

A stack of newspapers is shown on the right side of the image, with their pages fanned out. The background is a solid light blue color. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Google's Media Takeover

Google Transparency Project

October 2019

CAMPAIGN FOR
ACCOUNTABILITY

Google says it's trying to help newsrooms around the world. Where exactly is it putting its millions and what does it want in return?

Key findings:

- Google's media funding tracks regulatory threats
- Funding shifting from Europe to U.S. as backlash gathers pace
- Survey of recipients reveals growing unease with Google's influence
- History of program shows cause for concern as it reaches North America
- Most comprehensive tally to date finds more than half a billion dollars in funding

In late 2010, Google announced that it was giving \$5 million to nonprofits working on “new approaches to journalism in the digital age.”¹ The company said the grants were intended to “help new ideas blossom and encourage experimentation.”² But observers were quick to call them a peace offering to an industry already struggling with the damage the search giant was doing to its bottom line.³

Nearly a decade later, Google's media giving has burgeoned into a globe-spanning operation that spends tens of millions of dollars a year on everything from e-books and online subscription systems to fellowships and journalism conferences. Google has used its largesse to cast itself as a friend of journalism—even as its digital advertising and news aggregation have decimated the media's traditional sources of revenue.⁴ In the process, the company has established a presence in newsrooms throughout the world in a way that appears to have few, if any, precedents.

The Google Transparency Project undertook the most comprehensive effort yet to collect all of Google's payments to media organizations around the world in one place. The analysis included 16 different Google programs and related organizations and spanned more than a decade.

It revealed that Google and related entities have committed between \$567 million and \$569 million to support at least 1,157 media projects around the globe.⁵ The analysis also identified another 170 projects supported by Google for which no funding information was publicly available, suggesting that the total amount the company has spent on media grants is likely far higher.⁶

¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190626200221/https://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/10/5-million-to-encourage-innovation-in.html>,

http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2010/10/google_donates_5_million_to_di_2.html?source=Registration&email=>m=top

² <https://web.archive.org/web/20190626200221/https://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/10/5-million-to-encourage-innovation-in.html>

³ <https://www.niemanlab.org/2010/10/google-donates-5-million-for-news-innovation-to-knight-foundation-and-new-international-efforts/>

⁴ https://www.cjr.org/special_report/global-business-of-journalism.php

⁵ Total figures calculated by converting award currency into U.S. dollars as of January 1 of the award year.

⁶ See methodology

Google often boasts about its support for journalism, disclosing plans to spend over half a billion dollars on media initiatives since 2013. But Google isn't always transparent about its spending, making it difficult to assess what the company is giving—and what it may be getting in return. Google does not maintain a centralized public repository of all of its journalism sponsorships. When the company does disclose its support, it often withholds the size of the award, or only lists them within broad funding ranges.

In a survey conducted for this study, many recipients said they were precluded by contract from discussing details of their funding.

In many cases, the phrase “sponsored by Google” was the only indication the company had supported an event or organization. Google has also funded journalism projects through outside initiatives and private family foundations established by top Google executives, further complicating the tally.⁷

In September 2018, *Netzpolitik.org*, a German news site that advocates for digital rights, analyzed 447 European projects funded through one Google initiative, the €150 million (\$165 million) Digital News Innovation (DNI) Fund, which the company launched in 2015 to counter years of complaints from European publishers.⁸ The new GTP analysis includes spending by 15 additional Google programs and related organizations, and stretches from 2007 to 2019.

Google's media spending has largely tracked the legal and regulatory threats faced by the company

The new analysis identified nearly three times as many projects, and 859 unique recipients of Google's giving, providing new insight into the breadth and scope of the company's media initiatives. Google's 1,327 grants and other awards have run the gamut, from legacy institutions, professional organizations and other pillars of the media establishment, to start-ups, hyper-local projects and students just starting their journalism careers.

The company claims its funding of media projects is altruistic. “We believe in spreading knowledge to make life better for everyone,” Google's chief executive, Sundar Pichai, says in a quote featured prominently on the website of the company's News Initiative.⁹

But the new analysis suggested that Google's media giving is designed, at least in part, to advance its policy goals. Google's media spending has largely tracked the legal and regulatory threats faced by the company, increasing as its troubles intensified, then shifting to a new focus as different threats emerged.

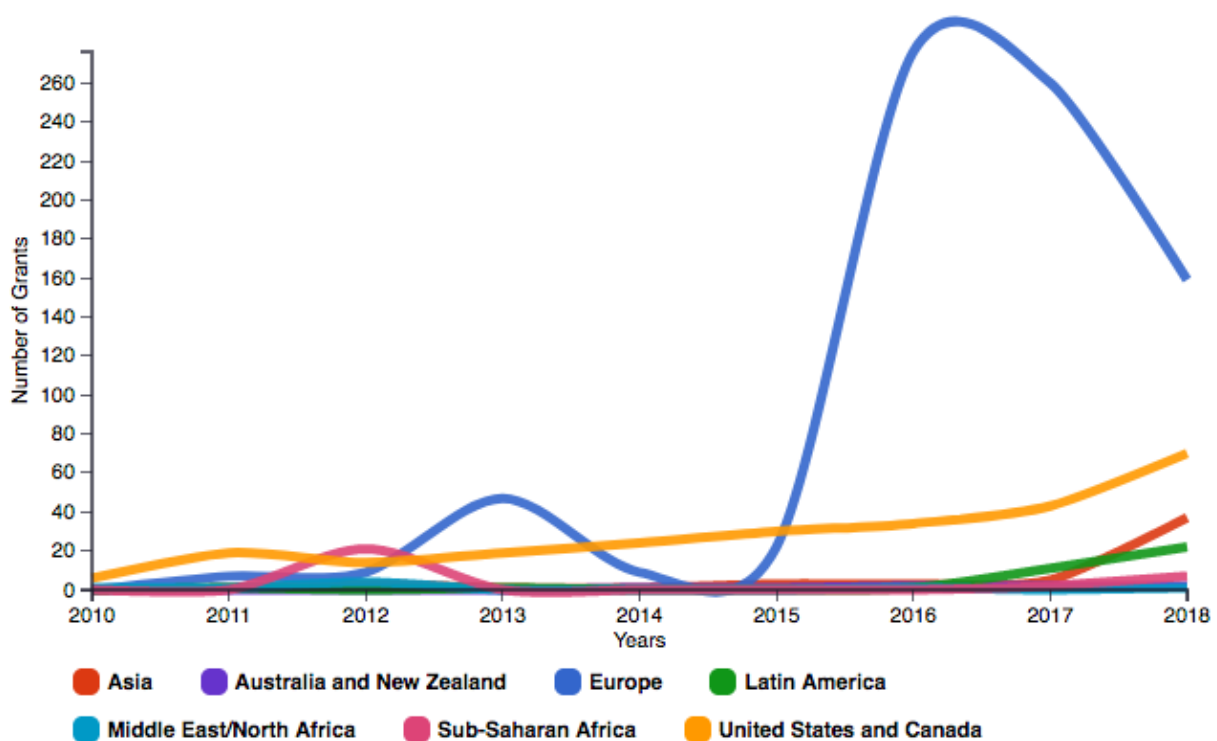
⁷ <https://journalists.org/2017/07/11/journalism-360-challenge-awards-285000-11-projects-advance-use-immersive-storytelling-news/>, https://web.archive.org/web/20190717172915/http://pdfs.citizenaudit.org/2008_11_PF/20-4170342_990PF_200712.pdf

⁸ <https://netzpolitik.org/2018/news-initiative-wohin-googles-millionen-fuer-die-medien-in-deutschland-fliesen/>; <https://netzpolitik.org/ueber-uns/>, <https://en.ejo.ch/digital-news/the-publishers-patron> <https://www.blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/digital-news-innovation-fund-three-years-and-662-total-projects-supported/>

⁹ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/about>

Some of Google's earliest media giving, for example, was focused on France, as news publishers in the country began to balk at the company's use of their content. In 2013 alone, Google made 45 French awards totaling more than \$37 million, according to the new data. After heading off the French threat, Google expanded its giving to include the rest of Europe as well, making 258 awards throughout the continent worth as much as \$92.4 million in 2016 alone, and an additional 18 awards worth an undisclosed amount.

