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Crowdfunded Journalism: A Small but Growing Addition to Publicly Driven Journalism

Projects funded through Kickstarter cut across more than 60 countries

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Projects funded through Kickstarter cut across more than 60 countries

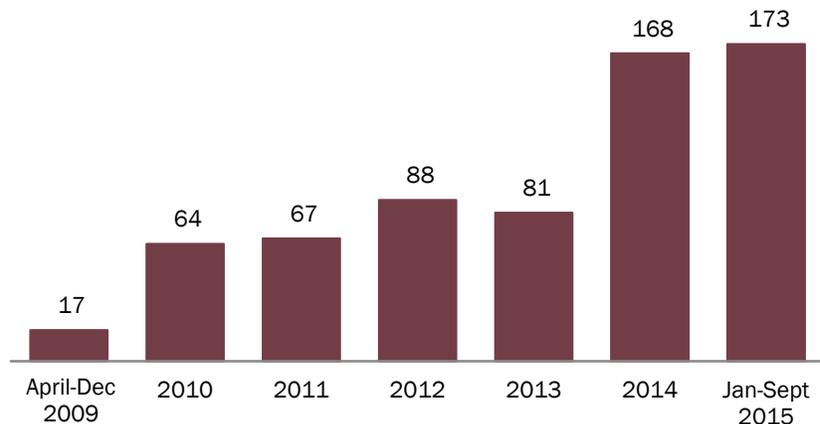
Over the past several years, crowdfunding via the internet has become a popular way to engage public support – and financial backing – for all kinds of projects, from the [Coolest Cooler](#) to a [virtual reality gaming headset](#) to a [prototype of a sailing spacecraft](#) and a [bailout fund for Greece](#). The area of journalism is no exception.

From April 28, 2009 to September 15, 2015, 658 journalism-related projects proposed on Kickstarter, one of the largest single hubs for crowdfunding journalism, received full – or more than full – funding, to the tune of nearly \$6.3 million.¹

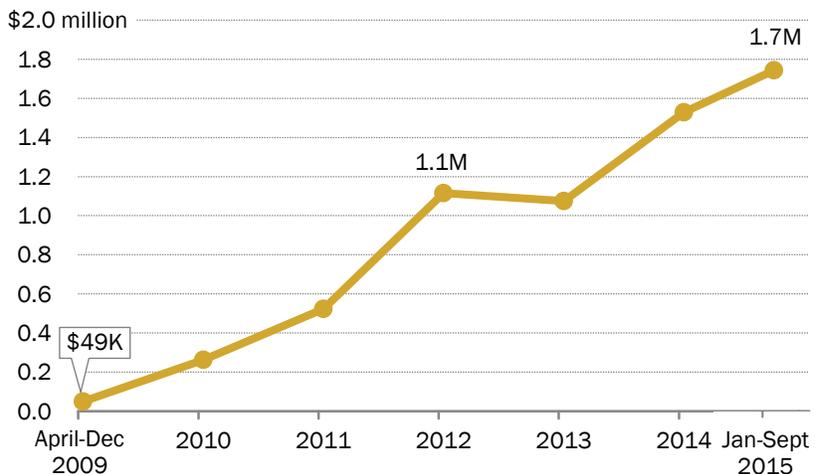
These totals – both in terms of number of projects and funds raised – trail nearly all of Kickstarter’s other funding

Interest in crowdfunded journalism grows over time

Number of funded journalism projects by year



Total funds raised for funded journalism projects by year



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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¹ The vast majority of the projects (84%) requested funding in U.S. dollars (554 of 658 projects). For this analysis, funding amounts requested in other currencies were translated to U.S. dollars using conversion rates as of Sept. 15, 2015, on [Oanda.com](#). Researchers also analyzed the total amount of funds both requested and pledged in foreign currencies using [OECD](#) average monthly conversion rates as of the month that the projects were launched on Kickstarter. The analysis revealed that the difference between the two methods produced only a 1% difference in the total overall level of funding across all projects.

categories, from music, theater and film to technology and games. Nevertheless, the number of funded journalism projects has seen an ongoing increase over time and includes a growing number of proposals from established media organizations.

