also established under the KOG Act. RTR Media staff prepare the KommAustria’s decisions and inform the public.

**RTR Media** is also directly responsible for administering certain subsidies, including the Private Broadcasting Fund, the Non-Commercial Broadcasting Fund, the Austrian Television Fund, the Digitalisation Fund, and the Fund for the Promotion of Digital Transformation (the latter detailed below).

### 4.1.1 The Press Subsidy

Since 1975, Austrian press subsidies legislation<sup>111</sup> has undergone various amendments, the latest being the *Press Subsidies Act 2004* (PresseFG 2004).<sup>112</sup> This scheme<sup>113</sup> offers direct financial support to daily and weekly newspapers “to promote the

101 Henningsen Consulting and Technopolis Group for the Publications Office of the European Union (2024) *Public Financing of News Media in the EU – Final Study* (Final report) p 53 <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4a26df80-bbff-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

102 Murschetz, P., & Karmasin, M. (2013) “Austria: Press Subsidies in Search of a New Design”. In Murschetz, P., (Ed.) *State Aid for Newspapers: Theories, Cases, Actions* (pp. 133–148) Springer Berlin Heidelberg. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-35691-9\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-35691-9_9)

103 Interestingly, these public press subsidies were linked to the public financing of political parties, as political parties and various interest groups controlled a significant share of the Austrian print media market at the time.

104 Guidelines for each of the subsidy schemes can be accessed in English at: RTR/KommAustria (n.d.) *The Subsidies* [https://www.rtr.at/medien/was\\_wir\\_tun/foerderungen/Startseite\\_Foerderungen.en.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/was_wir_tun/foerderungen/Startseite_Foerderungen.en.html)

105 The legislation is published in English on Austria’s RIS Legal Information System. The abbreviation provided is the KommAustria Act: *Federal Act on the establishment of an Austrian Communications Authority (“KommAustria”) (KommAustria Act – KOG) (Austria)* [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/ErV/ERV\\_2001\\_1\\_32/ERV\\_2001\\_1\\_32.pdf](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/ErV/ERV_2001_1_32/ERV_2001_1_32.pdf)

106 Fidler, H. (2025, October 23) “Babler does not want to return to the ‘disorderly firing out of advertisements’” *DerStandard* <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000293346/babler-will-nicht-zurueck-zum-ungeordneten-rausschiessen-von-inseraten> (English version accessed through Google Translate).

107 RTR/KommAustria (n.d.) *The Subsidies*.

108 Federal Act on the establishment of an Austrian Communications Authority (“KommAustria”) (KommAustria Act – KOG). (Austria) § 3(1).

109 Ibid § 4.

110 RTR Media *RTR Media*, [https://www.rtr.at/medien/wer\\_wir\\_sind/RTR\\_Medien/RTR\\_Media.en.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/wer_wir_sind/RTR_Medien/RTR_Media.en.html)

111 The 1975 legislation is published in German on Austria’s RIS Legal Information System: *Bundesgesetzblatt Für Die Republik Österreich: Bundesgesetz: Förderung der Presse 1975 No. 405* (Austria) [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblPdf/1975\\_404\\_0/1975\\_404\\_0.pdf](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblPdf/1975_404_0/1975_404_0.pdf)

112 The legislation is published in English on Austria’s RIS Legal Information System. [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=ERV&Dokumentnummer=E RV\\_2003\\_1\\_136](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?Abfrage=ERV&Dokumentnummer=E RV_2003_1_136)

113 For example, see: RTR and KommAustria (n.d.) *The Press Subsidy and Communications report*. p. 50. [https://www.rtr.at/medien/aktuelles/publikationen/Publikationen/kommunikationsbericht/communicationsreport\\_2024.en.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/aktuelles/publikationen/Publikationen/kommunikationsbericht/communicationsreport_2024.en.html)

diversity of the press in Austria,<sup>114</sup> including general distribution subsidies and special subsidies for diversity in regional daily newspapers. It distributed €7.1m in 2024.<sup>115</sup>

To qualify, newspaper publications must “predominantly serve the purpose of political, general economic and cultural information and opinion formation”,<sup>116</sup> publish largely editorially independent material, meet publication-frequency thresholds, have verifiable paid circulation, minimum numbers of full-time journalists, maintain a reasonable cover price, have published regularly for six months and be independent of government ownership or influence. The scheme’s latest guidelines have special provisions for “ethnic group newspapers” and regional newspapers.<sup>117</sup>

### Decision making

Before making funding decisions, KommAustria is required to seek expert recommendations from the six-member Press Subsidies Commission:<sup>118</sup> two members are appointed by the Federal Chancellor, two by the Austrian Newspaper Association and two by the print newspaper trade union. Its members agree on a chair who is not from their groups. Members cannot have employment or shareholder relationships with daily or weekly newspapers or other applicants for press subsidies. They advise on the content of annually published guidelines and make funding decisions on the press subsidies.

### Transparency

KommAustria is responsible for publishing subsidy outcomes no later than two weeks after payment on its public facing website. Published lists include open data sets available to download for analysis.<sup>119</sup>

### Recipient obligations

Recipients must disclose ownership and shareholdings, as well as their print medium’s circulation figures; for daily newspapers, these figures are broken down by provinces at the regulator’s request. KommAustria can request further data and documents to assess eligibility or calculate the subsidy amount. Recipients must also attest they have not committed specified criminal offences.<sup>120</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Promotion of quality journalism

The 2023 *Quality Journalism Subsidies Act* (QJF-G) is aimed at strengthening journalistic quality, innovation and sustainability across both print and digital media, providing funding to daily and weekly newspapers, magazines and online media targeted at Austrian audiences.<sup>121</sup>

The legislation specifies subsidy areas including promotion of journalism, promotion of content diversity (including regional coverage, international coverage and EU coverage as well as promotion of training, education and media literacy and self-regulatory representative institutions for print and online media, and press clubs) and amounts for each tranche.<sup>122</sup> Its primary goals are to promote the diversity of text-based news media as a basis for public discourse and diversity of opinion, and to support professional journalists, who in creating quality editorial content, adhere to recognised journalistic principles and exercise the necessary diligence to verify facts and the authenticity of sources.<sup>123</sup> The first grants of around €20m were delivered in 2024.<sup>124</sup>

114 *Federal Act on Subsidies for the Press 2004 (Press Subsidies Act 2004) (Austria) § 1(1)*.

115 Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications (2024) *Communications report* p. 51 [https://www.rtr.at/medien/aktuelles/publikationen/Publikationen/kommunikationsbericht/communicationsreport\\_2024.en.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/aktuelles/publikationen/Publikationen/kommunikationsbericht/communicationsreport_2024.en.html)

116 *Federal Act on Subsidies for the Press 2004 § 2(1)(1)*.

117 KommAustria (2024) *Guidelines for Funding According to the Press Funding Act for the Observation Period 2025 (KOA 8.050/ 24-002)* p. 7. [www.rtr.at/medien/was\\_wir\\_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/Richtlinien/Veroeffentlichungen/richtlinien2025.de.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/was_wir_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/Richtlinien/Veroeffentlichungen/richtlinien2025.de.html) Accessed in English using Google Translate.

118 *Federal Act on Subsidies for the Press 2004 (Press Subsidies Act 2004) (Austria) § 4(2)* [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?ResultFunctionToken=7baad5a2-7efa-4259-895f-16f0999a172&Abfrage=Erw&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeitVonDatum=&ImRisSeitBisDatum=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=100&Suchworte=pressefg&Dokumentnummer=ERV\\_2003\\_1\\_136e=pressefg&Dokumentnummer=ERV\\_2003\\_1\\_136](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?ResultFunctionToken=7baad5a2-7efa-4259-895f-16f0999a172&Abfrage=Erw&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeitVonDatum=&ImRisSeitBisDatum=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=100&Suchworte=pressefg&Dokumentnummer=ERV_2003_1_136e=pressefg&Dokumentnummer=ERV_2003_1_136).

119 KommAustria/RTR (2025) *Press Subsidies: Overview of Results in 2025* [https://www.rtr.at/medien/was\\_wir\\_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/entscheidungen/entscheidungen/uebersicht2025.de.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/was_wir_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/entscheidungen/entscheidungen/uebersicht2025.de.html)

120 KommAustria (2024) *Guidelines for Funding According to the Press Funding Act 2004 (Observation Period 2025) (KOA 8.050/ 24-002)*, pp. 8-10. [www.rtr.at/medien/was\\_wir\\_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/Richtlinien/Veroeffentlichungen/richtlinien2025.de.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/was_wir_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/Richtlinien/Veroeffentlichungen/richtlinien2025.de.html)

121 *Federal Act on Subsidies for High-Quality Journalism in Print and Online Media 2023 (Quality Journalism Subsidies Act – QJF-G) (Austria)*. [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?ResultFunctionToken=2a700290-2a92-4f58-b94d-fe5d62fcfb8&Abfrage=Erw&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeitVonDatum=&ImRisSeitBisDatum=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=100&Suchworte=QJF-G&Dokumentnummer=ERV\\_2023\\_1\\_163](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?ResultFunctionToken=2a700290-2a92-4f58-b94d-fe5d62fcfb8&Abfrage=Erw&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeitVonDatum=&ImRisSeitBisDatum=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=100&Suchworte=QJF-G&Dokumentnummer=ERV_2023_1_163)

122 *Ibid.*, §3.

123 *Ibid.*, § 1.

124 Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications (2024) *Communications Report* p. 52

Eligibility requirements include that media owners must operate print or online outlets that primarily serve editorial information and opinion formation for an Austrian audience, cover broad topics such as politics, economy, culture, science, and society, employ a structured editorial team led by an editor-in-chief, employ a certain number of full-time journalists, and be at least 60% independently written content, as well as requirements around distribution frequency, ethics and breadth.<sup>125</sup>

### Decision making

KommAustria makes funding decisions, subject to expert opinions from the Advisory Board on subsidies eligibility and allocation.<sup>126</sup> The Advisory Board is composed of five members, at least two of whom are women, appointed by the Federal Government.

Representatives must be “experts in the media sector or in media studies” with several years of relevant practical experience. Members or employees of government, parliamentary and entities working in civic education provided by political parties are excluded.

### Transparency

KommAustria publishes subsidy outcomes on its public facing website two weeks after payment.<sup>127</sup>

### Recipient obligations

Recipients must provide KommAustria with documents and evidence needed to verify eligibility requirements and to calculate subsidy amounts including proof of journalists’ pay meeting collective or market standards and audited confirmation of regional or EU coverage.<sup>128</sup> Applicants must include detailed cost breakdowns and disclosures of ownership and voting rights. KommAustria may request further information.<sup>129</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Journalism Subsidies

The *Journalism Subsidies Act 1984* (PubFG)<sup>130</sup> provides grants for both political education generated by non-profit foundations or associations and periodical print media covering cultural, religious, scientific, or societal issues.<sup>131</sup> In 2024, the latter component of the scheme was around €340,000.<sup>132</sup> Eligibility requirements include publication frequency, Austrian production and audience, serious focus on politics, culture or religion, or contribution to civic education and geographic reach.<sup>133</sup> Applicants must “require subsidies due to their financial situation”.<sup>134</sup>

### Decision making

KommAustria oversees the funding, determining the amount on a case-by-case basis. It takes into account “the scope, the number of copies, the features and the financial situation of a periodical print medium”, giving due consideration to recommendations from the Advisory Board.<sup>135</sup> The Advisory Board, appointed by the Federal Chancellor and administered at KommAustria, consists of representatives from (and nominated by) elected political parties, federal departments (Chancellery, Economic Affairs and Labour and Education, Science and Cultural Affairs), relevant trade unions, Austrian university journalism studies, state-recognised churches and religious denominations, associations representing Austrian editors of periodicals, publishers of periodicals and self-employed journalists, and professional accountants or tax advisers.

### Recipient obligations

The owner, editor or publisher of the periodical print medium is required to “undertake to exclusively use the subsidies to cover their expenses for the subsidised periodical print medium” in order to receive the grant.<sup>136</sup> Requests for subsidies

125 *Federal Act on Subsidies for High-Quality Journalism in Print and Online Media (Quality Journalism Subsidies Act) (Austria)* §§ 1, 4, 5 and 7. [https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?ResultFunctionToken=b9be87f8-1da2-41d7-a633-816cf68ab41d&Position=1&SkipToDocumentPage=True&Abfrage=Erw&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeitVonDatum=&ImRisSeitBisDatum=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=100&Suchworte=PubFG&Dokumentnummer=ERV\\_1984\\_369](https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokument.wxe?ResultFunctionToken=b9be87f8-1da2-41d7-a633-816cf68ab41d&Position=1&SkipToDocumentPage=True&Abfrage=Erw&Titel=&Quelle=&ImRisSeitVonDatum=&ImRisSeitBisDatum=&ImRisSeit=Undefined&ResultPageSize=100&Suchworte=PubFG&Dokumentnummer=ERV_1984_369)

126 *Ibid.*, § 19.

127 KommAustria/RTR (2025) *Press Subsidies: Overview of Results in 2025*, available as open data. [https://www.rtr.at/medien/was\\_wir\\_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/entscheidungen/entscheidungen/uebersicht2025.de.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/was_wir_tun/foerderungen/pressefoerderung/entscheidungen/entscheidungen/uebersicht2025.de.html)

128 *Federal Act on Subsidies for High-Quality Journalism in Print and Online Media 2023 (Quality Journalism Subsidies Act) (Austria)* § 20(3)

129 *Ibid.* § 21.

130 *Ibid.*

131 Part II of the legislation covers subsidies for journalism serving civic education.

132 Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications (RTR Media). (2024) *Communications report*. pp 53-54. [https://www.rtr.at/medien/aktuelles/publikationen/publikationen/kommunikationsbericht/communicationsreport\\_2024.en.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/aktuelles/publikationen/publikationen/kommunikationsbericht/communicationsreport_2024.en.html)

133 *Quality Journalism Subsidies Act* § 7(1).

134 *Ibid.* §§ 7(1)(5) and 8.

135 *Ibid.*, § 9 The legislation refers to advisory board, while the Austrian Regulatory Authority for Broadcasting and Telecommunications Communications Report 2024 refers to it as the Journalism Subsidy Advisory Board on p. 54.

136 *Ibid.* § 7(4).

must also be accompanied by a “verifiable statement of all costs incurred and earnings received by the print medium” from the past calendar year.<sup>137</sup>

Across all three schemes, subsidies may be forfeited or reclaimed where the owner’s activities breach legal or constitutional obligations, including where published content is found unlawful.

Applicants can also be excluded from receiving subsidies if their media have been used to incite violence or undermine democratic principles, for example, by calling for violent resistance to democracy or the rule of law, advocating violence as a political tool, or repeatedly urging disregard for specific areas of law. Recipients may be excluded from funding where they repeatedly incite hatred or violence against individuals or groups on protected grounds such as race, ethnicity, religion, sex, disability, or sexual orientation.

#### 4.1.4 Fund for the Promotion of Digital Transformation

The *KommAustria Act* also tasks RTR Media to “independently perform” the administration and allocation of money for certain funds, including the Fund to Promote Digital Transformation.<sup>138</sup> The Fund is intended to contribute to “strengthening media companies and their digital services and reinforce the vital role of media in a modern, democratic society.”<sup>139</sup> Project objectives include digital transformation and digital journalism; project funding is for transformation and digitalisation, measures to “strengthen journalism in an increasingly digital media landscape” (including journalist training and internships in digital journalism) and “incentive funding” for businesses with a “concrete project” (not ongoing business activities) for one of those objectives. While earlier legislation<sup>140</sup> drew this from Austria’s tax on digital platforms, it is no longer specifically earmarked from that fund.<sup>141</sup>

#### Decision making

RTR Media decides funding after reviewing the opinion of the Advisory Board.<sup>142</sup>

#### Transparency

RTR Media is obliged to publish funding decisions and issue an annual report.

#### Recipient obligations

Recipients are required to keep “accurate records of the proper use of the funds” including detailed costs breakdowns and evidence of expenses to submit to RTR Media. A final cost statement is due on completion, accompanied by a signed declaration of accuracy.<sup>143</sup> Funds not used for the intended purpose must be repaid and if documentation is not provided, RTR Media can reclaim the entire grant and further funding will be prohibited.

The “Incentive Funding” tranche also requires regular reporting on the use of funds towards the objectives as a funding condition, supplemented by “information on the progress of digitisation”. RTR Media can conduct on-site inspections (or commission third parties to do so) and may continuously monitor the use of grant funds in accordance with the guidelines and agreements. Recipients must allow inspections and release required documents to audits, keep records for 10 years and give RTR Media what it needs for its statutory annual report.

#### 4.1.5 Vienna Media Initiative – Media Start

This scheme, which is funded and administered at the local level by the Vienna Business Agency, was launched in 2020 to foster innovation, diversity and journalistic quality in the city’s media landscape, with a focus on micro-enterprises.<sup>144</sup> Media Start, one of its strands, is a program to assist self-employed journalists and small media enterprises in developing new journalistic concepts<sup>145</sup> which provides non-repayable grants of up to €10,000 per project.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>137</sup> *Quality Journalism Subsidies Act* §8(1)

<sup>138</sup> *Federal Act on the Establishment of an Austrian Communications Authority (“KommAustria”) (KommAustria Act – KOG) (Austria)* § 17(6)

<sup>139</sup> RTR Media (n.d.) *Fund for the Promotion of Digital Transformation*, [https://www.rtr.at/medien/was\\_wir\\_tun/foerderungen/digitalertransformation/startseite.en.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/was_wir_tun/foerderungen/digitalertransformation/startseite.en.html)

<sup>140</sup> Germany, Federal Chancellery (2021) *Simplified Impact-oriented Impact Assessment*, (parliamentary document) “With the exception of the first year, 2021 (in which €34 million will be available), €20 million annually from the additional funds of the digital tax will be allocated to the digital transformation process of media companies.” [https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/I/1026/fnameorig\\_987711.htm](https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVII/I/1026/fnameorig_987711.htm)

<sup>141</sup> Crabbe-Field, S., Gruden, E., Zuegel, K. *A Digital Tax to Support Quality Journalism: Applying the polluter pays principle to Big Tech Platforms*, Forum on Information and Democracy, p 41. <https://informationdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Policy-Brief-Digital-Taxes-for-Quality-Journalism.pdf>

<sup>142</sup> RTR Media (2024) *Guidelines on the Allocation of Funds from the Digital Transformation Fund*, [https://www.rtr.at/medien/was\\_wir\\_tun/foerderungen/digitalertransformation/richtlinien/startseite.de.html](https://www.rtr.at/medien/was_wir_tun/foerderungen/digitalertransformation/richtlinien/startseite.de.html) Google Translate was used to access an English translation.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Vienna Media Initiative (n.d.) <https://medieninitiative.wien/> Google Translate was used to access an English translation.

<sup>145</sup> Vienna Business Agency, (n.d.) *Media Start Funding under the Vienna Media Initiative*. <https://spielwiese-relaunch.wirtschaftsagentur.at/en/current-funding/media-start-funding-under-the-vienna-media-initiative/>

<sup>146</sup> Guidelines are available in German at Vienna Business Agency (2022) *Richtlinie Wiener Medieninitiative – Medienstart/22+ 2022-2025*, <https://cockpit.wirtschaftsagentur.at/Cockpit/Cockpit.aspx?target=2111927&l=2&&select=4718536> Google Translate was used to access an English translation.

### Decision making

City of Vienna distributes the funds to successful applicants, with the Executive Board of the Vienna Business Agency deciding successful funding proposals and grant amounts.<sup>147</sup> Applications undergo formal review and are evaluated by an independent jury comprising academics, journalists and media professionals. While the process for jury selection does not appear to be readily available, a list of the experts is available online.<sup>148</sup>

### Transparency

Vienna Business Agency publishes the details of funded projects online.<sup>149</sup> It publicly discloses non-personal project details, including the recipient's name, the funding amount and justification.

### Recipient obligations

Successful applicant obligations include reporting any significant project or cost changes to the Vienna Business Agency, with major adjustments requiring approval, keeping detailed records such as timesheets for personnel costs and invoices for external expenses, and submitting a final report and financial statement within three months of completion.<sup>150</sup>

Inadequate documentation or falling below the minimum cost threshold can result in funding withdrawal. Recipients must allow audits and document access for ten years after final payment.

## 4.2 Canada

Canada has a long history of subsidising news media, both public and private, in addition to other mechanisms such as tax credits for journalist employment and advertising quotas in certain media.

