

Independent Media Association

Strategy

(2023-24)

Overview

Following on from our membership consultation late last year and six months of work with a new staff member, our key focuses will be:

- Membership engagement
- Fundraising and sustainability

Proposed activities

Membership engagement

- **Engagement plan:** Implementing the proposed membership engagement plan (**see appendix**), to foster **a sense of belonging** and **a sense of connectivity** where **help can be found** and **work can be constructed and created**. There should be **shared solidarity and compassion** and the **impact should clearly be felt**.
- **Membership growth:** Restricting new membership until June 2024, when we will open up a seasonal intake of new members to reach 100. As it stands, we currently have 80 members. Those interested in becoming members prior to the intake season will be offered associate membership, granting them observer status at meetings but no voting rights.

Fundraising and sustainability

- **Fundraising:** The IMA has booked time with **a fundraiser pro bono** to help with writing, preparing and submitting grant applications to secure additional funding for the IMA.

- **Sustainability:** The IMA is attempting to find a niche among other sector organisations and serve its members in a way that benefits all and ensures the continued existence of the IMA.
- **The bigger picture:** The IMA knows from our engagement work that the number one issue to address is **funding and income generation in the sector**. Without it, there would be no independent media sector and no hope of a functioning democracy.
- **Member oversight:** Ensure members and the board of directors have oversight of all spending at AGMs.
- **Multilateral approach:** The IMA will also seek to **raise funds** from trade unions, enquiries, ethical advertising, crowdfunding, combined broadcasting, partner-based commissions, and new business models. The ideal is to become sustainable using one or more of these revenue streams, and not with grant funding.
- **Exit plan:** Develop a strategy to **pivot if some or none** of these revenue streams work.
- **Future hires:** The IMA would like to secure 3 to 5 year long-term funding to hire the following roles:
 - Additional Community Organiser
 - Business Development Manager
 - Fundraiser
 - Marketing and Communications Coordinator
 - Partnerships Coordinator

Overview – where we're at

Summary

The Independent Media Association (IMA), previously known as the Media Fund, is a member-owned cooperative currently representing over 80 independent media publishers across the UK, with a combined annual readership in excess of ten 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 every other representative organisation in the sector, the IMA is democratically organised and 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 but with one staff member initially supported by Lankelly Chase and further support from Opus Independents. Since expanding our available resources, we have double membership since Autumn 2022. The IMA is also unique in requesting that all publishers must be regulated by either the NUJ or IMPRESS. A clear dividing line with legacy press which is largely unregulated and one which sets the IMA apart as a collective of reliable and ethical publishers.

Since Autumn 2022, the IMA has created a concrete foundation to work on, and now is setting its sights on the bigger picture.

As a democratic organisation not hampered by charitable status, led by its membership, and made up of independent media organisations, we are uniquely qualified to advocate authentically to decision makers.

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 underrepresented 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 process

Membership in the IMA Cooperative is democratic, with all members meeting regularly and each holding one vote on all activity within the IMA. This applies to 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 media organisations that are run in the public interest, that are financially independent and that act as factually accurate sources of information.

Parameters for joining the cooperative

- That platforms support the aims and purpose of the IMA.
- Those producing news are required 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.
- Financial independence – with 50% or less of revenue from the state or multinational corporate sources*

*From August 2023, all publishers should have a [transparency page](#) on their website that shows where their revenue comes from, as part of the **financial independence** eligibility requirement. Copy for this page will be provided by the IMA, similar to the IMPRESS complaints policy template. Existing members will be encouraged to adopt this over time.

The current IMA Board

Our current Board can be found on our website [here](#).

AGM

The Board attempted to hold an AGM at the Media Democracy Festival in March 2023, but was unsuccessful due to not being quorate. This strategy will be confirmed at the next AGM, set for summer 2023.

There will be no elections as the current Board is currently one year through its two-year term.

Our money

Rhys Everquill is the current staff member of two days per week, paid for by Lankelly Chase and Opus Independents. Board members from member platforms offer their time in kind to support the IMA.

Staffing remains our largest expense. The current freelance rate for staff is £150 per day.

Governance plans

The IMA would like to develop a plan to convene a Board of Stakeholders, run by the IMA, and consisting of sectoral organisations like Better Media, ICNN, Media Reform Coalition, Impress, PINF, as well as other key stakeholders like major grantmakers, Co-operatives UK, and influential individuals. This would help secure funding, create healthier partnerships, and foster collaboration among organisations where there is often overlap in their work.

The picture of the sector

Current key and relevant stakeholders in the sector include:

- Media Reform Coalition
- Hacked Off
- Public Interest News Foundation
- IMPRESS
- National Union of Journalists
- ICNN
- Opus Independents
- Better Media
- NCTJ
- Centre for Investigative Journalism

Appendix

Membership engagement plan

Weekly Meet the Members:

- Produce one Meet the Members podcast and publish it to Substack Podcast.
- Encourage members to put themselves forward with regular callouts in WhatsApp.

Fortnightly newsletter:

- Using Substack.
- Include content sections voted on by members.
- Encourage members to submit their own content or share their achievements for inclusion in the newsletter.

Regular polls:

- Using WhatsApp
- Communicate the results of the polls to the members, along with the organisation's actions based on the outcomes
- Ask them a specific question: "Do you think we should continue the fortnightly newsletter"? And then 2-3 follow-up questions.