From Kickstarter's April 2009 launch through the end of the year, 17 journalism projects received funding. That number more than tripled just a year later, to 64 projects in 2010. Growth continued, reaching 168 funded projects in 2014 and 173 in the first nine months of 2015.²

The amount of money put into these projects grew as well, from \$49,256 in 2009 and \$263,352 in 2010 to \$1,743,668 in the first nine months of 2015.

Equally striking is the upward trend in the number of people contributing financially to these journalism projects – rising from 792 in 2009 to 25,651 in 2015.

The majority of funded projects over the seven-year time period,³ 71%, were produced by individuals not tied to any journalistic organization – either alone (43%) or as a part of a small group (29%). Established media organizations such as [ProPublica](#) and the [Boston Review](#) accounted for 22%, while other types of institutions such as public schools and private universities made up the remaining 7%. And while Kickstarter allows project submissions from [18 different countries](#), fully 84% asked for pledges in U.S. currency. Most (64%) were to be conducted in the U.S., while 36% proposed overseas work which cut across more than 60 countries.

Magazines are the most common project type, while websites bring in the largest share of funding

% of funded journalism projects and of total funds raised, by project type

Project type	% of funded projects	% of total dollars
Magazine	20	16
Website	16	29
Book	16	13
Radio/podcast	9	7
Documentary	7	6
Blog	6	3
Photojournalism	4	2
Newsletter	3	<1
Newspaper	2	2
Zine	1	<1
Research paper	1	<1
App	<1	1
Multiple formats	12	15
Not format-specific	5	4

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

"Multiple format" indicates projects including products in more than one distinct media format, such as books and podcasts, or a blog and a newspaper. "Not format-specific" indicates projects that were not tied to any physical media format, such as a training event, a book tour or an internship.

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² 63 more projects received funding in the last three months of 2015, for a total of 236.

³ For this analysis, "seven year time period" refers to calendar years for which data were available. The exact elapsed time was from April 28, 2009 - September 15, 2015.

With a median of 54 backers each, the funded projects over these six and a half years varied dramatically in focus, but many were for longer, more comprehensive works in the form of books, magazine articles and documentaries. Together these types of projects accounted for 43% of the funded projects and 36% of the total dollars raised.

Overall, the journalism projects produced and revenue gained from these crowdfunded ventures is still a drop in the bucket compared with the original reporting output that occurs on any given day and the [roughly \\$20 billion in revenue generated by newspaper ads alone](#). Kickstarter-fueled support for journalism also trails two funding sources that have attracted a fair amount of attention in the journalism world in recent years – philanthropy and venture capital, which [Pew Research Center estimated](#) to be in the hundreds of millions in 2013 alone. And the number of journalism-related projects funded over the seven-year period represents a small sliver of total crowdfunding activity on Kickstarter – both in terms of [money raised and number of projects](#). The just over 650 projects funded over the seven-year period trail every other category, sometimes by a great deal. They are, for example, a far cry from the more than 18,000 film and video projects, more than 6,000 gaming projects and nearly 8,000 art projects. Journalism also trails all project categories but one in money raised, again often by wide margins.

Nevertheless, the growing activity here is about more than just dollars and cents or prizewinning reporting. In today's evolving digital era, it represents a new, niche segment of nontraditional journalism driven in large part by public interest and motivation. It is bringing voice and visibility to efforts that would likely otherwise go unnoticed or unfunded, adding yet another way for the public to engage in creating, funding and disseminating journalism and adding one more option to the arsenal of revenue sources that the industry is desperately seeking to build up.