It has used a combination of direct government funding and mechanisms that redirect revenue between sectors, for example from commercial to community broadcasting and, most recently, through levies on large online platforms to support local Canadian news organisations. Funding mechanisms span across magazines and periodicals, newspapers, broadcasting and online, often with a focus on local and underserved audiences. The distribution mechanisms vary significantly across the different interventions and together form a complex matrix of media support.

Some programs use multiple distribution mechanisms, and the same administering organisation may distribute multiple funds, or a single fund may manage revenue from different legislative interventions. Canadian media support policies often explicitly reference the need for funds to be distributed at arm's length from government and this has resulted in the use of a range of independent organisations, rather than government itself, to manage some of the funding mechanisms.

Direct funding programs are generally developed and managed by the Department of Canadian Heritage. Interventions relating to broadcasting and online are implemented by the regulator - the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC).

The CRTC's legislative powers include, for example, determining the nature and quantum of levies and other matters relating to broadcasting and online services under a *Broadcasting Act*<sup>151</sup> which was modernised in the early 2020s, and it does so through public consultations and published decisions. Canada also has interesting parallels with Australia as it has implemented a version of news bargaining legislation, which has a mechanism for a single all-of-industry fund to be established in place of individual bargaining agreements.

This section considers aspects of the following selected news and journalism-specific interventions.

### Government direct funding programs:

- *Canada Periodical Fund* (five different funding streams distributed by DCH)
- *Local Journalism Initiative* (distributed through sector-run funds)

### Industry funded programs:

- *Independent Local News Fund* (levy on certain commercial organisations, distributed through sector-run funds)
- Online News Act (news bargaining scheme with exemption funds distributed by special purpose organisation).

<sup>147</sup> Guidelines available in German at Vienna Business Agency (2022) *Richtlinie Wiener Medieninitiative – Medienstart/22+ 2022-2025*, Google Translate was used to access an English translation.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> For example, see: Vienna Business Agency *Funding database*. <https://viennabusinessagency.at/gefoerderte-projekte/#Wiener%20Medieninitiative%20%E2%80%93%20Medienstart/22+>

<sup>150</sup> Vienna Business Agency (2022) *Richtlinie Wiener Medieninitiative – Medienstart/22+ 2022-2025*. pp.15-18 (Accessed via Google Translate)

<sup>151</sup> *Broadcasting Act 1991 (Canada)* <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/b-9.01/FullText.html>

The following table summarises the source of these funds and distributing organisations. It refers only to news-specific components of these funds, which may include distributions for other purposes.

**TABLE 2: SELECTED CANADIAN NEWS AND JOURNALISM FUNDING SCHEMES**

GOVERNMENT DIRECT FUNDED			
	Streams	Funding source	Distribution body/bodies
<b>Canada Periodical Fund</b>	Special Measures for Journalism	Government	Department of Canadian Heritage
	Aid to Publishers		
	Business Innovation		
	Collective Initiatives (CI)		
	Changing Narratives component of CI		
<b>Local Journalism Initiative</b>	Local Journalism Initiative (LJI)	Government	Sector-run funds known as “Initial Recipients”:
	Changing Narratives component of the LJI		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Media Coalition (CMC) represented by Community Radio Fund of Canada (CRFC)</li> <li>Consortium of Official Language Minority Community Media (OLMC)</li> <li>News Media Canada (NMC)</li> </ul>
INDUSTRY FUNDED BY REGULATORY DECISION UNDER LEGISLATION			
<b>Independent Local News Fund</b>	Independent Local News Fund	Levy on broadcast distribution undertakings (BDUs) Levy on “online undertakings”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB)</li> <li>CRFC</li> </ul>
	New Temporary Commercial Radio Fund	Levy on online undertakings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CAB</li> </ul>
<b>Online News Act</b>	Fund created for ONA (news bargaining) exemption payment	Google	Canadian Journalism Collective: Special purpose independent industry-led organisation, nominated by Google and approved by regulator (CRTC)

#### 4.2.1 Canada Periodical Fund (CPF)

Launched in 2010, the CPF replaced the previous Publications Assistance Program and Canada Magazine Fund.<sup>152</sup> Due to Canada's vast geography and small population, there had been various forms of Federal Government support for mailing newspapers and magazines for more than 150 years. The CPF currently includes the following streams, which have varied over time:

- **Special Measures for Journalism:** Originally a 2020 COVID-19 emergency measure, and most recently extended for a further year in October 2025, this stream provides funding for eligible Canadian publishers with free distribution and smaller paid circulation “to enable them to overcome market disadvantages” and meet evolving needs of readers.<sup>153</sup> Funds can be used for publishing activities, such as content creation, production, distribution, or business development.
- **Aid to Publishers** offers financial support for private sector Canada-based and Canadian-owned and controlled print magazines, print community newspapers and digital periodicals to produce and distribute “Canadian editorial content for Canadian readers”.
- **Business Innovation** (due to conclude in 2026) has supported projects for eligible small and mid-sized publishers of print and digital magazines or non-daily community newspapers.
- **Collective Initiatives** funds organisations for projects “designed to increase the overall sustainability of the Canadian magazine and (non-daily) community newspaper industries”.
- **Changing Narratives Fund** added to the Collective Initiatives stream in 2025-26, providing project funding for mentorship, training and professional development for diverse communities (specified as “Indigenous/Black/Racialized/Ethno-religious minority/People with disabilities/2SLGBTQI+ communities”) in magazine and (non-daily) community newspaper industries.<sup>154</sup>

#### Decision making

Funding can be grants or contributions. These are administered by the Department of Canadian Heritage, with applications reviewed by staff in its Periodical Publishing Policy and Programs directorate.<sup>155</sup> Funding decisions are final. In some cases, the funding is either direct or available for further distribution: e.g. under the new Changing Narratives Fund “diverse community-led/mandated organizations will be able to apply to distribute funding to community members’ projects”.

#### Transparency

Grants are published on a transparency page on the Canadian Heritage website.<sup>156</sup>

#### Recipient obligations

Acquittal requirements vary between the different streams. There are periodic program evaluations and recipients must keep records for five years. Recipients are required to provide specified reports, advise ownership changes and/or participate in results evaluation and audits may be required for funding over CAD\$250,000. Recipients are required to acknowledge the Government's financial support in all communications materials and promotional activities in line with detailed guidelines.<sup>157</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Local Journalism Initiative

Part of a package announced in 2018 and extended to 2024-27, the Local Journalism Initiative (LJI) pays press agencies and news organisations to “hire journalists or pay freelance journalists to produce civic journalism” for “underserved

<sup>152</sup> Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage (2008, January) *Redesigning Programs for the Periodical Industry: A Discussion Paper to Guide Consultations* [https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2016/pch/CH4-174-2008-eng.pdf](https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/pch/CH4-174-2008-eng.pdf)

<sup>153</sup> Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage *Special Measures for Journalism – Canada Periodical Fund* <https://www.canada.ca/en/canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/periodical-fund/special-measures-journalism.html>

<sup>154</sup> The Changing Narratives Fund is distributed through three existing programs including the Local Journalism Initiative in Section 4.2.2 below. See Government of Canada, Canadian Heritage, *Changing Narratives Fund* <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/changing-narratives-fund.html>

<sup>155</sup> Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage (Canadian Heritage) (n.d.) *Canada Periodical Fund* <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/periodical-fund.html>

<sup>156</sup> Canadian Heritage (n.d.) *Transparency – Canadian Heritage* <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/transparency.html>

<sup>157</sup> Canadian Heritage, *Guide on the Public Acknowledgment of Financial Support* <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/acknowledgement-financial-support.html>

communities”, defined as areas with “news deserts” or “news poverty”.<sup>158</sup> In 2025-6, the LJI added a funding stream to incorporate part of the Changing Narratives Fund, with the same diversity-based eligibility criteria as the Canada Periodical Fund component (as outlined in section 4.2.1 above).

#### 4.2.2.1 LJI decision making generally

Though funded by Government through the Department of Canadian Heritage, what is distinctive about this and other schemes covered below is that *implementation and distribution* are carried out through independent associations, “to protect the independence of the press” and avoid perceptions of government interference.<sup>159</sup>

When the Local Journalism Initiative was first established, the Government designated seven associations known as Administrator Organisations (AOs); the number of these funding bodies was later streamlined down to three, which are now known as “Initial Recipients” (IRs) and which represent different segments of the news industry.<sup>160</sup> Each IR is required under its agreement with the Government to set up its own application and assessment process for news organisations applying for funds<sup>161</sup> though all are required to apply certain requirements mandated by the Government (which recipients must report on in their acquittals), including that:

- program funds must be used to hire professional journalists;
- those hired must produce content additional to what is already produced;
- stories must be available for republication by any news organisation (even if not involved in the LJI) under a Creative Commons licence.<sup>162</sup>

Funding recipients are required to carry acknowledgment of Government funding (though not necessarily in the article itself).<sup>163</sup>

The Initial Recipients receive and then redistribute Local Journalism Initiative Funds to eligible Canadian media organisations as follows:

- The **Local Journalism Initiative** is distributed to eligible Canadian media organisations by:
  - Community Media Coalition (CMC) represented by the Community Radio Fund of Canada (CRFC);<sup>164</sup>
  - News Media Canada (NMC); and
  - Consortium of Official Language Minority Community Media (OLMC)
- The **Changing Narratives Fund** stream of the LJI is distributed by the CMC, represented by the CRFC.

Each of the above collectives is responsible for the funding of specific media segments:

- **CMC**: ethnic media (newspapers, online news services, community radio stations and community television stations), English-language community radio stations outside of Quebec, English-language community television stations, French-language community television stations outside of Quebec and Indigenous community radio stations and community television stations;
- **NMC**: English-language newspapers and online news services outside of Quebec, French-language newspapers and online news services in Quebec and Indigenous newspapers and online services; and
- **OLMC**: official language minority news media across Canada and French-language community radio and television stations in Quebec.

<sup>158</sup> News Deserts Communities: where citizens do not have access to journalistic information about community issues and institutions because there are no daily or community newspapers and other media (for example, community radio or television). Also, if there are other public or private broadcasters, they do not produce local news. News Poverty Communities: where there is limited access to journalistic content about community issues and institutions through a daily newspaper or public or private broadcaster. Available sources of local news - whether a newspaper, a community radio station or other media - demonstrate significant gaps in coverage due to a lack of capacity. Canadian Heritage, *Glossary of Terms*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/local-journalism-initiative/glossary.html>

<sup>159</sup> Canadian Heritage (n.d.) *Local Journalism Initiative*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/local-journalism-initiative.html>

<sup>160</sup> Canadian Heritage (n.d.) *Initial Recipients – Local Journalism Initiative and Changing Narratives Fund*, <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/local-journalism-initiative/mandated-organizations.html>

<sup>161</sup> Konieczna, K., Girardin, B (2024) “Missed Opportunities for Community Engagement: An Examination of the Government-Funded Local Journalism Initiative”, *Facts and Frictions: Emerging Debates, Pedagogies and Practices in Contemporary Journalism* 2(2), 8-21.

<sup>162</sup> Canadian Heritage (n.d.) *Local Journalism Initiative* <https://factsandfrictions.ca/portfolio-item/ffv3n2-missed-opportunities-lji/>

<sup>163</sup> Canadian Heritage (n.d.) *Guide on the Public Acknowledgment of Financial Support*.

<sup>164</sup> The CMC includes representatives from the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada (NEPMCC), the Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS) and the National Community and Campus Radio Association (NCRRA).

#### 4.2.2.2 CMC/NMC component of the LJI

Funding for this program is to “hire journalists to produce civic journalism for underserved communities”. The latest guidelines were developed by News Media Canada and the Community Media Coalition in conjunction with the Department of Canadian Heritage following a “realignment of mandates from the previous iteration of the program” intended to “streamline processes, reduce administrative costs, expedite reporting and ensure transparency of the program”.<sup>165</sup>

The 2025-27 CMC/NMC guidelines for the LJI released in November 2025 note two new funding opportunities: the Changing Narrative Funds and a Pilot Project for enhanced support under the LJI aimed at startup, Indigenous and rural/remote organisations.

#### Decision making

Decision making involves a “multi-stage review” involving:

- **Programs Team** (Community Radio Foundation of Canada (CRFC) and NMC), which is responsible for administrative management, including eligibility screening, managing conflicts of interest and implementing decisions; and
- **Independent Selection Committee:** External experts “with diverse backgrounds (including representation from LJI underrepresented groups)” review and score eligibility against criteria, using a points system, with a “Strategic Bonus” ranked against the program’s “Strategic Priorities”. The final ranked list may be adjusted “to ensure an equitable geographical distribution of funds” and is then approved by the Independent Selection Committee.<sup>166</sup>

#### Transparency

Grants and amounts are published online.

#### Recipient obligations

Recipients must enter into a “contribution agreement” which includes content expectations (“specific volume, type and format of news content proposed to be produced by the LJI journalist”).<sup>167</sup>

These are monitored by the administrator to the “national distribution platform” to ensure the recipient is meeting their proposed quota of news content. Recipients must submit progress and final reports, including progress on goals and significant challenges or delays.

Recipients “in violation of a previous agreement” are not eligible for new funding, until they have fulfilled obligations. The guidelines state: “To ensure that funds support incremental content creation, funded organizations must attest that employment created through the LJI would not otherwise have been created without financial support.”<sup>168</sup> Recipients must share the news on a specified national distribution platform<sup>169</sup> under a Creative Commons license (simultaneous to all media and the public). Recipients must also acknowledge LJI support, which “serves as a hallmark that this content can be republished by other media outlets”.

Funds cannot be used to support content not relating to current events or local issues, illegal content, opinions, advertising, “content that is demonstrably false or misleading” or investigative content to inform government lobbying/advertising.<sup>170</sup>

#### 4.2.2.3 OLMC process for LJI

#### Decision making

The Consortium of Official Languages Minority Community Media guidelines for its component of the LJI state that its governance is run by representatives from four subsectors of official language minority community media.<sup>171</sup> An independent panel of experts oversees the process of evaluating grant applications and making recommendations for

<sup>165</sup> Community Radio Fund of Canada (2025, September 12) *News Media Canada and Community Coalition Welcome Confirmation of Plans for 2025-2027 Local Journalism Initiative* <https://crfc-frcr.ca/en/news-media-canada-and-community-media-coalition-welcome-confirmation-of-plans-for-2025-2027-local-journalism-initiative/>

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p 14.

<sup>167</sup> CRFC and NMC (2025, November) *Local Journalism Initiative 2025-2027 Program Guidelines*, p16.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p 8.

<sup>169</sup> For CMC/CRFC: <https://www.frequencynews.ca/> (<https://www.frequencyinfo.ca/>); For NMC: <https://lji-ijl.ca>

<sup>170</sup> Community Radio Fund of Canada and News Media Canada (2025, November) *Local Journalism Initiative 2025-2027 Program Guidelines*, [https://mycrfc-monfrcr.smapplly.io/protected/nr/Q6nc8/LJI\\_2025-2027\\_-\\_Program\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://mycrfc-monfrcr.smapplly.io/protected/nr/Q6nc8/LJI_2025-2027_-_Program_Guidelines.pdf)

<sup>171</sup> OLMC (2025-2027) *Grant Application Guide: This present guide supports LJI applications for the fiscal years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 from eligible official language minority community media outlets* [https://olconsortiumlo.ca/content/user\\_files/2025/08/LJI-GRANT-APPLICATION-GUIDE-Updt-Aug.-25-EN.docx.pdf](https://olconsortiumlo.ca/content/user_files/2025/08/LJI-GRANT-APPLICATION-GUIDE-Updt-Aug.-25-EN.docx.pdf)

grant allocations. The panel includes at least five bilingual members from official language minority communities with “experience and expertise in business, community management, media operations, journalism, and program delivery” who are said to “understand the realities, challenges, and needs of official language minority populations and the eligible community media outlets serving these populations”.

The Guidelines also note that the panel “carries out its mandate independently from the Consortium member organizations and eligible media outlets”.<sup>172</sup> Panel decisions, which are based on specified scoring criteria, are final with no appeal.

### Transparency

Lists of recipients and amounts are published. The OLMC guidelines also require the Consortium to conduct ongoing impact analyses of grant programs.

### Recipient obligations

Due to the nature of the scheme, the grants have detailed guidelines. For example, provision for payment is per “content” unit produced by a journalist, and in the case of freelancers for additional copy editor costs; guidelines are specific to the different types of content (e.g. audio, print etc) and include word counts or duration, which means that recipients are obliged to keep and disclose very specific records of everything they publish or broadcast as a result of the funding. Grant recipients file detailed monthly cumulative production reports including, among other things, content title, civic issue addressed, area of news poverty, subjects lacking coverage and number of content units.<sup>173</sup>

Recipients must also “fully collaborate when consulted by the Consortium before, during and after the funded period”.<sup>174</sup> The source of funding must be acknowledged on the relevant media platform, as outlined in detailed guidelines for each type of medium, sometimes in the reporter’s byline and sometimes with the LJI “wordmark”.<sup>175</sup>

### 4.2.3 Independent Local News Fund and new Commercial Radio News Fund

The Independent Local News Fund (ILNF) replaced a previous Small Market Local Production Fund in 2016 and is established in CRTC broadcasting policy.<sup>176</sup> It sits alongside a series of measures (including investment and content quotas) aimed at supporting the production of locally reflective news and information by private independent television stations.

The ILNF was initially funded by licensed terrestrial and direct-to-home broadcast undertakings (BDUs), which paid 0.3% of their previous year’s broadcast revenues. Distribution was originally based on the proportion of eligible stations’ share of total expenditures on locally reflective news and information over the previous three years and proportions of total hours of local news, provided that not more than 10% in a year (now 12%) would go to the same station or group. The CRTC explains this as: “the more money invested and the more hours of locally reflective news and information broadcast, the more money the private independent television station could receive from the ILNF”.<sup>177</sup>

The *Online Streaming Act 2023*, which was part of the modernisation of the *Broadcasting Act*, resulted in the addition of a new CRTC policy imposing a similar charge on “online undertakings” as part of the Act’s policy that such services “make meaningful contributions to Canadian and Indigenous content”.<sup>178</sup> This charge is to be levied on online streaming services which make more than CAD\$25m in annual local “contributions revenue” and are not affiliated with a Canadian broadcaster. It covers platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Spotify, Apple Music and Disney Plus and YouTube, which are required to contribute 5% of their local revenues to be distributed to a specified range of funds under the CRTC policy.

Recipients include, among others, the following news-specific funds:

- *Audiovisual* online streaming revenues (in part) to the Independent Local News Fund; and
- *Audio* online services revenues (in part) to:

<sup>172</sup> OLMC (2025-2027) Section 8 of the *Grant Application Guide*: This present guide supports LJI applications for the fiscal years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027 from eligible official language minority community media outlets [https://olconsortiumlo.ca/content/user\\_files/2025/08/LJI-GRANT-APPLICATION-GUIDE-Updt-Aug.-25-EN.docx](https://olconsortiumlo.ca/content/user_files/2025/08/LJI-GRANT-APPLICATION-GUIDE-Updt-Aug.-25-EN.docx)

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, p 21.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, p 22.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, p 20.

<sup>176</sup> CRTC (2016, June 5) Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2016-224 *Policy Framework for Local and Community Television* <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2025/2025-193.htm>

<sup>177</sup> CRTC (2025, June 5) Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2025-133 *Review of the Independent Local News Fund* <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2025/2025-133.htm>

<sup>178</sup> CRTC (2024, June 4) Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 22024-121 *The Path Forward – Supporting Canadian and Indigenous Content Through Base Contributions* <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2024/2024-121.htm>

- a new temporary fund<sup>179</sup> supporting local commercial radio news production in “communities where radio is sometimes the only source of local news”<sup>180</sup> (Temporary Commercial Radio News Fund); and
- the Community Radio Fund of Canada.<sup>181</sup>

The above aspects of this levy have been contested in litigation by these streaming services: while not objecting to the requirement to pay cultural recipients under the same policy, they argue that they should not be levied to pay for news. The levy, originally due to commence in 2024, has been stayed by the Federal Court of Appeal pending a determination of the proceedings.<sup>182</sup> However, while this is pending, the CRTC has continued to make determinations around how it will work, including establishing the new Temporary Commercial Radio News Fund.

