



# Securing institutional funding



In this fourth installment of the series "Building a sustainable media with solutions and constructive journalism," we explore how newsrooms can secure **public or philanthropic funding** for their coverage of solutions.

Building on the experiments led by the [Solutions Journalism Network](#) around revenue, we brought in two experts who shared their expertise in raising money for journalism organizations.



**Adam Thomas**

Adam Thomas is a strategy coach who was previously executive director of the [European Journalism Centre](#), a nonprofit that supports media in Europe through grants and trainings. He is the founder of [Evenly Distributed](#), a consulting company for media entrepreneurs.

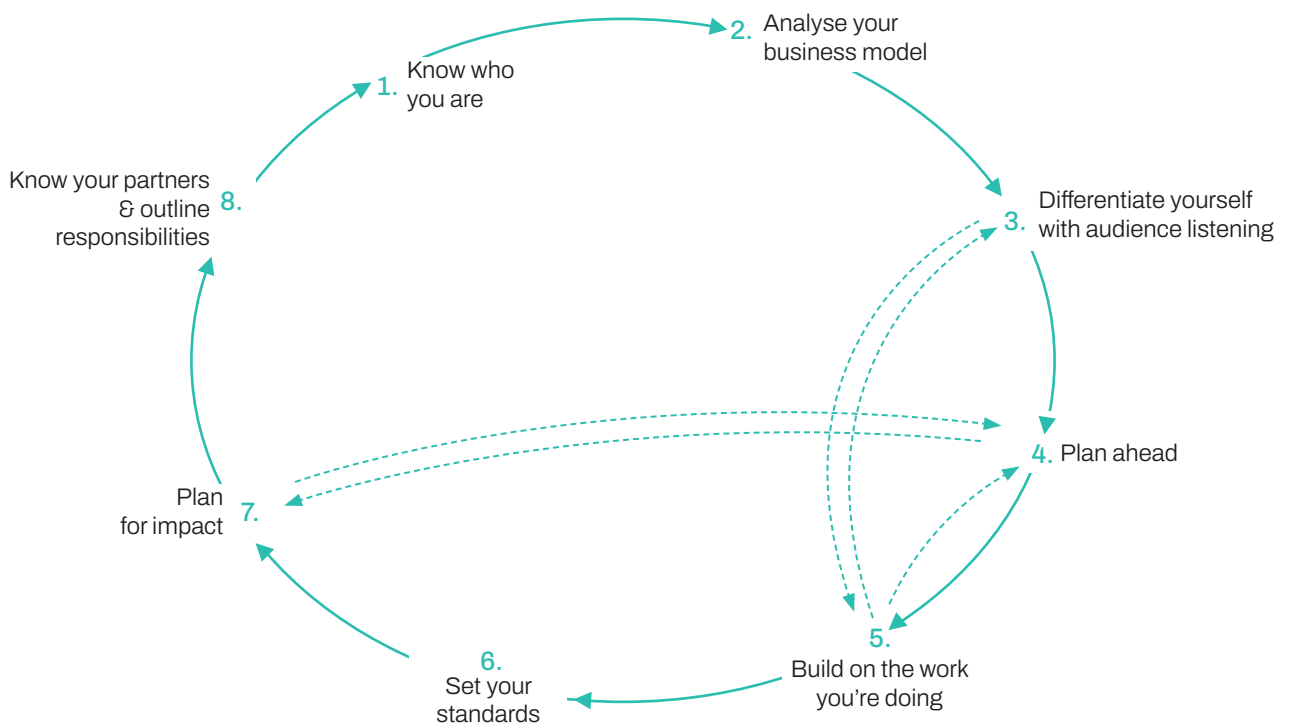


**Cristian Lupsa**

Cristian Lupsa is a storyteller, editor, and co-founder of [Decat o Revista](#), a Romanian digital and print magazine, that ran until 2022. He is a coach for a range of newsrooms and is the author of [Draft Four](#), a newsletter with reflections at the intersection of journalism and societal change.