Kickstarter, [recently reincorporated as a public benefit corporation](#), is one of two larger-scale and broad-based crowdfunding platforms, but it is currently the only major one with a distinct offering for journalism projects. The other, [Indiegogo, launched in 2008](#), offers categories for film, photography, transmedia and video/Web projects – but does not have a specific journalism genre. Another effort, [Beacon](#), was launched in 2013 as a platform dedicated to crowdfunding journalism based on a subscription model but now focuses more on partnerships and matching funds. Several other narrowly targeted crowdfunding platforms dedicated to journalism entered – and left – the space within the past few years, including [Spot.us](#) for community-funded journalism, [Contributoria and Indie Voices](#) for independent media, [Emphas.is](#) for photojournalism and [Vournio](#) for video journalism. An analysis of Kickstarter, then, while not completely exhaustive of all possible journalism-related crowdfunding, seemed an appropriate way to gauge the status and dynamics of this emerging arena.

For this project, researchers analyzed publicly available data for the 2,975 proposed projects in Kickstarter’s Journalism category between April 28 2009 and September 15 2015, with an in-depth examination of the 658 journalism projects that received full – or more than full – funding.⁴ The 658 funded projects were manually coded for a number of specific elements not in the publicly available data, including who proposed them, what specific types of journalistic endeavors were being presented to potential backers, the geographical orientation and whether a project was a new initiative or an expansion of ongoing work.

It is useful to keep in mind that Kickstarter categories can be somewhat fluid and overlap with other topic areas. For example, there are separate categories for publishing, photography, and film and video that could also include elements of reportage. For the purposes of this analysis, we worked with the publicly available data in the assigned Journalism category, and all coding was based on the descriptions and details of the projects provided in the submission.

⁴ When Kickstarter launched, the platform did not have a category dedicated to journalism, but it [added one in 2014](#) and retroactively assigned earlier projects to it.

Media organizations get crowdfunding, but individuals produce largest share of funded journalism projects

Pew Research Center identified four types of individuals or organizations behind the crowd-funded journalism projects: single individuals, small groups of unaffiliated individuals, media outlets or organizations, and public or private institutions such as universities.

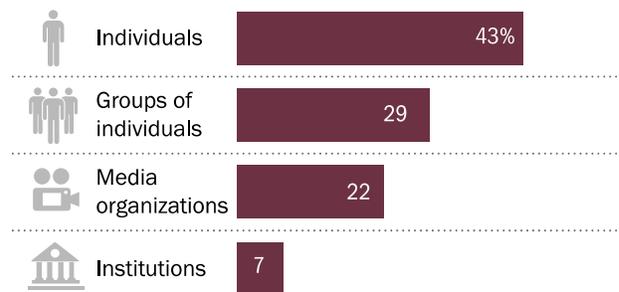
Single individuals accounted for more funded submissions than any other group – 43% over the seven-year time frame. These projects ranged from [The Smokey Generation](#), a digital oral history of wildland firefighters, to a [paleontology fieldwork memoir](#) by a freelance science writer, multimedia reporting from Tanzania on the [fate of the Kihansi spray toad](#), and [a traveling puppet named Stevie P. offering to write postcards from Europe](#).

Small groups of individuals accounted for another 29%, including [three graduate students](#) of religion who came together to independently produce a podcast, a book by two women about the [first western-style theme park in the U.S.](#), and [two documentary filmmakers](#) who traveled to Eastern Europe to tell the stories of refugees at the Serbian-Hungarian border.

The individuals involved varied from students of [Thai kickboxing](#) to [a team of former NPR reporters](#), which speaks to the broad appeal and significance of crowdfunding to individuals at all points along the journalistic spectrum.

Media organizations produce roughly a quarter of journalism projects on Kickstarter

% of funded journalism projects produced by...