### Decision making

The Canadian Association of Broadcasters (the CAB) has managed the ILNF<sup>183</sup> since the CRTC created that fund in 2017,<sup>184</sup> and now also manages the Temporary Commercial Radio News Fund. The CAB’s board is appointed from its members, which represent “the vast majority of Canadian programming services, including private radio and television stations, networks, speciality, pay and pay-per-view services”. Its plan to administer the Temporary Commercial Radio News Fund was approved by the CRTC in August 2025.<sup>185</sup>

However, as this is a new fund, the CRTC also required CAB to file an amended governance structure for the CRTC to review, having regard to concerns about non-CAB members having a say in its governance and to initiate stakeholder engagements involving CRNF recipients, interested parties and contributors to ensure “greater transparency and accountability on the funding and progress of the fund” to non-CAB member recipients. It was also required to propose a mechanism to resolve disputes about funding to address potential conflicts of interest and that is independent of the CAB CEO Radio Council. The CRTC rejected CAB’s suggestion that it act as a dispute resolution mechanism (as it did not do so for other funds). At time of writing, the structure was yet to be finalised.

### Transparency

CAB must file an annual report with the CRTC detailing funding amounts received and distributed. For the CRNF, it is allowed to submit a redacted version that excludes the revenue information of certain entities.<sup>186</sup>

### Recipient obligations

A June 2025 CRTC Review of the ILNF adjusted some of its parameters, including new reporting requirements on recipients (as well as the CAB) and requirements that they “make available online the locally reflective news and information content they produce and broadcast on television”.

ILNF recipients (covered by the streams managed by CAB) must file reports with the CAB detailing how the funds received have been used to meet the ILNF’s objectives.<sup>187</sup> Requirements include:

- reporting from the CAB must include the previous year’s locally reflective news and information expenditures and hours (in aggregate), in addition to the previous three years’ averaged totals;
- ILNF recipients must provide to the CAB and the Commission journalist FTE data for aggregate public release;
- the CAB must publicly release additional aggregated data based on information provided by recipients; and
- when claiming expenditures for online content serving underserved communities, ILNF recipients must provide the CAB and the Commission with the list of segments produced that qualify for the incentive, the related expenditures, and an explanation of how the production of those segments served underserved communities in their market.<sup>188</sup>

179 To create a new funding mechanism for commercial radio, the CRTC invited the Canadian Association of Broadcasters to file a plan to administer this fund including governance, eligibility criteria, accountability measures, reporting requirements and allocation methods. The plan was approved by CRTC Decision 2025-193 *Temporary Commercial Radio News Fund* <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2025/2025-193.htm>

180 Ibid.

181 The Community Radio Fund of Canada also administers part of the Local Journalism Initiative, <https://crtc-fcra.ca/en/>

182 Webb, J.A. (2024, December 23) Reasons for Order, Federal Court of Appeal Canada, *Amazon.com.ca ULC v Attorney General of Canada; Apple Canada v Attorney General of Canada, Motion Picture Association-Canada, Crunchyroll LLC, Netflix Services Canada ULC, Paramount Entertainment Canada ULC and Pluto Inc v Canadian Association of Broadcasters; Spotify AB v Attorney General of Canada, Amazon.com* <https://www.canlii.org/en/ca/fca/doc/2024/2024fca217/2024fca217.html>

183 At time of writing the CAB’s web pages on the ILNF were marked as “coming soon”.

184 CRTC (2016, June 15) *Policy Framework for Local and Community Television Broadcasting Regulatory Policy* CRTC 2016-224 <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2016/2016-224.htm> This framework sets out how funds are distributed; this was modified by CRTC Decision 2021-203 <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2021/2021-203.htm> and CRTC 2025-133 <https://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2025/2025-133.htm>

185 CRTC (2025, August 1) *Broadcasting Regulatory Policy* CRTC 2025-193: *Commercial Radio News Fund* <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2025/2025-193.htm>

186 Ibid.

187 CRTC (2025, June 5) *Broadcasting Decision* CRTC 2025-133 *Review of the Independent Local News Fund* <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2025/-133.htm>

188 Ibid.

The **Community Radio Fund of Canada**, a recipient of the proposed online streaming funds, already manages parts of the Local Journalism Initiative and the Changing Narratives fund (as well as other non-news specific funds). Created in 2007 to fund community and campus radio stations across Canada, it is run by a board (which includes a Canadian Association of Broadcasters representative and observers from other organisations) and it also advocates for funding for the sector.<sup>189</sup>

#### 4.2.4 Online News Act 2023 – “Google Fund” via CJC

This fund arises from the *Online News Act* framework, which is comparable to Australia’s NMBC. It requires certain large online platforms operating in Canada to “fairly compensate Canadian news organisations for content shared on their platforms”. While providing for a bargaining framework, section 11(1) of the *Online News Act* and related regulations<sup>190</sup> allow for a digital platform to ask the regulator for an exemption<sup>191</sup> from the requirement to bargain with individual news businesses.<sup>192</sup>

Google elected to seek exemption under the regulations, which required it to reach agreement with a single collective “that could distribute the funding equitably among news businesses”.<sup>193</sup> In October 2024, the CRTC granted Google a five-year exemption in exchange for Google agreeing to pay \$100m per year to Canadian news businesses.<sup>194</sup>

The exemption order provides for “equitable distribution” of these funds to the collective of news businesses “based on FTE online news-producing employees”, the ability for an attesting news business to join the collective at any time and “protection of freedom of expression and journalistic independence”. The exemption specifies that funds are to be used to support the production of local, regional and national news content.<sup>195</sup> The Act also requires Google’s agreement with CJC to contain guarantees of journalistic independence.<sup>196</sup>

As a result, the mechanism for funding news organisations is a process of arm’s length distribution through a news special-purpose organisation. This collective all-of-industry approach covers organisations that have registered as eligible under the Act.

#### Decision making

Google’s *Online News Act* funds are now independently administered by the Canadian Journalism Collective (CJC). Google selected the CJC for this purpose following a broad open-call process for Canadian news organisations to identify their funding eligibility, as required by the *Online News Act*, and the CJC framework was approved as part of the CRTC’s exemption order.<sup>197</sup> Around that time, Google also invited groups that were “interested in serving as a single collective to submit detailed proposals on their approach”, indicating the selection would be “informed by principles aligned with (the *Online News Act*’s) intent: diversity of representation, a robust governance structure, a high level of transparency, and assurance that as much funding as possible would go to news organisations”.<sup>198</sup>

Founded in May 2024 “to promote sustainability, equity and innovation in the implementation of the *Online News Act* and regulations”, the CJC represents a diverse group of news publishers. Its website notes it is not a government agency and receives no taxpayer funding. Working to *Online News Act* criteria, it describes its role as “administrative verification, not editorial assessment”, verifying:

- technical requirements (e.g. employment of journalists, original content production);
- operational criteria (e.g. content available on Google, serving Canadian audiences); and
- compliance with established journalistic standards (e.g. operating with recognised codes of ethics), employing professional journalists, and producing original news content as defined in the Act.<sup>199</sup>

189 CRFC (2023-4) *Annual Report* [https://crfc-fcrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2023-2024-Rapport-Annuel-FCRC\\_-\\_CRFC-Annual-Report.pdf](https://crfc-fcrc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/2023-2024-Rapport-Annuel-FCRC_-_CRFC-Annual-Report.pdf)

190 *Online News Act Application and Exemption Regulation*.

191 *Canada Online News Act SC 2023 II*. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/O-9.3/section-11.html?txthl=production+order> and *Online News Act Application and Exemption Regulations: SOR/2023-276* <https://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2024/2024-01-03/html/sor-dors276-eng.html>

192 There is no direct parallel in the NMBC but closest is the provision in subsection 88(1) of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (Cth) which allows the ACCC to authorise collective bargaining (for example as granted to Country Press Australia and Commercial Radio and Audio) to represent their sectors; it is unclear if for a whole-of-news industry approach would be permissible under the existing Australian legislation.

193 Meta took itself outside the scope of the legislation by removing news from its platforms in Canada.

194 CRTC (2024, October) *Online News Decision CRTC 2024-262 Exemption Order from the Online News Act granted to Google* <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2024/2024-262.htm>

195 Ibid.

196 Ibid. In paragraphs 24 and 25 titled “Journalistic independence” the CRTC found Google had met the requirement in subparagraph 11(1)(a)(iii) of the *Online News Act* that it “not allow corporate influence to undermine freedom of expression or journalistic independence”. The CRTC found Google had met the requirement in the regulations by including this in the agreement with CJC, which also affirmed that the CJC was to include in the member agreement “a commitment that news businesses not allow corporate influence to impact them in this way”.

197 Ibid.

198 Google (2024, June 7) *Canada blog: “How we’re moving forward with the Canadian news ecosystem”* <https://blog.google/intl/en-ca/company-news/outreach-initiatives/how-were-moving-forward-with-the-canadian-news-ecosystem/>

199 Canadian Journalism Collective website (n.d.) <https://cjc-ccj.ca/en/>

The CJC states that it does not assess “editorial positions or political viewpoints” or “journalistic opinions or reporting angles”. The organisation is governed by a representative board of directors, reflecting the following three representational classes of voting members (made up of subclasses with their own specific eligibility thresholds), which elect its board:<sup>200</sup>

Class A	A-1 large publishers, A-2 small and medium publishers, A-3 small and medium French publishers, A-4 start-up publishers, A-5 non-profit publishers, A-6 Indigenous publishers, A-7 black and other racialized publishers, A-8 official language minority community publishers.
Class B	B-1 radio broadcasters, B-2 television broadcasters, B-3 non-profit community television broadcasters, B-4 non-profit French language community television broadcasters in Quebec, B-5 non-profit French language community radio broadcasters, B-6 non-profit community radio broadcasters, B-7 start up and independent broadcasters, B-8 indigenous broadcasters.
Class C	National public broadcaster.

The 19 directors include eight from each of Class A and Class B (each elected by members from that class) and three independent directors. The latter must have no current contractual, fiduciary or ownership relationship to a news business, and own less than 10% of the shares in a news business. The Board also appoints independent directors, one on the recommendation of publisher directors and the other on recommendation of broadcaster directors. The public broadcaster (Class C) can elect a non-voting observer to attend director meetings.

News business eligibility and share of funding are determined by a Publishers Council and Broadcasters Council; their delegated powers are specific to their sector and they are also responsible for audit verification (other than for the public broadcaster).<sup>201</sup> The public broadcaster receives a proportion of funding, and a percentage is distributed to other types of entities on the basis of full-time-equivalent newsroom employees.<sup>202</sup>

### Transparency

Recipients and amounts funded are published on the CJC website.<sup>203</sup>

### Recipient obligations

Applications are made by category and require evidence of full-time eligible newsroom employees, eligibility criteria and governance documents.

As this structure is relatively new, there is a diversity of views on whether it is fully achieving the intentions of the framework.<sup>204</sup>

## 4.3 United States

While there has not been a history of direct US Federal Government funding for news, there was formerly US Government funding support for public media, which was terminated in 2025, as was its international news funding.<sup>205</sup> Also at the Federal level, a longstanding attempt at a collective news bargaining scheme, the *Federal Journalism Competition and Preservation Act*, stalled in 2023,<sup>206</sup> though news organisations continue to press for legislation.<sup>207</sup>

In the meantime, several US states have taken their own action to legislate for a number of different types of support for local news organisations. Some, such as New York and Maryland, have implemented tax credits for employing journalists. Some have direct funding, while others have sought to impose charges on digital platforms which are then used to fund local news organisations. Some are framed as taxes on digital platforms and others as “hybrid” forms of news bargaining, which allow for collective payments as well as other non-bargaining options.

200 Canadian Journalism Collective (consolidated as at 2025, February 2) *The General By-law Being a By-law Relating Generally to the Conduct of the Affairs of the Canadian Journalism Collective (the “Corporation”)* <https://cjc-ccj.ca/app/uploads/2025/09/2025-02-26-by-laws-en.pdf> (CJC By-law). The by-law also includes the distribution formula for the Google payment (Article 9).

201 There is a cap of 7% of total fund for public broadcasters and 30% for other broadcasters under Section 10(3) of the *Online News Act Application and Exemption Regulations*: SOR/2023-276. <https://gazette.gc.ca/rp-pr/p2/2024/2024-01-03/html/sor-dors276-eng.html>

202 Ibid. Section 9(2) and 9(3) set out the formula for “equitable distribution of monetary compensation” CJC By-laws Article <https://cjc-ccj.ca/app/uploads/2025/09/2025-02-26-by-laws-en.pdf>

203 CJC (n.d.) *Canadian Journalism Collective Issues First Public Disclosure of Funding Recipients* <https://cjc-ccj.ca/en/canadian-journalism-collective-issues-first-public-disclosure-of-funding-recipients/>

204 For example, Kahn, G. (2025, October 3) *How Google’s Funding for Canadian News Publishers is Split – and Who Benefits the Most*, Reuters Institute, University of Oxford <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-googles-funding-canadian-news-publishers-split-and-who-benefits-most>

205 Copeland, R. (2025, June) *Crisis in Journalism: The Impact of US Government Funding Cuts on Global Media*, BBC Media Action, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/crisis-in-journalism-report-june-2025.pdf>

206 Section 2094 *Journalism Competition and Preservation Act of 2023* (US) <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/1094>

207 Staff, News Media Alliance (2025, September 14) *Support Journalism Awards Dinner and Fly-In 2025* <https://www.newsmediaalliance.org/support-journalism-fly-in-2025/>

While the mechanisms of these interventions vary, they share similar legislative definitions, are all framed around digital platform and news activities within their state and are aimed at the largest digital platforms with thresholds for revenue and audiences.

This section summaries some of the key elements of State funding schemes for news, whether passed, underway or withdrawn, which provide for:

- **direct government funding of news:**
  - Acts in force: California, New Jersey
- **funding news through a form of digital tax:**
  - Bills in progress: Hawaii, Washington State
  - Bill not passed: California
- **forms of news bargaining** with options for collective payments to eligible news organisations, either by platforms or through third-party funding distribution mechanisms:
  - Bill withdrawn: California
  - Bills in progress: Illinois, Oregon, New York State

#### 4.3.1 US State direct funding mechanisms

##### 4.3.1.1 California Civic Media Program

The context for this legislation is significant. It forms part of an agreement made in late 2024 between Google and the State of California (the “Google deal”) to establish a partnership between Google, the State, news publishers, major tech companies and philanthropy under which both Google and the State of California were required to commit funds, and the State was to prioritise advertising in local publications and publications in underserved markets.

The Google deal resulted in the withdrawal of the California *Journalism Preservation Act* bill (Section 4.3.3.1 below) which had proposed charging digital platforms through a form of collective bargaining, with payments based around digital platform advertising revenue.

The Google deal initially involved funds being distributed by University of California Berkeley Journalism School (with a percentage allocated for locally focused publications and those targeting underrepresented groups) and a National AI accelerator. In January 2025, it was reported that UC Berkeley had withdrawn from the deal “citing concerns about how the funding would be administered”.<sup>208</sup> It was reported in May 2025 that the Californian Government had reduced its payment due to budget cuts,<sup>209</sup> but it went ahead with the legislation for the State’s direct funding component.

California’s contribution to the Google deal is now embodied in the *California Civic Media Act 2025*, approved by Governor Newsom on 11 October 2025, which establishes a California Civic Media Program.<sup>210</sup> Unlike the proposed Google deal, which was to be distributed through a university, the \$10m per year in direct government funding will be administered by the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development, GO-Biz (“the office”).<sup>211</sup> The legislated fund includes annual government appropriations, but it may also accept contributions from private sources (including for-profit and not-for-profit).<sup>212</sup> Its program goals include “enhancing the public good through supporting a robust and dynamic California press corps and reinforcing the vital role of journalism”.<sup>213</sup>

#### Decision making

The legislation provides for a nine-person advisory board, including two “at large” members, two representing the California News Publishers Association, and one each representing American Community Media, the Local Independent Online News Publishers, Latino Media Collaborative, California Black Media and Media Guild of the West. Members are recommended by those entities.<sup>214</sup>

208 Katzenberger, T. (2025, January 26) “California Left Scrambling on Google Journalism Fund After UC Berkeley Backs Out”, *Politico* <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/01/16/california-google-journalism-uc-berkeley-00198605>

209 Katzenberger, T., Mui, C. (2025, May 21) “California, Google Rework First-in-Nation Journalism Deal Amid State Deficit” *Politico* <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/21/california-google-journalism-deficit-newsom-00363504>

210 *Senate Bill No 155 California Civic Media Act 2025* (California) which is an amendment to Chapter 1.6 of Part 2 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government Code, through the addition of Article 15 California Civic Media Act commencing with 12100.160. References below are to numbered sections. [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=202520260SB155](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260SB155)

211 California Legislative Analyst’s Office (2025, October 16) *The 2025 California Spending Plan – Other Provisions* <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/5081>

212 Senate Bill No 155 California Civic Media Act 2025 (California).

213 Ibid, 12100.161(a).

214 Ibid, 12100.161(b).

The office has sole discretion on *public* funding expenditure, but may solicit recommendations from the advisory board.<sup>215</sup> The advisory board is required to make recommendations on allocation of funds from private sources and may do so pro-rata on the basis of the number of employed journalists “with the goal of increasing the total number of journalists employed in the state.”<sup>216</sup> If the private funds are held by a third-party administrator, the office will instruct the administrator on expenditure.<sup>217</sup>

The legislation includes a cap on administrative fees for the fund.<sup>218</sup> It also provides that “the office shall prioritize allocations to support local and community news organisations,”<sup>219</sup> which is consistent with the legislation’s goals of ensuring sustainability of community-facing journalism and supporting news organisations serving underserved and underrepresented communities.<sup>220</sup>

#### 4.3.1.2 New Jersey Civic Info Consortium – Government/Philanthropy Fund

The California scheme in part reflects the structure of a fund established in 2018 by the State of New Jersey under the *Civic Info Bill NJ A3628*<sup>221</sup> in response to the “growing local news crisis”. Funded in part by government appropriation, but also able to attract philanthropic funding, this fund describes itself a “first in the nation consortium”<sup>222</sup> which “funds initiatives to benefit the State’s civic life and meet the evolving information needs of New Jersey’s communities”. The Bill was developed through the work of nonprofit advocacy organisation Free Press, and a “broad coalition of thousands of residents, universities, journalists, lawmakers and more.” Establishing the Consortium, a partnership of six New Jersey higher education institutions,<sup>223</sup> the Bill provided for an initial USD \$20m government appropriation and USD\$1m annually for startup funding, grant making and administration.

#### Decision making

**Board:** Unlike for the California scheme, the 15-member Board is a decision-making rather than advisory body, with a legislated role to set strategic priorities, metrics and accountability measures and approve grants. The Board structure is notable for the diversity of political appointments and required skills:

- Two members appointed by the Governor, not from the same political party;
- One member appointed by the President of the Senate and one by Minority Leader of the Senate;
- One member appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly and one appointed by the Minority Leader of the General Assembly;
- Five members (no more than three from the same political party) appointed by the president of each member’s university with backgrounds or experience in journalism, media or technology;
- Four members (no more than two from the same political party) appointed by a majority vote of the nine above members, of which:
  - one member represents the media sector;
  - one member represents the technology sector; and
  - two members, not employed by the State or a member university at the time of their appointment who have “demonstrated a record of commitment to public service and understand the importance of media and technology to the State’s future”.<sup>224</sup>

The Executive Director must employ program officers who are “experienced practitioners with a strong understanding of the media or civic technology fields” and represent “the State’s racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic diversity within any limits allowed under law”. Grants officers are responsible for “soliciting, recommending, and processing grant proposals”, public engagement and evaluation.

#### Transparency

The Consortium’s required annual report to government lists all applicants, approved applicants, grant amounts, matching funding/in-kind contributions and status report on funded activities. The Board is required to hold annual public hearings

215 Senate Bill No 155 California Civic Media Act 2025 (California).

216 Ibid, Section 12100.162 (d)(2).

217 Ibid, Section 12100.162 (d)(1).

218 Ibid, Section 12100.162 (e)(1).

219 Ibid, Section 12100.162(e)(4).

220 Ibid, Section 12100.161(a)(4) and (5).

221 *Bill NJ A3628 (New Jersey)*, <https://www.billtrack50.com/BillDetail/969532>

222 New Jersey Civic Info Consortium, *About the Consortium*, <https://njcivicinfo.org/about/>

223 College of New Jersey, Montclair State University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Rowan University, Kean University, Rutgers University

224 Section 4, Bill NJ A3628 (New Jersey), <https://www.billtrack50.com/BillDetail/969532>

in the northern, central and southern regions of the state as a forum for the Board to report on how the public funds were spent and to gather public input on the Consortium's mission, whether it is meeting it, and what it should be. Public input from this process is required to be used to assess whether metrics and grants process need change.