We created the diagram below to help visualize the ongoing workflow that fundraising requires. While this gives a general sense of the process, we acknowledge that the reality should not necessarily be so linear. Several steps may run in parallel and require work at various stages of this cycle.

**Project & Funding Development Cycle**





## 1. Think about your own vision, mission and strategy as a guiding light for your pitch to funders.

Why do you do what you do? Both Adam Thomas and Cristian Lupsa recommend getting very clear about your vision, mission and values before going after funding. Besides being crucial for fundraising, they will provide a guiding light for your organisation’s work!

Thomas has great videos about journalism vision and mission statements available on his [YouTube channel](#). To summarize his most relevant tips: the “**vision is the future, the change you want to see. Your mission is what you’re doing right now to achieve your vision**”.

He says each mission statement has four elements: a purpose (why), the tactics (how), the values (what do you stand for) and the community (who are you serving).

To define purpose, Thomas recommends asking the “why” question 5 times to move beyond the surface and define your deep purpose.

When it comes to outlining your strategy as a news organization, Cristian Lupsa suggests laying out what you say no to, and what you do uniquely (that others don’t do or do differently)?

One compelling example of a uniquely positioned media outlet is [Rubryka](#), a solutions-oriented publication based in Ukraine, who has carried on reporting on solutions amidst the war.



## 2. Analyze your revenue streams. Work with (or follow the work of) people who have a good understanding of the institutional funding ecosystem.

In order to pursue institutional fundraising from a place of strength, with a clear sense of the goals, a well planned and analysed revenue stream can be very helpful. To support media organisations in doing this analysis, Thomas suggests working with the **matrix below**. Things listed on the left are unstable, and those on the right are stable. Below is slow growing, and above is fast growing. For Thomas, it’s essential to understand what are the sources of revenues you have and which ones present opportunities for development. This should help understand how you can achieve a diversified revenue model. You need to diversify for risk management by pursuing both strategies with high potential for growth and also ensuring stability with consistent through perhaps not high yield revenue sources.



You can check a [free fundraising engine](#) spreadsheet from [Evenly distributed](#). Also available, there is an experimental, [free GPT tool](#) to match projects with funders.



### 3. Differentiate yourself, and know your audience best.

“If you’re a locally based organization, your chance to compete with increasing demand for funding, including from big sized organizations, is to make the case that you know your audience better (and show how you know you do, through surveys, anecdotes, data...) and make your differentiation in the eyes of the funder”, says Adam Thomas.

In the case of solutions journalism, it’s good to remind funders that survey after survey and studies after studies, audiences have been asking for a reporting that not only highlights problems, but also ways to respond to them, and which seem to be working. It’s even more compelling if you have had the opportunity to directly ask your organization’s audience what type of reporting they want to see more of.

Catarina Carvalho, Director of [Mensagem Jornal de Lisboa](#), shares that the most powerful argument she has found for funders is to think of the audience not as victims of news but as active citizens, who can act locally: “In general, when we speak about solutions journalism to foundations or sponsors their eyes are sparkling. Because they are, too, tired of the way journalism is being produced”, she says.



### 4. Study the areas of interest of financial stakeholders you’re in contact with and identify where you align.

Generally, it’s important to have project management tools (e-g: Asana, Trello, Salesforce...) to manage your fundraising work in order to track and follow-up on your conversations with potential funders, outline their areas of interest and identify where you align. That also means it’s crucial to plan ahead and be ready when the opportunity or call for funding comes up!



### 5. Don’t start a new project from scratch to get funding. Build on the work you’re already doing, and think about capacity.