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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Definitions

Individuals: Single individuals with no stated formal affiliation and acting on their own behalf

Groups of individuals: Two or more individuals with no formal affiliation and acting on their own behalf

Media organizations: Any outlet or organization whose primary mission is to produce news or information

Institutions: Any kind of public or private institution other than media-focused ones. Includes schools at any level, nonprofits and for-profit businesses

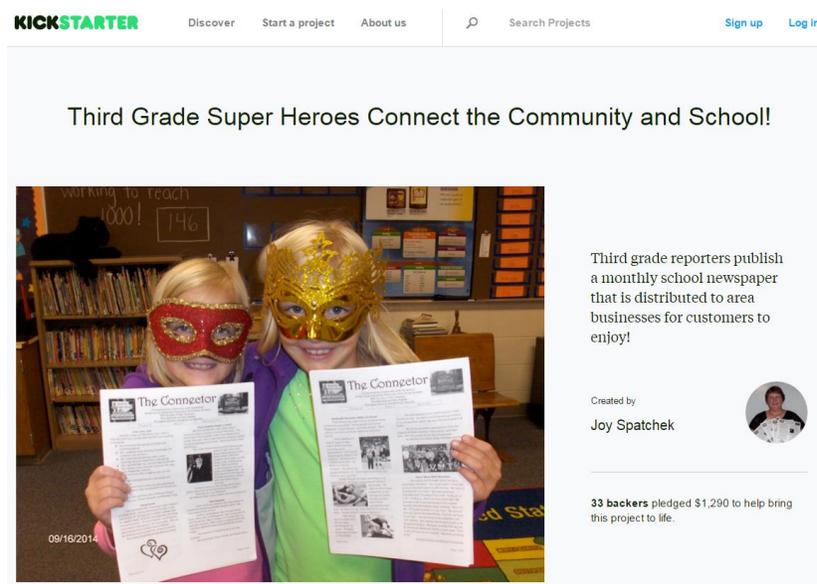
Media organizations have stepped into the crowdfunding space as well, with a certain measure of success. Roughly a quarter of funded journalism projects during this time (22%) were produced by some type of established media outlet or organization.

As with individuals and small groups, the media organizations producing projects – as well as the types of projects they proposed – ran the gamut. For example, the [San Francisco Public Press](#), in operation since 2009, sought funding to further connect neighborhoods to their local investigative newspaper by delivering print issues via bicycle; the relatively high-profile [Texas Tribune](#) generated funding to livestream a year of 2014 election coverage; and [Baltimore Brew](#) successfully sought monetary support to expand its city coverage. [Civil Eats](#)' proposal was to move from an all-volunteer enterprise to one that was able to pay their writers and editors a wage, while NK News looked for backers to fund sending two journalists for an extended time [to China-North Korea](#)



Source: Kickstarter website. Screenshot taken Jan. 10, 2016.

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Source: Kickstarter website. Screenshot taken Jan. 10, 2016.

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[border region](#). And the online community ADHDKidsRock.com needed some financial support to [keep the website going and add new resources](#).

Public and private institutions accounted for 7% of all the journalism proposals. Schools (ranging from [elementary schools](#) to [high schools](#) to [universities](#)) were by far the most common type of institution (31 of 46 of the institutionally based projects) and sought funding for such projects as a summer edition of a [student newspaper](#), a print

issue of a [campus lifestyle magazine](#) and an [online storytelling platform](#). There were also several projects initiated by 501(c)(3) nonprofits such as [Reef Check California](#), a group that collects data on marine life; [the Society for Science and the Public](#), which sought funding for a Teacher Guide companion to its Science News magazine and a [Norwegian think tank](#) which proposed a book focused on an examination of the environment for entrepreneurs in several European countries.



Source: Kickstarter website. Screenshot taken Jan. 10, 2016.

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The total number of projects funded grew tenfold over time, from a total of just 17 that received full funding in 2009 to 173 in 2015. With the exception of 2013, single individuals held the greatest share of total projects, ranging from 30% to 59%, while institutions held fairly steady at between 5% and 9% over time. Groups of individuals did not show much fluctuation in their share of total projects, remaining in the 25-35% range in all years. Media organizations ranged between a low of 6% of all projects in 2009 and a high of 36% in 2013.

Journalism projects funded on Kickstarter see growth over a seven-year period

Number of funded journalism projects produced each year by...