### Recipient obligations

Grantees are trained and assisted in impact tracking, to be used for assessment throughout their grant period. Their proposals must outline goals or expectations and they must provide narrative and financial final reports, which may be used as the basis of renewal invitations. They must find and maintain a university partnership with a Consortium member university through the grant period.<sup>225</sup>

### Independence measures

Grants include a statement that the recipient is “independent from the influence of a State, a member university, and any other grantor or contributor of funds or outside source”. Grantors or contributors of funding must acknowledge in writing that their grant or donation does not entitle them to “dictate or influence the content of any work” produced by the grantee.<sup>226</sup>

## 4.3.2 US proposed State taxes on digital platforms to support news

### 4.3.2.1 Hawaii

Hawaii's HB 1458 was introduced in January 2025, but did not advance from committee to a vote during that legislative session.<sup>227</sup> The bill's tax-and-redistribute model imposes a digital advertising tax on major social media and search engine platforms deriving revenue from Hawaii-based audiences or content and distributes it through a legislated “broadband and digital equity special fund”, which is to be used to fund initiatives including support for local journalism initiatives.<sup>228</sup>

### Decision making

The Department of Taxation is to be responsible for the rules for implementing and enforcing the tax, including determining the proportion of advertising revenue subject to the tax.<sup>229</sup> The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism will receive an appropriation to be distributed and be responsible for determining expending the appropriated sums from the special fund.<sup>230</sup> The bill itself does not outline any further transparency or reporting requirements.

### 4.3.2.2 Washington State

The State of Washington's bill, SB 5400 *Supporting Local News Journalism 2025* is in the form of a “local journalism investment surcharge”.<sup>231</sup> This means it is a tax on specified digital platforms, including search engine and social media companies which use local content.<sup>232</sup> At time of writing, the bill is in committee. Funds generated support the creation of the Washington Local News Sustainability Program in the Department of Commerce,<sup>233</sup> a grant scheme designed to support employing “news journalists covering civic affairs in underserved communities to deepen understanding of complex community issues and policies”.<sup>234</sup> Grants are distributed based on number of journalists employed.

To finance the news grants program, the bill proposes a 1.22% quarterly “local journalism investment surcharge”<sup>235</sup> on the gross income of large social media and search engine companies.<sup>236</sup> The surcharge is capped at \$6m per year per company.<sup>237</sup> The Department can audit or investigate whether a company is liable to pay the tax.<sup>238</sup> The Department's director would be responsible for grants to eligible news journalism providers<sup>239</sup> and “may consult with civic affairs leaders and local news leaders in developing this program”.

225 New Jersey Civic Info Consortium, *Grants*, <https://njcivicinfo.org/grants/>

226 *Bill NJ A3628 (New Jersey)*, <https://www.billtrack50.com/BillDetail/969532>

227 *Hawaii House Bill 1458 (Hawaii)*. The bill is intended to amend Chapter 206S of the Hawaii Revised Statutes <https://legiscan.com/HI/bill/HB1458/2025>.

228 *Ibid*, Section 2.

229 *Ibid*, Section 2.

230 *Ibid*, Section 4.

231 *Senate Bill 5400 (Washington)*. The bill is intended to amend the Revised Code of Washington, a compilation of all permanent laws in force. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsu/mmary/?BillNumber=5400&Year=2025&Initiative=false> Section 7(1)(a)

232 *Ibid*, Section 7(2)(b) “Covered platform” definition.

233 *Ibid*, Section 2(1).

234 *Ibid*, Section 2 (2).

235 *Ibid*, Section 7(1).

236 *Ibid*, Section 7(1)(d).

237 *Ibid*, Section 7(1)(b).

238 *Ibid*, Section 7(4).

239 *Ibid*, Section 2(1).

### Recipient obligations

Recipients will be required to submit progress and final reports to the Department of Commerce “as requested by the Department”.<sup>240</sup>

#### 4.3.2.3 California Tax and Revenue Code amendment Bill No SB1327

This proposed Tax and Revenue Code amendment intended to tax digital platforms on “data extraction” from digital advertising within California.<sup>241</sup> Introduced before the 2024 *Journalism Preservation Act*, it did not proceed after the Google deal.

Its provisions are interesting for their use of specified grants to non-profit news organisations, university fellowships and journalist training. Revenue was to go to a Data Extraction Mitigation Fee Fund, created in State Treasury by the legislation<sup>242</sup> to fund both journalism tax credits and:

- up to USD\$25 million in grants to eligible non-profit news organisations (50% to smaller organisations with less than ten full time employees);
- USD\$10 million to University of California, Berkeley, California Local News Fellowship program for grants to expand coverage of local public affairs throughout the state; and
- USD\$5 million annually to establish a program for fellowships for “hiring, training and career progression for journalists and media professionals from historically underrepresented and marginalized backgrounds...” to “strengthen newsroom and ownership diversity for ethnic and underserved communities”.

The Franchise Tax Board, as grant administrator, was empowered to make necessary regulations.<sup>243</sup> Other distribution, transparency and accountability mechanisms were not specified in the bill.

### 4.3.3 US news bargaining schemes with alternative distribution methods

At least four US states have attempted some sort of collective news bargaining legislation for digital platforms, which are mostly aimed at the largest platforms. While some of the US state bills have been withdrawn or stalled, others remain in train. The following summarises key elements, with a focus on the diverse range of proposed distribution mechanisms, including around transparency.

Unlike Australia’s NMBC, which is primarily focused on individual deals between news organisations and digital platforms (with a provision for sectoral collective bargaining), the key mechanisms are collective bargaining processes (and related arbitrations) involving all eligible news organisations through notification processes, similar to the Canadian *Online News Act* scheme.

While the State bills share many aspects, they also have significant differences in their mechanisms.

#### 4.3.3.1 California Journalism Preservation Act AB 886

This bill, which was withdrawn after the Google deal, appears to have broadly influenced the framework for the US State bills outlined in the following sections. It provided for covered digital platforms<sup>244</sup> to make either:

- a legislated payment, for which the total amount was to be specified in this section (had it passed) and distributed to news organisations according to a legislated formula<sup>245</sup>; or
- a payment determined through a “final arbitration process” with “digital journalism providers”<sup>246</sup> (i.e. eligible news organisations), which is a form of collective bargaining.<sup>247</sup>

The amount to be paid was based on the digital advertising revenue of the “covered” digital platforms<sup>248</sup> to compensate digital journalism providers<sup>249</sup> for accessing their California-facing online services. The required amount was either as

<sup>240</sup> Senate Bill 5400 (Washington).

<sup>241</sup> CA SB1327 2023, *Income Taxation: Credits: Local News Media: Data Extraction Transactions (California)* <https://legiscan.com/CA/text/SB1327/2023>

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, inserting Section 19608 to the *Revenue and Taxation Code*. See section 19608(c).

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, Section 19608(4).

<sup>244</sup> *Journalism Preservation Act 2024 (California) (Bill)* [https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=202320240AB886](https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202320240AB886) Defined in section 3273.80(c).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, Section 3273.81(a)(2).

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, Section 3273.81(b).

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, Section 3273.81(a).

<sup>248</sup> Defined in Section 3273.80(c).

<sup>249</sup> Defined in Section 3273.80(d).

set out in the legislation or as determined through “final arbitration process” by an “approved claims administrator” to be engaged by the platform, which would decide the “percentage of the covered platform’s advertising” revenue to be paid.<sup>250</sup>

Digital platforms were required to compile and post on their websites a list of “digital journalism providers” (i.e. eligible news organisations) they had accessed for a California audience in the preceding 12 months.<sup>251</sup>

If they went to arbitration, digital journalism providers seeking payments were required to jointly participate<sup>252</sup> in a final offer arbitration process with a covered platform “to determine a single percentage of the covered platform’s advertising revenue from which distributions will be allotted”. (In contrast, platforms were prohibited from participating jointly in an arbitration process). Parties could also reach agreement through a legislated mediation process.

### Distribution formula

The distribution formula was proportionate to numbers of news journalists and freelancers employed by each digital journalism provider for the primary purpose of producing news for a California audience<sup>253</sup> with a minimum percentage (1%) to be allocated to smaller digital journalism providers.<sup>254</sup> This applied whether the determination was the statutory amount or reached through the arbitration process. Payments to a particular digital journalism provider could be reduced by “any compensation received by a digital journalism provider through a commercial agreement for access to content by the covered platform”.<sup>255</sup> However, the formula could not include “any value conferred on any digital journalism provider by the covered platform for distributing or aggregating its content” other than payments under commercial agreements”.<sup>256</sup> That is, only monetary compensation could be offset.

### Distribution responsibility and process

Distributions (“journalism usage payments”) could be made directly to the digital journalism provider or through the administrator,<sup>257</sup> who was required to be “well qualified to perform the distribution and has administered multiple settlements in the State of California that comply with complex civil litigation class action settlement guidelines in at least three state or federal courts in California”.<sup>258</sup> Digital journalism providers that disagreed with the determination of their eligibility or the amount could seek review through a specified dispute resolution process.

### Transparency

The legislation required the administrator to meet certain requirements and publish on its website an annual report “detailing non-confidential operations of the fund” including recipient names and payments.<sup>259</sup> As outlined below, there were also significant transparency obligations for recipients.

### Recipient obligations

The legislation not only made the digital platforms accountable for payment but also imposed mandatory spending requirements on how payments (“journalism usage fees”) could be used by the recipients, i.e. the news organisations. Recipients were required to justify how they had spent the payments from the digital platforms:

- for larger organisations, digital journalism providers were required to spend at least 70% of all payments received under the scheme on news journalists and support staff;
- organisations with five or fewer employees had to spend at least 50%.<sup>260</sup>

Within 30 days of arbitration award, judgment or settlement with the platform, the digital journalism provider was obliged to prepare a written compliance plan specifying how they intended to meet the 70% (or 50%) spending requirement, any expected hiring of news journalists or support staff and any planned adjustments to compensation, and

250 Journalism Preservation Act 2024 (California) (Bill).

251 Ibid, Section 3273.83(a).

252 Ibid, section 3273.84(a)(2) “by a majority vote (one vote each), participating digital journalism providers shall establish rules and procedures to govern decision making regarding the arbitration proposal or any settlement reached pursuant to subdivision (c) and each eligible digital journalism provider shall be entitled to one vote”.

253 Journalism Preservation Act 2023-24 AB 886 (California) Section 3273.81(a).

254 Ibid, 3273.81. There was also a revenue threshold and other eligibility requirements for small publishers.

255 Ibid, 3273.82(f) and 3273.84(g)(3)(C).

256 Ibid, 3273.84(g)(2).

257 Ibid, 3273.82.

258 Ibid, 3273.82(a).

259 Ibid, 3273.82(b).

260 Ibid, 3273.86.

they were also required to deliver the report to the journalists, support staff and their relevant representatives.<sup>261</sup> Additionally, within one year, and annually, the digital journalism provider had to issue a report including attestation of compliance with spending requirements, total amount of journalism usage fees received from the digital platform, names of each paying platform, detailed explanation of how funds were spent, including any unspent, and staffing data (e.g. the number of journalists and support staff hired or terminated in that year). This report was required to be published online in a text-searchable format, and provided to journalists and support staff, relevant representatives and paying platforms.<sup>262</sup>

Critically, platforms could withhold payments until the digital journalism provider submitted a copy of the report to them and published a copy of the report online.<sup>263</sup> While the detailed acquittal, attestation and transparency provisions described are mirrored in some of the other State bills, the latter provision allowing withholding of funds for failure to report on spending appears to be unique.

#### **4.3.3.2 Illinois Journalism Preservation Act (bill)**

After a previous similar bill did not succeed, this bill was introduced in early 2025 and was later sent to the Senate's Assignments Committee.<sup>264</sup> This effectively paused its progress while its sponsor, Senator Stadelman, determined how to proceed. He was reported to be trying to work with other states to "see if we can find a common path or commonality and maybe increase our leverage".<sup>265</sup>

While the Illinois bill appears to be broadly based on the California news bargaining scheme, a key difference is it does not specify the amount of a total payment as an alternative to bargaining,<sup>266</sup> so annual payment amounts are to be determined by "final offer" arbitration<sup>267</sup> or as a negotiated settlement. However, like the California scheme, it specifies a minimum amount (no less than 1%) for small publishers (which meet thresholds) and a formula proportionate to number of employed journalists of each eligible recipient "producing content in Illinois that was accessed by a platform".<sup>268</sup> Eligible digital journalism providers that want to receive a "journalism usage fee" under the Act would be required to give notice to a covered platform, certifying their eligibility and identifying their websites that carry digital content, as well as notifying their journalists, support staff and representatives. The digital platform may make distributions directly or through an approved claims administrator.<sup>269</sup>

#### **Recipient obligations**

Comparably to the California bill, the Illinois bill obliges digital journalism providers to meet specific spending requirements (70% on news journalists and support staff and 50% if fewer than five employees) and to prepare a compliance plan on how it will comply with the spending requirement, hiring of journalists/support staff and other matters.<sup>270</sup> Recipients must also attest compliance with the above plan and disclose total "journalism usage fee" payments received, names of the paying platforms, details of how funds were spent and staffing data,<sup>271</sup> and publish an annual report online in a text-searchable format as well as delivering copies of the report to their journalists and support staff, relevant employee representatives, and the platforms that paid the journalism usage fees.

#### **4.3.3.3 Oregon Journalism Protection Act (bill)**

The Oregon model is also based on news bargaining, with platforms having the option to sidestep this by making a direct payment to a dedicated fund. Introduced in early 2025, the bill (known as SB 686), was narrowly rejected (15/14) in the Oregon Senate in June 2025 but referred back to a Committee. It is reported that its sponsor plans to reintroduce it in a future session.<sup>272</sup>

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261 Journalism Preservation Act 2024 (California) (Bill).

262 Ibid, 3273.87(b).

263 Ibid, 3273.87 (c).

264 *Journalism Preservation Act SB 1732 (Illinois)* <https://www.ilga.gov/Legislation/BillStatus?DocNum=1732&GAID=18&GA=104&DocTypeID=SB&LegID=160756&SessionD=1145> see also Senate Rule 3-9 in Senate Resolution 0004 (Illinois). [https://www.ilga.gov/Uploads/Rules/Senate/104th\\_Senate\\_Rules-SR4.pdf](https://www.ilga.gov/Uploads/Rules/Senate/104th_Senate_Rules-SR4.pdf)

265 Carroll, H., (2025, May 5) The Big Tech News Bills, *Northwestern Medill Local News Initiative* <https://localnewsinitiative.northwestern.edu/posts/2025/05/05/states-legislation-for-big-tech-journalism-compensation/>

266 *Journalism Preservation Act SB 1732 (Illinois)*,

267 Ibid, Section 25.

268 Ibid, Section 20. Smaller publishers still need to meet certain thresholds of digital presence.

269 Ibid, Section 23(a).

270 Ibid, Section 35(a).

271 Ibid, Section 40.

272 Nanguneri, S. (2025, June 25). "Oregon Senate rejects bill making big tech pay for local journalism as session end nears" *Oregon Capital Chronicle* <https://oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2025/06/24/oregon-senate-rejects-bill-making-big-tech-pay-for-local-journalism-as-session-end-nears/>

The Bill requires online platforms to enter into agreements with digital journalism providers to compensate them for access to their content and offers digital platforms different ways to comply:<sup>273</sup>

- either pay a specified total amount to news providers they have accessed in the state:
  - for platforms with 6 billion or more worldwide monthly active users, at least \$104m each year to digital journalism providers; and
  - for those with fewer than 6 billion, at least USD\$18m per year; or
- enter into a “final offer” arbitration process (which includes compulsory mediation) to determine a percentage of the digital platform’s advertising revenue to pay to digital journalism providers.

Platforms that elect to make the legislated payment are required to distribute:

- 10% to the Oregon Civic Information Consortium established in the legislation<sup>274</sup>; and
- 90% to newsrooms, with 1% allocated to small newsrooms.<sup>275</sup>

The mechanism differs from the other Bills in prohibiting digital platforms from accessing the content of eligible digital journalism providers and creating a right for a digital journalism provider to bring a civil action against a covered platform<sup>276</sup> with specified damages (USD\$1000 per access in violation of section 2).<sup>277</sup> This right does not apply if there is an arbitration, settlement or payment as above.

### **Decision making (Oregon Civic Information Consortium)**

To manage the 10% under the specified payment provision, the Bill proposes creating a non-profit Oregon Civic Information Consortium<sup>278</sup> with a Governor-appointed, Senate-confirmed board of:

- members employed in the news media industry or Oregon journalistic publications;
- 3 members representing nonprofit or community organisations;
- 1 member representing a labour union for working journalists;
- 1 member from a society of professional journalism;
- 1 member representing the digital technology sector;
- 1 member representing University of Oregon; and
- 1 representing another Oregon public university.<sup>279</sup>

The Board sets the Consortium’s priorities, oversee grant-making metrics, and is required to hold annual public hearings on fund use. It is empowered under the Bill to distribute grants supporting projects to expand reliable local news, strengthen journalism networks and training, and advance public interest information initiatives. It must also give “attention to underserved areas and meeting the information needs of low-income and racial and ethnic communities”<sup>280</sup>

Grant agreements issued by the Consortium are to include clear goals, accountability measures, and protections for editorial independence to protect against funders potentially influencing content.<sup>281</sup> They must include a statement that the grantee is “independent from the influence of the state, a member university, an outside source and any other grantor or contributor of funds”. Grantors or contributors (including digital platforms) must acknowledge in writing that the grant or donation does not entitle them to “dictate or influence the content of any work” produced by the grantee.<sup>282</sup>

The Consortium’s executive director is responsible for grant processes. Criteria and opportunities are published online and program officers “are experienced practitioners with a strong understanding of the local journalism field, community-based organisations and fiscal and grant management”.<sup>283</sup>

<sup>273</sup> *Senate Bill 686 (Oregon)*, <https://legiscan.com/OR/bill/SB686/2025>, Sections 2(b) and 5.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid*, Section 10.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid*, Section 2(b)(2). No less than 1% goes to those who would receive less than USD\$25,000 under proportional distribution by number of journalists and freelancers.

<sup>276</sup> *Senate Bill 686 (Oregon)*, Section 2.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid*, Sections 2(a)(1)(b)(7) and s(b)(1). This right does not apply if there is arbitration, settlement or the specified payment.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid*, Section 10.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid*, Section 10(2).

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, Section 12(2).

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid*, Section 12(1).

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid*, Section 12(3).

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid*, Section 11(1).

## Transparency

The bill proposes that digital platforms be required to compile and publish on their website a list of digital journalism providers that produced online content that the platform accessed for an Oregon audience in the previous 2 years.<sup>284</sup> The Consortium will be required to hold annual public hearings in different geographical regions of the state, providing a forum to report on the public funds and gather public input on its mission, and whether it is achieving it, and whether the grant-making metrics or grants process needs change.<sup>285</sup> This is similar to the model used in New Jersey for its government/ philanthropic grants program. The Consortium is also required to produce and publish annual reports on grants for the Governor and legislative committees, which may include recommendations around legislation, regulation and policies.<sup>286</sup>

## Recipient obligations including transparency

Like the California and Illinois bills, digital journalism providers would be required to spend 70% of funds on their news journalists and support staff (50% for smaller organisations, with a legislative formula for valuing freelancers) and issue compliance plans on how they intend to meet their requirements.<sup>287</sup> Within a year of settlement and then annually digital journalism providers will have to publish an online text-searchable annual report with a compliance attestation addressing spending requirements, total amount received, how the funds were spent and staffing data.

### 4.3.3.4 New York State bill

New York Senate Bill 440, introduced in February 2025,<sup>288</sup> is currently with the Consumer Affairs and Protection Committee. Its provisions are broadly similar to the other US State news bargaining bills, but more limited. For example, it does not include requirements about how funds are to be spent.