Overall, more than one-fifth of the company's media grants (285 awards) have gone to media outlets in France and Germany. The two countries were among the strongest advocates of a tighter European Union copyright law, fiercely opposed by Google, that would require sites to pay publishers for using bits of their articles.¹⁰



Key dates

2010: European Commission launches formal antitrust investigation of Google's search business

2012: France and Germany consider forcing search engines to pay publishers for content

2015: European Union considers taxing digital companies for showing copyrighted material; Europe's competition chief says the company will be charged with antitrust violations

¹⁰ <https://www.neweurope.eu/article/google-supports-media-asks-political-help/> <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/final-approval-given-to-eu-copyright-directive>, <https://phys.org/news/2019-07-french-parliament-copyright-reform-eu.html>

2017: Google faces criticism for allowing Russian operatives to use its platforms to interfere in the 2016 election

2018: U.S. media companies cut more than 15,000 jobs

2019: Justice Department opens federal antitrust investigation of Google's business practices; U.S. Congress launches inquiries

Most recently, Google's media largesse has shifted to the United States, where lawmakers have become increasingly skeptical of dominant technology platforms, privacy legislation is being considered and antitrust authorities have begun to investigate them for abuse.

In 2018, amid complaints that it had allowed foreign actors to manipulate U.S. elections and profited from fake news, our analysis identified 66 grants and other Google awards in the U.S. worth at least \$4 million, with the actual total likely much higher. That was more than the total number of U.S. awards it made in 2015 and 2016 combined and more in dollar terms than at any point in the decade we examined.

The company's latest campaign is the Google News Initiative (GNI), a three-year, \$300 million effort it announced in 2018 "to help journalism thrive in the digital age."¹¹ The program's scope is international, but in its first year it has included a notable focus on the U.S.

In March 2019, Google and the Sacramento-based McClatchy newspaper chain unveiled The Compass Experiment, a three-year project that will launch digital-only new operations in three small- to mid-sized U.S. communities.¹² The project will be funded through the GNI, but like many awards made under the program, the exact amount to be provided was not disclosed.

In May 2019, Google announced a new "innovation challenge," pledging up to \$300,000 each for local news projects from the U.S. and Canada designed to generate revenue or increase audience engagement.¹³

A July 2019 meeting between Google officials and top Canadian media executives suggests the company is also importing to North America the approach it first developed in Europe, where it tapped establishment media figures to act as gatekeepers to its millions.¹⁴ The approach was seen by critics as a way to coopt media leaders, and one that in some cases created troubling conflicts of interest.

Direct payments to media organizations are just one of the ways Google has insinuated itself into the newsroom. Google has built goodwill by backing more than 144 news fellowships between 2013 and 2018, according to the analysis, to the benefit of both young journalists and the media organizations that host them.

¹¹ <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/announcing-google-news-initiative/>

¹² <https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/mcclatchy-and-google-partner-experimental-lab-local-news/>, <https://www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?CIK=MNI&owner=exclude&action=getcompany>

¹³ <https://blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/challenge-stimulate-local-news-north-america/>

¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/jessebrown/status/1148649957752213504?s=21>

The 10-week program, which in 2018 paid U.S. participants up to \$10,000, often begins with a trip to Google’s Mountain View, California, headquarters. There, new fellows receive “a behind-the-scenes look at what the Google News Lab is doing to support the work of journalists around the world.”¹⁵

It has embedded student reporters in some of the world’s most influential news organizations, including the *BBC*, *Financial Times*, and *ProPublica*.¹⁶ Google expanded its News Lab Fellowship program last year, saying it would provide more than 50 fellowships in 12 countries.¹⁷

Google has also funded several initiatives that seek to automate aspects of journalism usually done by humans, and in some cases replace human newsgathering and reporting with bots, artificial intelligence and automation. The tools include programs that write news stories with minimal human input.¹⁸

The new analysis also revealed growing uneasiness among recipients of Google’s media giving. As part of its review, GTP attempted to contact more than 800 organizations and individuals that have received Google funding.¹⁹ Many said their agreements with the tech giant prevented them from disclosing the amounts they had received. Some did provide exact funding levels and many reported a generally positive experience, noting that Google was a hands-off funder and made no attempt to interfere with their projects.

But some recipients expressed concerns about Google’s impact on the media ecosystem. A recipient of a 2017 Google News Lab grant was generally appreciative of Google’s interest in supporting journalism, but said “it seems as though many of their programs, unsurprisingly, lean heavily towards subsidizing/promoting the use of Google’s tools, which always raises my concerns about long-term sustainability.”

A 2015 winner of a Computational Journalism Award said she had recently learned about the ways Google and Facebook siphon ad revenue from media organizations. “I fear for the future of free press in Europe and I think Google’s efforts to help journalists at the same time do not make up for the revenue loss,” she wrote. “Had I been aware of these issues in 2014 when I applied for the Google grant, I might not have done it. I know and respect great colleagues at Google, but the company as a whole IMO has not had a positive impact on journalists.”

Perhaps to counter such views, Google has frequently supported broad industry-wide efforts, multiplying the impact of its giving. Three recipients, the California-based Center for Investigative Reporting, Maastricht-based European Journalism Centre, and the U.S.-based

¹⁵ <https://www.poynter.org/business-work/2017/calling-all-media-nerds-were-looking-for-our-next-google-news-lab-fellow/>
<https://www.propublica.org/atpropublica/apply-to-be-a-google-news-lab-fellow-at-propublica>

¹⁶ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/training/fellowship>,
<https://ajr.org/2013/11/13/google-journalism-fellowships-2/>

¹⁷ <https://medium.com/@grove/our-next-steps-in-the-google-news-initiative-ec5b7fe4dcb8>

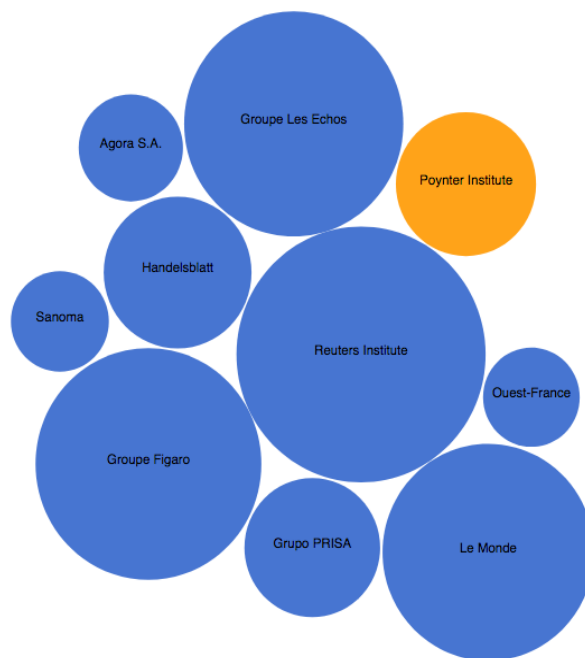
¹⁸ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/quevedo-ai-journalist-aide-de-camp/>

¹⁹ GTP did not attempt to contact recipients of Google’s first Asia-Pacific Innovation Challenge, announced in spring 2019, or recipients of the 2012 African News Innovation Challenge.

Investigative Reporters and Editors received the most grants by far—26, 25, and 23 awards respectively.²⁰ The fourth most frequent recipients received only 11 awards.



Top recipients by number of awards



Top recipients by monetary value

The biggest beneficiary of Google's largesse in monetary terms was the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford, which received at least £5.5 million over five years from Google, according to the analysis.²¹ The funds were mostly for an annual digital news project, with Google's contribution dwarfing the £695,203 provided by the project's 13 other sponsors.

In another example of Google spreading its giving across the industry, a program conducted by the Indianapolis-based Society of Professional Journalists has provided free training on Google products to more than 21,000 journalists at more than 550 locations across the United States and Canada.²²

In Europe, Google enlisted members of the media establishment to help distribute its millions and, perhaps not surprisingly, concentrated much of its funding among the largest and most politically connected media conglomerates. For example, *Le Figaro* and its sister companies have received at

²⁰ Each of the three organizations held a series of training events with backing from Google. Two of them—the Center for Investigative Reporting and IRE—also hosted Google fellows.

