

The Pivot Fund Survey Report

Introduction

The class JRNL5480 (Research for Media Strategy) at Northeastern University partnered with Pivot Fund, an intermediary venture philanthropic organization dedicated to investing in independent BIPOC-led community news, to survey philanthropic foundations.

The survey was launched on February 17, 2023, to learn about trends in funding priorities and gauge interest in funding news outlets. The survey consisted of 22 questions, broken up into 4 different sections: basic information about the funder; focus and interests; funding experience; and funding abilities and intentions.

To distribute the survey, we referenced a list provided by the class Teaching Assistant naming several philanthropic foundations, which did not include contact information. Collectively, the class sourced about 160 email addresses. We distributed our survey link directly via email to get as large of a sample size as possible. The emails of the charitable organizations surveyed were located on organization websites or through public records. On February 17, 2023, each group distributed the survey link funders, and followed up on February 22 and February 28. The survey was closed on Mar 12, 2023. In total, we received 16 responses, one of them being partially answered. Given the small sample size, we cannot draw too many conclusions but still provide some useful insights.

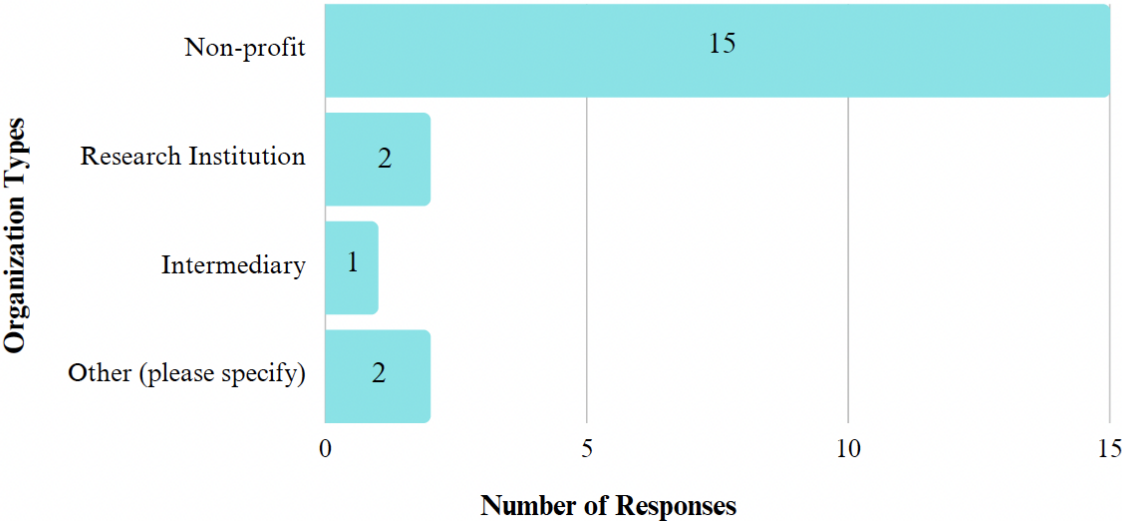
Section 1: Basic Information About Funders

1.1 Who They Have Funded

75% (15 respondents) indicated they fund “Non-profit Organizations.” They fund organizations other than non-profits very seldom — “Research Institutions” are funded by only 10% (2 respondents); “Intermediary” is funded by 5% (1 respondent).

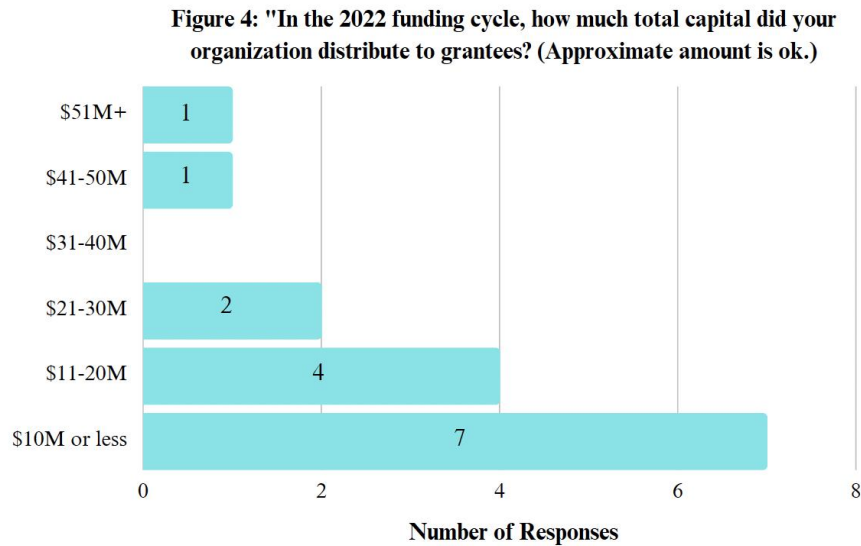
Additionally, 43.8% (7 respondents) indicated they had NOT donated to BIPOC-news groups. 37.5% (6 respondents) indicated they had. 12.5% (2 respondents) did not know.

Figure 2: "Are there specific types of organizations that your organization prioritizes funding for? Select all that apply."



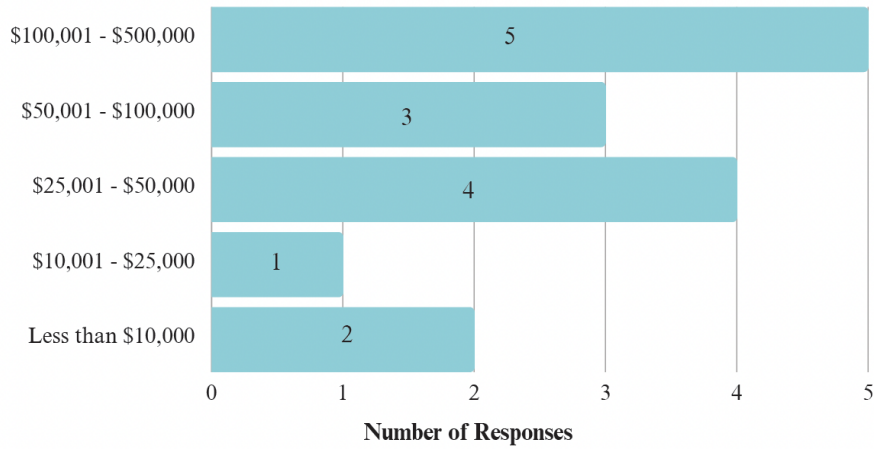
1.2 Grantmaking Financials

In the 2022 funding cycle, 81.3% (13 respondents) distributed “more than 20” awards, 12.5% (2 respondents) distributed between “11-20” awards. Additionally, the budget ranged from \$495K to \$700M.



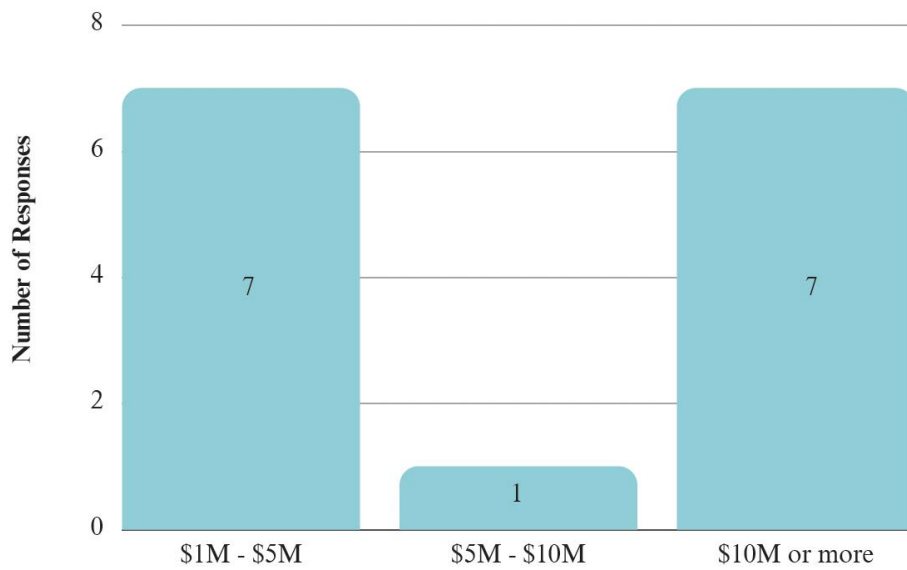
The average financial award size for the 2022 funding cycle was “\$100,001 - \$500,000” for 31.3% (5 respondents), followed by “\$25,001 - \$50,000” by 25% (4 respondents), then “\$50,001 - \$100,000” by 18.8% (3 respondents), then “less than \$10,000” by 12.5% (2 respondents), and finally “\$10,001 - \$25,000” by 6.3% (1 respondent).

Figure 5: "In the 2022 funding cycle, what was the average financial award size granted (either grant or investment)?"



43.8% (7 respondents) budgeted “\$1M - \$5M” for the 2023 funding cycle. Equally, 43.8% (7 respondents) budgeted “Greater than \$10M.” Only 6.3% (1 respondent) budgeted “\$5M - \$10M.”