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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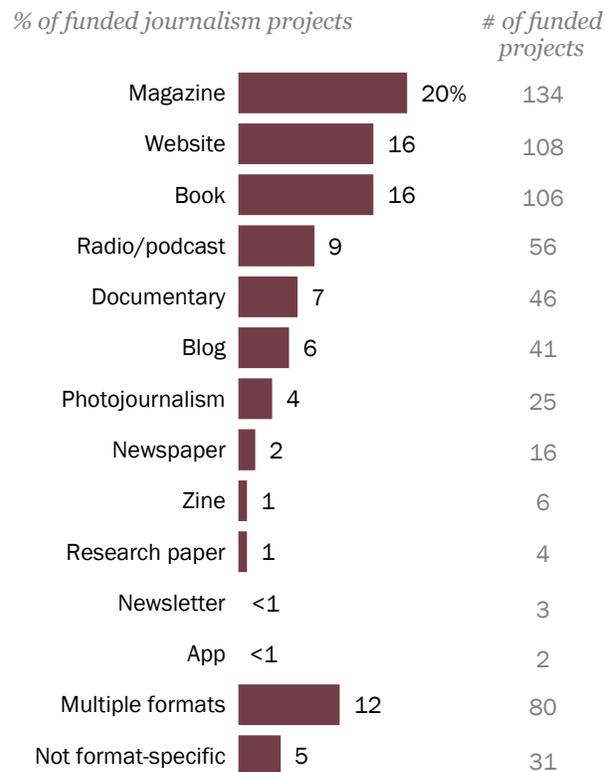
Sustained and longer-form journalism stand out in funded projects

Another way to think about these funded projects is according to the format or structure of the journalism being produced. Researchers found a total of 14 different media formats represented in the journalism projects. The most common ones tend to be larger and longer enterprises that would not be possible without the support of independent donors. Among this array of formats, magazine-related projects – including [the launch of new full-fledged publications](#), [the expansion of issue-based coverage by a news magazine and standalone articles](#) that the producers planned to pitch to existing magazines or journals – topped the list as the single most popular format, making up 20% of all funded projects in the Journalism category.

Website-related endeavors were another popular area, accounting for 16% of all funded proposals. Most of these efforts sought funds to support the online creation of news and information content, such as [Media Diversified](#)'s goal of producing an interactive directory of ethnic minority voices in the UK media landscape. A proposal to establish a multimedia website, [Nuba Reports](#), which would provide firsthand news from Southern Sudan, was also successful, as was one by a group of citizen journalists to expand the reporting reach of [Russia Insider](#). Others, like [The Nicaragua Dispatch](#), turned to crowdfunding as a way of maintaining or overhauling an existing website; it asked for backers to pledge toward the cost of hiring a Web developer. In this instance, The Dispatch specifically sought to remake the site into a crowdsourcing platform.

Books also accounted for 16% and encompassed an array of genres such as [history](#), [novels](#), [personal narratives](#) and [professional sports](#), as well as multiple chronicles of [hiking](#) the