## 4.4 Nordic countries

Public funding for news support in the Nordic countries has been established for decades and regarded by some as a model of diversity and sustainability, as well as generally ranking highly on the World Press Freedom Index.<sup>289</sup> Direct funding schemes sit alongside other forms of support including tax exemptions. While regulated by national acts and government ordinances, subsidy schemes in the European Union countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) need European Commission approval. The schemes of non-EU members (Norway and Iceland) are approved by the EFTA Surveillance Authority (ESA).<sup>290</sup> Some countries have multiple funding streams. Sweden, for example, has five different subsidy schemes covering press subsidies (print and digital) with others for general news media regardless of distribution platform.<sup>291</sup> The following sections look at long-term schemes in Denmark and Norway, both of which contain distinctive elements.

### 4.4.1 Denmark

The Danish Media Agreement 2023-2026, which is a parliamentary media agreement laying out Denmark's policy framework, provides €540m of direct support to written media annually.<sup>292</sup>

#### *Review of government funding for media*

The Agreement required evaluation of editorial production subsidies in 2024. The Danish Committee on Future Media Support released its report in October 2025, which is to be considered in negotiations for the next Media Agreement.<sup>293</sup>

The report addresses fragmentation and inconsistency in the current model and recommends four separate schemes be replaced with an overall basic support model with the same conditions for all journalistic media, prioritisation of local, regional and independent media, platform neutrality and other principles. Its key principles are democratisation (covering more media and benefiting more citizens), futureproofing and simplification. The report proposes eight mainly objective criteria, with a preference for cash subsidies over other mechanisms. Key changes proposed include that subsidies be tied

284 Senate Bill 686 (Oregon).

285 Ibid, Section 10(7).

286 Ibid, Section 10(9).

287 Ibid, Section 6(1).

288 *New York Senate Bill 4401* is an amendment to the *General Business Law (New York)*, <https://legiscan.com/NY/bill/S04401/2025>

289 Bennett, E., Rae, M. Hess, K., The Australia Institute Nordic Policy Centre (2023, January) *Supporting Media Diversity: Nordic Lessons* <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/P1353-NPC-Media-Diversity-Web.pdf>

290 Harrie, E., Nordicom, (2022, October) *Direct Media Subsidies to News Media – a Nordic Overview* <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/faktablad/factsheet-2022-1-direct-media-subsidies-to-news-media.pdf>

291 Henningsen Consulting and Technopolis Group for the European Commission, (2024), *Public Financing of the News Media in the EU*, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4a26df80-bbff-11ee-b164-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

292 Denmark, Ministry of Culture (2025, October 29) *Committee Proposes New Media Support: Simple, Future-Proof and for the Benefit of Danes* <https://kum.dk/aktuelt/nyheder/udvalg-foreslaar-ny-mediestoette-enkel-fremtidsikret-og-til-gavn-for-danskerne>, accessed in English with Google Translate.

293 Ibid.

to what qualifying news media invests in editorial work, prioritising local/regional titles and freestanding independent titles by weighting their reported investment (to address news deserts), a cap on funds for any single news media title (with a larger cap for local/regional and independent titles) and a limit of no more than 35% of an organisation's funding, to avoid subsidy dependence. It also suggests expanding the scope of innovation support.<sup>294</sup>

#### *Existing schemes*

The current Danish *Media Support Act 2013*,<sup>295</sup> which replaced a previous print-based scheme in 2014, is an example of the current schemes. Subsidies are granted to private printed news media and “written internet-based media” in the form of editorial production support, project support or redevelopment support. To be eligible, outlets must be “independent” and have a “responsible editor” and minimum editorial staff, broad audience, deal primarily with “political, societal and cultural themes and publish at least 10 times a year”. Grants are in proportion to editorial costs, with a capped subsidy. There are supplementary subsidies for independent nationwide media with more frequent publication and lower circulation. Establishment grants are available, aimed at the organisation being “self-sustaining after the end of the support period”.

#### **Decision making**

The above Act provides for the Minister of Culture to make detailed rules on when a news outlet is considered independent, the design of subsidy schemes, reporting and auditing, among other things. While the scheme is administered by the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces, distribution is managed by the Media Board appointed by the Minister to process grant applications, with seven members appointed for four-year terms.

Section 12 provides that the chairman must be a lawyer and:

members of the Board shall collectively represent expertise within news reporting, business economics, the media market, journalistic innovation and media consumption, as well as the democratic function of the media and technological development regarding the types of media covered by the Act.

One member can be appointed on recommendation of the Danish Media Association and another on recommendation of the Danish Union of Journalists. The Board's decisions are final.<sup>296</sup>

#### **Transparency**

The legislation requires the Board to publish an annual report on its activities.

#### **4.4.2 Norway**

Due to the nature of the newspaper market, with many small and local newspapers, Norway has had government direct support schemes for newspapers since 1969.<sup>297</sup> Its current Act on *Financial Support for the Media (Media Support Act)* came into force on 1 January 2021<sup>298</sup> with the purpose to:

facilitate a diversity of editor-controlled journalistic media throughout the country by contributing to predictable financial frameworks for the media's operations and strengthened independence in the management of media support.

The Act<sup>299</sup> provides for:

- production subsidies for news and current affairs media “to stimulate a diversity of text-based news and current affairs media throughout the country, with a broad journalistic content aimed at the general public”;
- subsidies for Sami news and current affairs media aimed at the Sami population and intended to promote Sami languages;
- innovation and development grants especially in small, local media;
- grants to local audio and visual media.

<sup>294</sup> The report raises interesting issues around “front-end” design of media support schemes, which are outside the scope of this paper but may be worthy to explore in other contexts.

<sup>295</sup> Lov om mediestøtte - *Media Supmultilaterport Act 2013 (Denmark)* Law No 1604 of 26/12/2013, as amended in 2023, <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2013/1604> (*Media Support Act*).

<sup>296</sup> *Media support Act*, section 14.

<sup>297</sup> Nordicom, (2022, October) *Direct Media Subsidies to News Media – a Nordic Overview* <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/faktablad/factsheet-2022-1-direct-media-subsidies-to-news-media.pdf>

<sup>298</sup> *Media Support Act*.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid Sections 5-8.

## Decision making

The Norwegian Media Authority makes distribution decisions and monitors the use of grant funds. Interestingly, there is an explicit legislated statement of independence around decision making: it states that such decisions are made independently of the King.<sup>300</sup>

Decisions can be appealed to the Media Complaints Board. The production subsidy (which is the largest) can be reviewed by a Board, with members appointed by the Ministry for Culture.

## 4.5 Korea

There are at least nine subsidy schemes for news organisations,<sup>301</sup> including several legislated support schemes for news media, in Korea, which are interesting for the way they use independent organisations in their distribution, their decision-making composition and legislated statements around independence. The Act of Promotion of Newspapers establishes a registration system for print and online newspapers and news services and also ensures financial support is available to the news media through the establishment of a special purpose fund. (There are comparable registration requirements in the Act on Promotion of Periodicals.)

Since reforms in 1987, Korea's Constitution includes guaranteed freedom of speech and the press, subject to restrictions on violating the rights of others or undermining public morals or social ethics.<sup>302</sup>

### 4.5.1 Press Promotion Fund

This fund was specified in law in 2010 through Article 34 of the *Act on the Promotion of Newspapers*.<sup>303</sup> Article 34 establishes a Press Promotion Fund made up of government and other funds, which can be used for specified types of assistance to local news.<sup>304</sup> The current Act includes guarantees of the “freedom and independence of the press for newspapers and online newspapers”<sup>305</sup> alongside obligations to “respect the dignity and value of human beings and the fundamental system of democracy”<sup>306</sup> as well as obligations around the conduct of newspapers.

## Decision making

The Press Promotion Fund is established, managed and operated by the Korea Press Foundation (which itself is established by the legislation)<sup>307</sup> through a Press Promotion Fund Management Committee. The legislation provides that a Presidential Decree prescribes matters “necessary for raising the Press Promotion Fund, and management and operation thereof and for the organization, operation, etc. of the Press Promotion Fund Management Committee.”<sup>308</sup>

## Transparency

The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism measures and evaluates the outcomes of the Fund's use and projects and notifies the KPF of results. MCST determines outcome objectives and standards for evaluation after consultation with the KPF. The Presidential Decree determines evaluation methods, which include annual performance evaluation against targets, goals and evaluation criteria.<sup>309</sup>

The evaluation team may include a certified public accountant and a lawyer, each with at least five years of practical experience, and a person experienced in investigation and evaluation of funds. There is a further process for evaluation of funds generally by the Minister of Economy and Finance under the National Finance Act; the process requires the Minister of Economy and Finance to report the results to the State Council and National Assembly.<sup>310</sup>

300 *Media Support Act*, Section 11: The King cannot instruct the Norwegian Media Authority or the Media Appeals Board regarding decisions in individual cases, nor may the King change the Norwegian Media Authority's or the Media Appeals Board's decisions or make decisions in a case that comes under their authority according to regulations pursuant to this Act.

301 Koskie, T., Wilding, D. (2026) “Subsidising the Value of News” in Flew, T., Stepnik, A., Koskie, T., *Valuing News – Digital Platforms and Journalism Futures*, Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, pp97-124.

302 *Constitution of the Republic of Korea (1987)* Articles 21(1) and 21(4).

303 *Act on the Promotion of Newspapers (2009 Amendment Effective 2010) (Republic of Korea)* English translation at [https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/lawView.do?hseq=42723&lang=ENG](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=42723&lang=ENG) This replaced a previous Newspaper Development Fund enacted under the *Newspaper Act 2005 (Act on Guarantees of Freedom and Functions of Newspapers etc)*. The Press Promotion fund integrated the Newspaper Development Fund with Korea Press Foundation funds.

304 *Ibid*, Article 35.

305 *Ibid*, Article 4.

306 *Ibid*, Article 3.

307 *Ibid* Article 29. The KPF created in this legislation replaced a previous KPF and other sector entities. See KPF, (n.d.) *Introduction*, [https://www.kpf.or.kr/eng/intropage/intropageShow.do?page\\_id=c1dbc730923e428d8d373a8b9d7baa46](https://www.kpf.or.kr/eng/intropage/intropageShow.do?page_id=c1dbc730923e428d8d373a8b9d7baa46)

308 *Ibid*, Article 26(3).

309 *Ibid*, Article 37. See also Enforcement Decree of the Act on the Promotion of News Communications (Presidential Decree) amended as at 30 July 2024 Articles 32 and 33. English translation.

310 *National Finance Act (Republic of Korea)*, Article 82. See Korea Legislation Research Institute *States of the Republic of Korea* English translation [https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng\\_service/lawView.do?hseq=40922&lang=ENG](https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=40922&lang=ENG)

The fund was most recently evaluated in 2023.<sup>311</sup>

#### 4.5.2 Local Newspapers Development Fund

The *Special Act on Assistance in Development of Local Newspapers* which was first enacted in 2004 and most recently amended in 2023<sup>312</sup> has the purpose of contributing “to the diversification of public opinion, realization of democracy and balanced development of communities, by laying a foundation for the sound development of local newspapers.”<sup>313</sup>

The Act provides for State and local governments to “guarantee that local newspapers enjoy freedom of newsgathering and reporting and shall respect their autonomy”<sup>314</sup> and requires both to formulate policies to “nurture and support” local newspapers and take necessary “legislative, fiscal and financial measures.”<sup>315</sup> The Minister for Culture Sport and Tourism is required to form triennial plans for local newspaper development on the advice of a Committee for Local Press.<sup>316</sup>

The Act establishes the Local Newspapers Development Fund, made up of government funds, donations and other Presidentially decreed sources.<sup>317</sup> The Minister is responsible for management and operations, which they may delegate to a “press-related” entity prescribed by Presidential Decree.<sup>318</sup>

#### Decision making

The Committee for Local Press administers the fund. Apart from a role in policy making, it is responsible for selecting eligible recipients under legislated criteria. The Minister can appoint up to nine people “with extensive expertise and experience and of high standing, in connection with the development of local communities and local newspapers” to the Committee, which must include:<sup>319</sup>

- three people recommended by “the chairperson of the Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee of the National Assembly in consultation with the executive secretary of each negotiating party”;
- one person recommended by the Korean Association of Newspapers, the Journalists Association of Korea and the Korean Society for Journalism & Communication Studies; and
- two people “for whom three years have passed since they retired after having held offices in a local newspaper for at least 10 years”.

Public officials, party members (up to two years after leaving) and newspaper publishers are not eligible.<sup>320</sup>

#### Transparency

The Minister is responsible for evaluation, supervision and publishing results. The fund was evaluated in 2025.<sup>321</sup>

#### Recipient obligations

Recipients report to the Minister within three months of completion. Fraudulent receipt of a subsidy or using it other than for designated purposes is punishable by imprisonment or a fine.<sup>322</sup>

## 4.6 United Kingdom

The UK has a long history supporting public interest media, primarily through indirect support such as the BBC’s licence fee (and the BBC in turn funding a Local Democracy Reporting Service), tax incentives or government advertising placements. The Government established the Cairncross Review in 2018 to consider the sustainability of “high quality journalism in the UK”. Among its findings were that given market failure in the supply of public interest news, public intervention may be the only remedy. It also recommended the expansion of direct financial support for public interest news and the establishment of a new Institute for Public Interest News, noting that:

311 Republic of Korea 2023 *Fund Preservation Evaluation Report* pp 133-143 [https://www.moef.go.kr/com/bbs/detailComtPolbbsView.do?menuNo=5020200&searchNttId=MOSF\\_00000000064510&searchBbsId=MOSFBBS\\_000000000039](https://www.moef.go.kr/com/bbs/detailComtPolbbsView.do?menuNo=5020200&searchNttId=MOSF_00000000064510&searchBbsId=MOSFBBS_000000000039) (English translation accessed using Google Translate)

312 *Special Act on Assistance in Development of Local Newspapers Act (2004) (Republic of Korea)*.

313 Ibid, Article 1.

314 Ibid, Article 3.

315 Ibid, Article 4.

316 Ibid, Article 6.

317 Ibid, Article 13.

318 Ibid, Article 14.

319 Ibid, Article 8.

320 Ibid, Article 10-2.

321 Republic of Korea Ministry of Economy and Finance 2025 *Fund Existence Evaluation Report* pp 103-105 [https://www.moef.go.kr/com/bbs/detailComtPolbbsView.do?searchBbsId=MOSFBBS\\_000000000039&menuNo=5020200&searchNttId=MOSF\\_000000000074384](https://www.moef.go.kr/com/bbs/detailComtPolbbsView.do?searchBbsId=MOSFBBS_000000000039&menuNo=5020200&searchNttId=MOSF_000000000074384)

322 Republic of Korea, *Special Act on Assistance in Development of Local Newspapers Act (2004)*, Article 20.

if new business models fail adequately to support public-interest news, and especially local democracy reporting, the Institute might become a rough equivalent to the Arts Council, channelling a combination of public and private finance into those parts of the industry it deemed most worthy of support.<sup>323</sup>

On the latter, the government response at the time acknowledged its value but stated that “it is not for government to lead on this issue.”<sup>324</sup>

#### 4.6.1 Pilot Future News Project

In 2019-2020, the UK Government ran a one-year Future News Pilot Project Fund to test “new approaches to public interest news so communities across England have access to reliable and accurate news about issues that matter”, which was a further recommendation of the Government-commissioned Cairncross Review on the future of journalism.<sup>325</sup>

Though funding came from Government, the Fund itself was managed and distributed by an existing independent not-for-profit, Nesta.<sup>326</sup> Recipient requirements included not only record-keeping but willingness to participate in program evaluation of impact up to three years after the grant.<sup>327</sup>

#### 4.6.2 Proposal for alternative models of governance

In 2023, a coalition of UK organisations - Media Reform Coalition, Public Interest News Foundation and Institute of Welsh Affairs - proposed a model for a £100m fund managed through an original model of “participatory grant-making” used elsewhere in philanthropy but not traditionally for media. It suggested governance should involve grassroots input by those affected - for example Citizens Assemblies and Citizens Panels - which have been used in other types of UK Government decision making.<sup>328</sup> Interestingly, aspects of this form of citizen input exist in the New Jersey Civic Consortium Model and the proposed Oregon Civic Consortium model.

## 4.7 South Africa

Established in legislation in 2002, with funding commencing in 2004,<sup>329</sup> South Africa’s Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) is a “statutory development agency” which describes itself as partnership between the South African Government and major print and broadcasting companies “to assist in ... developing community and small commercial media in South Africa.” It offers separate grant streams for community broadcast (television and radio), community print publications and small commercial print publications (print may include digital).

The legislation establishes the agency and provides that it “is independent and must be impartial and exercise its powers and perform its duties without fear, favour or prejudice, and without any political or commercial interference.”<sup>330</sup> It further provides that the agency “must not interfere in the editorial content of the media.”<sup>331</sup> Its objectives are to “promote development and diversity in the South African media throughout the country” consistently with Constitutional freedom of expression, including freedom of the press and other media.<sup>332</sup>

#### Decision making

Its six-member Board is appointed by the President on recommendation of the National Assembly, with the candidate shortlist to be published. Candidates must be citizens and resident, not a parliamentary member or party office bearer, not convicted of corruption or other crime or otherwise incapacitated.<sup>333</sup> The Board is responsible for prescribing detailed selection criteria for community media projects, small commercial media projects and research projects and for evaluating all projects.<sup>334, 335</sup>

323 Cairncross, C. (2019, February 12) *Cairncross Review: A Sustainable Future for Journalism* [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c6bfcd4e5274a72b93331d/021919\\_DCMS\\_Cairncross\\_Review\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c6bfcd4e5274a72b93331d/021919_DCMS_Cairncross_Review_.pdf) at p11.

324 UK Government (2020, January 27) *Government Response to the Cairncross Review: a Sustainable Future for Journalism* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-cairncross-review-a-sustainable-future-for-journalism/government-response-to-the-cairncross-review-a-sustainable-future-for-journalism> While this form of direct funding was rejected, the UK offers other forms of non-direct media funding, including VAT relief.

325 Ibid.

326 Established in 1998 by the UK Government National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, In 2012 Nesta became an independent social innovation organisation.

327 Nesta, *Future News Pilot Fund*, (n.d.) <https://www.nesta.org.uk/project/future-news-fund/>

328 Media Reform Coalition, Public Interest News Foundation and Institute of Welsh Affairs (2023) *Funding Journalism Using Participatory Decision Making* [https://www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/\\_files/ugd/cde0e9\\_f2d9ecdbebac4f82826995d14b9dc017.pdf](https://www.publicinterestnews.org.uk/_files/ugd/cde0e9_f2d9ecdbebac4f82826995d14b9dc017.pdf)

329 Established under *the Media Diversity and Development Agency Act No 14 of 2002 (South Africa)*.

330 Ibid, Sections 2(1), (2) and (4).

331 Ibid, Section 2(5).

332 Ibid, Section 6.

333 Ibid, Sections 4 and 5.

334 Ibid, Section 19.

335 Further criteria for the Board are set out in the Regulations in terms of section 22 of the *Media Development and Diversity Agency Act*, Vol 460, Pretoria, 10 October 2023 No 25570 *Media Diversity and Development Agency Act No 14 of 2002 (South Africa)*.