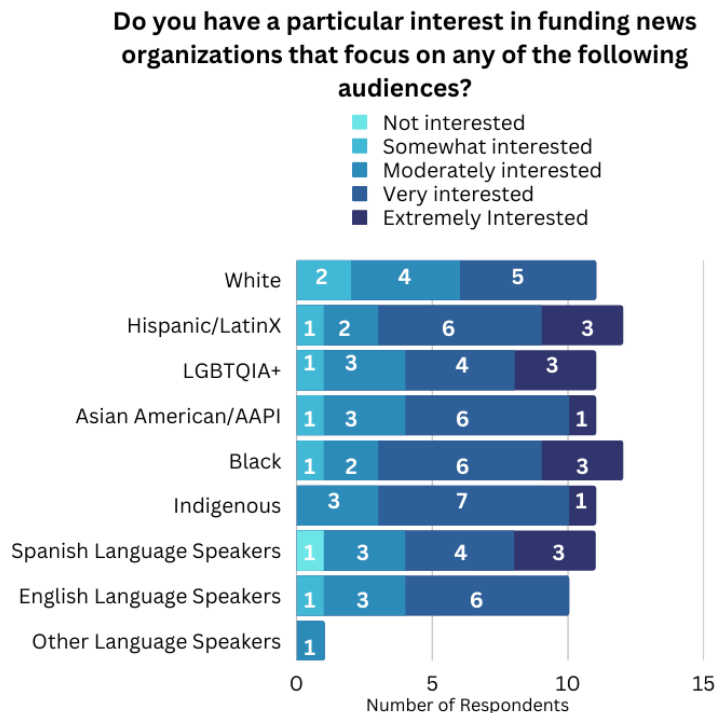
Figure 6: "In the 2023 funding cycle, how much total capital did your organization budget for grantmaking?"



Section 2: Focus and Interests

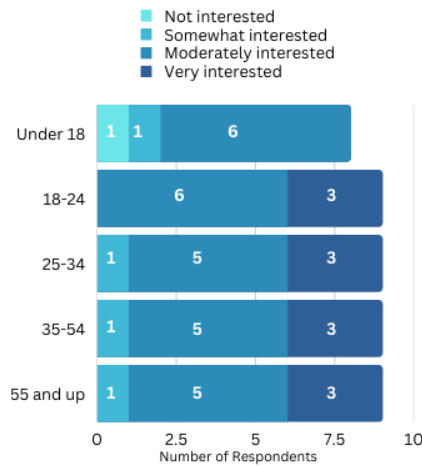
2.1 Target Audiences

Funders have a greater interest in news organizations that target minorities. 56.25% (9 respondents) were very or extremely interested in funding news organizations that focus on Hispanic/LatinX and Black audiences. 50% (8 respondents) were very or extremely interested in a focus on Indigenous audiences. 43.75% (7 respondents) were very or extremely interested in funding organizations that focus on Asian American/AAPI, LGBTQIA+, and Spanish language speakers. In contrast, only 37.5% (6 respondents) were very or extremely interested in funding organizations that focus on English language speakers, and only 31.25% (5 respondents) were very or extremely interested in funding organizations that focus on white audiences. One respondent opted for the “other language speakers” option, saying that they were interested in funding news organizations that focus on the “general audience of NYers.”



As for the age group of target audiences, funders had similar interest in different age groups. 56.25% (9 respondents) said they were moderately or very interested in funding news organizations that focus on audiences that are ages 18-24. 50% (8 respondents) said they were moderately or very interested in funding news organizations that focus on audiences that are ages 25-34, 35-54, and 55 and up. On the contrary, only 43.75% (7 respondents) said they were moderately or very interested in funding news organizations that focus on audiences under 18.

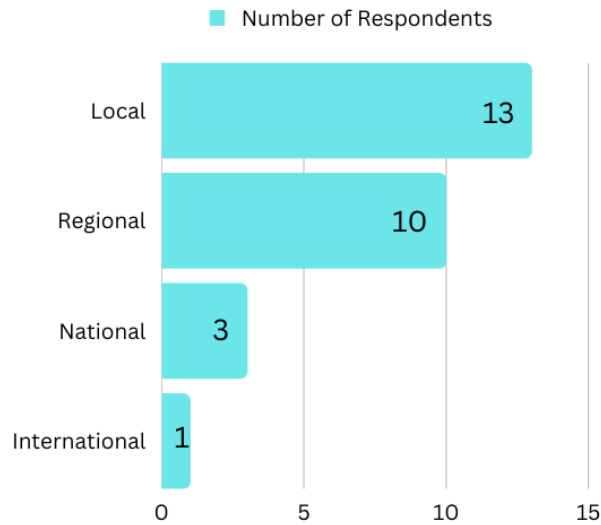
Do you have a special interest in funding news organizations that focus on target audiences of a certain age group?



2.2 Geographical Interest

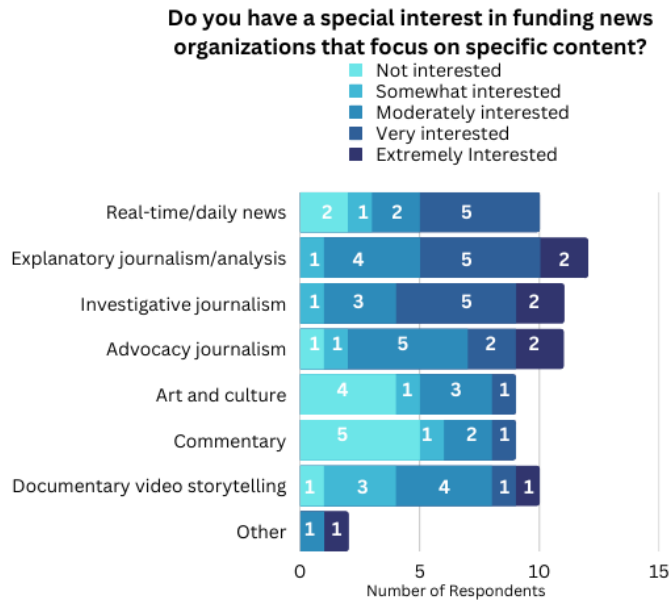
Funders have shown overwhelming interest in news organizations which have local and regional focus, with local-focused news organizations being funders' top interest. 81.25% (13 respondents) prefer funding news organizations with a local focus, while 62.5% (10 respondents) prefer funding ones with a regional focus. Only 18.75% (3 respondents) wanted a focus on national audiences, while 6.25% (1 respondent) wanted a focus on international audiences.

Which of the following focuses do you prefer that the news organizations you fund have?



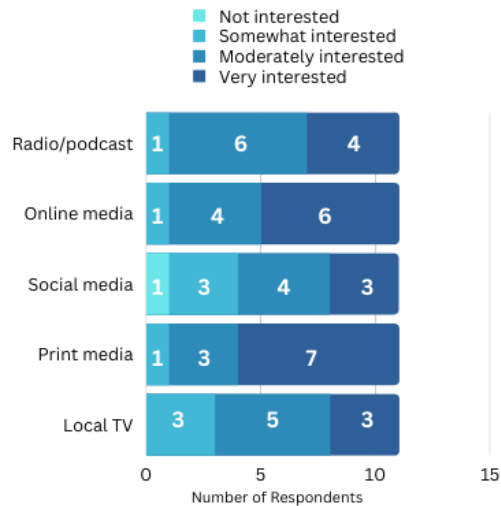
2.3 Content and Mediums

Funders are more interested in news organizations that focus on explanatory journalism and analysis and investigative journalism, while news organizations that focus on arts, culture and commentary are a less interesting group for funders. 43.75% (7 respondents) were very or extremely interested in funding news organizations that focused on both explanatory or investigative journalism. 31.3% (5 respondents) were very interested in funding news organizations that focused on real-time/daily news. Only 25% (4 respondents) were very or extremely interested in funding organizations that distribute advocacy journalism. 6.25% (1 respondent) was very interested in funding art and culture or commentary focused news content. The one respondent who answered “Other” specified that they were moderately and extremely interested in funding news organizations that focused on “Solutions Journalism practiced with fidelity as outlined by the national Solutions Journalism Network.”



Online and print media show a greater advantage than other mediums in terms of getting readers' interests. 43.8% (7 respondents) said they were very interested in funding news organizations that distributed information via print media, a surprising finding given the declining future prospects of this medium as digital media grows in popularity. 37.5% (6 respondents) said they were very interested in organizations that distributed online media. Even in the age of digital content, funders still prefer radio/podcast and local TV to social media: Only 25% (4 respondents) said they were very interested in organizations that distributed information via radio/podcast, and only 18.75% (3 respondents) were very interested in organizations using social media or local TV distribution.

Do you have a special interest in funding news organizations that distribute information using specific mediums?