The public supports a wide range of crowdfunded journalism projects



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

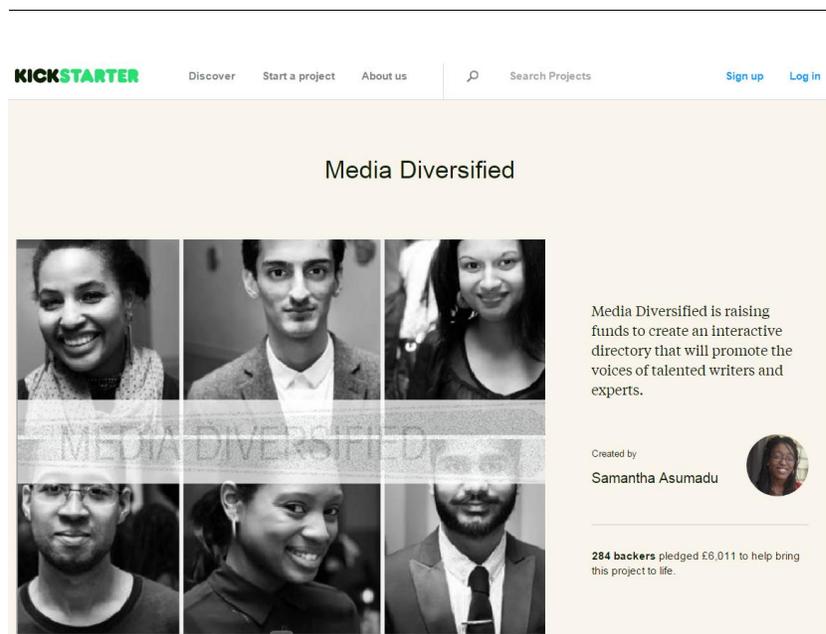
Note: Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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[Appalachian Trail](#). Also funded were several book projects from journalists seeking to synthesize (or further build upon) their experiences from months or years of reporting. For example, freelance journalist [Nathan Webster](#), embedded with U.S. troops during the Iraq War, produced two separate books with Kickstarter support; editorial cartoonist and war correspondent [Ted Rall](#) sought funds to return to Afghanistan; and crime reporter Scott Thomas Anderson had two successful pitches based on months of work embedded with law enforcement agencies that focused on [methamphetamine-driven crime](#) and the [intersection of prison culture, crime and the underfunding of mental health care](#).

Storytelling through documentaries – primarily though not exclusively video – was the goal of 7% of the funded projects, 46 in all. These, too, often aimed at bringing together extended periods of work to tell a more complete story. A Dutch

“Kidscorrespondent” who wanted to [report the stories of Syrian children living in Lebanon](#), a freelancer seeking to expand the reach of his documentary about [sex trafficking of minors in the U.S.](#), and a feature-length project to tell the story of [four Afghan photojournalists](#) all found financial backing via Kickstarter. Less weighty topics also garnered support, such as a piece about the [2014 World Laser Tag Championship](#) and films about a group of friends [hiking the John Muir Trail](#) and the [60th anniversary of Godzilla](#).



Source: Kickstarter website. Screenshot taken Jan. 10, 2016.

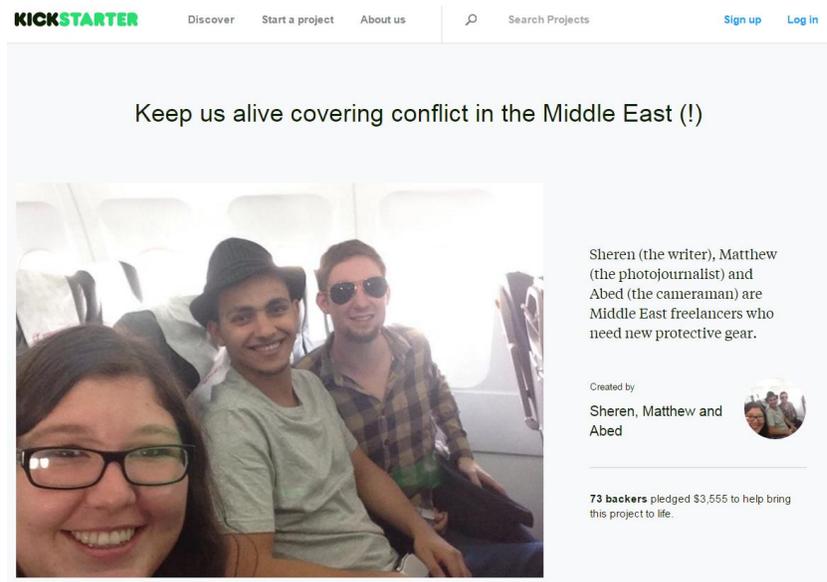
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A total of 56 projects (9% of all proposals) were related to radio and podcasts, though podcasts clearly dominated, with 42 out of the 56 projects. Funded podcast proposals ranged from PRI Soundworks seeking funding to launch the second season of [“One With Farai,”](#) to the producers of a podcast about [women’s soccer](#) who wanted to improve and expand their content; and from the hosts of [“The World’s Only Barbecue Podcast Hosted in a Car”](#) requesting funds for hosting fees as

well as gas, to the hosts of a biweekly show telling the stories of [parklands and historic sites throughout the U.S.](#) Among the non-podcast radio projects were requests for funds to help keep the nonprofit [Alaska Teen Media Institute](#) afloat, to build a [new low-power FM radio station in Chicago](#) and to expand an existing smaller-scale project in the UK into a [new community radio station](#).