²¹ The top recipients by monetary value were calculated based on the sum of the high estimates of Google's contribution to each recipient. Grants that were part of a large Google initiative, where the only available information is the total of Google's spending on the entire program, were excluded from this calculation. We did, however, include specific grants that were shared among multiple recipients.

https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/FOI_0.pdf

²² <https://www.spj.org/google.asp>

least €4.5 million for seven different media projects since 2013.²³ The publisher of the venerated French daily *Le Monde* has received more than €3.2 million since 2013—substantial amounts for media companies struggling in a harsh business environment.²⁴

The analysis also highlighted Google’s support for local news, which has suffered most in the digital age and is arguably least able to resist Google’s incursion into the newsroom.²⁵ It was among the funders of Report for America, a national service program run by the GroundTruth Project that places journalists in newsrooms across the country, providing \$150,000 in 2018 and \$250,000 in 2019.²⁶ The program sponsored 61 “emerging journalists” in 2019, placing them at *The Modesto Bee* in California, the *Casper Star Tribune* in Wyoming, the *Charleston Gazette-Mail* in West Virginia and the *Detroit Free Press*.²⁷

The Google News Lab provided an undisclosed amount to Matter, the online publisher, which ran a series of local news bootcamps across the U.S. in 2018, providing free training for journalists, news businesspeople, designers, and technologists.²⁸ And Google supported Advance Local, a U.S. publisher that owns 24 newspapers and nine websites, as it built a new format for local news storytelling.²⁹

The scope and scale of the funding shows that the media is growing increasingly dependent on Google for cash, technology, training and other essentials. That, in turn, raises concerns about whether newsrooms will be willing to bite the hand that feeds them. Until recently, the tech giants had not been subjected to the kind of aggressive accountability journalism that a dominant industry would normally face. And even now, Google has been able to avoid the type of scrutiny that Facebook has endured over the past year.

Facebook has taken notice. In January 2019 it announced it was setting up its own \$300 million fund to make payments to journalism projects.³⁰

“These people should be being investigated by local news. They should not be the platform on which it is depending,” Emily Bell, a former top editor of *The Guardian* and founding director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, explained in a recent discussion of Google and Facebook’s support local journalism. “That is a looming problem for us as journalists, because we can very easily get addicted to the money.”³¹

With Google set to expand its giving into additional regions of the world, the new details about the company’s giving in Europe should serve as a cautionary tale.³² The company has shown its willingness to use its funding for a struggling industry to advance its own policy priorities. In

²³ See methodology

²⁴ https://www.lemonde.fr/actualite-medias/article/2018/04/12/2017-une-annee-de-croissance-pour-le-groupe-le-monde_5284379_3236.html

²⁵ <https://www.wsj.com/graphics/local-newspapers-stark-divide/>

²⁶ Email correspondence from recipient.

²⁷ <https://www.reportforamerica.org/2019/04/25/report-for-america-announces-61-corps-members-placed-in-50-local-news-organizations/>

²⁸ <https://medium.com/matter-driven-narrative/a-lot-more-experiments-open-matter-e3088db96fb>

²⁹ <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2018/12/gni-youtube-innovation-funding.html>, <https://www.advancelocal.com/>

³⁰ https://www.cjr.org/the_new_gatekeepers/facebook-journalism-funding.php

³¹ <https://slate.com/technology/2019/04/google-and-facebook-are-investing-in-the-local-news-business.html>, <https://journalism.columbia.edu/faculty/emily-bell>

³² <https://web.archive.org/web/20190731160414/https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/innovation-challenges/>

June 2018, for example, a Google executive asked European media companies that had received grants to lobby on its behalf against tighter E.U. copyright rules, which the company staunchly opposed.³³

The company has also shown itself willing to directly buy favorable coverage from the media. Just two weeks before the executive's lobbying request, Google was reported to have been one of six companies paying £500,000 each to London's *Evening Standard* newspaper for "money-can't-buy" positive news stories and favorable comment pieces that would appear to readers as routine, independent editorial content.³⁴ Despite criticism of the arrangement, Google and the newspaper proceeded with a revamped campaign.³⁵

"These people should be being investigated by local news. They should not be the platform on which it is depending"

Google's business decisions over the past two decades have been uniquely damaging to the industry.³⁶ Its Google News aggregator stripped the value of trusted news brands, in some cases built up over a century or more, by lumping their stories together with those from less credible sources. The result was that *The New York Times* was put on the same level as a blog riffing off its deep investigation, blurring the distinction for readers.³⁷

Google also undercut sites that relied on paid subscriptions with its "first click free" policy, which required publishers to offer free access to articles in order to appear in its search results.³⁸ The policy helped delay the development of a sustainable business model for much of the industry, and its withdrawal came too late for many.

The company's stranglehold over the online advertising market has devastated media companies. Google and Facebook together take 99% of new digital advertising spending, according to the most recent data from the World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers.³⁹

At the same time, Google's giving has not stanch the bleeding in news media. In 2018 alone, media companies cut more than 15,000 jobs according to a recent report from Challenger, Gray & Christmas, a 281% increase over 2017.⁴⁰ Three-quarters of those jobs were from news organizations.

³³ <https://gizmodo.com/google-threatens-pulling-news-from-eu-as-disastrous-cop-1831957852>,
<https://www.ft.com/content/a8031d7a-78a0-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d>,

<https://netzpolitik.org/wp-upload/2018/09/google-dni-email-on-copyright.pdf>,

³⁴ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/george-osborne-s-london-evening-standard-promises-positive-news-coverage-to-uber-goo/>

³⁵ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/george-osborne-s-evening-standard-launches-delayed-money-can-t-buy>,
<https://web.archive.org/save/https://www.standard.co.uk/futurelondon/skills>

³⁶ <https://digitalcontentnext.org/blog/2016/06/16/google-and-facebook-devour-the-ad-and-data-pie-scraps-for-everyone-else/>

³⁷ <https://digitalcontentnext.org/blog/2018/06/12/fight-for-the-future-new-york-times-ceo-mark-thompsons-breaking-the-news-keynote/>

³⁸ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/google-offers-hand-to-news-publishers-1506916861>

³⁹ https://www.cjr.org/special_report/global-business-of-journalism.php

⁴⁰ <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/2018-was-the-worst-year-of-media-layoffs-since-2009-153106605.html>

This year isn't looking much better: With layoffs and buyouts at *Vice Media*, *McClatchy*, *BuzzFeed*, *Gannett* and several other media outlets, news organizations cut more than 3,600 jobs in the first half of 2019.⁴¹

Against that backdrop, Google's journalism initiatives—and similar, more recent spending by Facebook—are providing a financial infusion that has proved irresistible for struggling newsrooms that might normally look askance at funding from an industry they cover. As one recipient of Google funding told us: “I think you will find that many journalists are at the same time grateful that such funding sources exist (as others have been drying out for some time), and apprehensive that the huge digital gatekeepers are becoming involved in funding the news.”

Already, the deepening integration is raising troubling questions about conflicts of interest. Is Google's giving being adequately disclosed, so readers, competitors, and others can weigh its influence? Does the money come with strings attached, explicit or implicit? And can reporters cover the company freely and fully, even as it supplements their newsrooms' budgets, sometimes through multiple projects?

Google's funding poses other problems, too. Should a technology platform with its own business interests to consider be deciding which media groups are worthy of support? Those questions are proving increasingly thorny, and Google is ill-equipped to handle them. In April 2019, for example, the company withdrew a planned grant to a Hungarian news site allied with Prime Minister Viktor Orban after critics complained about its racist, anti-Semitic content.⁴²

In April 2019, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg floated another approach, one that would allow technology platforms to help support news organizations while avoiding charges that they were buying influence. Put simply: paying publishers for their content.⁴³ Facebook is reportedly moving forward with such a plan, offering several news outlets millions of dollars for the rights to include their content in a news section to be launched in late 2019.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the discomfort with Google's current approach is intensifying. In July 2019, the publisher of a Canadian news site disclosed a private meeting about the Google News Initiative at Google's Canadian headquarters that included top editors from the *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, and the head of news at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.⁴⁵

“The unspoken idea here is that having (accidentally?) destroyed the news business, Google will now help rebuild it, w products & partnerships,” tweeted Jesse Brown, publisher of CanadaLand, who said he walked out after being told the meeting was off the record. “[N]ews publishers need to think a bit harder about getting in bed with these interests.”