Section 3: Funding Experiences

3.1 Distributing and Quantifying Funding

Potential funders distribute funds to news organizations in a variety of ways, Question 13 asked respondents “How much funding do you provide news organizations in each of the following forms?” This was a “select all that apply” question, all 16 respondents completed this question. The second most popular way of funding was “Advertising” and “Small individual contributions.” Both received 15.2% (14) of the responses, respectively. The third most popular way of funding was through “Subscription/Membership” receiving 13.0% (12) of the responses. The option “Technical Assistance,” received 12.0% (11) of the responses. Finally, “Sponsorship” received 10.9% (10) responses, and “Foundation grants” received 4.3% (4) of the responses. Interpreting this information leads us to understand that the most rewarding ways organizations can distribute funding is when they can be involved in creating awareness of them to larger audiences. However, the choice which received the most responses was the “Other” option,

16.3% (15) of respondents selected this option. Out of these responses, only one of the two respondents chose to specify what form of funding they provide to news organizations:

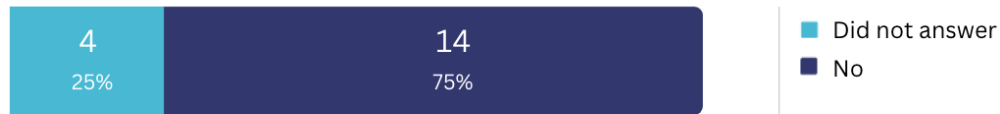
“Underwritten coverage, whereby we negotiate with an outlet, fund the hiring of a reporter, train the entire newsroom on solutions journalism, agree to complete editorial independence, require a community convening at the end of the first year of coverage, sometimes have funded a second year. We also provide operating support for a state-wide news collaborative of 20 media outlets.”



3.2 Contingencies to Receive Funding

When gauging how often funders require an accelerator program as a condition of funding, results showed that 75% (14) of respondents disagreed with funders requiring completion of an accelerator program. 25% (4) of respondents chose not to answer the question.

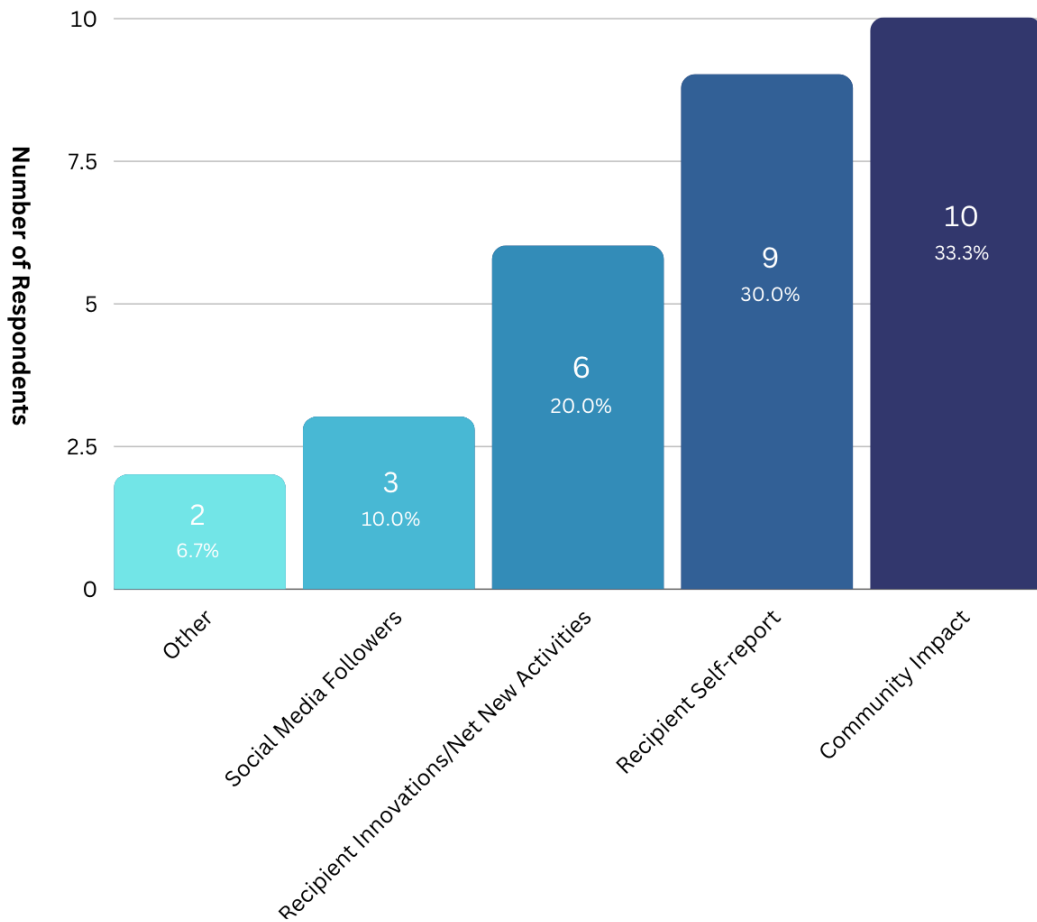
Do you require news organizations to complete an accelerator (a program providing mentorship and limited funding in exchange for equity) or similar program as a condition for funding?



3.3 Measuring Success as a Result of Funding

Respondents were asked what the most popular method that funders used to measure the success of their recipients was. The highest ranked method was through “Community impact,” which received 33.3% (10) of the responses. The next most popular response was “Recipient self-report,” with 30.0% (9) of the responses. The third most selected option was “Recipient innovations/net new activities” with 20.0% (6) of the responses, “Social media followers” received 10.0% (3) of the responses, and “Other” received 6.7% (2) of the responses. When selecting “Other”, one respondent indicated that they were able to measure success through the “number of stories, places, impressions/people reached” and the other answered through “third party evaluation.”

These results indicate that the most frequent way funders measure the success of their funding is through the active change they are able to see within the organizations that they support. Focusing on establishing a good relationship with the funded organizations will encourage recipients to self-report their success, and encouraging recipients to emphasize their community outreach can potentially increase the social media response. These two routes proved to be popular methods by which funders measured their organizations’ success. By establishing these behaviors and expectations of communication, organizations can maximize their engagement response and the constant communication will already be set in place to further encourage them to directly communicate results with funders more often than they already do.



3.4 Measuring the Benefits of Funding

Funders have seen their contributions create varying levels of success and the furthering of opportunities for organizations they fund. 50% (8 respondents) believed that their funding was “Somewhat helpful” to news organizations while 12.5% (2 respondents) believed that their funding was “Extremely helpful”. 6.3% (1) respondents answered “I don’t know” when determining the level of impact they’ve had on the organizations they funded. On average, funding appears to be helpful in creating other opportunities for funded news organizations which is in accordance with Pivot Fund’s goals.

To your knowledge, how helpful was your funding in helping news organizations gain more funding, more publicity, or more advertisement opportunities?

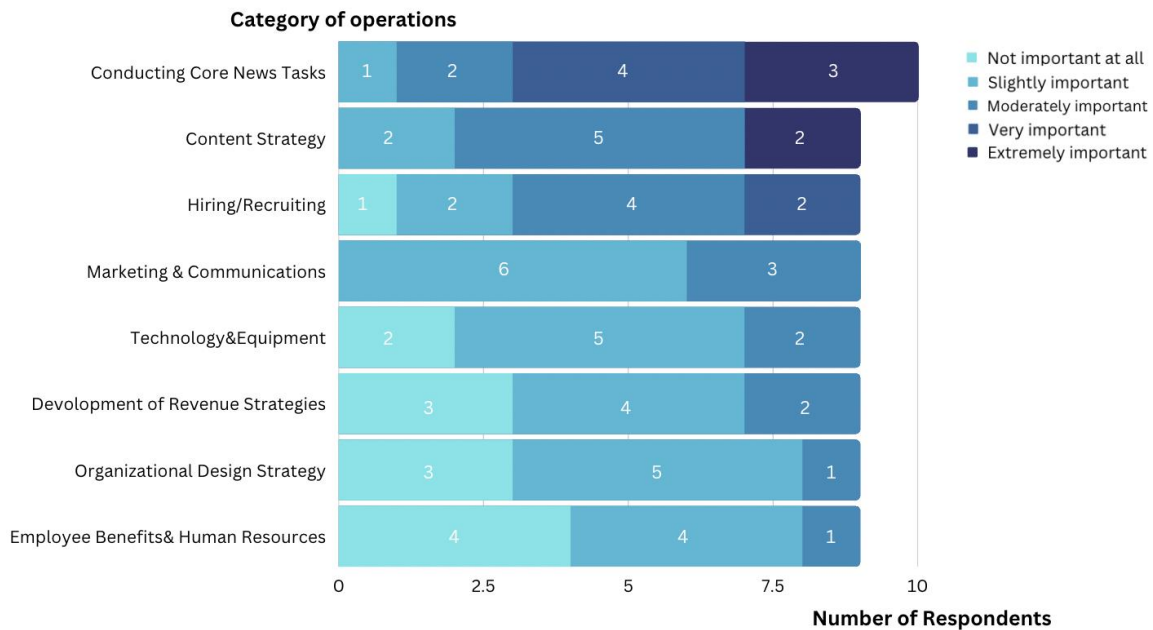


Overall, it is clear that funders support newsrooms in a variety of ways. The results of the survey display that, in various forms, funders' contributions are important and even crucial to newsrooms gaining recognition. After a fair assessment and analysis, the Pivot Fund is on track with involving funders in their mission to establish BIPOC news organizations as prominent and well-supported platforms.