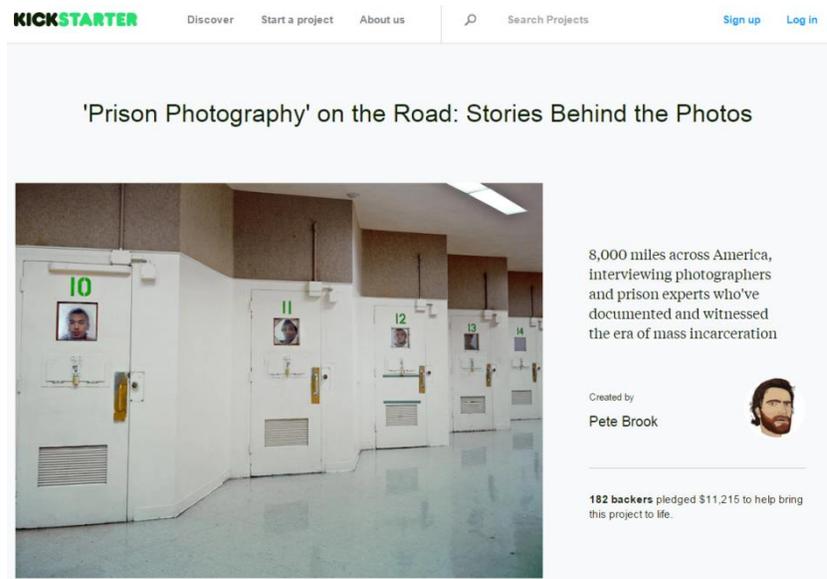
Forty-one blog projects were proposed, accounting for 6% of all proposals. Most were from individuals, such as a food and travel writer who wanted to expand his blog about [working at an orchard](#) or a seasoned, published journalist who sought funds to [travel to Cuba](#) and write about the change occurring there for his blog. But media organizations were also present – PolitiFact looked for backers of its idea to provide [instant fact-checking](#) of President Obama’s 2015 State of the Union address and the Republican response via live blog.

Funded proposals also included 25 photojournalism projects (4% of all examined projects), and here, too, most were put forward by single individuals such as a freelance photojournalist who wanted to travel to Poland and learn



Source: Kickstarter website. Screenshot taken Jan. 10, 2016.

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Source: Kickstarter website. Screenshot taken Jan. 10, 2016.

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about the lives of people who [live in the vicinity of Auschwitz](#); a photojournalism expedition to follow the proposed route of [Nicaragua's Grand Canal project](#); and a freelance writer who proposed traveling across America to [interview photographers](#) who focused their work on prisons and the criminal justice system.

Far less common – each representing 2% or less of all funded journalism projects (31 in all) – were newspapers, newsletters, zines, research papers and apps. Among the small handful of funded zines (usually self-published, original works intended for small circulation) was one that looked at [worker's collectives in the Twin Cities](#). Newspaper projects included one from the nonprofit Knoxville History Project seeking funds for the launch of a for-profit independent weekly newspaper, [the Knoxville Mercury](#), and a relaunch of a community newspaper, [The Betsie Current](#). An iPhone app examined the [Armenian Genocide of 1915](#).

Not all of the projects examined, however, focused on only one medium. Eighty projects – 12% of the total – were explicitly multimedia in nature. In one such project, a journalist proposed to [follow a Libyan-born man back to Libya](#) and chronicle his efforts to help rebuild that war-torn country, producing reports in multiple media formats, including print, online blog, audio slideshow, photos and video. Another multimedia proposal was from a two-person team that intended to travel across America, [interview people who had lost their jobs in the economic downturn](#) and produce a book length oral history accompanied by a film.