⁴¹ <https://www.challengergray.com/press/press-releases/2019-june-job-cut-report-challenger-report-shows-highest-first-half-total-2009>, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-07-01/journalism-layoffs-are-at-the-highest-level-since-last-recession>

⁴² <https://www.politico.eu/article/google-withdraws-grant-to-hungary-news-site-over-fake-news-anti-semitism/>

⁴³ <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/1/18290330/facebook-news-tab-mark-zuckerberg-license-fee-axel-springer-mathias-dopfner>, <https://www.facebook.com/4/posts/10107028379388161?sfns=mo>

⁴⁴ https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-offers-news-outlets-millions-of-dollars-a-year-to-license-content-11565294575?mod=hp_minor_pos1

⁴⁵ <https://twitter.com/jessebrown/status/1148649957752213504?s=21>

A Brief History of Google's Media Funding

Quieting Critics in France

By 2012, Google was facing fierce headwinds in Europe. Publishers were struggling with plummeting revenues and complaining loudly about the company's unauthorized aggregation of their content.

In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel's government endorsed legislation allowing publishers to charge search engines and aggregators when they display small bits of news articles along with search results.⁴⁶ In France, President Francois Hollande threatened to introduce similar legislation if Google and French publishers were unable to resolve their standoff.⁴⁷

But in early 2013, Google found a way to blunts its critics in France. After "intense negotiations" with representatives of the French press, the company announced a new initiative to provide €60 million (\$80 million) over three years to help French publishers generate more online revenue.⁴⁸



Google's Eric Schmidt and French President Francois Hollande signed a deal in 2013 that established a €60 million fund to help French publishers generate more online revenue.

The funding deal, which was signed in February 2013 by Hollande and Google's executive chairman, Eric Schmidt, also deepened the company's ties with French publishers by offering them training on Google's advertising tools.⁴⁹ And it put an end to the threatened French legislation.

Schmidt hailed the arrangement as a model that could be followed in other countries.⁵⁰ But trade associations representing German publishers and their peers across Europe balked. They complained that French publishers had broken ranks with their peers across Europe, and they argued that putting an end to the company's unauthorized—and

unpaid—use of their content required a fundamental change in Google's relationship with publishers.⁵¹

Despite the criticism, the French project, known as the Google Digital Innovation Press Fund (*Fonds pour l'Innovation Numérique de la Presse* or *FINP*), was officially launched in September 2013.⁵²

⁴⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/02/technology/german-copyright-law-targets-google-links.html>

⁴⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/18/technology/a-first-step-on-continent-for-google-on-use-of-content.html>

⁴⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/feb/01/google-52m-fund-help-french-publishers>

⁴⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/18/technology/a-first-step-on-continent-for-google-on-use-of-content.html>

⁵⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/18/technology/a-first-step-on-continent-for-google-on-use-of-content.html>

⁵¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/18/technology/a-first-step-on-continent-for-google-on-use-of-content.html>

⁵² <http://www.lefigaro.fr/medias/2013/09/19/20004-20130919ARTFIG00333-google-et-la-presse-lancent-le-fonds-d-innovation-de-la-presse-en-ligne.php>

To distribute the funds, Google tapped members of the journalistic establishment and positioned them as gatekeepers to its millions—a model it would subsequently replicate elsewhere.⁵³ The presidency of the FINP board rotated among representatives of Google and the French press association (l'Association de la Presse d'Information Politique et Générale, or AIPG), while the press representatives on the board came from some of France's largest newspaper publishers, including *Le Figaro* and *Les Echos*.

Ludovic Blecher, the former editor-in-chief at *Libération*, a French paper founded by Jean-Paul Sartre, was appointed director of the new fund. Nathalie Collin, the CEO of *Le Nouvel Observateur* and an AIPG representative, served as one of the four rotating presidents.⁵⁴

Blecher's former paper was critical of the deal, complaining that "the press screams victory, while the agreement has little to do with the original idea of compensation." The paper also noted the potential for conflicts of interest, given that media representatives sitting on the board could have power over the media projects receiving funding.⁵⁵

Others echoed the concerns. Maurice Botbol, the founder of Indigo Publications and president of SPILL, an independent press association, condemned the lack of transparency and the inherent conflicts of interest in the governance of the fund. Not only would the publishers on the board be the main beneficiaries of Google's funding, Botbol noted, both they and Google would have access to detailed files on the editorial and commercial strategies of competing companies, including data about competitors' pricing rules, audience monetization and database performance.⁵⁶

And while the fund was pitched as a way to help online publications, critics charged that it strongly favored France's media establishment, whose backing Google needed if it was to fend off the threat of regulation. "The help goes to the rich, not the innovators," said Edwy Plenel, publisher of the internet-based *Mediapart*. Plenel complained that the fund appeared chiefly intended for France's largest print publications and did too little to help newer internet-based publications.⁵⁷

It's unclear whether Google ever made good on its total €60-million funding commitment. The FINP website (finp.fr) is now offline, and while archives of the site show what appears to be activity after 2014, details about those awards are not available.⁵⁸

Two available funding reports, for 2013 and 2014, confirm that Google's spending in France was tilted heavily toward the media establishment. The French fund financed 52 media projects in

⁵³ Google used a similar approach after a 2014 ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union that people could ask search engines to remove results for queries that include their name. To comply, the company set up a council of experts.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190304202013/https://archive.google.com/advisorycouncil/>

⁵⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140701080810/http://www.finp.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FINP-rapport2013.pdf> (French)

⁵⁵ https://www.liberation.fr/eclairements/2013/09/19/la-presse-entrainee-par-le-fonds-google_933272 (French)

The FINP said it took steps to mitigate potential conflicts.

⁵⁶ <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/edition/les-invites-de-mediapart/article/251013/fonds-google-l-arbitraire-le-plus-absolu> (French)

⁵⁷ <https://observatoiredesmedias.com/2013/11/13/edwy-plenel-et-le-fonds-google-je-mets-en-cause-l-ensemble-de-ce-processus/>

⁵⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170217014032/http://www.finp.fr/category/actu/>

2013 and 2014, for a total of €32 million.⁵⁹ Largely validating critics' concerns, more than 90% of the funding was reserved for AIPG members and France's largest print publications.⁶⁰

Almost 30% of all funding in 2013 and 2014 went to FINP board members: *Le Figaro* (€4 million), *Les Echos* (€3 million), and *Le Nouvel Observateur* (€2 million). Blecher's former paper *Libération*, one of the early critics of the deal, received €649,000 in 2013 for "exclusive digital offers" and e-books on demand.⁶¹

For *Libération*, Google's efforts may have been too little, too late. Facing a 15% slide in the publication's sales, the paper's editor-in-chief, Nicolas Demorand, proposed a restructuring plan that would have transformed the iconic leftist paper into a "social network, providing content for multimedia platforms."

According to *Libération* journalists, Demorand's plan involved doing everything but journalism, turning the paper's headquarters into a cultural center, with a bar, a restaurant, a TV studio and a start-up hub. In February 2014, just a few months after the paper received its FINP grant, Demorand resigned after suffering four votes of no confidence from the publication's editorial board.⁶²

Ludovic Blecher fared better. In October 2015 he joined Google to work on the Digital News Innovation Fund, helping to take the model Google had tested in France to the rest of Europe.⁶³

Reaching Across Europe

Just as Google's funds were finding their way to French newsrooms, the company faced a new threat in Brussels. In January 2015, the European Union's digital chief, Günther Oettinger, revealed that the EU was considering a tax on U.S. internet companies as part of its new plan to build a single digital market across Europe.⁶⁴

A crucial part of the plan was to reform copyright rules for the 21st century, including a potential tax on digital companies for showing copyrighted material. "If [foreign technology companies] are playing in our European markets then we have some instruments to come to a guarantee that they are acting on the basis of our rules," Oettinger explained in an interview with *The Wall Street Journal*.

Adding to Google's regulatory headaches, Europe's competition chief, Margrethe Vestager, announced in April of that year that the company would be charged with antitrust violations for

⁵⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140701080810/http://www.finp.fr:80/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FINP-rapport2013.pdf>, <https://www.linformaticien.com/Portals/0/2015/mars/Dossierdepreste-Bilantendances2014FINP-1.pdf> (French)

⁶⁰ <https://www.frenchweb.fr/fonds-google-la-presse-historique-rafle-90-des-fonds-les-pure-players-ramassent-les-miettes/152250> (French)

⁶¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140701080810/http://www.finp.fr/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/FINP-rapport2013.pdf>

⁶² <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-26169559>

⁶³ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ludovicblecher/?originalSubdomain=fr>

⁶⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/eu-considers-taxing-google-other-u-s-internet-firms-1421699055>

abusing its dominant position in online search to favor its own services over those of competitors.⁶⁵

Less than four months after Oettinger's statement and only two weeks after Vestager's April 2015 announcement, Google returned to the strategy it had used in France, pledging to provide €150 million to newsrooms throughout Europe to stimulate and support "innovation in digital journalism."⁶⁶

Taking a page from the company's successful charm offensive in France, the Digital News Innovation Fund initially included partnerships with just eight of Europe's most established print publications: *The Guardian* and *Financial Times* in the U.K.; *Die Zeit* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Germany; *Les Echos* from France; *La Stampa* from Italy; *El País* from Spain and *NRC Media* from the Netherlands.