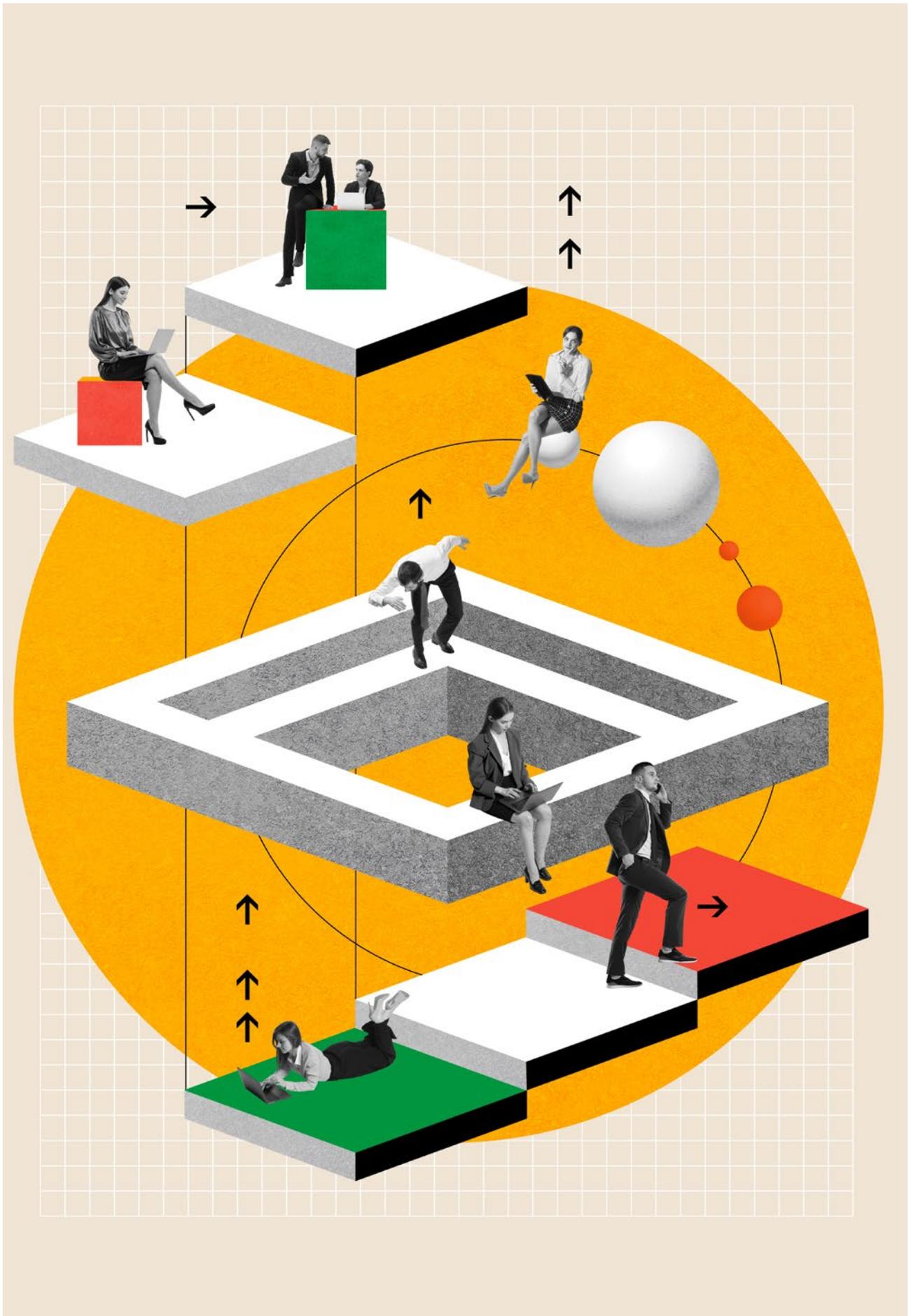
## Transparency

Grant recipients are published on the agency's website.

This appears to be the only statutory special purpose media funding agency of its kind among the above examples.

## 4.8 Key takeouts

- Government direct funding for public interest news is common across many parts of the world, including some very longstanding programs.
- Issues of diversion of revenue, shifts in audience behaviours and the emergence of news deserts are common across many jurisdictions.
- Legislated funding programs, rather than policy measures, are common in many jurisdictions, though the legislated mechanisms for distributing those funds vary significantly.
- Several countries offer a range of different funding models alongside each other – for example, Canada offers direct funding managed by a government department, direct funding managed by industry associations and a news bargaining model which has allowed for the process of establishment of an industry-led body to manage funding distribution. Similarly, Nordic countries commonly offer a range of different subsidy programs.
- In terms of structural independence, funding decision makers vary, including government departments, independent industry associations and special purpose organisations. However, decision making at minister level is uncommon.
- The use of industry-, experience- or expertise-based advisory panels is more common than not across the jurisdictions surveyed, across a range of funding schemes.
- Detailed transparency provisions are similar across most grants processes.
- Recipient obligations share many common aspects, but there are significant differences, with examples of more stringent requirements including longer term evaluation, return of funding and penalties for misuse of funds.
- News bargaining models in Canada and in US state bills include some optional mechanisms that are more akin to grants processes, including requirements around the use of funding.
- While there is significant diversity in approaches and structures, many elements of these mechanisms could be adaptable and applicable in the Australian context.



# 5. INTERNATIONAL NGO FUNDING MECHANISMS FOR PUBLIC INTEREST NEWS

In light of the News MAP policy<sup>336</sup>, it is useful to consider the possible role of philanthropic grant distribution alongside direct funding. The distribution mechanisms of NGOs also contain aspects that may be relevant to the distribution of direct funding or other legislated funding mechanisms, including measures for independence, expert assessment and transparency.

As context, philanthropic support for journalism has occurred in Australia at various times from various sources including through the Minderoo Foundation, Myer Foundation and the Local and Independent News Association<sup>337</sup> and formerly through the Judith Nielson Foundation, but is more widespread in the US,<sup>338, 339</sup> the UK and Europe.<sup>340</sup>

Digital platforms have also established their own schemes: Meta set up the Australian News Fund (administered by the Walkley Foundation),<sup>341</sup> while Google has been a major funder<sup>342</sup> of news through its Digital News Innovation Fund (DNI) in parts of Europe and other programs including support offered in Australia. There are many examples across the world; the following selection offer interesting counterpoints and unusual elements in their governance or funding mechanisms.

## 5.1 Austria/Germany/Switzerland: Media Forward Fund (MFF)

This not-for-profit, transnational endeavour was founded in July 2024 by a conglomerate of independent news organisations, foundations and impact investors. It distributes funding to applicants in Austria, Germany and Switzerland, with the aim to “strengthen journalism and thus democracy” and a focus on underserved media audiences.”<sup>343, 344</sup>

Its objective is to support the growth of independent, public interest news journalism and viable business models with a view to achieving long-term sustainability in the sector.<sup>345</sup> Developed with start-up funding from the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, it now obtains funding from philanthropic contributions from commercial partners. In November 2025, the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) became its first public sector partner, in a program for upskilling public interest journalism focused on science and data.<sup>346</sup> The MFF’s General Funding Line is designed for small and/or not-for-profit media organisations that “serve the common

336 Australian Government, *News Media Assistance Program: Government’s Role in News and Journalism* (Report, December 2024) page 15. <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/news-media-assistance-program-governments-role-in-news-and-journalism-december2024.pdf>

337 Local and Independent News Association, *Microgrants*, <https://lina.org.au/grants/microgrants/>

338 US\$534m of philanthropic funding was on journalism in 2020. Public Interest News Foundation (2020, March 31) *Submission to UK Select Committee on Digital, Culture, Media and Sport*, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/107669/pdf/>

339 US philanthropy for journalism is summarised in Schiffrin, A., Clifford, H., Adjin-Tettey TD., *Saving Journalism 2: Global Strategies and a Look at Investigative Journalism* <https://www.kas.de/documents/283221/283270/Saving+Journalism+2+++Global+Strategies+and+a+Look+at+Investigative+Journalism.pdf/a8ec2655-5636-8d69-00e5-e698e76c3845?version=1.0&t=1642517860288>

340 Other countries offer tax credits for philanthropic funding of public interest media, which improves the prospects of attracting donations.

341 Meta Australian News Fund, <https://www.walkleys.com/valuing-journalism/meta-australian-news-fund/>

342 Pichal, S. (2020, October 1) “Our \$1 billion investment in partnerships with news publishers”, *The Keyword Google Blog*.

343 Allianz Foundation (2025) *Media Forward Fund: Supporting Public Interest Journalism*. <https://allianzfoundation.org/media-forward-fund/>

344 Media Forward Fund, (n.d.) <https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/>

345 Ibid.

346 Media Forward Fund (2025, November 11) *First Federal Ministry Joins Media Forward Fund*, <https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/news/bmftr-und-mff-starten-upskilling-programm>

good” and in which “revenues produced by [the] work are predominantly generated with the intention of strengthening journalism in its social mission of promoting public education and strengthening democracy.”<sup>347</sup> To receive funding, applicants must be journalistic organisations headquartered in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland that “serve the common good”. This means through work “generated with the intention of strengthening journalism in its social mission of promoting public education and strengthening democracy.”<sup>348</sup>

### Decision making

Applications are first reviewed by an Expert Council of 14 voluntary media and journalism specialists (six women and eight men) from Austria, Germany and Switzerland, who “contribute additional expertise from their respective fields during the evaluation of funding applications”. A team of independent jurors appointed by the fund’s Advisory Board decides on successful applications.<sup>349</sup> Two jurors are from Germany and two from Switzerland and one from Austria, typically from media and journalistic backgrounds, with the list of names publicly available. Organisations where jurors are employed are excluded from applying to the MFF.<sup>350</sup>

### Transparency

Media Forward Fund publicises a detailed breakdown of funded applicants on its website.<sup>351</sup>

### Recipient obligations

Recipients are required to submit a mid-term report halfway through the funding period and a final report at the end, both detailing narrative and financial progress.<sup>352</sup> There are at least five structured check-ins during the two-year cycle, starting with a kick-off and ending with a joint workshop to review milestones, lessons and financials. Journalistic content produced with for-profit partners must be publicly available for free; collaborative works must grant the public free non-commercial use rights.

## 5.2 South Africa: Digital News Transformation Fund (DNTF)

Launched in 2025, the DNTF describes itself as a new “first of its kind” partnership between Google and the Association of Independent Publishers.<sup>353</sup> The fund is intended to support initiatives that “modernise newsrooms, expand audiences and diversify income streams” including “inventive commercial experiment”. Its inaugural Board was announced in August 2025, including a group of media leaders (founders and CEOs) from a diverse range of media, followed by its first call for proposals. It describes its governance model as “built to ensure transparency, fairness and long-term impact”, with a specialist Board providing strategic oversight. A management company, Tshikululu Social Investments (TSI) is fund manager for the organisation’s set up, compliance, due diligence, grant adjudication support, disbursement, financial and program management, reporting and strategic oversight. Its commercial terms are confidential.

### Decision making

To “protect independence and integrity”, the fund says that Google is not involved in adjudication, oversight or decision-making bodies and AIP’s role was limited to co-founding the fund. Funding decisions are made independently by an Adjudication Committee, using a Board-approved scoring matrix, following a pre-screening by TSI. Decisions are ratified by the Oversight and Advisory Board. A statement on the inaugural round described the process as comprising “an independent panel of sector experts” whose final decisions “were reached through full-pack reviews and plenary discussions to ensure fairness and alignment with the Fund’s mission.”<sup>354</sup>

### Transparency

Funding decisions are published on the Fund website including beneficiary, project title and short description, approved amount and “non-sensitive outcomes once complete”. A Media Release was issued on 26 November 2025 describing the process for the first grant cycle. It appeared to respond to “recent commentary” in reaffirming the process as “independent, transparent and aligned with the Fund’s governance framework”.<sup>355</sup>

347 Media Forward Fund, (n.d.) *FAQs: Funding Eligibility*. [https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/\\_\\_home\\_\\_-2](https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/__home__-2)

348 Ibid.

349 Media Forward Fund (n.d.) *About the Media Forward Fund* <https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/about-us>

350 Ibid.

351 Media Forward Fund (2025) *Our Grantees*. <https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/grantees>

352 Media Forward Fund (n.d.) *FAQs: Working Together*. [https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/\\_\\_home\\_\\_-2](https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/__home__-2)

353 DNTF Digital News Transformation Fund (2025, August 25) *Media Release* <https://dntfund.org.za/digital-news-transformation-fund-opens-for-applications-on-25-august-2025/>

354 DNTF (2025, October 27) *“Digital News Transformation Fund Concludes Adjudication for First Funding Call”*. <https://dntfund.org.za/digital-news-transformation-fund-concludes-adjudication-for-first-funding-call/>

355 DNTF (2025, November 26) *“The Adjudication Process Revealed”*. <https://dntfund.org.za/the-adjudication-process-revealed/>

### Recipient obligations

Grant recipients are required to submit biannual progress reports, provide financial reports (which may include audited or independently reviewed statements), submit a financial impact report aligned with agreed deliverables and participate in case study development for sector learning.<sup>356</sup>

## 5.3 Canada Journalism Futures Fund

Describing itself as the “first of its kind” in Canada, the *Journalism Futures Fund* was created to support “independent journalism to strengthen civic life and democracy in Canada”. Its inaugural round in September 2025, the outcomes of which are to be announced in February 2026, is aimed at supporting “small-to-medium organizations that produce impactful journalism, engage their audiences, are led by members of communities that are underserved in Canadian media, and have a strong vision for their future”.<sup>357</sup> It is funded by philanthropic foundations and individual donors, who have no say in funding decisions.

### Decision making

After a due diligence review of an introductory application, all applications are assessed by independent reviewers against specified evaluation criteria. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a full application (and receive an honorarium to do so). An independent jury of “individuals drawn from the Canadian journalism sector” will review full applications, and the shortlisted applicants are invited to jury interviews.

## 5.4 Journalismfund Europe

This Brussels-based “independent, non-profit intermediary organisation”<sup>358</sup> is aimed at strengthening European democracy “by facilitating independent, cross-border investigative journalism and by bringing donors and journalist or media together without endangering the journalist’s independence.”<sup>359</sup> It grew out of the Pascal Decroos Fund for Investigative Journalism established in 1999, focused on Dutch-language media. Funding is sourced from international foundations and the Flemish Government and is available to professional journalists.

### Decision making

Each grant program has its own jury, who are “experienced individuals with expertise in investigative journalism and the media”. Decisions are made independently, based on evaluation criteria. Jury members are anonymous until they leave the jury to ensure “the independence of the jury process and the confidentiality of the investigations”.<sup>360</sup> Juror names are published at the end of their term (maximum 4 years). Jury members are selected by Journalismfund Europe “independently of donors and other parties” and are bound by confidentiality and conflict of interest policies.

### Recipient obligations

Grant recipients are required to report the impact of their story once published<sup>361</sup> and commit to work with the fund on communication strategy to “maximise outreach and possible impact”. Grant agreements specify the form of funding credit (to be published in the medium/media that distribute the project).<sup>362</sup> Grantees and editors are responsible for legal screening prior to publication.

In the context of a disclaimer of liability for content, the guidelines also contain a statement that “Journalismfund will have no influence on the content, presentation or editorial process of the project”.<sup>363</sup>

## 5.5 Key takeouts

- NGO funding models for public interest news are increasingly prevalent, with several commencing operations in the last year or so and some involving public/private investment.
- Some exist in countries where there is also government funding support for public interest news.
- Jury processes are common, using industry expertise.
- These funds often publish explicit independence statements to the effect that funding decisions are made separately from donors.

356 DNTF (n.d.) FAQ page <https://dntfund.org.za/faqs/>

357 Journalism Futures Fund/Fonds Avenir Medias, (n.d.) <https://inspiritfoundation.org/journalism-futures-fund/>

358 Journalismfund Europe (n.d.) <https://www.journalismfund.eu/>

359 Journalismfund Europe (n.d.) *About Us* <https://www.journalismfund.eu/about-us>

360 Journalismfund Europe (n.d.) *Jury* <https://www.journalismfund.eu/about-us/organisation/jury>

361 Journalismfund Europe (n.d.) *General Rules and Criteria – Grant Programmes for Individuals* [https://www.journalismfund.eu/sites/default/files/GeneralGrantRules2020\\_0.pdf](https://www.journalismfund.eu/sites/default/files/GeneralGrantRules2020_0.pdf)

362 Ibid, p 5.

363 Ibid, p 6.



# 6. AUSTRALIAN STATUTORY FUNDING BODIES: CULTURAL/ACADEMIC

While this report focuses primarily on news and media-related funding, comparable distribution mechanisms exist in related Australian public interest sectors. The three examples below deal broadly with governance structures of bodies managing large amounts of money to be distributed to individuals and organisations in certain sectors in order to support significant public policy goals, but through processes that are independent from government influence. Each has mechanisms for transparent decision-making processes, which are important when distributing significant pools of funding, as is the acquittal of funds disbursed.

These types of models may also offer elements which could be adapted for the distribution of funds for public interest news, particularly if mechanisms such as the NBI or News MAP were to become responsible for disbursing large amounts of funding in the longer term. The examples considered below use a variety of mechanisms including multi-step grant assessments, tax offset and co-investment models, each administered independently from the government funding source.

## 6.1 Australian Research Council (ARC)

The ARC is governed by the *Australian Research Council Act 2001* (Cth) (ARC Act). About \$1b annually is allocated to its National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) to distribute to higher education institutions, publicly funded research organisations and their researchers. The NCGP is split broadly into two streams: Discovery and Linkage. Discovery supports individual researchers and research teams to “build ‘new’ knowledge and a knowledge-based economy”<sup>364</sup> and Linkage “promotes national and international research partnerships between researchers and business, industry, community organisations, and other publicly funded research agencies”.<sup>365</sup>

364 ARC (n.d.) *Discovery Program*. <https://www.arc.gov.au/funding-research/funding-schemes/discovery-program>

365 ARC (n.d.) *Linkage Program*. <https://www.arc.gov.au/funding-research/funding-schemes/linkage-program>

Grant allocation methods and the organisation's structure were refreshed following a 2022 independent review, which found that previous ministerial interventions in administration of grant schemes had eroded trust and created concerns about political interference in research. This led to recommendations for stronger governance around decision making. The Government agreed to the review's recommendations (other than one agreed in-principle) and implemented them in amendments to the ARC Act<sup>366</sup> which came into effect on 1 July 2024. As a result of the changes:

- the Board approves grants for most research projects. Subsection 10(2) of the ARC Act confirms independence of decision making, stating “the Minister must not give a direction in relation to the making of a decision by the Board about whether or not to give a particular funding approval”;
- the Australian Research Integrity Committee was established;<sup>367</sup>
- an annual appropriation has replaced the former capped special appropriation; and
- the Minister approves funding guidelines (on the ARC's advice) but subject to Parliamentary scrutiny. The Minister retains the power to approve certain nationally significant investments.<sup>368</sup>

A policy review of the NCGP is underway. At time of writing, the final report had been completed by the ARC and was under consideration by the Government.<sup>369</sup>

## Decision making

**Board:** The ARC has a newly appointed board with specified powers, functions and membership structure, with the CEO appointed by the board following consultation with the Minister. It has a clarified purpose and alignment of fund administration with comparable local and international research agencies. When appointing board members, the Minister must be satisfied of their “substantial experience or expertise; and professional credibility and significant standing” in a field or in research management.<sup>370</sup>

Under the ARC Act, the Minister establishes advisory committees to provide guidance and advice about ARC activities.<sup>371</sup> In addition to the ARC Advisory Committee, there is a new ARC Indigenous Forum that will “advise the Board on initiatives to strengthen Indigenous leadership in the research sector, build opportunities for Indigenous-led and focused research, and support career pathways for emerging Indigenous researchers.”<sup>372</sup> A new operational structure includes Academic Directors providing “strategic policy and operation advice and expertise in specific funding schemes”.

**Grants:** Most grant decisions are made through a staged process:<sup>373</sup>

- **Peer review:** Proposals are selected through a peer review process involving academic experts (Detailed and General Assessors) who assess applications against relevant criteria, including by scoring and ranking. During that process, applicants lodge a rejoinder and a Selection Advisory Committee (SAC) ranks the applications. The appeals process in most Grant Guidelines is limited to administrative matters, not merit.<sup>374</sup>
- **Board decision:** The SAC puts forward its list to the ARC Board (or the Minister for Education for designated schemes) to make the final decision.
- **Ministerial power:** While decision-making powers generally reside with the Board and the expert panels, the Minister can reject grants for national interest reasons such as security, defence or international relations (s 47(8) ARC Act).
- **Requests not to assess:** Applicants may request the ARC named assessors not assess their application.

## Transparency

366 *Australian Research Council Amendment (Review Response) Act 2024* (Cth) <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2024A00008/latest/text>

367 Australian Government, ARC and NHMRC, *Australian Research Integrity Committee Framework* <https://www.arc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-06/ARIC%20Framework%202024.pdf>

368 The ARC's *Annual Report 2024-25* suggested the amendments had had a positive impact.

369 ARC (n.d.) *Policy Review of the National Competitive Grants Program* <https://www.arc.gov.au/engage-us/consultations/policy-review-national-competitive-grants-program> and ARC (2025, December 10) *NCGP Update and Upcoming Scheme Opportunities* <https://www.arc.gov.au/news-publications/media/news-network-messages/ngcp-update-and-upcoming-scheme-opportunities>

370 Part 3, Division 1 Clause 12(3) *ARC Act* (Cth).

371 The Government explained its reasoning for the change in the following statement: Clare, J., Minister for Education (2024, June 26) “New independent board to end the days of political interference in the Australian Research Council” <https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/new-independent-board-end-days-political-interference-australian-research-council-0>

372 ARC (2025) *Annual Report 2024-25*, p vi. <https://www.arc.gov.au/about-arc/corporate-information/corporate-reporting/annual-report#arc-annual-report-202425>

373 ARC (n.d.) *Overview of ARC Funding Process* <https://www.arc.gov.au/funding-research/peer-review/overview-arc-funding-process>; ARC, *The Peer Review Process* <https://www.arc.gov.au/funding-research/peer-review/assessment-process>

374 Ibid.

The ARC Act amendment specified more prescriptive requirements for the ARC’s annual report, including disclosure of Ministerial or other directions given to the Board, information about the nature of the employment of researchers who have received funding, and other matters required by the Minister.<sup>375</sup>

### Recipient obligations

Applicants enter into a Grant Agreement with the ARC, including payment schedule, requirements around funding use, specified personnel, audits, monitoring and reporting.<sup>376</sup> Each scheme has its own published grant guidelines. Generally, grant funds must be used only for eligible project costs and recipients must manage and certify expenditure in end of year, final and (if required) post-project reports.<sup>377</sup> Recipients may be asked for an independently produced auditor statement and to complete an annual assurance questionnaire.