Section 4: Funding Abilities and Intentions

4.1 Areas of Operation

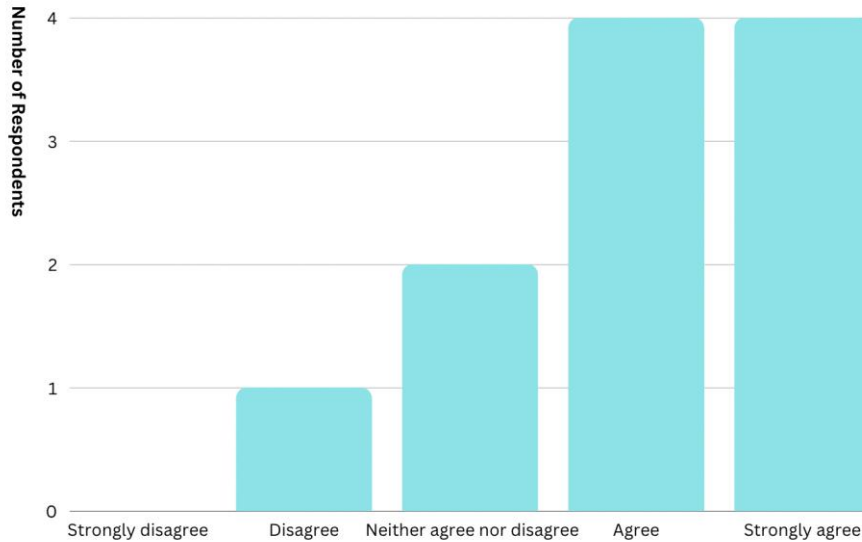
Question 17 focuses on the areas of news outlet operation on which donors prefer their donations to be spent. 70% of respondents (7 respondents) said that they considered Conducting Core News Tasks to be very or extremely important and 70% of respondents (7 respondents) considered Content Strategy to be very important or extremely important. 22% of respondents (2 respondents) believed Hiring/Recruiting to be very important.



Respondents were least likely to indicate Employee Benefits & Human Resources as having a high degree of importance, with 89% (8 respondents) choosing not important at all or only slightly important for this option. This information may direct the employees at Pivot Fund as to how to best match a funder with a news outlet in need of funding, particularly those that need funding for conducting core news tasks, designing robust content strategy, or hiring or recruiting talent, or those that don't need funding for employee benefits and human resources.

4.2 Expectations for News Organizations

In consideration of primary expectations of news organizations, the majority of respondents gave positive feedback regarding the ability of the current news outlets they fund to meet their basic expectations. Of these respondents, 73% (8 respondents) strongly agreed or agreed that the news outlets they currently fund meet their expectations/



Only 9% (1 respondent) indicated that they disagree that their expectations are being met, and no respondents indicated they strongly disagree with the sentiments. Organizations who are not having their expectations met may serve as an opportunity for the Pivot Fund to connect them with news outlets who *will* meet their expectations.

We asked the respondents who answered either “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” to explain their answers and received the following responses:

“In recent years, Chicago has earned a reputation for growing innovative, important efforts in nonprofit journalism. News organizations, including many that we support, are developing new business models, creating new pathways to diverse and representative newsrooms, and bringing quality and award-winning reporting to every Chicago neighborhood.”

“We seek increased coverage of stories focused on health and wellbeing. Funding news sources has increased coverage in our region.”

“We have no separate funding category for independent news organizations, so they make up a relatively small part of our overall grantee universe. That said, our modest investments in these entities have had good returns in terms of helping New Yorkers be informed and engaged citizens.”

“We currently fund two organizations to sustain the statewide practice of solutions journalism. (J schools should be teaching sojo!). In particular, our statewide news collaborative does deep, solutions-based investigative reporting and also has a data expert to ferret out patterns in data that tell a story. For the two underwritten coverage series we funded, both spanned two years and were prolific in creating long-form, solutions based articles that we cared deeply about. We also fund professional development and fellowships for journalists.”

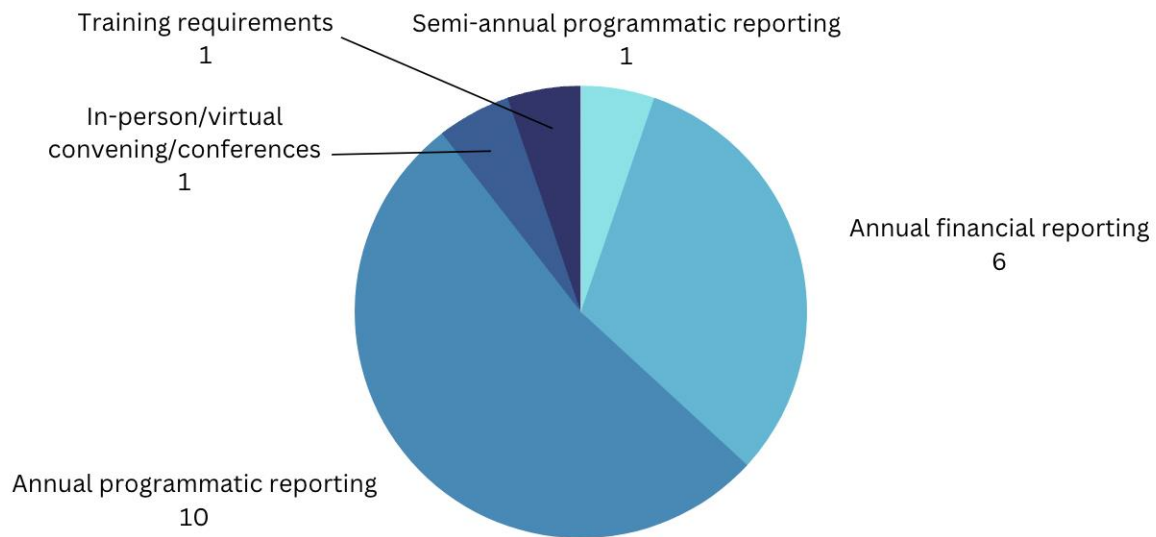
“We have to refine our current portfolio based upon new and emerging strategies for our foundation. But we are in a good place and are refining, not remaking our grant making in this area.”

“We have funded the environmental reporting teams at the key local newspapers in both our communities for 6 years and have been extremely pleased with the depth and breadth of their coverage and the amount of public engagement that has occurred. We just made a \$3 million grant (one of our largest) to launch a local news initiative in Indiana with the American Journalism Project. The opportunity for this to transform how local news is gathered and disseminated is encouraging.”

Hopefully, these encouraging responses will strengthen the Pivot Fund’s mission statement and may serve as valuable examples towards the continued recruitment of funders for small, locally-based news outlets.

4.3 Requirements to Receive Funding

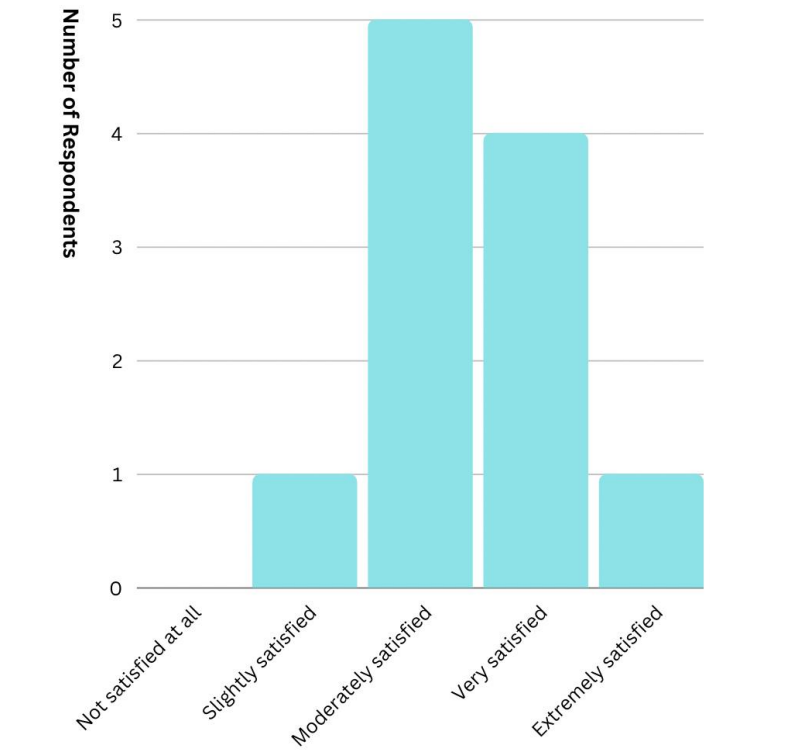
When asked about what funders require of the news outlets that receive their funding, respondents indicated a diverse range overall, with two requirements standing out as the more popular choices. 90% (10 respondents) like to see annual programmatic reporting by funded news outlets, and 55% (6 respondents) like to see annual financial reporting/



Semi-annual programmatic reporting, training requirements, and conferences were the least popular choices, with each receiving the favor of only 9% (1 respondent). This finding may help the Pivot Fund better match potential funders with the best recipients for that organization and, to some extent, inform recipients of what to expect from their funders.