Monthly workshops/guides:

- Member-led: Ask a member to create a pre-recorded workshop about something members would find useful (e.g. how to turn your media company into a co-op)
- Posted to the website once per month and on social media
- A focus on funding until the end of 2023.

Quarterly general meetings:

- Held online via Google Meet
- Provide updates on the organisation's activities, achievements, and upcoming plans
- Include interactive sessions, guest speakers, and opportunities for members to ask questions or provide feedback.

Hybrid annual general meeting (AGM):

- Plan an annual general meeting that combines online and in-person participation (hybrid format)
- Allow members to attend either in-person or virtually, based on their preferences
- Include presentations, workshops, networking sessions, and opportunities for members to vote on important matters (perhaps tie into an event, e.g. Media Democracy Festival)
- If hybrid is not possible, hold exclusively online instead of exclusively in-person.

Additional member engagement opportunities:

- **Resources:** Creating new and engaging resources for the website.
- **WhatsApp Community:** Re-working the WhatsApp Community to better suit the wants and needs of the IMA membership.
- **“Adopt a member”:** Assign new members to individual Board members, who can have an additional introduction call and be their point of contact for any additional queries.
- **Matchmaker system:** A buddying system for members, where two members who might be interested in working together are brought together by the IMA.
- **Member Handbook:** The go-to place for all information about the IMA and IMA membership.
- **Meeting requirements:** All members will be encouraged to attend at least one meeting per year.

Long-term membership engagement goals:

- WhatsApp “In the News” initiative – get five publishers in a WhatsApp chat titled “In the News: Politics” or “In the News: Culture”. Then:
 - Ask them to publish their content in there regularly
 - Invite the public to join these groups
 - Create a new WhatsApp community to better facilitate and manage it
 - Turn on admin-only posting

- Turn off join approval
- Ask members to add this to their websites
- Promote via partners, e.g. PINF, Impress, MRC.
- Affiliate membership for publishers who don't want to join IMPRESS and/or NUJ.

A Note on Working Groups

In previous strategies, the IMA had focused on organising working group spaces where members could freely participate and work together on projects covering the NUJ, campaigns, collaborations, and resources. Due to staff capacity, this was later scaled down to NUJ and campaigns.

Due to a lack of interest, and alternatives proposed above, our previous format of working groups will cease unless there is a general call and consensus there needs to be one on a specific project, topic, or issue.

Additionally, the community organiser will meet with the Trade Union Liaison, NUJ Officer, and Campaigns Coordinator regularly to keep active some of the work that was being done in these working groups. This work includes campaigning for easier access to press cards, worker's rights, and media-related policy and legislation.

A note on the new WhatsApp Community

How it works

There will be four types of WhatsApp Community groups:

1. **Announcements** (admin only)
2. **IMA Polls** (admin only)
3. **IMA Board** (Board only)
4. **Open groups**, e.g. podcasting, video production, social media marketing, crowdfunding, grant applications, and more.

The open groups serve as spaces for members to connect, share ideas, ask questions, and collaborate with one another.

The hope is that WhatsApp will make available Polls to Announcement groups, meaning IMA Polls and Announcements can be merged thus having less groups in the WhatsApp Community.

Open group suggested list

- **Podcasting:** This group is for members interested in podcasting.
- **Social Media Marketing:** This group is for members interested in social media marketing.
- **Fundraising:** This group is for members interested in crowdfunding, grants, and more.
- **Video Production:** This group is for members interested in video, whether that's on YouTube or elsewhere.
- **Local Journalism:** This group is for local newspapers, newsletters, and news websites.
- **Investigative Journalism:** This group is for members interested in investigative and data journalism.
- **Co-operatives:** This group is for members who are run as co-operatives.
- **Social Justice and Human Rights:** This group is for members focusing on social justice issues, e.g. racism, homophobia, etc.
- **Environment:** This group is for members producing content around environmental sustainability.
- **Film, art, and culture:** This group is for members who produce content on independent film, art, and culture.
- **Content sharing:** This group is for members who want to share content with other IMA members.

Membership onboarding process

New potential members are identified throughout the year and brought on board as associate members. When the seasonal intake period arrives, the following process is implemented for new onboarding:

- a. **Prospective Members Application:** Potential members apply via the ima.press website using the Joint IMA / IMPRESS application form. As part of this application, they must provide a link to a published transparency page on their website, utilising the copy provided by the IMA, which is easily downloadable from our website.

- b. **Funding and History Research:** IMA staff conducts a comprehensive check on the prospective member's funding and history.
- c. **Board Approval:** If everything is deemed satisfactory, the Board is presented with the publisher's details and approves further action.
- d. **Acknowledgement Email:** The prospective member receives an acknowledgment email, providing a date and time for the general meeting where their membership will be confirmed by IMA members.
- e. **Member Handbook:** After IMA members have approved the prospective member, they are sent a welcome email with the Member Handbook and added to the Full Member database.
- f. **Website and Google Map Inclusion:** The member's details are added to the IMA's website and Google Map.
- g. **Announcement on WhatsApp and Media Matters:** The member's onboarding is announced on WhatsApp and in Media Matters.
- h. **IMPRESS and/or NUJ Membership Confirmation:** After a period of 6 months, confirmation of IMPRESS and/or NUJ membership is obtained.