Six months later, in October 2015, Google said it had expanded the program, and invited applications from startups and others interested in media innovation.⁶⁷ The fund promised to support projects in three categories: early stage "prototype" projects that would receive up to €50,000; "medium" projects that Google would provide up to €300,000; and "large" projects that would be capped at €1 million.

In February 2016, Google announced the first 128 project awards, allocating €27 million to projects in 23 different European countries.⁶⁸ Germany, which had passed an ancillary copyright law in 2013 granting publishers the right to charge search engines for reproducing their content, received almost €5 million of that funding—far more than any other country.⁶⁹

The company has continued its cash infusion in the years since. Through subsequent funding rounds, Google has awarded more than €140 million to 662 media projects in 30 European countries—a considerable sum for struggling newsrooms but a rounding error in Google's effort to protect its share of Europe's €48 billion digital ad market.⁷⁰

Google says it has targeted four key themes with those funds: battling misinformation, telling local stories, boosting digital revenues, and exploring new technologies.⁷¹

Netzpolitik.org's 2018 analysis, which looked at Google's DNI funding through the first four rounds, noted that, like the French fund in 2013, the lion's share of the European fund was reserved for old and established media outlets:

⁶⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/15/business/international/google-expected-to-face-antitrust-charges-in-europe.html>

⁶⁶ <https://europe.googleblog.com/2015/04/lets-work-together-to-support-quality.html>

⁶⁷ <https://techcrunch.com/2015/10/22/with-120-news-publishers-signed-on-google-opens-applications-for-170m-dni-innovation-fund/>

⁶⁸ https://blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/digital-news-initiative-first-funding_24/

⁶⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/02/technology/german-copyright-law-targets-google-links.html>

⁷⁰ <https://blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/digital-news-innovation-fund-three-years-and-662-total-projects-supported/>, <https://digitalgo.it/en/events/digital-advertising-market-in-europe-is-worth-e48-bn-the-highlights-form-iab-interact/>

⁷¹ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/report/european-innovation-supporting-quality-journalism/>

*The typical recipient of Google funding is a legacy institution, Western European and for-profit. Comparatively, the DNI Fund is much less generous to non-commercial journalism. Only 10% of projects in our data set went to non-profit or public-service media.*⁷²

Over the course of the Digital News Initiative, Google awarded the largest number of awards to media outlets in Germany: 92 projects for a total between €11.1 and €36 million. The next largest beneficiary was France, which received 72 awards totaling between €9.5 and €33.3 million, on top of the grants disbursed through the earlier French program.

Google's focus on Germany and its media establishment appears to be no accident. The country plays a leadership role in the European Union as a whole, and its politicians have played a central role in crafting policies that threaten to strike at the heart of Google's business model.

Google's focus on Germany and its media establishment appears to be no accident

Oettinger, Europe's commissioner for the digital economy until early 2017 was a prominent member of German Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union.⁷³ He was a key supporter of the EU's Copyright Directive requiring search engines and news aggregators to pay licensing fees when offering snippets of content on their sites.⁷⁴ Axel Voss, another German politician, was appointed as the EU's Rapporteur for the Copyright Directive in June of 2017.⁷⁵ Google fought a furious battle to kill the measure, threatening in January 2019 to pull its news service from Europe if the law goes into effect.⁷⁶

In structuring the DNI Fund, Google also borrowed from its French forerunner, again exposing the company to conflict of interest concerns. Like the board of Google's French fund, the board of the European fund includes several representatives of companies or organizations that have received Google support, some of it substantial.⁷⁷ Among them:

- Veit Dengler, the CEO of Neue Zürcher Zeitung, a Swiss publisher, until 2017. The company received an award of €300,000 to €1 million in 2016 for an app to provide personalized news based on a user's location and interests, and another the following

⁷² <https://en.ejo.ch/digital-news/the-publishers-patron>

⁷³ <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-commissioner-guenther-oettinger-calls-angela-merkel-a-lame-duck-germany-cdu/>

⁷⁴ <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/politico-brussels-playbook-presented-by-google-not-brexite-day-oettinger-interview-did-vestager-kill-renzi/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.eppgroup.eu/newsroom/news/axel-voss-appointed-new-rapporteur-for-copyright-directive>

⁷⁶ <https://gizmodo.com/google-threatens-pulling-news-from-eu-as-disastrous-cop-1831957852>

⁷⁷ <https://web.archive.org/web/20190731172115/https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/about/>

year, in the same range, for a program to deliver personalized messages to users.⁷⁸ Google also supported two fellowships at NZZ.

- Miriam Meckel, the publisher of *Wirtschaftswoche*, a German business magazine. Handelsblatt Media Group, the publisher of *Wirtschaftswoche*, received funding for six digital media projects between 2016 to 2019. Handelsblatt publications also received two Google News Lab fellowships.⁷⁹
- Bartosz Hojka, the CEO of Agora S.A, one of the largest media companies in Central and Eastern Europe. Agora media subsidiaries have received funding for at least five different projects, three in the €300,000 to €1 million range and two “prototype” projects funded with grants up to €50,000.⁸⁰
- Arianna Ciccone is the founder and director of the Perugia International Journalism Festival, the largest annual media event in Europe. Google has sponsored the festival since at least 2015, and in 2017 became one of the festival’s main sponsors.⁸¹
- Murdoch MacLennan, the CEO of the U.K.’s Telegraph Media Group until 2017, is a fifth board member whose company benefitted from DNI funding. While MacLennan has since left the board, his publishing company received funding for a “medium” project in 2016 and two fellowships.⁸²

Google often portrays its media funding as philanthropy. But, as it doled out grants to publishers across Europe, Google showed its willingness to leverage relationships built through the DNI Fund to advance its policy priorities.

In one particularly egregious instance in June 2018, Google’s director of strategic relations, Madhav Chinnappa, encouraged publishers participating in a DNI working group to contact their members of the European Parliament to oppose the tighter EU copyright rules.⁸³ His message,

⁷⁸ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/nzz-companion-app/>,
<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/innovativedynamic-paygate-delivering-personalised-messages-round-4/>

⁷⁹ https://handelsblattgroup.com/tag/storyflow/?post_type=presse-meldung (German),
<https://handelsblattgroup.com/Presse/wirtschaftswoche-erhaelt-innovationsfoerderung-von-googles-digital-news-initiative-2/>,
 (German)

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/wirtschaftswoche-pro/>,
<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/text-speech-synthesis-round-5/>

⁸⁰ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/x-ray-politics-get-know-more-about-your-constituency/>,
<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/newsmavens/>,

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/harmony-round-5/>,
<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/tok-fm-microphone/>,

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/search-radio-round-4/>
⁸¹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20140730002348/https://www.journalismfestival.com/sponsors/>,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20170205104230/http://www.journalismfestival.com/sponsors/>

⁸² <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/real-time-sports-action-visualiser/>,
<https://web.archive.org/web/20170202133128/https://www.city.ac.uk/news/2016/april/journalism-students-from-city-secure-half-of-new-google-work-placements>

<https://www.city.ac.uk/news/2017/april/google-news-lab-fellowships-2017>

⁸³ <https://www.ft.com/content/a8031d7a-78a0-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d>,

<https://netzpolitik.org/wp-upload/2018/09/google-dni-email-on-copyright.pdf>,

<https://gizmodo.com/google-threatens-pulling-news-from-eu-as-disastrous-cop-1831957852>

which began, “HI DNI WG friends,” pointed out that “the timing is urgent,” with a key committee vote just days away.

From: Madhav Chinnappa <madhav@google.com>

Date: 14 June 2018 at 12:33:47 BST

To: DNI Workgroup <dn>

<dn>

Cc: "

Subject: Re: DNI WG Lisbon - Agenda

HI DNI WG friends,

Hope this email finds you well! One of the actions from our DNI WG meeting in Lisbon was about more information about the proposed Copyright Directive. Apologies for the delay on my side and the timing is urgent as there is a vote in [the Juri committee](#) of the European Parliament on June 20th on the Copyright directive.

