

IMA Strategy: Autumn 2021-22

After extensive canvassing of the membership the Board is proposing the following strategy for the following 12 months

Strategy - our key focuses

The IMA will focus activity on the following three areas

1. **Campaigning and lobbying**
2. **Membership Support Services**
3. **Collaborative Projects**

Specifics - what will this look like?

Campaigning and lobbying

- Lobbying - Facebook, Google, DCMS, Devolved Governments + the NUJ in order to increase protections and respect for our membership
- Public advocacy - increase public awareness of and support for independent media, through producing and publicising reports, making public interventions on behalf of IM and running public facing campaigns
- Organising collective action - like building an independent media caucus in the NUJ

Membership Support Services

- Do trainings - in fundraising, marketing, legal support, etc -lead by membership requests
- Promote members work - through social media, email newsletter, etc
- Connect members with important resources - trainings, advice, speakers, interviewees, etc. Eventually we will build a database

Collaborative Projects

- Organise networking meetings
- Coordinate messaging and promotion of each others work between members
- Create content based projects that are co created by several members in collaboration
- Create shared spaces to get information from political sources (campaigns organisations, experts, MPS), ideally through a regular briefing open to all members

Execution - how we will do this

We will set up three working groups which are open to all members, and already populated by board members, to focus on the 3 identified focuses. Ask the board to get involved or for updates from these groups.

1. **Campaigning and lobbying**
2. **Membership Support Services**
3. **Collaborative Projects**

[Based on this 'Membership Consultation Notes' document](#)

Full Strategy Document

Introduction: The Independent Media Association (IMA)

[The Independent Media Association](#) (IMA), previously known as the Media Fund, is a member owned cooperative currently representing over [40 independent media publishers](#) across the UK, with a combined annual readership of more than 20 million people.

While representing members the IMA is also well networked into a growing ecosystem of independent media infrastructure organisations which includes the likes of Public Interest News Foundation, The NUJ, Impress, The Bureau Local and the Journalist Charity among others.

Unlike other representative organisations in the sector, the IMA is made up of, and delivered by people who run independent media platforms day in, day out. It is the largest grassroots, non-partisan, representative organisation for independent media platforms in the UK. Currently, delivered largely on a voluntary basis with in-kind and some financial support from members - notably Bywire News resources a day per week staff time each week. The IMA is in its infancy but is regularly attracting interest from new members joining the cooperative and contributing their skills, passion and experience to the sum of the parts.

The IMA has a crucial role to play in facilitating collaboration between members, hosting training and problem solving support functions and representing and advocating for the sector to decision makers and institutional power.

The IMA was born out of the first ever industry-focused independent media conference in the UK, which took place in Sheffield in 2017 and was coordinated by hyperlocal platform [Now Then](#). The conference had over 35 publishers from across the UK in attendance and it identified a shared need for a representative, networked and equitable organisation to bring together independent media platforms to work collaboratively and support each other.

Incorporated as a cooperative in 2018 with media platforms as equal members of the cooperative, the Media Fund as it was known, rebranded and re-focused as the Independent Media Association in late 2020. It is unique in aspiration, form and function in the UK.

Our Purpose:

- To support the independent media sector, represent the interests of our members and showcase their work.

Our Aims:

- Provide advice, training, shared resources and events for the benefit of members
- Encourage collaboration between members
- Connect members and wider civil society organisations
- Develop resources to support the setting up of new media outlets
- Raise funds for internships, journalist positions, seed funding and other funding pots for the benefit of members.
- Support members to recruit and amplify marginalised people and groups under represented in the mainstream media
- Support members to produce accessible media for disabled people.
- Champion the importance of independent media within the wider media sector, to decision makers and the public
- Showcase the best of independent media through an annual awards ceremony
- Promote our members at events, on our website and across social media by sharing content and producing original video and podcast shows
- Adhere to the [NUJ's Code of Conduct](#)
- Contribute to independent media freedom and plurality by celebrating freedom of expression and the diversity of our members' styles, views and formats.
- Work with other organisations, agencies and parties across the political spectrum in the interests of members and of a healthy democracy and fourth estate.
- Work closely with and refer any concerns about our members content to the relevant member's complaints editor, IMPRESS or the NUJ as appropriate

Our Membership:

Membership in the IMA Cooperative is democratic with all members meeting regularly and each holding one vote on all activity within the IMA. This includes elections, agenda items, calling special meetings, nominations for new members and governance roles. At these meetings member organisations share knowledge, challenges, opportunities, best practice and explore scope for collaboration, syndication and amplification of specific stories and campaigns.