4.4 Satisfaction of Donor Reporting

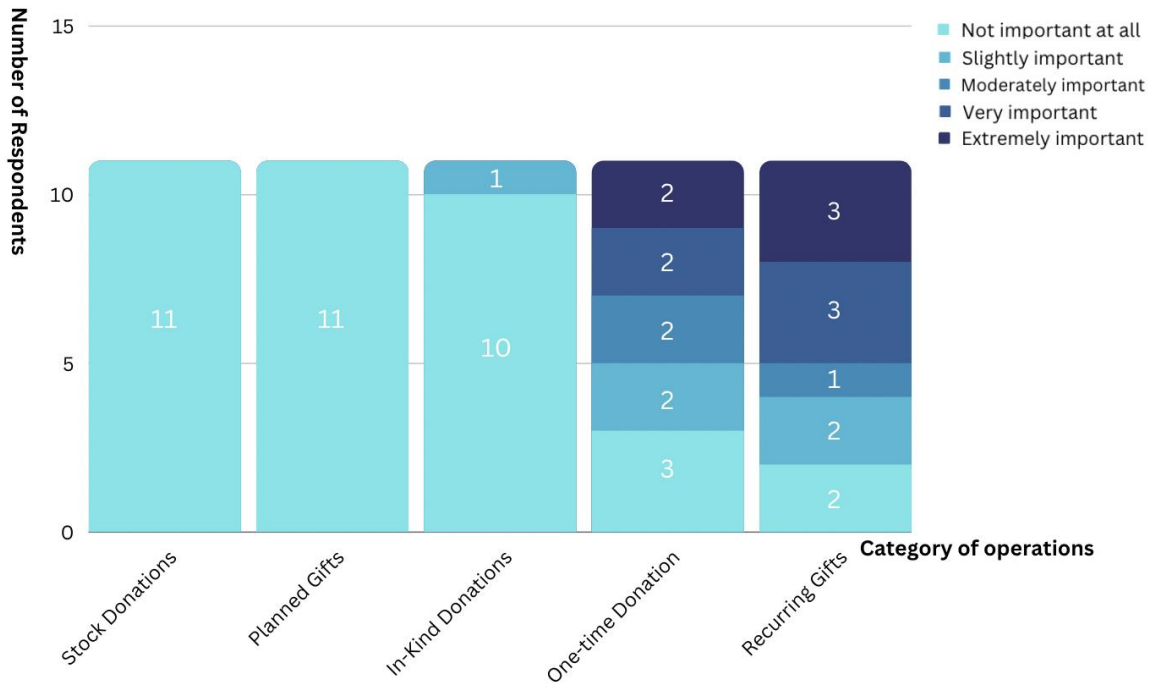
When asked about the satisfaction level of donor impact reporting amongst respondents, 36% (4 respondents) of those that responded to this question chose "very satisfied," and 9% (1 respondent) said "extremely satisfied."



It is important to note that while many funders were quite satisfied with donor impact reporting, an equal amount did not feel this way. In fact, the most popular response was only moderately satisfied, receiving 45% (5 respondents) votes, and 9% (1 respondent) indicated they are only slightly satisfied (Figure 20). Funders with a low degree of satisfaction may serve as an opportunity for the Pivot Fund to recommend other news outlets to them that may be able to submit more satisfying donor impact reports.

4.5 Forms of Charitable Contributions

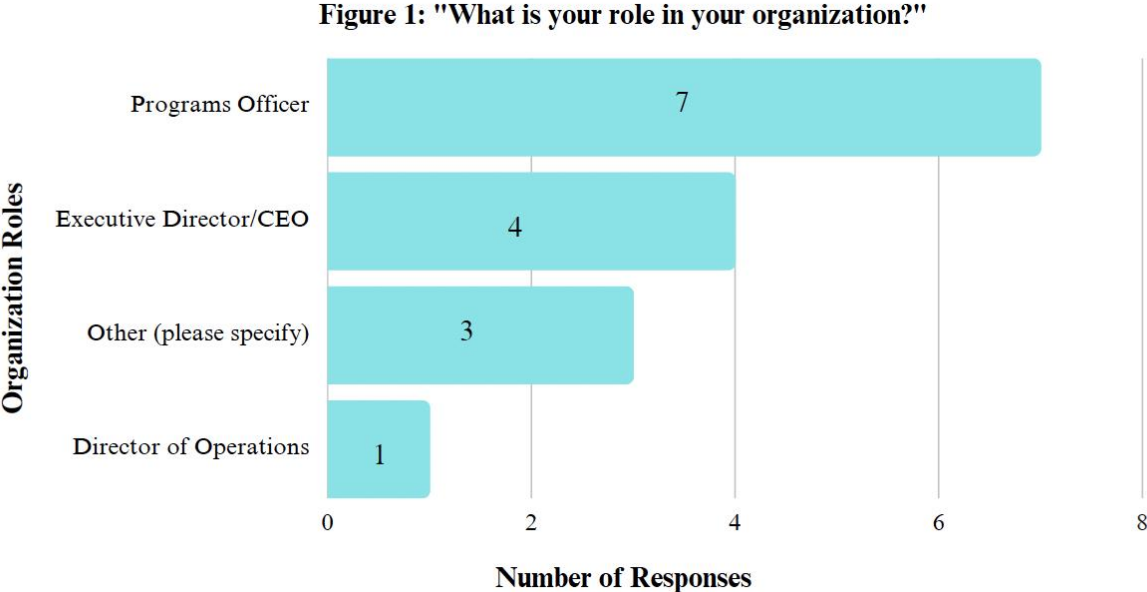
When it comes to ranking importance of giving different types of charitable contributions, 55% (6 respondents) expressed they found "Recurring Gifts" extremely or moderately important, and 36% (4 respondents) expressed that a "One-time Donation" option would be extremely or moderately important.



In-kind donations were less popular, with 100% of respondents choosing either not important at all or slightly important for this category. All respondents were very reluctant to include "Stock Donations" and "Planned Gifts" in their consideration, with both categories receiving 100% of respondents' votes for the not important at all option (Figure 21). This finding allows the Pivot Fund to adjust their search for news outlets in accordance with what types of funding they can receive.

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire and Results

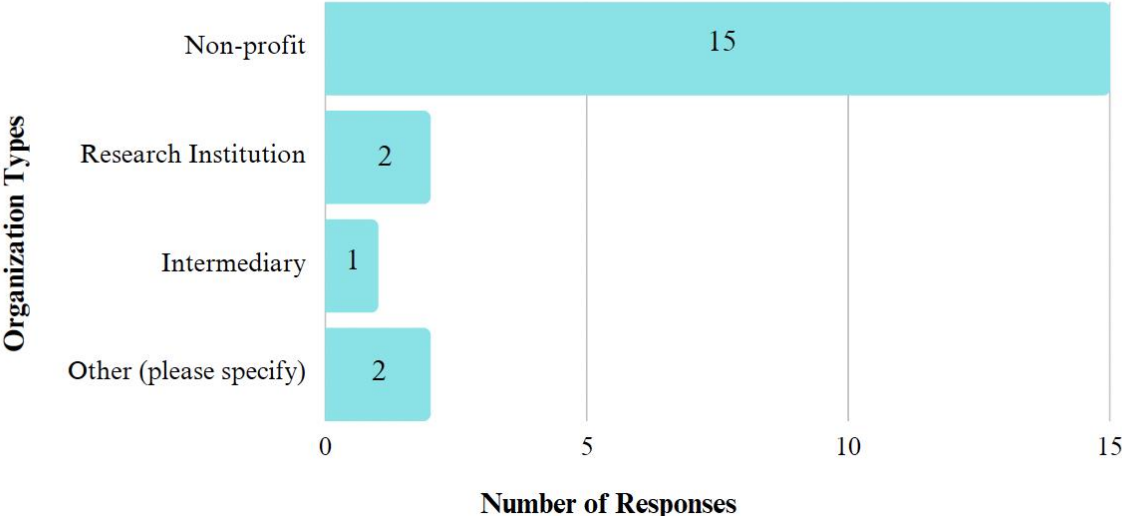
Q1: What is your role in your organization?



Q2: Are there specific types of organizations that your organization prioritizes funding for?