Linda Shaw, who oversees programmes dedicated to generating revenue with solutions journalism at the [Solutions Journalism Network](#), argues that **commitment to a project** is probably the biggest criteria she is looking for when reviewing proposals, together with capacity. “We need to make sure the news org isn’t already involved in too many initiatives, and that there is support from the top and buy-in from the editors and reporters. If a newsroom chases breaking news reactively, then it is not well positioned to take on solutions”, she adds.

If your newsroom is already practicing solutions journalism, it can also be a great asset to a funder: the European Journalism Centre has reported that a newsroom they’ve supported had secured two philanthropic grants to continue the work they started after having benefited from the [Solutions Journalism Accelerator](#) support programme.



### 6. Set standards for solutions journalism.

There is this misconception that solutions journalism is a brand new practice exploring new topics yet to be covered in the newsroom. In fact, solutions journalism is never as relevant as when it investigates solutions to problems that have been largely reported on, which reporters have deep knowledge and expertise about. Solutions reporting comes in when audiences have repeatedly heard stories about the same kind of issues, to tell a different part of the story. This approach to reporting should be grounded in what the journalists know about, what audiences care about, and aligned with rigorous editorial standards. Making this clear to funders is crucial for them to understand that solutions reporting is not a new shiny object, but provides continuity with solid work already being produced.



## 7. Think about impact as you develop your project, not when reporting time comes at the end of your work.

Meenal Thakur, who oversees solutions journalism programs at [Transitions](#), says that when reviewing applications, she's particularly interested in the potential of the newsrooms to create impact with solutions journalism especially in terms of the topics covered and the community served: "This can be gauged by the stories it already publishes and on what topics. Recently we gave funding to a small newsroom, [Storyteller](#), serving the multilingual, Slovak-Serbian community located in Vojvodina/Serbia and Slovak diaspora to be able to introduce and promote solutions journalism for a specific local community," she adds. Solutions journalism fosters civic engagement by encouraging community members to take an active role in addressing local challenges. By highlighting evidence-based responses that have proven effective, it also informs policymakers, guiding them toward solutions that drive real change.

For example, Storyteller [reported on](#) how informal education can empower individuals and strengthen the cultural scene of the Slovak minority community in Serbia. Such stories can help ensure that government support—such as funding from the National Council of the Slovak National Minority in Serbia—is allocated to initiatives that deliver meaningful impact. Moreover, solutions journalism enhances community resilience by showcasing how local groups can mobilize, organize, and overcome challenges.

If you're new to Impact tracking and Impact strategies for your solutions reporting, you can check out the Solutions Journalism Network's Impact page and [Impact tracking guide](#), as well as [Impact architects](#), which offers a lot of free tools.

Tracking the impact of your work will be essential to then be able to report on the deliverables attached to projects you received funding for. Being clear on this as you prepare

your proposal will help you gather information and data that can account for the work you've done. This can strengthen your ability to make the case for the value you bring.

As Adam Thomas puts it: "Essentially, the answer to the question **What if we didn't exist?** is the core problem that your organization is trying to solve, and you can frame everything you're doing in regard to that question. Everything that did happen is Impact".



## 8. If working with a partner, ensure you know each other's priorities well and have a good relationship. Set clear expectations for this partnership.

As Adam Thomas suggests, especially if you're looking for European public funding, **think three to five years ahead**. Look for what the EU is funding, where you can fit, and find partners you'll propose a project with ahead of time (two years is a good timeframe to forge a partnership). "The commission loves people they have already worked with, so look at partners who have previously received funding from the EU", Thomas adds.

"Once you find your partner, use a RACSI matrix " says the expert. This matrix can help you in setting expectations from this partnership and outlining who will be responsible for what. A good partnership is one that is rooted in clarity about who does what. The **RACSI matrix** helps assign roles breaking down decision-making into five categories:

**R: Responsible** – Who's doing the work?

**A: Accountable** – Who's ultimately answerable for the outcome?

**C: Consulted** – Who needs to be included for input?

**S: Supporting** – Who provides resources or assistance?

**I: Informed** – Who needs to stay updated?