At its core, the IMA supports news organisations that are run in the public interest, that are financially independent and that act as factually accurate sources of information.

Parameters for Membership:

- Supports the aims and purpose of the IMA.
- For those producing news, we require outlets to be regulated by IMPRESS and/or for their core team to be NUJ members and to adhere to the NUJ code of conduct, within 6 months of joining.

The Independent Media Association Board:

Chair: Drew Rose (*The Canary*)

General Secretary: James Lock (*Opus Independent*)

Communications Secretary: Klaudia Fior (*Bywire News*)

Sara Badawi (*Hacked Off*)

Thomas Barlow (*Bywire News*)

Jason Cridland (*Dorset Eye*)

Debs Cridland (*Dorset Eye*)

Laura Lee (*Socialist Think Tank*)

Abla Kandalajt (*Mydylarama*)

Nathan Sparkes (*Hacked Off*)

Gary Kelly (*Milk the Cow Podcast*) *Bio*: Founder and Director of Milk the Cow Podcast. A writer, community worker, live performer, podcaster, festival and events management since the 90's.

Membership Review

One of our first activities as board members was to introduce a review and consultation with members. We began this process in the spring of 2021 which with the limited time of the volunteer board and indeed of members has taken some time to complete and we admit fully was not exhaustive. As a board we see this as a process which should be incumbent on the board to complete annually and to reflect and improve upon with the members.

At the time of writing, we have conducted interviews over zoom with the majority of our members and the following recommendations reflect a view from the board about what

members told us they were struggling with and how they felt the IMA could be effective in supporting them and the wider sector.

Members told us they need support in the following areas:

- Marketing for donation drives
- Audience and readership development
- Wider promotion of their work
- Training and advice on fundraising and grant funding
- Training and advice on commercial Income models
- Connecting and collaborating with other independent media platforms
- Lobbying social media platforms to value and amplify content from independent media platforms.
- Campaigning and advocating for independent media to government and institutional decision makers.
- Organising collective action as a sector

Recommendations:

After hearing from members we categorised feedback into three core areas of response which as a board we have devolved into three working groups in order to develop our priorities going forward. As a board we would welcome further input and participation from members in any of the below categories of work or working groups.

Categories of work:

1. Campaigning and lobbying
2. Membership Support Services
3. Collaborative Projects

Board Working Groups:

Campaigning and lobbying:

Get in touch with James@weareopus.org or Nathan Sparkes at nathan@hackinginquiry.org to join this group.

To advocate for the independent media sector and the value it brings, with incumbent power holders and gatekeepers - including elected representatives, tech and social media giants, funders and Unions.

Areas of focus:

- Lobbying - Facebook, Google, DCMS, Devolved Governments, the NUJ in order to increase protections for the sector and raise awareness of the value the sector brings to media plurality in the UK.
- Public advocacy - increase public awareness of and support for independent media, through producing and publicising reports, making public interventions on behalf of our members and running public facing campaigns holding power to account.
- Organising collective action - building an independent media caucus in the NUJ and finding pathways for collaboration with social justice organisations and NGO's.
- Forming a cross party group of elected representatives through whom we can advocate the needs of the sector and leverage influence.

Membership Support Services

Get in touch with Thomas Barlow thomas@ima.press or Klaudia Fior at social@ima.press to join this group.

To develop services and resources which assist members in their ongoing sustainability and improve their practice. To celebrate and promote the work of members both internally and externally.

- Facilitating training and advice sessions for members, including fundraising, marketing, legal support.
- Promoting members work through the Independent Media Awards, social media, newsletter and any other emerging forms of content -i.e podcasts, press releases.
- Developing and making accessible shared resources created from expertise held within the membership, which might include step by step guides, interview or writing techniques, event management etc.

Collaborative Projects

Get in touch with Drew Rose and drew@thecanary.co to join this group.

To create spaces, processes and opportunities for collaboration between members on shared stories, approaches, solutions and action. To develop briefings for members to encounter and hear from the work of organisations, NGO's and campaigns external to the IMA and the media sector.