If you feel strongly about this, then please consider contacting [the MEPs](#) on the Juri committee.

All the best - Madhav

In June 2018, a Google executive encouraged publishers participating in a DNI working group to contact their members of the European Parliament to oppose tighter EU copyright rules.

Dominating the Newsroom

In addition to the leverage it has apparently applied in policy disputes, the company receives another substantial and tangible benefit from its media giving: Google’s suite of products increasingly dominates newsrooms around the world.

As *Netzpolitik* warned, through its search engine, its servers, its subscription and analytics tools, as well as YouTube and other services, Google “has built an ecosystem that no publisher can ignore.”⁸⁴ Google has also become a leading sponsor of media training efforts, backing conferences, hackathons, fellowships and other programs, all aimed at shaping journalists for the digital age.

The company has boasted about its support for Report for America, a program inspired by the popular Teach for America that matches young journalists with local newsrooms for a year of public-service reporting.⁸⁵ Google News Lab said it would “provide in-depth training to the corps members on digital and data journalism, and provide them with hardware to help them in the field, including 360 degree cameras.”⁸⁶ The company has not disclosed how much money it has provided to The GroundTruth Project, which runs the program.⁸⁷ But in response to our

⁸⁴ <https://en.ejo.ch/digital-news/the-publishers-patron>

⁸⁵ <https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/supporting-local-journalism-report-america/>

⁸⁶ <https://thegroundtruthproject.org/report-america-launches-google-news-lab-summit/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.blog.google/outreach-initiatives/google-news-initiative/supporting-local-journalism-report-america/>

queries, the GroundTruth Project said it had received \$150,000 from Google for 2017-2018 and \$250,000 for 2018-2019 for Report for America.

Under a different program, thousands of journalists have been trained on using Google's newsroom tools. From 2013 through 2017, Google contributed more than \$1 million to the Society of Professional Journalists, according to records and board minutes found on the SPJ website. A training program launched by the group in 2015 that is conducted in association with the Google News Initiative has provided free training on Google products to more than 21,000 journalists at more than 550 locations across the United States and Canada.⁸⁸

*Google's suite of products increasingly dominates newsrooms
around the world*

The workshops include instruction on Google Alerts, Google Surveys, Google Earth, Google Maps, Google Permissions, Google's Public Data Explorer, Google Scholar, Google Advanced Search, Google Translate, Google Trends, and YouTube.

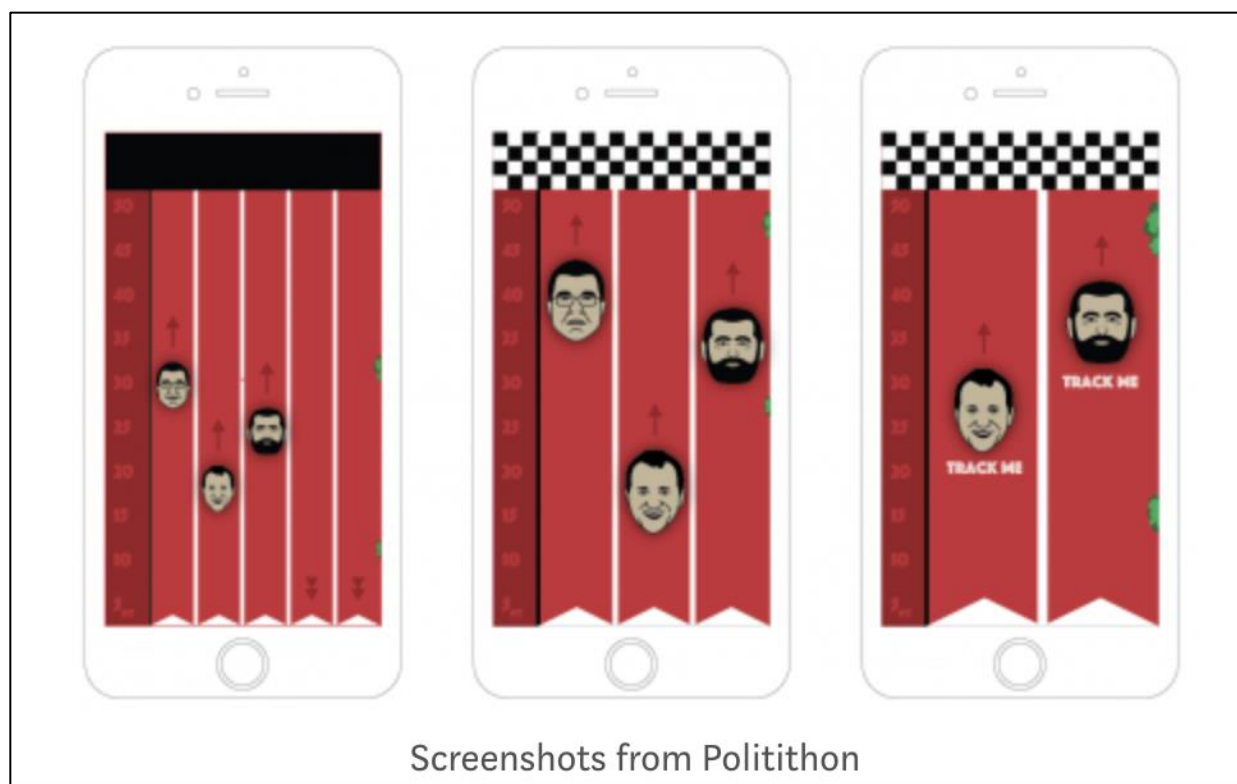
The trainers for these sessions, journalists or former journalists themselves, have worked for some of the most influential news outlets in the U.S. including *CNN*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Axios*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *San Jose Mercury News*, *NPR* and others. Many of them disclose in their LinkedIn profiles that they consult as media or technology trainers, but it is unclear whether or not they are financially compensated by Google.⁸⁹

Some of the projects developed with Google's funding appear to be at odds with its professed intention to support quality journalism. "Politithon"—developed at a 2018 hackathon organized by the Global Editors Network that was financially supported by Google—consists of a smartphone game app in which Lebanese politicians compete in a race, advancing across the screen based on their positive policy achievements. The politician sticking to his or her promises the most wins.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ <https://www.spj.org/google.asp>

⁸⁹ <https://www.linkedin.com/in/andyboyle/>,
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/samanthasunne/>

⁹⁰ <https://medium.com/editors-lab-impact/holding-powers-accountable-through-prototypes-in-lebanon-9a9ecbb3de01>



In "Politithon," a game developed at a 2018 hackathon that was supported by Google, Lebanese politicians advance across a screen based on their positive policy achievements.

“Wildcard,” another GEN hackathon project developed by journalists and designers from South Africa’s *Eyewitness News*, uses artificial intelligence to surf social media platforms in order to find the best sports memes during sporting events—“the buzz off the field, the endless trolling, the crazy in-jokes”—and deliver the content to users.⁹¹

The European Journalism Centre (EJC) takes a different approach. Since 2014, the Centre has sponsored more than two dozen News Impact Summits “powered by” Google.⁹² Offered free of charge to journalists and media professionals, the daylong summits include speeches and presentations by Google on “Digital Newsgathering Tools,” breakout sessions on “Immersive Storytelling” and the “Digital Transition of Local News,” talks on blockchain as a news tool and the importance of “archiving and sharing data.”⁹³

The amount Google contributes to the summits is unknown, but the company dominates these conferences in ways large and small. Many of the summit speakers work for news and media organizations that also receive Google funding. For example, an analysis of EJC’s Berlin

⁹¹ <http://community.globaleditorsnetwork.org/content/wild-card-0>,
[https://www.globaleditorsnetwork.org/programmes/editors-lab/season-6-\(2017-2018\)/](https://www.globaleditorsnetwork.org/programmes/editors-lab/season-6-(2017-2018)/)

⁹² <https://newsimpact.io/>, <https://newsimpact.io/about>

⁹³ <https://newsimpact.io/summits/news-impact-summit-cardiff#programme>,
<https://newsimpact.io/summits/news-impact-summit-berlin#programme>,
<https://newsimpact.io/summits/brussels-17#programme>

Summit in December 2018 reveals that nearly half the speakers were either Google employees or worked for organizations receiving funding, grants or sponsorships from the company.⁹⁴