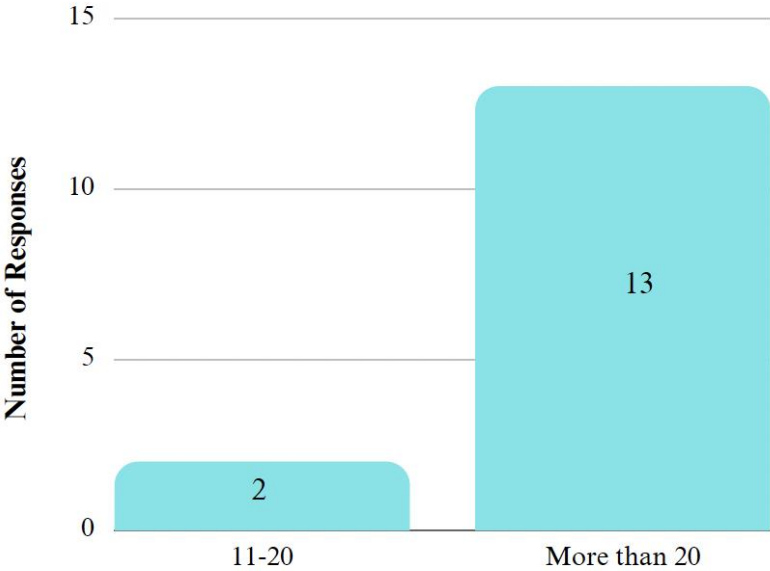
Select all that apply.

Figure 2: "Are there specific types of organizations that your organization prioritizes funding for? Select all that apply."



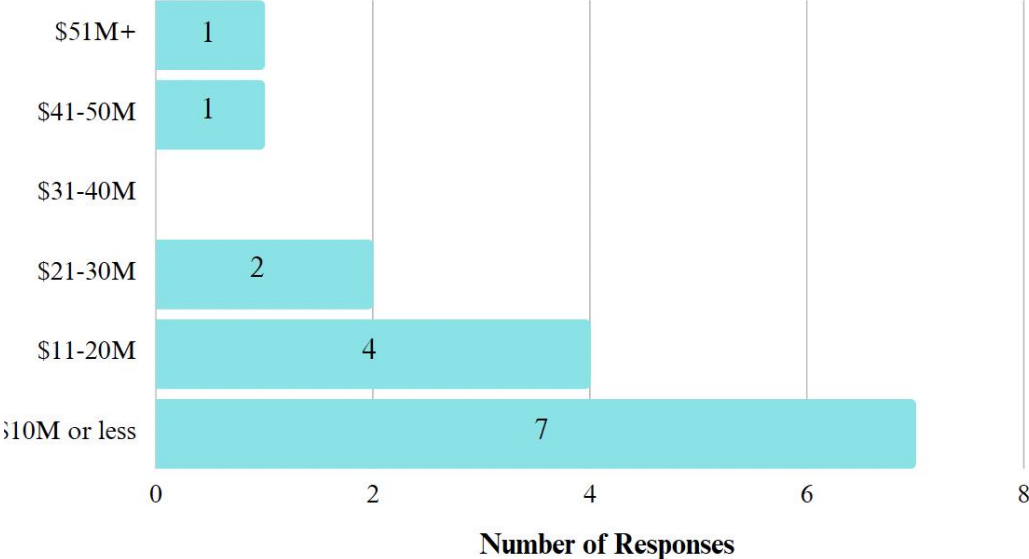
Q3: In the 2022 funding cycle, how many awards did your organization distribute to grantees?

Figure 3: "In the 2022 funding cycle, how many awards did your organization distribute to grantees?"



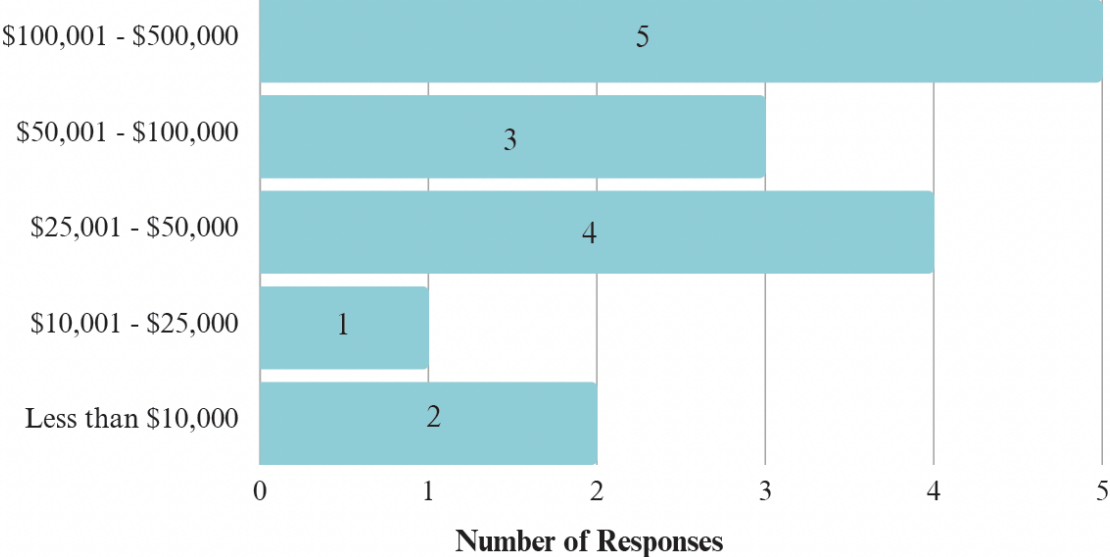
Q4: In the 2022 funding cycle, how much total capital did your organization distribute to grantees? (Approximate amount is ok.)

Figure 4: "In the 2022 funding cycle, how much total capital did your organization distribute to grantees? (Approximate amount is ok.)"



Q5: In the 2022 funding cycle, what was the average financial award size granted (either grant or investment)?

Figure 5: "In the 2022 funding cycle, what was the average financial award size granted (either grant or investment)?"



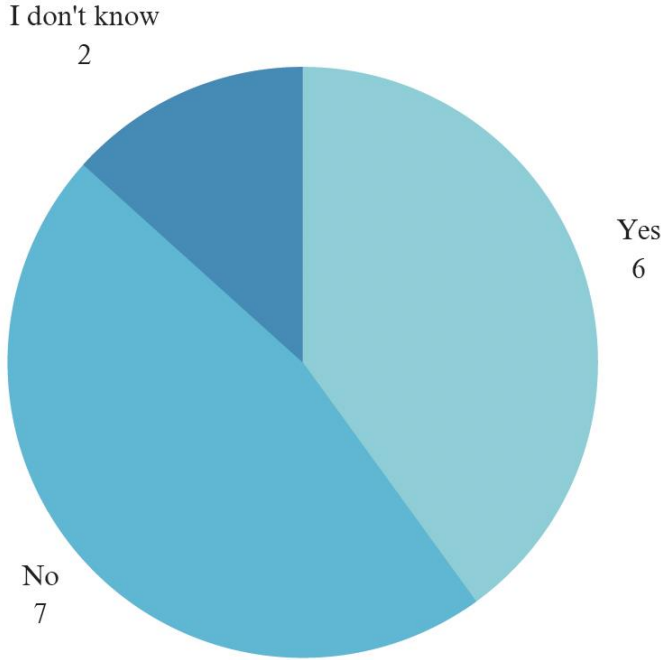
Q6: In the 2023 funding cycle, how much total capital did your organization budget for grantmaking?

Figure 6: "In the 2023 funding cycle, how much total capital did your organization budget for grantmaking?"



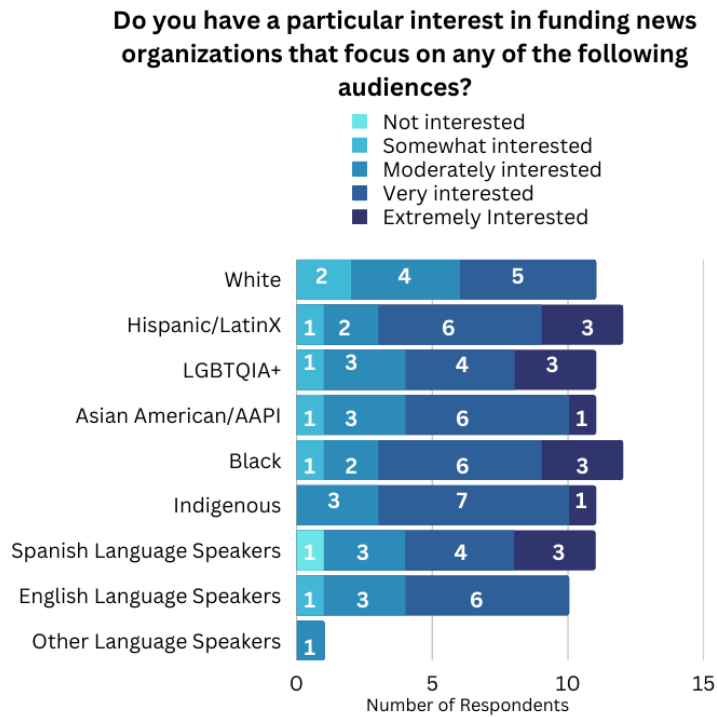
Q7: Has your organization donated directly to a BIPOC (Blac, Indigenous, People of Color)-led or serving news outlets?