- Organise regular networking and collaboration meetings

- To inspire and recognise the importance of a solutions focussed approach to independent media content and how as a membership we can champion this.
- Develop shared messaging, solidarity and promotion of members' work by members.
- Create content based projects that are co created by several members in collaboration.
- Create briefing opportunities for IMA members to access and question information from political and campaign sources (social justice organisations, experts, elected representatives), ideally through a regular briefing open to all members

Looking ahead:

The IMA has a crucial role to play in advocating for the value, importance and impact of the independent media sector. With diverse members across the sector we are able to link hyperlocal publications that serve their communities with public interest news and UK-wide platforms that break stories of national importance and to act on the sum of those parts. But we must work together, be anti-rivalrous and strategic if we are to thrive.

A corporate or 'legacy' media owned by a select group of billionaires has let too many stories of corruption, incompetence and greed fly under the radar. This is dangerous for our democracy. Independent media has a vital role to play in increasing media literacy and active citizenship, exposing wrongdoing, corruption and abuses of power, celebrating arts and culture and to often marginalised and under-valued voices. Perhaps most importantly we have a role in being solutions focussed and driving the change we want to see in the world. We are at the vanguard of a new pluriverse of media and we share a lot of common ground between us - lets act on it.

Many of us however are also fledgling, and in order to have impact we must support one another to learn news skills, adopt innovative models and share learning and impact. We must also recognise and support one another's wellbeing in what is a difficult and often isolating sector. Many of you are working as volunteers, or not being paid well enough for your contributions, many of you are struggling to access funding or raise income, many of you are struggling to reach readers and are dependent on the uncertainties of social media algorithms and by working together we can address these problems over time.

The Independent Media Association is a member owned cooperative. We want to be led by you and to respond to your needs, ambitions and collective impact. To do this effectively we all need to find ways, however small, of contributing, whether that is attending a meeting, or reaching out to a fellow member or helping create a resource for other members to improve their practice. There are ways we can all help one another. If you have time, join the board, join a working group, help us strategise and improve the impact of the IMA.

Opportunities and Risks:

Opportunities:

- The pandemic has changed mindsets and more people are reading and valuing independent media.
- We have a huge and diverse membership already and new members are getting in touch each day.
- We fill an advocacy and sector representation gap that means we can campaign and be 'political' which other infrastructure organisations, often incorporated as charities are not able to fulfill.
- We are member controlled and member led, which means that we are in a position to hear in real time from platforms on the ground and leverage emergent opportunities.
- Our membership operates on a variety of platforms using a variety of models which makes the content we collectively produce relevant to huge numbers of different people and stakeholders.

Threats:

- We have not developed a sustainable income model which means that we are vulnerable to burn out from volunteers and reliant on resources from organisations which are themselves relatively fragile.
- The sector itself is fragile and under-resourced which means that our membership struggles to contribute meaningfully to the IMA.
- We may lose members due to the ongoing fragility of the sector, particularly around revenues which are tied to social media platforms.
- The IMA by it's nature challenges the incumbent power of legacy media and associated stakeholders, opening itself to challenge and attack.

Our money

- Our regular outgoings
 - £47 per month: Website + email hosting

- £45 per month: Accountancy costs
- Money in the bank
 - £1150.17

Sustainability:

- We are developing several strategies to support the ongoing sustainability of the Independent Media Association.
- Working with Unions and other membership bodies through our [Funding Hub](#) programme, supporting writers from working class and marginalised communities, community correspondents and solutions focused journalism.
- Seed grant funding from funders who recognise the power and potential impact of a platform led independent media association.
- Donations from the public and philanthropic giving.
- Working with solutions focussed social justice campaigns and NGO's to advocate on issues of collective concern.
- Sponsorship of the Independent Media Awards
- PAYC Membership fees from those members who generate surplus.

Next Steps and our Ask of Members:

- Next members meeting - feedback on this report, share your thoughts and problems with others, help us improve and have impact.
- Join a working group and contribute some time to the IMA - even an hour a week has value.
- Tell us who who we should be speaking to
- Champion the IMA to other platforms and increase our membership and collective impact.
- Nominate yourself or another platform for an Independent Media Award
- Share with your readers that they can nominate you for an independent media award
- Tell us about an expertise you hold and help us convert it into a resource which can be shared with the rest of the membership to improve every ones practice.
- Share a story with the IMA that you have published that you would like us to share on IMA platforms
- Reach out to another IMA member on Slack and say hello
- Put the IMA logo on your website