European Journalism Centre Berlin Conference

Speaker	Organization	Google Funding
Áine Kerr	Kinzen	€300,000 to €1 million in 2018 for Smart Commute, a news curation tool. ⁹⁵
Adam Thomas	European Journalism Centre	Google News Initiative is the primary sponsor of EJC's News Impact Summits. Funding amounts not disclosed.
Alexandra Großkurth	Google	N/A
Anita Zielina	Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism	£5.5 million from 2013 through 2018 for Reuters Digital News Report. ⁹⁶
Anu Ubaud	Helsingin Sanomat	€490,000 in 2017 to develop an AI Content Recommendation System, €300,000 to €1 million to develop a machine learning based content analysis and prediction system in 2019. ⁹⁷ Also received a Google summer fellow in 2017. ⁹⁸
Christina Elmer	Spiegel Online	Two €300,000 to €1 million awards. ⁹⁹ Also part of the Google News Lab fellowship program. ¹⁰⁰
Eliza Anyangwe, Rachel Hamada	The Bureau Local	A project of the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, Bureau Local. €662,000 DNI recipient in 2016. ¹⁰¹ In 2018, Google announced a £250,000 grant to support Bureau Local. ¹⁰²
Esther Alonso	eldiario.es	Recipient of a Google DNI award between €300,000 and €1 million in 2016 and €50,000 to €300,000 in 2017. ¹⁰³
Isabelle Sonnenfeld	Google News Lab	N/A
Kustaw Bessems	de Volkskrant	2018 DNI recipient of between €300,000 and €1 million for a content recommendation platform. Parent company De Persgroep also the recipient of two additional DNI awards. ¹⁰⁴

⁹⁴ <https://newsimpact.io/summits/news-impact-summit-berlin#speakers>

⁹⁵ <https://kinzen.com/blog/2018/7/23/nevalabs-receives-funding-from-google-digital-news-innovation-fund>, <https://www.independent.ie/business/technology/news/what-kinzen-is-and-how-it-works-37454843.html>

⁹⁶ https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-05/FOI_0.pdf

⁹⁷ <https://www.blog.google/around-the-globe/google-europe/digital-news-initiative-20-million-funding-innovation-news/>, <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/trike-machine-learning-based-content-analysis-and-prediction-system/>

⁹⁸ <https://medium.com/google-news-lab/the-google-news-lab-fellowship-expands-in-europe-517bdfb1a76b>

⁹⁹ <https://blog.google/topics/google-europe/digital-news-initiative-second-funding-24-million/>

¹⁰⁰ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/vamp-voice-and-audio-monetisation-platform-round-5/>

¹⁰¹ <https://medium.com/google-news-lab/introducing-our-news-lab-fellows-in-germany-switzerland-and-austria-6167f1fb0a67>

¹⁰² <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/bureau-local/>

¹⁰³ <https://www.pressgazette.co.uk/googles-uk-boss-says-tech-giant-ready-to-partner-with-government-over-outcome-of-cairncross-review/>

¹⁰⁴ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/brainhub/>

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/leave-your-mark-lym/>

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/de-volkskrant-guide-life-round-5/>

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/context-king-halo-effect-premium-news-websites-round-4/>

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/digital-news-rack/>

Mattia Peretti	European Journalism Centre	Google News Initiative is the primary sponsor of EJC's News Impact Summits. Funding amounts not disclosed.
Sebastian Horn	Zeit Online	Part of the Google News Lab fellowship program. ¹⁰⁵ Zeit Online and its parent company, Die Zeit Verlagsgruppe, are also the recipients of two DNI prototype awards of up to €50,000 each. ¹⁰⁶
Zuzanna Ziomecka	NewsMavens	NewsMavens is a DNI recipient of €300,000 to €1 million. ¹⁰⁷ NewsMavens parent company Agora S.A. has received four additional grants through the DNI.

Beginning in 2017, EJC expanded the program further, offering new two-day “News Impact Academy” events for journalists.¹⁰⁸ The 2018 sessions in Amsterdam, Paris, Barcelona, London and Warsaw promised to inspire “digital innovators” in the newsroom and transform reporters into “innovation evangelists.”¹⁰⁹

The GTP analysis identified similar Google-funded workshops, professional development conferences and training initiatives organized by more than a dozen other media and journalism trade associations around the world including:

- Alliance of Independent Journalists (based in Jakarta, Indonesia)
- Centre for Investigative Journalism (London, England)
- Center for Investigative Reporting (Emeryville, CA)
- Centre for Community Journalism (Cardiff, Wales)
- Code for Africa (multiple locations)
- Escola de Dados (multiple locations, Brazil)
- Foro de Periodismo Argentino (Buenos Aires, Argentina)
- Hacks/Hackers (worldwide)
- International Center for Journalists (Washington, DC)
- Local Media Association (Lake City, MI)
- Maynard Institute for Journalism Education (Emeryville, CA)
- National Council for the Training of Journalists (Essex, England)

Promoting Automation

Google’s stranglehold over online ad revenue and its aggregation of content have decimated newsrooms around the world. But today, journalists’ dismal career prospects are also threatened by algorithms, bots and the automation of newsgathering—even the writing process itself. And it’s often Google that provides the funding to make it happen.

¹⁰⁵ <https://medium.com/google-news-lab/introducing-our-news-lab-fellows-in-germany-switzerland-and-austria-6167f1fb0a67>

¹⁰⁶ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/freelancer-engagement-management-tool/>,
<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/archivist-data-driven-content-management-round-4/>

¹⁰⁷ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/newsmavens/>

¹⁰⁸ <https://newsimpact.io/academy>, <https://newsimpact.io/about>

¹⁰⁹ <https://newsimpact.io/academy>

GTP's analysis of projects supported by the Google DNI Fund identified a number of initiatives that seek to automate aspects of journalism previously done by humans, or in some cases, replace human newsgathering and reporting with bots, artificial intelligence and automation.

Many of the descriptions of the projects are careful to point out that the tools are simply designed to empower journalists and make their lives easier, and in many respects that's certainly the case. Innovative technologies like data visualizations, live video platforms, virtual reality and structured data tools have made many aspects of newsgathering and reporting easier and more efficient.

But the automation projects sponsored by Google go further. There are tools that farm out research functions to algorithms, artificial intelligence and automated machines; computer programs that can imitate the tonality and even speaking style of a broadcaster's voice and deliver the news in her place; and automated tools that can write news stories with minimal human involvement.

For example, Headline24, an online news portal in Heidelberg, Germany, was awarded between €300,000 and €1 million by Google in 2016 for its Human Robo-Journalism initiative, a project that used automated news placement and even automated writing to create stories.¹¹⁰

"We think that in the future, digital technology will relieve journalists of their 'routine work' and thus free up space for time-consuming research and eloquent presentation," the site announced after receiving the Google grant.

Acknowledging that the project might be viewed with some trepidation by Headline24 employees, the site attempted to put them at ease: "And yes, we know it sounds a bit scary that machines should research, evaluate and write in the future," the company explained. "That is why we emphasize the human factor in this project. The journalist continues to be at the center of our approach." But, the site conceded, "Whether that works as described above? Well, we do not (yet) know that."

Another German project called "Vocally Yours" promised to build "trust and intimacy" with news audiences through natural language processing and text-to-speech tools that mimic the tonality and even conversational style of a journalist's voice. Launched by the German business magazine *Wirtschaftswoche*, whose publisher, Miriam Meckel, is on the board of the DNI Fund, the project was awarded between €300,000 to €1 million in 2018.¹¹¹

In Finland, Sanoma is experimenting with automating several aspects of newsgathering and reporting previously conducted by humans as well. The company, which announced plans to cut 80 jobs in 2018 and 65 jobs in its Belgium division in 2016, has received at least three Google

¹¹⁰ <https://www.heidelberg24.de/region/mannheim-headline24-google-digital-news-initiative-unterstuetzt-projekt-human-robo-journa-6170970.html> (German),

<https://www.heidelberg24.de/ueber-uns/>, <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/human-robo-journalism-hrj/>

¹¹¹ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/vocally-yours-round-5/>,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190717152001/https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/participate/members/>

DNI awards for automation projects through its subsidiaries or companies in which it has a majority stake.¹¹²

In 2017, a Finnish news agency, Oy Suomen Tietotoimisto Finska Notisbyrå Ab, received €220,000 from Google to create U-bot, a program that uses advanced language technology, AI and machine learning to write news stories.¹¹³ Sanoma owns 75% of the news agency.¹¹⁴ *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's largest subscription paper and another Sanoma property, received a €490,000 Google award the same year for a machine learning content recommendation system to suggest news stories to readers.¹¹⁵ In 2019, *Helsingin Sanomat* received another €300,000 to €1 million from the DNI for a machine learning-based content analysis and prediction system.¹¹⁶

In Portugal, *Público - Comunicação Social*, which saw its circulation cut in half in the decade from 2003 to 2013, is embracing artificial intelligence in order to “free reporters to do more meaningful reporting,” according to a summary of the Google award it received in 2017.¹¹⁷ The publication said it would use the funds to develop +Perto, a program that will utilize AI for “short stories written by computers” on traffic, weather, minor and youth league sports results, and movie and restaurant reviews.