Figure 7: "Has your organization donated directly to a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)-led or serving news outlets?"



Number of Responses

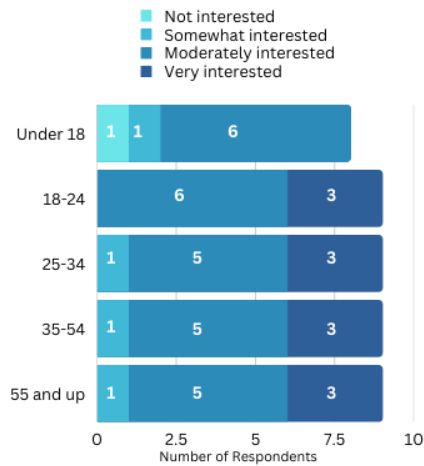
Q8: Do you have a particular interest in funding news organizations that focus on any of the following audiences?



Other answers: the person who selected “other language speakers” specified the general audience of NYers.

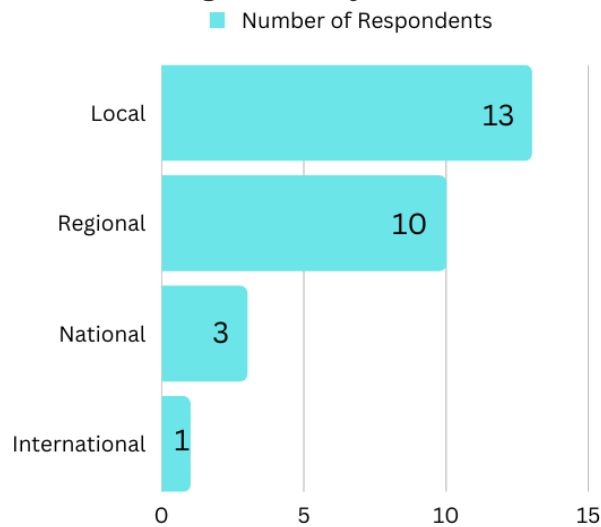
Q9: Do you have a special interest in funding news organizations that focus on target audiences of a certain age group?

Do you have a special interest in funding news organizations that focus on target audiences of a certain age group?

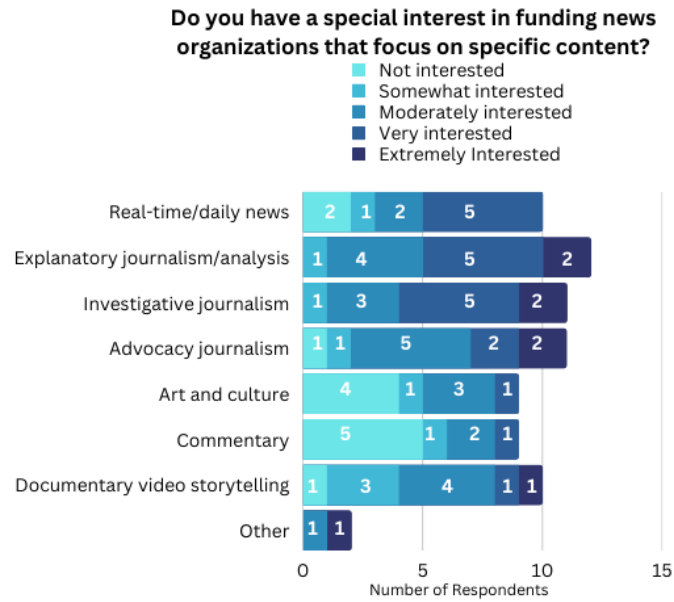


Q10: Which of the following focuses do you prefer that the news organizations you fund have? (Select all that apply)

Which of the following focuses do you prefer that the news organizations you fund have?



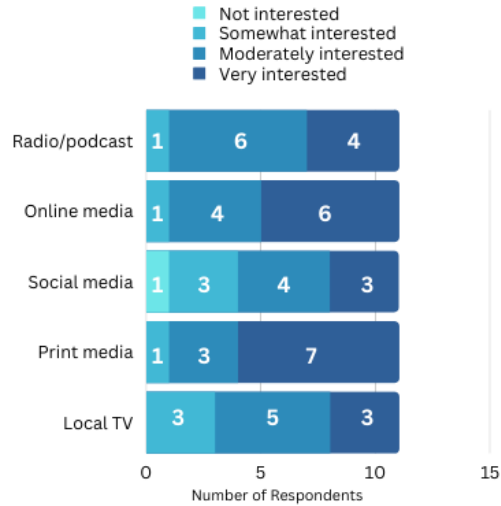
Q11: Do you have a special interest in funding news organizations that focus on specific news content?



Other answers: Solutions Journalism practiced with fidelity as outlined by the national Solutions Journalism Network

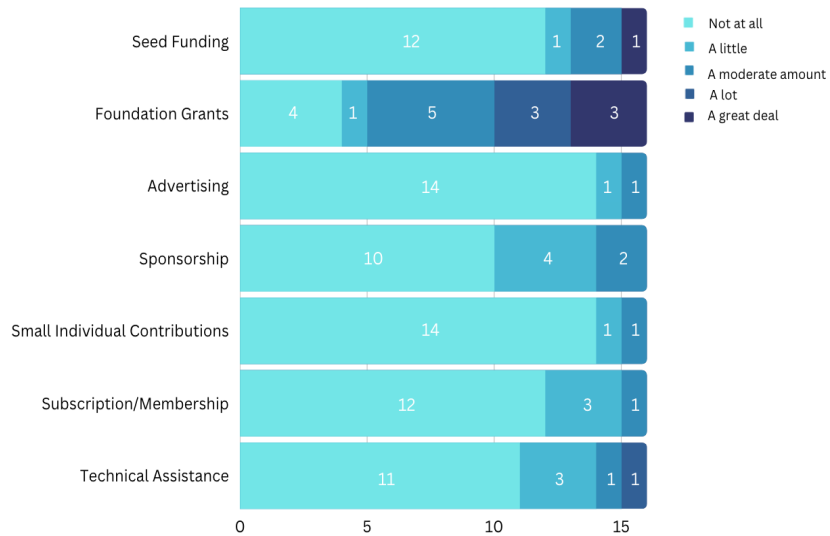
Q12: Do you have a special interest in funding news organizations that distribute information using specific mediums?

Do you have a special interest in funding news organizations that distribute information using specific mediums?



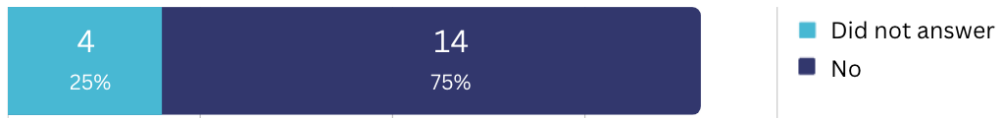
Q13: How much funding do you provide news organizations in each of the following forms?
Select all that apply.

How much funding do you provide news organizations in each of the following forms?

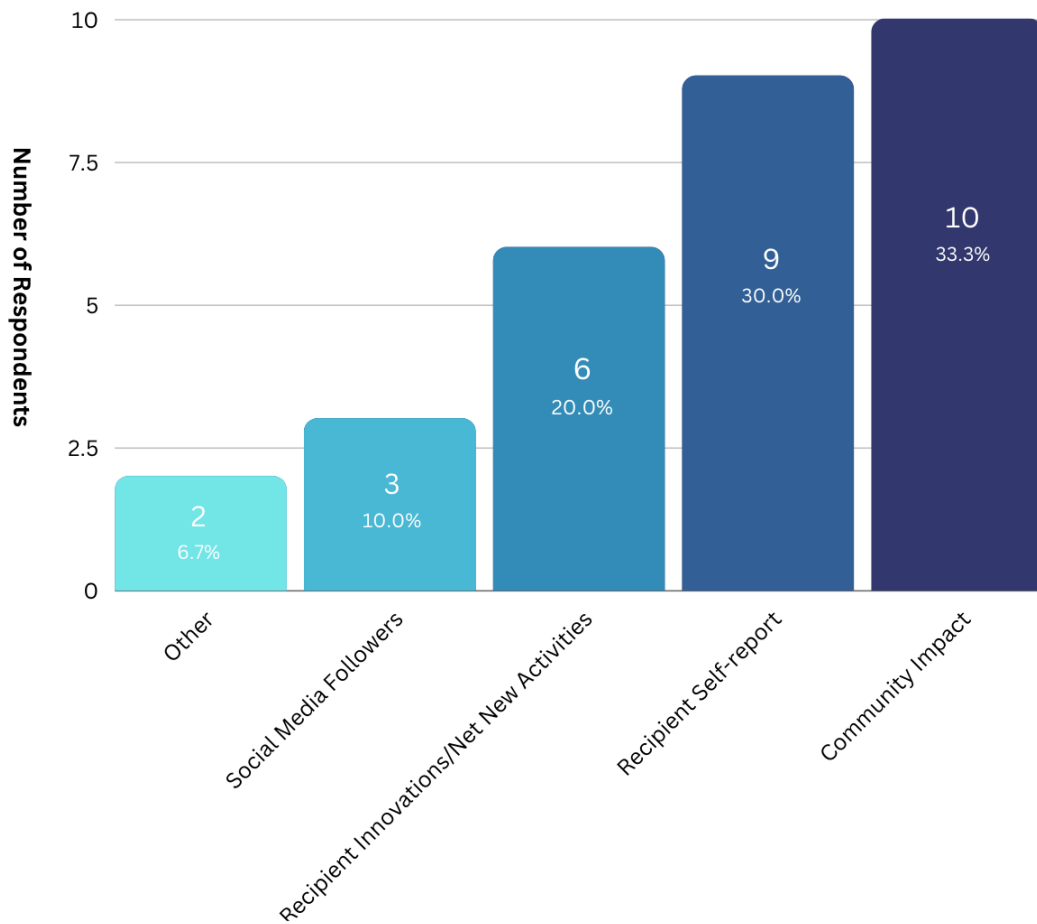


Q14: Do you require news organizations to complete an accelerator (a program providing mentorship and limited funding in exchange for equity) or similar program as a condition of funding?