## 6.2 Creative Australia

Creative Australia (formerly the Australia Council) operates under the *Creative Australia Act 2023* and its current work is aligned with the National Cultural Policy, *Revive: A Place for Every Story, a Story for Every Place*. As the Government’s primary arts funding body, with a \$318m budget for 2025-26,<sup>378</sup> it provides funding across the arts sector for individual creators, community-based organisations, large-scale cultural projects, First Nations initiatives, and for international promotion.

### Decision making

**Board:** Creative Australia is governed by the Australia Council Board, which oversees the organisation’s overall strategy, policy, and funding programs. Members are appointed by the Minister, who must be satisfied “that the person has appropriate qualifications, knowledge, skills or experience” and must have regard to “the desirability of the Board having members who have skills, experience or involvement in the arts”.<sup>379</sup>

The *Creative Australia Act 2023* also establishes other governing and advisory bodies, including the First Nations Board, Music Council Australia, Writing Australia Council and Creative Workplaces Council.<sup>380</sup> The First Nations Board, founded in September 2024, is responsible for Creative Australia’s investment and funding decisions into First Nations arts and culture; its members are appointed by the Minister following consultation with the Board. Members of the three councils are also appointed by the Minister. Creative Australia’s Board has the power to establish specialist committees to advise or assist it and the overall organisation’s functions.<sup>381</sup>

**Grants:** Creative Australia assesses grant applications through three main methods: peer assessment, industry advice, and staff assessment, to ensure decision making is arm’s length from government based on artistic merit and published criteria:

- Peer assessment panels of five to nine individuals are selected by Creative Australia from a pool of experienced artists and arts professionals. They review and rank applications, usually for high-volume programs, according to artform, with representation across regions, cultures, genders, and abilities.<sup>382</sup> Final budget allocation is approved by Creative Australia’s executive team.
- Creative Australia staff, its executive team, and in some cases the Australia Council Board or a “co-investment partner” decide which applications will be funded. Industry advice from sector experts can be sought on strategic or large-scale investment programs. Staff assessment is used for some programs, including those that are “comparatively simple”.<sup>383</sup>

Applicants may request a review of a grant decision if they believe their application was affected by incorrect advice from staff or not assessed according to the published process or criteria.<sup>384</sup> Eligible cases can be referred for procedural (but not artistic merits) review by the Decisions Review Committee including at least three Board members.

375 *Australian Research Council Amendment (Review Response) Act 2024 (Cth)*, s 65A.

376 ARC (n.d.) *Grant Agreements* <https://www.arc.gov.au/manage-your-grant/fundinggrant-agreements>

377 For example, see the guidelines, agreement and other documents at: Australia Government (n.d.) *Discovery Projects Expression of Interest for Funding Commencing in 2027* <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/ViewDocuments?GoUId=c35ald2c-1a57-42fb-933c-13ba7010fcb7>

378 Creative Australia (2025) *Entity Resources and Planned Performance* (Portfolio Budget Statements, 2025), [https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-26\\_infra\\_pbs\\_10\\_ca.pdf](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-26_infra_pbs_10_ca.pdf) p253.

379 *Creative Australia Act 2023 (Cth)* s 22(3)(4).

380 *Ibid*, Pts 3A, 4, 4A and 5.

381 *Ibid* s 61.

382 Creative Australia (n.d.) *How We Assess Applications: Industry Advice*, <https://creative.gov.au/investments-opportunities/assessment/how-we-assess-applications>

383 *Ibid*.

384 Creative Australia (n.d.) *Appeals: Appealing a Grant Decision*, <https://creative.gov.au/investments-opportunities/appeals>

## Transparency

Creative Australia provides a searchable list of grants from 2015 to date on its website.<sup>385</sup> This includes recipient name, funding area and project category, decision date, and amount awarded. Its Annual Report lists its peer assessors, industry advisors, board and committee members.

## Recipient obligations

Successful recipients acquit their grants with a final report, outlining expenditure and the artistic outcomes of the funded activity, and may also be required to submit regular progress reports (e.g. for projects with multi-year funding).

## 6.3 Screen Australia

Screen Australia is the Government's national screen agency under the *Screen Australia Act 2008*, operating at arm's length from the Government in its day-to-day funding decisions. Its 2025-26 budget is approximately \$94m.<sup>386</sup> Overseen by a Board, the organisation invests across development, production and marketing for narrative and documentary projects, with dedicated programs for games, First Nations storytelling and industry development. It also administers the Producer Offset, a refundable tax rebate. (Other offsets are administered by the Department of Communications.)

## Decision making

**Board:** Members are appointed by the Minister and comprise a chair, deputy and three to seven members.<sup>387</sup> The legislation does not specify qualifications, skills or diversity, however the website indicates board members "have a range of expertise across artistic practice, arts management, business, management, public policy, corporate governance and administration, regional issues, gender, multicultural and First Nations community participation in the arts, finance, philanthropy, legal affairs, corporate strategy and research."<sup>388</sup>

A First Nations Board, with "a broad range of skills and expertise and representation across artforms" oversees investment in First Nations arts and culture.<sup>389</sup>

**Grants:** Grant applications for most programs involve a competitive two-stage process where applications are initially reviewed by the organisation's Program Operations team to determine eligibility and then assessed by Screen Australia delegates who may use industry specialists comprised of practising filmmakers or other industry professionals.

Larger schemes may include a panel review or further industry advisor input or specialist/cultural assessors. Funding recommendations are made at Screen Australia investment meetings with relevant senior or executive level staff (which may be chaired by the CEO). Projects containing potentially contentious or sensitive subject matter may be referred to the board for decision.<sup>390</sup> There is no merits appeal; decisions can only be reviewed for procedural integrity.

## Transparency

The organisation publishes guidelines, decision criteria and outcomes with recipient, project title and amount.

## Recipient obligations

Payments are typically in tranches tied to milestones. Each funding agreement sets out reporting requirements and acquittals, including progress updates, deliverables, and final acquittal reports to demonstrate how funds were spent and outcomes achieved. For larger projects (usually those with funding above \$1m), recipients are required to supply a full independent audit of expenditure, while smaller projects may submit a statutory declaration verifying financial statements. Failure to provide acquittal materials or outstanding reports can affect future funding eligibility.<sup>391</sup>

385 Creative Australia (n.d.) *Awarded Grants* <https://creative.gov.au/investments-opportunities/awarded-grants>

386 Screen Australia (2025), *Entity Resources and Planned Performance* (Portfolio Budget Statements, 2025) [https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-26\\_infra\\_pbs\\_23\\_screen.pdf](https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2025-26_infra_pbs_23_screen.pdf) p495.

387 Part 3 *Screen Australia Act 2008* (Cth).

388 Screen Australia (n.d.) *Who We Are*, <https://creative.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are>

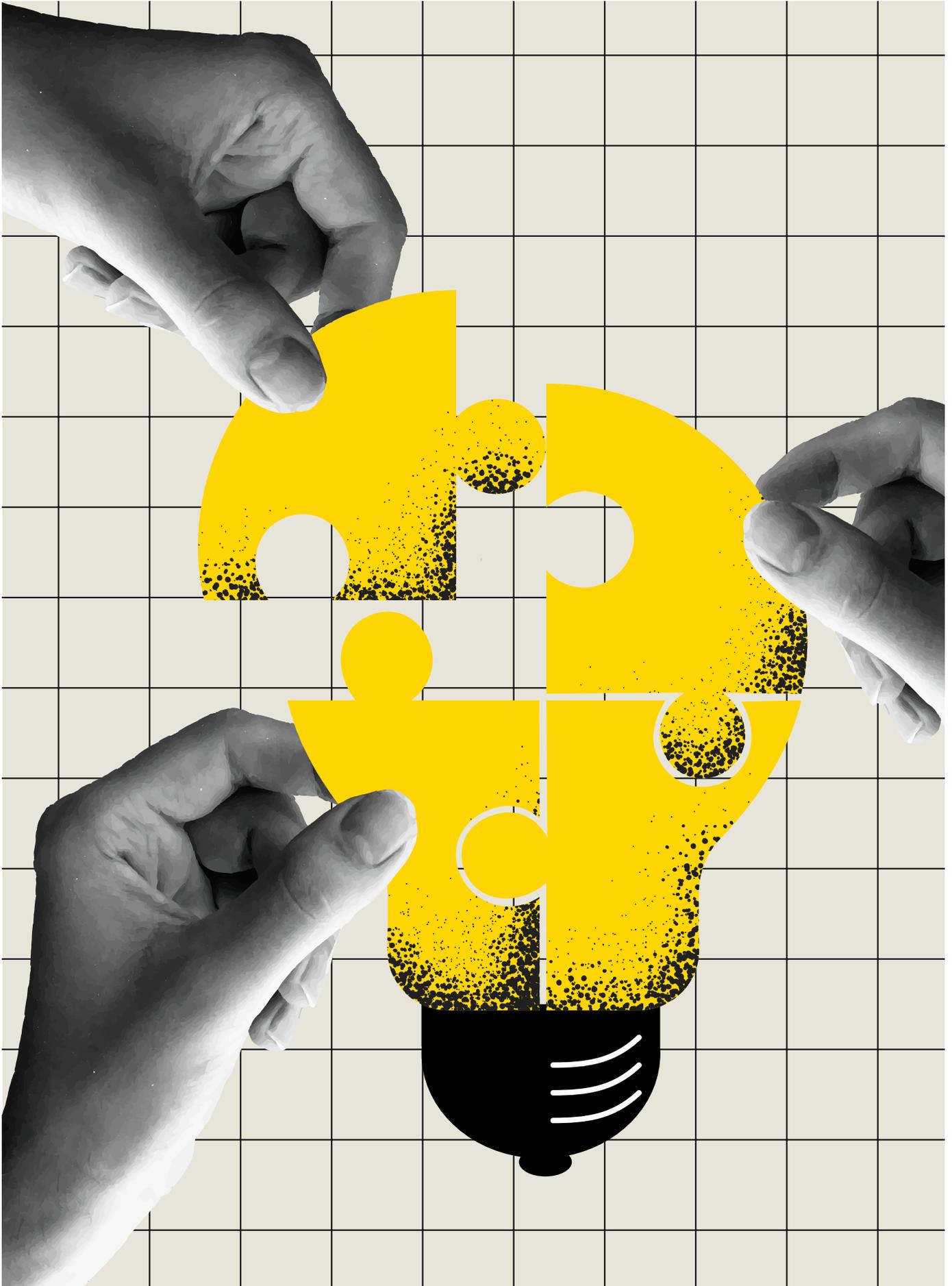
389 Ibid.

390 Screen Australia (n.d.) *Narrative Content Production Funding Guidelines* <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding-and-support/narrative-content-production/narrative-content-production-guidelines>

391 Screen Australia (2025) *Information for Recipients* <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/screen-australia/about-us/doing-business-with-us/information-for-recipients>

## 6.4 Key takeouts

- While not news specific, these mechanisms are examples of comparable arm's length processes for managing funds for public interest purposes.
- The reliance on industry or internal expertise relates to some extent to the types of decisions, which are often competitive grants programs requiring specialist or subject-matter knowledge.
- Although some involve commercial agreements, there is generally transparency around aspects of the funding and universal requirements around detailed acquittal.



# 7. OBSERVATIONS ON AUSTRALIAN AND INTERNATIONAL FUNDING MECHANISMS

This review of selected Australian and international examples of news funding interventions reveals a diverse range of ways in which public funding is used to support the media, in Australia and across many countries, with equal diversity and nuance in the distribution mechanisms themselves. In the past few years, many countries have reviewed and refreshed their news funding models, including in response to the digital platforms environment.

To different degrees, the news support schemes examined in this report all reflect similar core values that should apply to any use of public funds – a clear link to policy, transparency of administration and decision-making process and acquittals to ensure funds are used for their intended purposes - but with a heightened need to ensure that both the mechanisms and perceptions about how they operate are designed to maintain journalistic or editorial *independence* as a key value.

Public funding of media by democracies is universally anchored in government policy which recognises the role of independent news media as a public good, and a diversity of news media voices as central to healthy citizen engagement. How these policies are realised and implemented reflects the diverse regulatory, cultural and economic context in each jurisdiction, as shown in the examples considered in this report. However, despite the range of ways in which direct news funding is delivered, the surveyed jurisdictions show that policies around localism, protecting legacy media, and addressing news deserts and underserved audiences are common across them.

While some measures are specific to the legislative or regulatory frameworks of particular jurisdictions, many if not most of the news funding interventions (or their elements) could be adaptable to the Australian environment. Optimising funding distribution is, however, not just about trying new structures. The design of funding is also about what is appropriate and proportionate to the program and about risks associated with the funding. For example, the News MAP policy framework aims for programs “designed to minimise burdens while promoting trust”.

The purpose of this report is not to advocate for any model, but to explore them. The key findings below are arranged by the three focus areas around each intervention explored in this report – decision making, transparency and recipient obligations - and themes that emerge from them.

## 7.1 Decision making

### Structures

This section looks at the types of entities involved in making news funding decisions.

In Australia, the structures for news funding decisions have noticeably evolved and responsibilities for them have shifted since first introduced in the late 2010s.

The original measures were delivered through a legislated program, while the more recent programs are driven through policy rather than legislation. The first program was overseen by the ACMA and used an independent advisory board; subsequently, the Minister was decision-maker with advisory and Department of Communications support; and, in the most recent programs, government departments have decision-making responsibility. Across the seven programs, there have been three different categories of decision maker: the Minister; the regulator; and departmental officials.

More recently, the Department of Communications itself has not been the decision maker. The 2024 and 2025 news funding grants are administered by the Department of Science, Industry and Resources (DISR), with the Department of Communications listed as policy entity. The 2025 multicultural media grant is administered by another department: Home Affairs. However, the Department of Communications oversees the administration of the Community Broadcasting Program grant and engages with the public broadcasters on their respective independent funding programs.

Similarly the role of advisory boards in making recommendations has receded: for the 2024 and 2025 journalist funding programs, decisions rest with Department of Industry, Science and Resources, and the guidelines allow for, but do not require, expert advice either from the Department of Communications or external advisers. The extent to which such advice is sought and used is not known. Ministerial decision-making is no longer the practice, as also reflected in the Australian academic and cultural funding sectors.

Internationally, many of the news funding examples (e.g. Austria, Nordic countries, Korea, South Africa, US states) remain as legislated government funding programs, delivered through varied statutory, regulatory or industry-led mechanisms. Others are carried out in other legislated contexts, such as some of Canada’s direct funding programs and its news bargaining exemption process, which allows digital platforms to meet their legislative obligations through payments to an industry-led fund. These schemes are reflected in the yet-to-be enacted US news bargaining-style bills which represent a range of hybrid news funding mechanisms.

The latter schemes in Canada and proposed in several US states are particularly interesting as they demonstrate that news bargaining processes can be multidimensional and offer the parties options – whether individual, collective or all of industry – for different forms of distribution whether direct from the platforms or through a process managed by a qualified administrator. Some of the funding is earmarked for public interest uses. In the case of the Oregon bill, a percentage goes to a civic news fund established in the same legislation, with an expert and representative board and a remit to focus on underserved and minority communities. These hybrid schemes are also tied to particular news policy imperatives, both by specifying a minimum percentage of digital platform contribution that must go to smaller news organisations, and by requiring news organisation recipients to spend minimum percentages on journalists and support staff.

Direct funding for news is not exclusively government or industry sourced: several jurisdictions have forms of hybrid public/private news funds, which are legislated with government appropriations but able to accept philanthropic and other fundings sources, such as the examples in Korea, New Jersey and the recent Californian legislation. This is also a key element of the current Oregon bill proposal. The News MAP policy framework foreshadows that such models are worthy of exploration.<sup>392</sup>

Funding schemes elsewhere in the world are designed around a range of different structures, each with elements specific to its jurisdiction or program. In the countries surveyed there was no example of minister as decision maker but a wide variety of decision-making bodies (See also *Appendix 1*). Examples of entities which decide on news funding distribution under existing schemes include those set out in Table 3, below.

**TABLE 3: NEWS FUNDING DISTRIBUTION ENTITIES**

Type of decision-making entity	Jurisdictions with examples of these
Government department	Australia, Canada, California
Regulator	Austria, Norway
Statutory entity	Korea, Denmark
Statutory corporation to oversee news funding	South Africa
Not-for-profit organisation established in funding legislation	New Jersey
Not-for-profit special purpose organisation	Australia, Canada
Not-for-profit industry body (existing)	Canada

<sup>392</sup> Australian Government (2024, December) *News Media Assistance Program: Government’s Role in News and Journalism*, p 15.

The majority of international examples reviewed are anchored in legislation which specifies decision-making processes for funding distribution. Canada stands out as an unusual example where, under legislation for certain broadcasting/online schemes, the regulator determines and approves funding policies, processes and amounts, but fund distribution governance is independently delivered by industry organisations and the regulator has no direct involvement in funding distribution.

South Africa was the only international example included in this report where there was a statutory corporation established in legislation to distribute funding to news organisations, which has similarities to the way in which the Australian Research Council, Screen Australia and Creative Austria operate as arm's length funders for their sector. However, Denmark and Korea have other types of funding distribution entities established in legislation.

The New Jersey civic information legislation creates a funding entity operating as a not-for-profit that manages both government and philanthropic funds. This appears to have influenced the model for the proposed Oregon funding structure under its news bargaining bill (which itself provides for hybrid streams of news-directed funding).

Though not direct funding from government (but disbursed under a legislative scheme) the US state news bargaining bills are also distinctive in that they provide for funding of news organisations either directly by the digital platform or through an administrator with specified qualifications. (The specified administrator can also distribute funds following arbitration processes under those schemes.)

The table in *Appendix 1* below details the types of key decision makers for selected local and international news funding programs, noting those which use advisory panels and where the structure is anchored in legislation. It further demonstrates that there is no single dominant way in which funding distribution is structured but that minister-level decision-making is less prevalent and the majority of structures reviewed involve some sort of advisory or expert input, even if they are not the final decision makers. One of the newest models, the Canadian Journalism Collective, is yet to be reviewed for its efficacy, but in an attempt to be representative it involves an unusually large and diverse board of 19 members. On the other hand, other Canadian distribution models (such as funds managed by existing industry associations) have operated for some years. The regulator's decision to engage them in the latest direct funding program may indicate that they provide a successful model.

Similarly, existing Australian models of funding distribution in media, cultural and academic sectors (CBF, ARC, Screen Australia, Creative Australia) may offer the starting point for the development of future news funding distribution models. Their current structures have been the subject of detailed reviews and, in their contexts, are broadly regarded as successful models for the local environment.

## Independence

Independence and arm's length decision making are key elements of news funding: all of the interventions reviewed in this report involve some sort of separation between state (or another funder) and the media recipient, and procedures to minimise conflicts of interest are standard. Examples are set out in Table 4, below. One of the most striking examples of arm's length distribution of government funds is the Canadian model, including the Local Journalism Initiative and Independent Local News Fund, where large tranches of funds are managed by industry associations which develop their own guidelines and governance for approval by the regulator, within the parameters of legislation and regulation around "equitable funding". The Canadian Government website expressly states that this is to "protect the independence of the press."<sup>393</sup> Other independence mechanisms include the following:

- legislated guarantees of independence, such as those in ABC and SBS Act or the Norwegian and Korean media legislation;
- explicit statements and guarantees, whether in legislation, funding guidelines or public announcements; and
- mandatory acknowledgment statements in funding program guidelines, for example those in the two most recent Australian journalism programs.