Even some of Google's most stalwart European media critics have tapped the company's generosity to pursue automation projects. Axel Springer, which applauded European antitrust action against Google and as recently as April 2018 promised more independence from the company, received funding in 2016 for a prototype project named “A bot called zombie.”¹¹⁸

The tool—a joint-venture between Ringier and Axel Springer that was developed by the Swiss news outlet *Le Temps*—uses Google Analytics, Google News and Google Trends to analyze the hottest news topics. Then it prods editorial staff via email to republish relevant articles to contribute to the trending data stream.

In Cyprus, the Cyprus News Agency received funding for StoryBot, a robot-assisted journalism project that automates aspects of the newsgathering process so that they can be performed

¹¹² https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/sanoma_media_aims_to_cut_up_to_80_jobs/10445880,

<http://www.flanderstoday.eu/business/65-jobs-under-threat-sanoma-media-group>

¹¹³ <http://www.goodnewsfinland.com/finnish-news-goes-robotic-with-google-funding/>,

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/u-bot-dive-machine-learning-round-4/>

¹¹⁴ <http://www.helsinkitimes.fi/business/15642-sanoma-acquires-majority-stake-in-struggling-stt.html>

¹¹⁵ <http://www.goodnewsfinland.com/finnish-news-goes-robotic-with-google-funding/>,

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/content-recommendation-system-machine-learning-helps-recommend-journalism-users-round-4/>

¹¹⁶ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/trike-machine-learning-based-content-analysis-and-prediction-system/>

¹¹⁷ <https://www.publico.pt/2017/07/06/tecnologia/noticia/publico-ganha-financiamento-do-google-para-aplicacao-de-jornalismo-local-1778182> (Portuguese),

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/perto/>

<http://www.top-ten-10.com/business/publishingbiz/portugal-newspapers.htm>,

<https://www.bpiequity.bpi.pt/others/PDF.aspx?id=49681> (p. 17)

¹¹⁸ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/news-corp-axel-springer-applaud-27-billion-fine-levied-google-1017054>,

<https://digiday.com/media/want-publishers-think-unthinkable-axel-springer-reducing-reliance-google-ad-tech/>,

<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/bot-called-zombie-can-identify-online-newspapers-best-articles-and-assess-when-and-why-republish-them/>

quickly and “with minimal intervention and effort by journalists.”¹¹⁹ And in Spain, Ileon.com received Google funding to explore outsourcing to computers what many might consider a critically important function for real human journalists: news coverage of wildfires, snowfall, weather and road conditions.¹²⁰ Named QUEVEDO, the “AI Journalist” will use software and natural language generation to “write news on the fly.”

Across its media initiatives, Google frequently mentions its commitment to “spreading knowledge to make life better for everyone.” As CEO Sundar Pichai puts it, “It’s at the heart of Google’s mission. It’s the mission of publishers and journalists. Put simply, our futures are tied together.”¹²¹

But for journalists pushed out by automation, or let go because of lagging revenue, those ties may not be welcome.

¹¹⁹ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/storybot-automated-workflows-news-production-towards-robot-assisted-journalism/>

¹²⁰ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/dnifund/dni-projects/quevedo-ai-journalist-aide-de-camp/>

¹²¹ <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/about>

Methodology

The Google Transparency Project undertook the most comprehensive effort yet to collect all of Google's payments to media organizations around the world in one place.

Our database of Google's media funding began with a comprehensive examination of the Google Digital News Innovation Fund, a Google initiative to fund media projects and outlets in Europe. We supplemented this data with additional information from the company's own disclosure pages. These included sources such as the Google News Initiative website and blog; Google's corporate press announcements; the 990 tax forms of affiliated nonprofits, including the family foundations of its current and former senior executives; and press releases and other announcements from Google's regional and country affiliates (i.e. Google Latin America, Google Australia, etc.).

To expand the dataset, we then searched for disclosures from hundreds of media outlets, trade associations, media-related academic programs, and individual media professionals receiving Google support. Sources included 990 tax forms for media and journalism-related nonprofits and trade associations; board minutes and annual reports; and any news stories or third-party blog posts about Google funding of media projects.

For all awards, we attempted to identify the specific project or initiative funded and the amount received; the year it was funded; the project details; and the country in which the media outlet was located. In most cases, project descriptions have been drawn from award announcements.

Our methodology identified 1,327 grants and other awards from Google and related entities. But this dataset likely understates the full amount of Google's media funding. In many cases, for instance, neither Google nor the recipient disclosed the funding amount. For programs like the Google Digital News Initiative, Google only disclosed a range of funding for each recipient. In other cases, Google jointly funded media awards with other funders. In those cases, we provide information about Google's contribution to the award where available, and we note when Google's contribution to the award is not disclosed. Google has also launched several new media funding initiatives recently for which details are not yet available.

If we were able to confirm the exact amount of an award, we list that amount in the data table. If we were not able to identify the exact award amount, we used available information to construct a range of possible values for the award. In many cases, we had data about the total funding for a program under which Google distributed many awards, and we used this information to construct the award range. There were 170 projects in the database for which we had insufficient information to produce even a range of possible values; we list the award amount as "Not disclosed" in these cases. Each entry in the dataset includes a link to our source for the award amount.

GTP also attempted to reach out to more than 800 recipients via email to confirm the funding details in our dataset. When a recipient's response provided us with more precise information than was available from public records, we note the recipient as a source in the dataset.

Once we finalized the dataset, we analyzed it to produce the figures in this report.

To calculate Google's total contribution to media organizations (\$567 to \$569 million), we first converted all award amounts, Google contributions, and program totals from local currency to USD using the exchange rate on January 1 of the award or program year, as appropriate.

We then generated the total commitment figures by counting the program total once for each block of grants awarded as a part of a program to which Google's commitment is known. For example, we counted a \$1 million contribution from Google to the Knight News Challenge *once* for all 16 projects funded as a part of the news challenge. We did this because in many cases, we had no award amount data, but we were able to determine Google's total funding commitment to a program under which a media grant was awarded.

For projects not awarded as a part of a program with a discernable funding total, we counted the award as if it were its own program. When Google was not the sole funder of an award, we only counted Google's contribution to the award, if known. If there were other funders but Google's contribution was not known, we counted the low amount as 0 and the high amount as the award total.

To calculate country-year and region-year totals, we used award amount data only, not program totals. The reason for this is that many programs span multiple countries and years. To generate these totals, we use the award amount low and award amount high variables converted from local currency to USD using the exchange rate on January 1 of the award year. These totals reflect Google's contribution, rather than the total amount awarded.

Most of the cash totals reported for individual recipients in this report are derived from counting the awards to each recipient and summing Google's contribution to each recipient's awards in the local currency. However, the bubble chart showing the top recipients by monetary value requires us to convert the amount awarded to each recipient to USD from local currency using the exchange rate on January 1 of the award year. We then totaled the high estimates of Google's contribution to each recipient. Grants that were part of a large Google initiative, where the only available information is the total of Google's spending on the entire program, were excluded from this calculation. We did, however, include specific grants that were shared among multiple recipients.

Finally, we reported funding initiative totals in local currency by totaling the raw award amount variables by Google division and country. We combined subprograms like the Google News Initiative YouTube Innovation Funding into one parent initiative (the Google News Initiative, in this case) to get 16 Google divisions and related entities: Google, Google Argentina, Google Australia, Google Brazil, Google Canada, Google Digital News Innovation Fund, Google Germany, Google Ideas, Google Latin America, Google News Initiative, Google News Lab , Google UK Ltd, Google-AIPG Digital Innovation Press Fund, Google.org, the Brin Wojcicki Foundation, and the Schmidt Family Foundation.