

About The Scottish Beacon

The Scottish Beacon is a project of Greater Govanhill CIC, an award-winning community-led media project. During COP26, we created a pilot print publication that included the work of 11 different independent community-based publications around Scotland. It centred around how climate change was impacting communities around Scotland, and how communities were meeting that challenge.

Building on the success of that pilot print, we have now launched The Scottish Beacon as a collaborative digital platform brings together the best stories published by Scotland's independent media in a curated new website and newsletter that features the work of publishers from across Scotland, offering readers a community-led alternative to centralised media coverage.

The aim is that the website will bring insightful stories from around Scotland to a wider audience, who will be able to participate in polls, surveys, and crowd-sourced investigations. We share stories from communities that have resonance with others around the country.

We have built a Scotland-wide network of 22 member publications, connecting independently-run local and hyperlocal newsrooms serving urban and rural communities. Publications range from community magazines that have been running for decades to newly established websites and newsletters. Some have experienced teams of journalists behind them, some are made of volunteers passionate about making a difference in their communities.

We also aim to strengthen the voice of community-based media and support the sustainability of the sector. We hope this will bring greater cohesion to communities and contributes to them becoming more democratic and engaged. Locally based journalism has been shown how it can counter the polarising impact of some national journalism by connecting communities and bringing together across multiple levels on local issues.

What we have done and where we're at

The Scottish Beacon project received funding from the Google News Initiative Innovation Challenge Fund for the development of the project. That funding lasted a year and comes and end on the 31 October.

We used the funded time to:

- research the independent media landscape in Scotland;
- reach out to publishers and onboard them onto the project;
- carry out comprehensive outcome mapping work to develop ways of tracking its impact;
- build our 'collaborative scaffolding' (the infrastructure including memorandum of understanding and partnership agreements);

- develop our branding and visual identity;
- work with developers to build a bespoke website;
- set up an engaged membership programme;
- launch our website and social media channels;
- provide peer-to-peer training workshops on things like FOIs, newsletter strategy etc.;
- hold one in-person partners meet-up and regular online meetings;
- start developing ideas for collaborative investigations;
- publish stories and build our readership base;
- start exploring revenue generation options including syndication, collective ad sales, and other partnership work;

Our impact so far

One of the key aims of this project is to increase revenue to participating publishers. Participating publishers have been commissioned through this project to pitch stories for a solutions journalism reporting project.

We have found that there is already value in creating a space for connection. Publishers who have been able to attend the online meetings have reported that they enjoy spending time with others involved and are already learning from one another - as they share business/legal advice and story ideas - and that they feel more supported.

How we would use the award

The funding we received covered project development costs, but it did not cover editorial costs. We have several ideas for collaborative investigative projects we want to carry out but have not had the capacity to carry them out properly.

We would use this award to pay an investigative journalist to lead on one of these projects, investigating at a national level, gathering and sharing data and then providing training and support to partner organisations to write local stories. We would also pay participating newsrooms for the stories they publish, and cover some core costs.

This is a model that has been followed by the numerous collaboratives that we have modelled ourselves on in the US (that I have visited as part of a research fellowship). It's something we hope to expand and do more of. This award would allow us to pilot this way of working, to break stories with national and local impact.