

# Ten Principles for Local News

- 1. Local news can play a vital role in our societies – but there’s no guarantee that it will.** At its best, local news engages people in democracy, increases voting rates, reduces corruption, enhances trust, supports community cohesion and stimulates local economies. But at its worst, news can drive misinformation, polarisation and even hatred. The benefits of local news are not automatic: they come when local news is delivered by people who are committed to truth-seeking and truth-telling and accountable to the communities they serve.
- 2. We need to maximise the best and mitigate the worst of local news.** Left to a market that chases high margins and quick returns, local news is at risk of sinking to the lowest common denominator, with few reporters on the ground, little original journalism, exploitative use of AI and a business model based on clickbait. In some cases, local news is disappearing altogether. A new movement of journalists and community organisers is leading a rebirth of local news, but they need urgent support to fulfil their potential.
- 3. The needs of local people should determine the shape of local news.** Entrepreneurs always test the market before launching a new product, and the same should go for local news. More than this: we should find out what local people actually *need* from local news – even if they’re not able to pay for it. This isn’t just about market research; it’s about community listening. Ideally, local news entrepreneurs will build products that people need *and* want *and* can pay for – but this will take time and patient capital.
- 4. Local news provides a public good, but the market may not align this with economic value.** The market may sometimes support the best form of local news. But this is the exception, not the rule, when so many economic incentives are pushing in the opposite direction: towards emotive content that is cheap to produce rather than meaningful content that generates understanding. We need policymakers to change these incentives for the long term, and philanthropists and social investors to correct this market failure in the short to medium term.
- 5. We need to go back to first principles to help local news fulfil its potential.** We know that local news can have a positive impact on democracy, society and the economy. But we don’t always pay attention to *how* local news achieves these benefits. The human touch is crucial: people respond to the presence of reporters in council meetings and in the community. New forms of local media are building on this with community newsrooms, news cafes and other forms of in-person journalism. We should encourage more innovation in this direction.
- 6. There is no single right business model for local news.** The market can’t be trusted to deliver the best local news, but commercial news organisations still have a role to play. A plural local news economy, with public, private and non-

profit media, mitigates the risk of relying on one business model. However, we should ensure that public policy does not reward investors who asset strip local news, extracting value from communities without giving anything in return.

7. **Policymakers have a role to play.** Where there is a mismatch between the social value of local news and its market valuation, there is an urgent need for policymakers to step in. Arm's-length subsidies can work in some contexts, but there are many other options: regulating digital markets; creating tax incentives for investors and donors; funding research and development; or directing government advertising towards trustworthy local media.
8. **Philanthropists have a role to play.** In some areas, we may have to accept that the market and/or subsidies will never sustain local news, and philanthropists have a long-term role to play, just as they do in other areas of civil society. However, in many other cases, philanthropy can catalyse transformation by injecting cash and confidence into the best models of local news, encouraging other donors and investors, and funding advocacy and infrastructure to build a sustainable sector.
9. **Advertisers have a role to play.** The old equilibrium between advertising and journalism was disrupted in the early 2000s, when new platforms created a more efficient and effective way for advertisers to reach audiences. A lot of local journalism is now funded by the worst kind of advertising – cheap and nasty clickbait that tarnishes the sites it funds. But there are better models out there, where news providers build partnerships with brands they can wholeheartedly recommend to their communities.
10. **Platforms have a role to play.** Many people blame big tech platforms for the demise of local news in the early twenty-first century, but this misses two important points: (1) the local news market was already consolidating before the rise of platforms; and (2) platforms can play a vital role in our societies. We shouldn't think about this in terms of publishers vs platforms, but publishers working with platforms to build a democratic public sphere that is open to everyone and geared towards truth. The challenge is to find the right economic relationship between platforms and publishers to underpin this social value.

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