Do you require news organizations to complete an accelerator (a program providing mentorship and limited funding in exchange for equity) or similar program as a condition for funding?



Q15: What metrics do you use to measure the success of your recipients? Select all that apply.

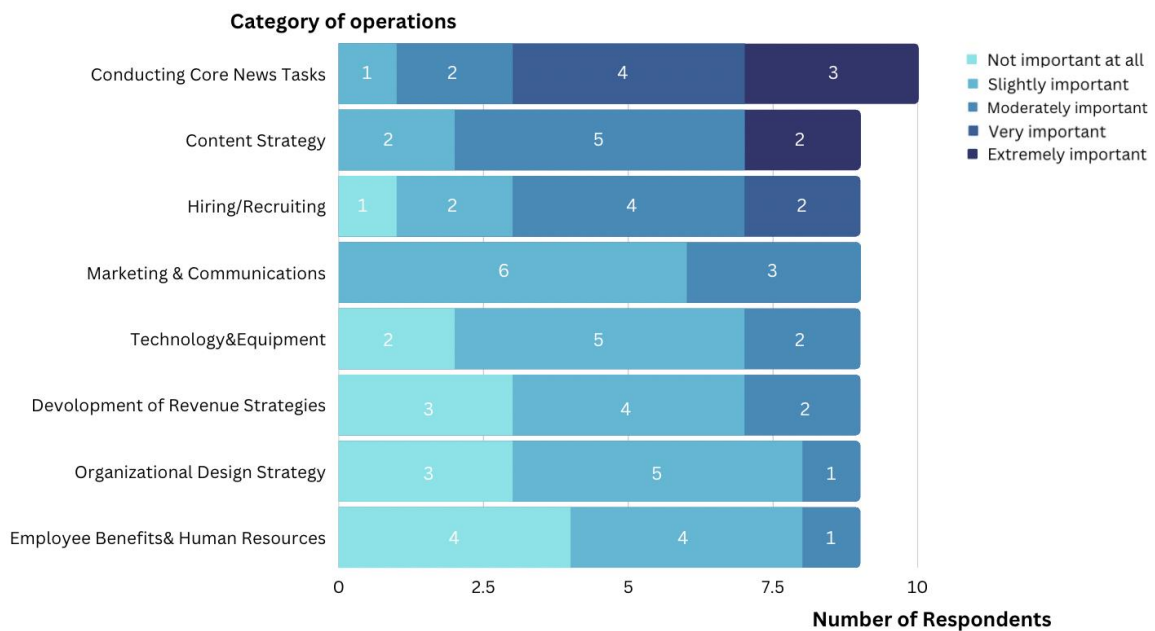


Q16: To your knowledge, how helpful was your funding in helping news organizations gain more funding, more publicity, and more advertising opportunities?

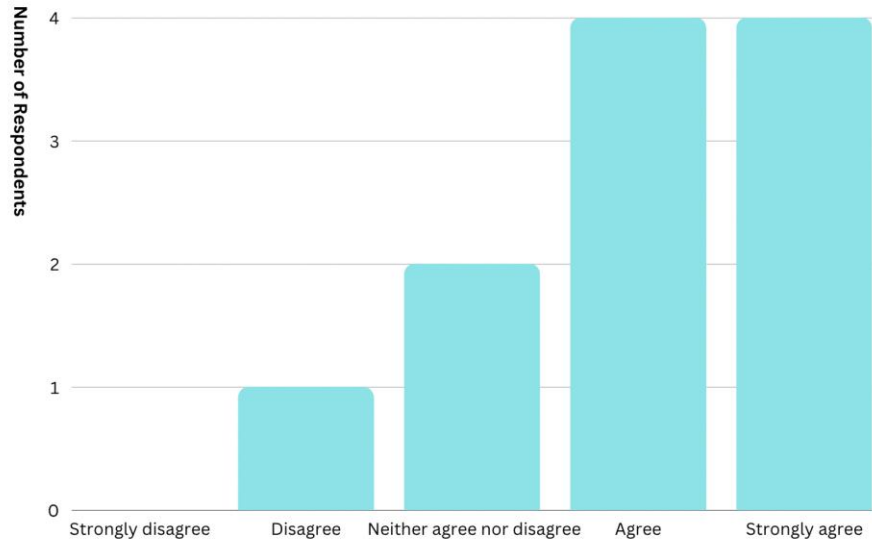
To your knowledge, how helpful was your funding in helping news organizations gain more funding, more publicity, or more advertisement opportunities?



Q17: How important is it that your funds go towards news organizations' following operations?

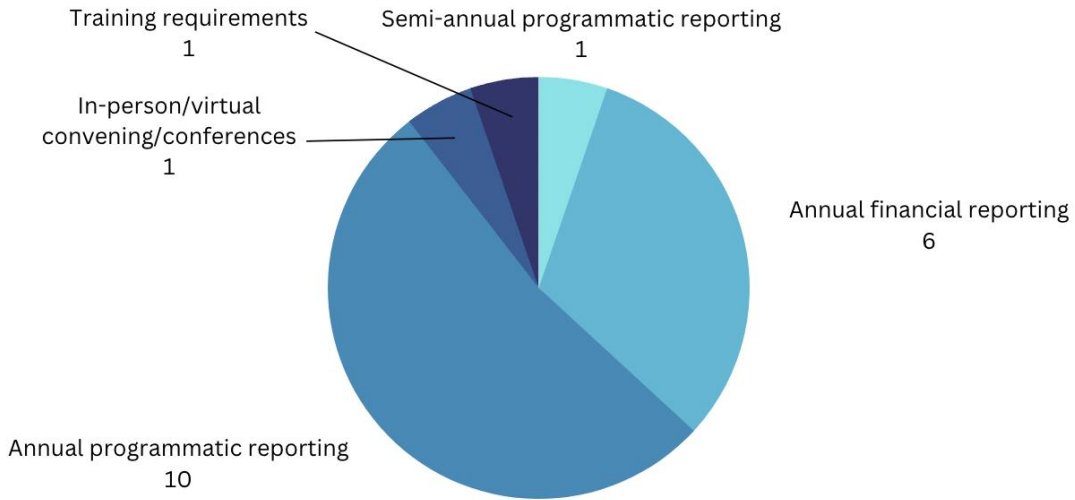


Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "Currently funded news organizations meet our primary expectations."

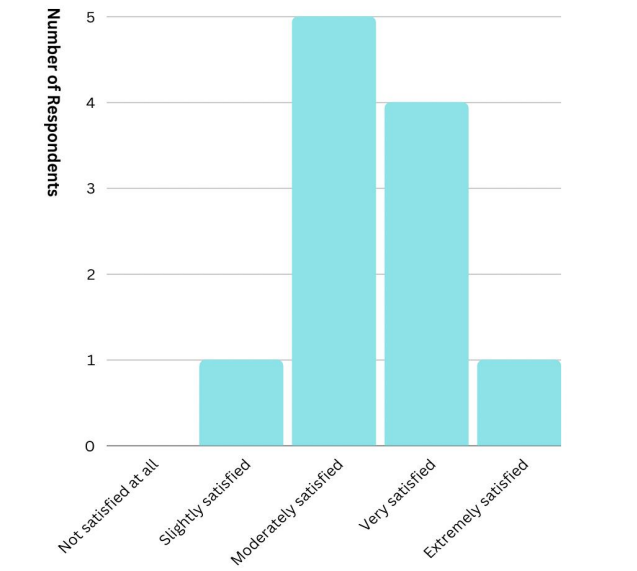


Q19: Please briefly explain your answer to the question above - why or why not? Feel free to leave a few sentences if possible.

Q20: What funding reporting requirements does your organization have for news outlets? (i.e., to get funding they must fulfill x obligation).



Q21: Do you feel satisfied with the donor impact report that the funded news outlets have submitted?



Q22: How likely is it that your organization will give funding in the following forms of charitable contributions?

