

Funding for Academic- News Partnerships

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THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
**CENTER FOR
COMMUNITY NEWS**

The [Center for Community News](#) supports collaborations between colleges/universities and local media outlets where student reporting provides needed local content. Core to all of these programs is a faculty champion/advocate. And all of these programs have support from their institution including paying the faculty to teach the classes, office space/overhead and students.

However, some faculty champions have been turning to additional funding sources to grow their programs – funds that are often used to hire professionals to mentor students and/or to fund students directly.

Creative faculty have figured out different ways to fund moving their projects forward. Here we present some of the ideas that have emerged. This document is a living document – please consider adding your suggestions – by emailing Richard (rwatts@uvm.edu). (Note, our focus is grants and donations, not advertising revenue and on local and regional fundraising, not national).

The time is right.

Faculty and colleges have several built-in advantages when it comes to raising money. First of all your institution has credibility, has the nonprofit status needed to accept foundation and donor advised funds and built-in systems to find, engage and recognize donors. Secondly, the story you are telling is strong, students want applied learning experiences, local news is in a national crisis and higher education has a public service mission. You just have to get your ideas in front of the right people.

Funding Sources

University Sources

Often the lowest hanging fruit are internal sources. Here we list a few:

- Department level funding for creative faculty initiatives
- University/college wide competitions to encourage innovation
- Administrators discretion – funding directly from senior level administrators
- Summer student scholarships – repurposed to support reporting students.
- Student work-study awards – to pay students
- Funding that comes with endowed chairs

University Alumni

Alumni like to give to their institution. The foundation/ development officer is key to unlocking this source of funds. Meet with a development officer. They are often donor-centric in the sense that they put a menu of ideas in front of donors and see where the interests are. You need to be on that list. Think of your development officer as someone to keep posted on what you are doing. Alumni like to support students, so put forward student success, send them links and clips.

There may also be alumni of your program you are in touch with already. If not reach out and include alumni in program updates. There is no better and more efficient way to raise and accept funds than through your alumni. This is a unique resource that only you have access to.

Often your institution will have endowment funds with specific gift language. If your program does not fit, the language can sometimes be adapted. In older institutions these funds are spread across the university, in different departments, and are not always fully utilized.

Local foundations

Look up local foundations. And see who they have given to and if it matches. Again your development office may have information here. But they may not know about smaller entities or not be focused on them. You can also look at like-minded organizations in your area and see who they have funded.

There may also be a community foundation with a mission to support local projects. Sometimes these foundations also manage individual funds for donors, called donor advised funds, that are a good source of funding. This report from RFA calls on these foundations to do more and for the creation of [community news funds](#). In New Mexico there is a [Local News Collaboration fund](#) for example. The [Center for Cooperative Media](#) has many good resources.

Issue based

There may be organizations with a particular mission where your interests align. In Vermont, for example, we have received funding from the Vermont Humanities Council to build a student beat around arts and culture, from an electric utility to increase energy beat stories, from government agencies to build beats around the environment and transportation and from AARP to write stories about livability and to train citizens in reporting.

Legacy Press

Newspapers were extremely profitable into the 1980s. And some of the families that sold those papers both understand the need and may have the resources to give.

Corporate Sources

Larger companies will usually have a giving program. Sometimes there is a process to apply. Sometimes it is about finding the decision-makers within the company and putting a strong story in front of them. Look at the larger companies in your area and reach out to them. There may be someone in your orbit with connections to the company.

Accepting and Redistributing Funds

Accepting funds

The foundation/development side of the university may be a good partner for you here. They often have low overhead. At UVM, the charitable arm of the University has a very reasonable administrative cost of 5%. At KU it is .09 percent. Note that any contribution to this part of your college/university has to meet charitable gift guidelines. But the nonprofit status of your university is key to accepting foundation funds and donor advised funds.

Some grants can sometimes end up in the sponsored projects/research arm of your institution, which may charge overhead from 37% to 51%. However, if the grant sponsors request a lower overhead number that will usually be observed. We've found the research organizations within the University often unable to provide the flexibility that these entrepreneurial programs require.

Redistributing funds

When it comes to redistributing funds, university systems are challenging. And unfortunately, as a large school Dean said to us – there is little to be done to change it – just find the legal ways to make your program work. Sometimes student employment offices can be helpful in paying students. Sometimes not. Hiring staff as temporary employees is done by some. Personal services contracts can be another solution. Some programs have gone as far as setting up external 501c3 accounts – or partner with outside entities to accept and distribute funds. The list of work arounds is long and we won't list them here. Just use all those creative skills that won the funding in the first place to think about how to accept and spend it. (Feel free to call us to talk through any ideas).

Funding Sources

The 100 programs in our survey have won funding from the following local, regional and national sources. Here we offer the list just to give you a sense of what is possible. Each region or community will have their own sources. And this does not include the many university/college funding sources faculty have utilized.

Poynter fellowship, Coca Cola, Hearst Foundations, John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, Cole Campbell Dialogues in Democracy, The Oxford Community Foundation, The Menard Center for Democracy, The Texas Newspaper Foundation, Cornell Sun Alumni Association, Inasmuch Foundation, Scripps Howard Foundation; Park Foundation, NAB, BEA, Raycom, CPB, Missouri Foundation for Health, Walton Family Foundation, Knight-Lenfest Local News Transformation Fund, Knight ONA Challenge Grant, Andrew and Julie Klingenstein Family Fund, Peyton Anderson Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Google News Initiative, Ford Community, The Nicholas B. Ottaway Foundation, McClure Center Advisory Board, Lake Champlain Basin Program, Efficiency Vermont, Lintilhac Foundation, Vermont Community Foundation, National Life, Humanities Council, NH Charitable Foundation, New Mexico Local News Foundation, Knight Foundation, Greater Montana Foundation.

And many, many alumni gifts through foundation/development offices or directly to your programs.

Fundraising tips

Obviously, it is all about personal relationships. Work on those. Leverage the resources of your institution every way you can. Perhaps you can offer to match gifts with other funds that you already have. Donors like to see their money go further.

About the author

Richard Watts is the Director of the Center for Community News and the Community News Service at the University of Vermont. The two programs have raised about \$900,000 over the last five years to support student reporting in Vermont and nationally.

On the cover

Students in the 2021 Community News Service cohort at the University of Vermont.