As an entity created for the purpose of administering funds paid in compliance with an order for exemption from news bargaining legislation, the Canadian Journalism Collective model has industry-led decision-making on the distribution of funds to news organisations, separate to its source of funding, which is Google. For other news funding NGOs, the use of independent juries and panels is common, and these organisations often publish detailed descriptions of their decision-making processes. In one case, jury members are anonymous until after their term, to "ensure the independence of the jury process";<sup>394</sup> in another, lists of jurors are published ostensibly for the same purpose.<sup>395</sup> NGOs commonly include clear statements about their independence from funders, for example, the recent South African Digital News Transformation Fund and the Canadian Journalism Collective, and some require donors to sign statements affirming this.

<sup>393</sup> For example, Government of Canada, Department of Canadian Heritage (n.d.) *Local Journalism Initiative* <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/funding/local-journalism-initiative.html>

<sup>394</sup> Journalismfund Europe (n.d.) *Jury* <https://www.journalismfund.eu/about-us/organisation/jury>

<sup>395</sup> Media Forward Fund (n.d.) *About the Media Forward Fund* <https://www.mediaforwardfund.org/en/about-us>

**TABLE 4: SELECTED EXAMPLES OF INDEPENDENCE PROVISIONS OR STATEMENTS**

Jurisdiction	Program/organisation	Mechanism	Statements
Australia	2024 News Media Assistance Program	Policy framework	<p>“Freedom of the press is an essential part of this framework.”</p> <p>“Where government decides that intervention is warranted, it must limit any imposition on the freedom of the press. Policy interventions must be proportionate to the risks and harms being addressed, and the benefits being sought. Any imposition on the freedom of the press must be minimised, and risks of undesirable consequences mitigated to the maximum reasonable extent.”</p>
	2024 News Media Relief Funding 2025 Journalism Assistance Fund	Grant statement	<p>“Support from the program covers part of the cost of employing journalists, but does not influence the production of specific content.”</p>
Canada	Canadian Heritage	Grants overview	<p>“To protect the independence of the press, 3 not-for-profit organizations deliver the Initiative, jointly representing the different segments of the news industry. A single not-for-profit organization delivers the Changing Narratives Fund stream.”</p>
	Consortium of Official Language Minority Community Media	Grant guideline	<p>Independent panel of experts “carries out its mandate independently from Consortium member organizations and eligible media outlets”.</p>
	CRTC decision on Google meeting independence requirements of Online News Act 2023	Regulatory decision under legislation	<p>“Journalistic Independence 24. Subparagraph 11(1)(a)(iii) of the Act requires that Google not allow corporate influence to undermine freedom of expression or journalistic independence. Section 8 of the Regulations indicates that this requirement is met if the Agreement includes a commitment that the operator will not take any action that undermines freedom of expression or journalistic independence. Clauses 5(c)(i) to (iii) in the Agreement include Google’s commitment to avoid such actions. Further, clause 7(d)(i)(B) affirms that the CJC will include in the member agreement a commitment that news businesses not allow corporate influence to impact them in this way. 25. Accordingly, the Commission considers that Google has met the requirement to ensure that journalistic independence is protected.”</p>
Korea	Act on the Promotion of Newspapers (2010)	Legislative provision	<p>“Article 4: The freedom and independence of editing newspapers and online newspapers shall be guaranteed.”</p>
New Jersey	New Jersey Civic Info Consortium	Legislative provision	<p>“Section 8: A grant issued by the consortium shall be in the form of a grant agreement (which) shall include ... the expectations stated between the consortium and the grantee ...(in) a statement that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. the grantee shall be independent from the influence of the State, a member university, and any other grantor or contributor of funds or outside source; and</li> <li>b. any grantor or other contributor of funds to the grantee shall acknowledge in writing the grantor’s or contributor’s understanding that the grant or donation does not entitle the grantor or contributor to dictate or influence the content of any work the grantee produces or may produce.”</li> </ul>
Norway	Act on Financial Support for the Media (Media Support Act) (2021)	Legislative provision	<p>“Section 11: The King cannot instruct the Norwegian Media Authority or the Media Appeals Board regarding decisions in individual cases, nor may the King change the Norwegian Media Authority’s or the Media Appeals Board’s decisions or make decisions in a case that comes under their authority according to regulations pursuant to this Act.”</p>

### Expert and representative decision making or advice

Experts and sector representatives are sometimes involved in advising and/or decision making around news funding. As noted earlier, while current Australian news funding programs provide options for the administering department to seek expert advice but do not require it, expert or representative decision-making is used by Community Broadcasting Foundation, the ARC, Screen Australia and Creative Australia and in the nomination of board members for Australian public broadcasters. Some schemes, such as the ARC and CBF, also include processes on how to become a grants assessor, which build expertise in this essential element of the process. Expert or representative advisers are also common in many of the international news funding interventions (*Appendix 2*) and NGO-run news funding programs. The need for expertise will of course depend on the nature of the grants and the extent to which there are discretionary elements, such as business cases, which need to be graded and ranked, as opposed to programs involving simpler numerical qualifying thresholds.

## 7.2. Transparency of funding programs

News grants across all jurisdictions involve a baseline level of transparency; at a minimum, grant recipients and the amounts they received are available within a specified timeframe on public websites (in the case of Australian Government grants, through the GrantConnect portal). This is fairly consistent across most jurisdictions.<sup>396</sup>

However, as noted earlier, consolidated descriptions or reports on the outcomes of funding programs tend not to be available, either in Australia or overseas, unless there is academic critique or a formal review. Examples include: the independently commissioned review into the ARC Act, the review of the Community Broadcasting Program, and the performance assessment of the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund and Public Interest Newsgathering Program.

While the News MAP Policy Framework outlines broad principles around transparency in program design,<sup>397</sup> its consultation paper more explicitly addressed issues around future program evaluation, to ensure that there are also easier ways to understand if programs are achieving what they intended:

As part of continuous improvement of the News MAP Policy Framework, the Government will complement the ACMA's Media Diversity Measurement Framework with research and evaluation activities. Evaluations will be designed in accordance with the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy, which aims to improve the way agencies assess implementation, measure the impact of government programs and frame policy decisions on revised or new programs.... The Government will continue to evaluate and feed these lessons into the design of any future measures... This will ensure that over time the News MAP evidence base is continually strengthened to support effective and principled policies for public interest journalism.<sup>398</sup>

## 7.3 Recipient obligations

Grant programs around the world contain variations of similar provisions concerning reporting, acquittals, cooperation with audits and site visits, and other recipient obligations but vary in their details. In some cases, reports are required to activate further payments and recipients may be required to notify changes in their business circumstances, where this is relevant to the type of funding grant. As sometimes outlined in grant principles, the intention is to ensure the requirements are appropriate to purpose and not unduly burdensome.

A number of jurisdictions appear to be moving towards outcomes-based reporting, to help identify whether grants are achieving their intended purposes. Some of the European grants require longer retention of information and co-operation after the end of the funding period (up to ten years), to enable grants administrators to undertake longer-term assessment of the success or otherwise of a program, for example in Austria. Failure to meet requirements can result in future ineligibility, requirements to repay or, in the case of Korea, criminal liability.

While grant acquittals are universal, some of the more unusual requirements are in the US hybrid news bargaining bills: recipients are not only required to spend set percentages on the employment of journalists and support staff, but are required to provide annual attestations that they have done so and platforms may withhold funding if these have not been provided. These attestations must also be published to the platforms and the news organisation's employees. Whether or not these bills are passed, they present a distinctive legislative approach by policymakers to news funding acquittals.

<sup>396</sup> The NMBC program involves the negotiation of commercial agreements that are by their nature commercial-in-confidence. The NBI scheme will presumably require certain disclosures, at least to government departments for the purpose of obtaining a tax offset.

<sup>397</sup> Australian Government (2024, December) *News Media Assistance Program: Government's Role in News and Journalism*.

<sup>398</sup> Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (2023) *News Media Assistance Program: Consultation Paper*. p 32. <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/news-media-assistance-program-consultation-paper-december2023.pdf>

## Summary

With continued pressures from the increasing dominance of digital platforms and the emergence of Generative AI, there is likely to be a long-term need for public funding and/or other regulatory support for Australian public interest news media, alongside other interventions. Current programs are primarily focused on the employment of journalists (e.g. the November 2025 tranche of News MAP) while others (e.g. the upcoming tranche) are more likely to be directed at building innovative and sustainable business models. The latter may go towards improving sustainability, but may be unlikely to fully address operational needs. Similar objectives have been recognised in the funding of audiovisual, artistic and academic contexts, which are regarded as public goods worthy of ongoing public investment, as key contributors to the health of Australian society.

These concerns are shared internationally, as noted in the October 2025 *Paris Declaration on Multilateral Action for Information Integrity and Independent Media*, to which Australia is a signatory. Among other things, the declaration recognises reliable information “as a global public good requiring sustained public support”. Signatories commit to advance the provision of this public good and to “safeguard independent journalism through multilateral action, while fostering innovative and sustainable business models for the production and distribution of reliable information”.<sup>399</sup>

The economic basis for providing support to public interest news media is also acknowledged internationally<sup>400</sup> and the rationale for intervention is articulated in the News MAP policy framework<sup>401</sup> and the Treasury’s Consultation Paper on the News Bargaining Incentive.<sup>402</sup> As a result, there is likely to be an ongoing need for funding to news organisations, whether through government appropriation, redirection from various forms of digital platforms, or through hybrid public/private funds.

While tried and tested models have been used in Australia for news and comparable forms of direct funding, the variety and depth of international experiences in news funding offer Australian policy makers the opportunity to explore innovative models in current and future consultations. This paper has focused mostly on the “back-end” aspects. However, it also highlights that there are a range of interesting “front-end” models that Australia could look to in designing how to best support the continuing availability of public interest news.

When considering the design of news funding distribution mechanisms, policy makers will need to consider the following questions, among others:

- **What entity is the appropriate decision maker?** Government department, regulator, independent statutory corporation, special-purpose not-for-profit, or existing fund or funds manager, or other structure?
- **What process will ensure independence?** Decision making structures, independent decision makers, legislated guarantees of independence and/or statements of independence?
- **How will decision making be managed?** Single decision maker, advisory board, expert advice, expert and/or sector representation?
- **How will it ensure transparency?** Is single grant reporting sufficient or should there be consolidated reports, data sets and other material that supports visibility of the program/s?
- **How will it ensure funds are spent as intended?** What acquittals will be needed? Will there be audit and evaluation requirements during and after the program? What information will enable long term assessment of its efficacy?

At the time of writing, two significant policy processes - the News MAP framework and News Bargaining Incentive consultation - offer the opportunity for the public, the news industry and digital platforms to engage on the practicalities and benefits of different models, with reference not only to what has been done before in Australia but to models and elements that exist or are emerging overseas.

Given that mechanisms for news funding have changed significantly since 2018, there is clearly room to adapt and optimise these mechanisms. This is also a point in time that provides an opportunity to unify and align government policies for different news support mechanisms.

399 Australia and 33 other signatories (2025, October 29) *Paris Declaration on Multilateral Action for Information Integrity and Independent Media* <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2025/10/29/paris-declaration-on-multilateral-action-for-information-integrity-and-independent-media>

400 Acemo Lu, D., Aghion, P., Besley, T., Bria, F., Coyle, E., Ezekwesili, M., Mazzucato, M., Mian, A., Prat, A., Songwe, V., Stiglitz, J. (2025, October) *The Economic Imperative of Investing in Public Interest Media: Statement of the High-Level Panel on Public Interest Media Forum on Information and Democracy* <https://informationdemocracy.org/publications/the-economic-imperative-of-investing-in-public-interest-media-statement-of-the-high-level-panel-on-public-interest-media/>

401 Australian Government (2024, December) *News Media Assistance Program: Government’s Role in News and Journalism*.

402 Australian Government, The Treasury (2025, November) *News Bargaining Incentive Consultation Paper*.

The goal is a system that is practical and supportive for the news industry, while being appropriate and manageable for the funder, whether the government or the digital platforms being asked to make substantial contributions under legislated schemes. Most importantly, funding distribution mechanisms of the future need to be designed to deliver tangible outcomes for the Australian public as the beneficiary of these major investments.

## Appendix 1 – Decision making on government news grants

### TABLE 5: DECISION MAKING ON GOVERNMENT NEWS GRANTS\*

Jurisdiction	Decision maker	Advisory body	Program or legislation
<b>DECISION BY MINISTER</b>			
Australia	Minister for Communications	Assessment Committee Dept of Communications, with option for Dept Social Services staff and external advisers	2018 Regional Journalism Scholarships
		Assessment Committee Dept of Communications Advisory panel appointed by Minister	2018 Regional Publishers Cadetships
		Dept of Communications panel	2020 Public Interest News Gathering Fund
		Assessment Committee Advisory Committee of industry members selected by Minister	2022 Journalist Fund
	Minister for Communications	Assessment Committee Option of industry advisory panel	2022 Journalist Fund First Nations Cadets
<b>DECISION BY BODY CREATED IN FUNDING LEGISLATION</b>			
South Africa	Media Development and Diversity Agency Board (appointed by Minister)		<i>Media Diversity and Development Agency Act (2002)</i>
Denmark	Media Board		<i>Media Support Act (2013)</i>
Korea	Korea Press Foundation (replacing previous industry entities)		<i>Press Promotion Fund Act on the Promotion of Newspapers (2010)</i>
New Jersey	New Jersey Civic Information Consortium (NFP). Representatives from politics, universities, media, tech, public service/knowledge		<i>Civic Info Bill (2018) (enacted)</i>
Oregon	Oregon Civic Information Consortium appointed by Governor, Senate-confirmed. Representatives from news/journalism employees, community, journalist union, professional journalism society, tech sector and universities.		<i>Journalism Protection Act 2025 (bill)</i>
<b>DECISION BY REGULATOR</b>			
Australia	ACMA assessments team	Independent Advisory Committee with publishing, journalism or business experience	2018 Regional and Small Publishers Fund, established in <i>Broadcasting Services Act (1992)</i>
Austria	KommAustria	Press Subsidies Commission appointed by Federal Chancellor, Austrian Newspaper Association and print newspaper union	<i>Press Subsidies Act (2004)</i>
	KommAustria	Advisory Board appointed by Federal Government	<i>Quality Journalism Subsidies (2023)</i>
	KommAustria	Advisory Board appointed by Federal Chancellor including representatives from politics, unions, universities, religion, periodicals association, accountants or tax experts	<i>Journalism Subsidies Act (1984)</i>
	RTR Media (administrative arm of KommAustria)	Advisory Board	Fund to Promote Digital Transformation

<b>Norway</b>	Norwegian Media Authority  Appeals to: Media Complaints Board: or Board appointed by Ministry of Culture (re Production Subsidy)		<i>Media Support Act (2021)</i>
<b>DECISION BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT</b>			
<b>Australia</b>	Department of Industry (DISR) Program Delegate manager in administering department	DISR can seek technical expert advice from Department of Communications	2024 News Media Relief Fund
	DISR Program Delegate (Manager in DISR Business Grants Hub)	DISR can seek technical expert advice from Department of Communications	2025 Journalist Assistance Fund
	Department of Home Affairs, Deputy Secretary of Immigration Programs	Selection Advisory Panel which can include department employees, sector experts and Commonwealth officers with specialist expertise	2025 Critical Support for Multicultural Communities – Independent Multicultural Media
<b>Canada</b>	Department of Canadian Heritage	Applications reviewed by departmental staff	Canada Periodical Fund
<b>California</b>	Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz)	Advisory board (with diverse industry association members) can make technical recommendations	<i>California Civic Media Act (2025)</i>
<b>Hawaii</b>	Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism		<i>HB 1488 bill (2025)</i>
<b>Washington state</b>	Department of Commerce - Director	May consult with civic affairs leaders and local news leaders in developing the program	<i>Supporting Local News Journalism bill (2025)</i>
<b>Vienna</b>	Vienna Business Agency Executive Board	Evaluation by independent jury of academics, journalists and media professionals	Vienna Media Initiative
<b>DECISION BY INDUSTRY ORGANISATION</b>			
<b>Australia</b>	Community Broadcasting Foundation Board, after peer-to-peer review processes by Board appointed assessors	Advisory Committees: Contents Grants, Development and Operations and Sector Investment	Community Broadcasting Program
<b>Canada</b>	Community Radio Foundation of Canada		2025-27 Local Journalism Initiative Changing Narratives stream
	News Media Canada and Community Radio Foundation of Canada - Independent selection committee	First stage of review conducted by (CRFC and NMC) Programs Team	2025-27 Local Journalism Initiative
	Canadian Association of Broadcasters		Independent Local News Fund Temporary New Commercial Radio Fund
	Community Radio Foundation of Canada		Independent Local News Fund
	Consortium of Official Languages Minority Community Media independent expert panel		2025-27 Local Journalism Initiative
	Canadian Journalism Collective Publishers Council and Broadcasters Council Appeal to Councils		<i>Online News Act (2023) exemption funds</i>
<b>Korea</b>	Committee for Local Press		Local Newspapers Development Fund <i>Special Act on Assistance in Development of Local Newspapers (2004)</i>

\*Includes proposed schemes under US state bills, as well as legislated schemes.

## Appendix 2: Expert advice in decision making – government schemes

### TABLE 6: EXPERT ADVICE IN DECISION MAKING – GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

Jurisdiction	Body	Composition/expertise	Program/Legislation
Austria	Press Subsidies Commission	2 appointed by Federal Chancellor 2 appointed by Australian Newspaper Association 2 appointed by print newspaper trade union	Press Subsidy <i>Press Subsidies Act (2004)</i>
	Advisory Board	5 members (including at least 2 women) appointed by government who are experts in the media sector or media studies with several years of practical experience	Quality Journalism Subsidies <i>Quality Journalism Subsidies Act (2023)</i>
	Advisory Board	Appointed by the Federal Chancellor from (and nominated by) elected political parties, specified departments, relevant trade unions, Austrian university journalism studies, state recognised churches and religious denominations, associations representing Austrian editors of periodicals, publishers of periodical and self-employed journalists, professional accountants or tax advisers	Journalism Subsidies <i>Journalism Subsidies Act (1984)</i>
Vienna	Independent jury	Academics, journalists and media professionals	Media Start
Canada	Independent Selection Committee	External experts with diverse backgrounds including representation from Local Journalism Initiative underrepresented groups	LJI (CMC/NMC component): CMC/NMC guidelines approved by CRTC
	Independent panel of experts	At least 5 bilingual members from official language minority communities with “experience and expertise in business, community management, media operations, journalism and program delivery” which understand community needs	LJI (OLMC component) OLMC guidelines approved by CRTC
California	Advisory Board	2 at large members, 2 representing California News Publishers Association, 1 each representing American Community Media, the Local Independent Online News Publishers, Latino Media Collaborative, California Black Media, Media Guild of the West	Civic Media Program <i>California Civic Media Act (2025)</i>
Denmark	Media Board	7 members: Chairman must be a lawyer and members of the board shall collectively represent expertise within news reporting, business economics, the media market, journalistic innovation and media consumption, as well as the democratic function of the media and technological development regarding the types of media covered by the Act	Media Support <i>Media Support Act (2013)</i>
New Jersey	Decision making Board	2 members appointed by the Governor, not of the same political party 1 appointed by the President of the Senate and one by Minority Leader of the Senate 1 approved by Speaker of the General Assembly 1 appointed by the Minority Leader of the General Assembly 5 (no more than 3 from the same political party) appointed by the president of each member’s university “each of whom shall have background or experience in the field of journalism, media, technology” 4 (no more than 2 from the same political party) appointed by a majority vote of the nine above members, of which: 1 represents the media sector, 1 represents the technology sector and 2 are not employed by the State or a member university at the time of their appointment and have “demonstrated a record of commitment to public service and understand the importance of media and technology to the State’s future”	Civic Info Consortium <i>Civic Info Bill NJ A3628</i>

<p><b>Korea</b></p>	<p>Committee for Local Press</p>	<p><b>3</b> recommended by the chairperson of the Culture, Sports and Tourism Committee of the National Assembly in consultation with the executive secretary of each negotiating party  <b>1</b> recommended by the Korean Association of Newspapers, the Journalists Association of Korea and the Korean Society for Journalism &amp; Communication Studies;  <b>2</b> for whom 3 years have passed since they retired after having held offices in a local newspaper for at least 10 years</p>	<p>Local Newspapers Development Fund  <i>Special Act on Assistance in Development of Local Newspapers (2004)</i></p>
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