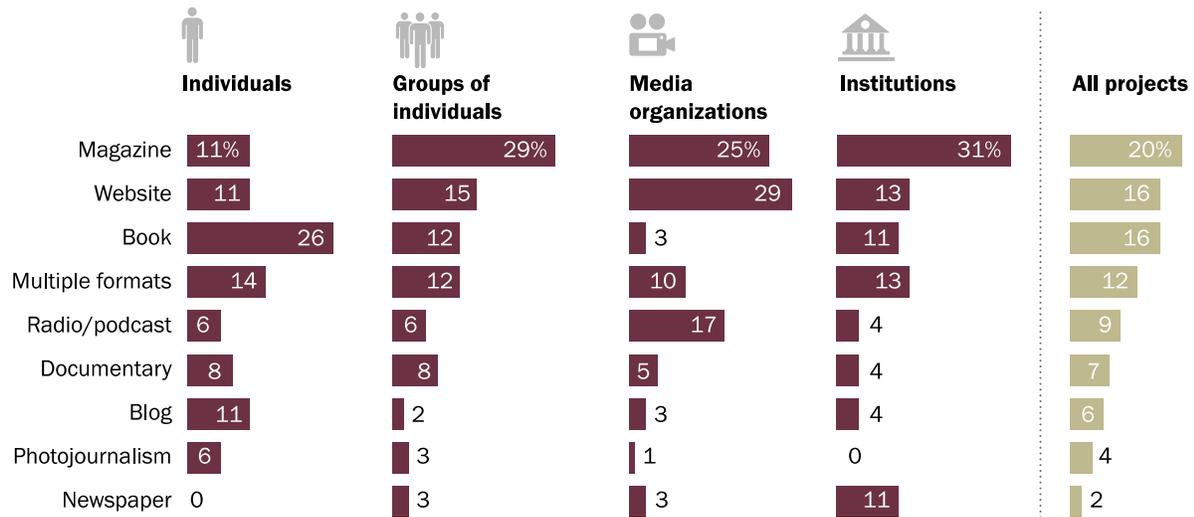
Finally, about 5% of the projects overall were for something other than a published product of some kind. This group included things as diverse as [book tours](#), internships or [experiential travel](#), [training events](#), [curriculum development](#), a [translation project](#), and projects seeking funds to pay for protective gear (bullet-proof vests and helmets) for [journalists working in conflict zones](#).

Across these categories, one feature that stands out – and goes against much of today's focus on second-by-second news updates – is longer-form journalism, which tends to also take a broader, more in-depth look at news events. Magazine-related work, books and documentaries together accounted for 43% of projects funded by the public. And several other categories such as radio/podcasts, zines and blogs may have long-form, analytical elements as well.

Producers varied in the types of projects they tended to put forward. Single individuals were more likely than other types of producers to seek funding for books, which accounted for 26% of individuals' projects compared with 12% or less for other types of producers. Media organizations, on the other hand, were the most likely to receive funding for website-related products (which made up 29% of their projects, vs. 15% or less for other producers) and radio/podcasts (17% vs. 6% or less for others).

Individuals more likely to produce books; media organizations more focused on websites

% of funded journalism projects produced by...for each project type



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

Note: "Not format-specific" category not shown here. Apps, newsletters, research papers and zines accounted for fewer than 15 projects each and are not shown here.

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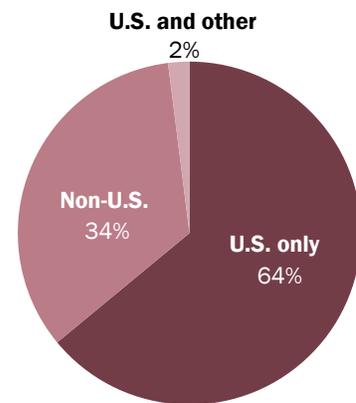
Roughly a third of journalism projects were focused outside the U.S.

Though Kickstarter is a U.S.-based website, it allows residents from [18 different countries](#)⁵ to propose projects (16 countries in North America and Europe, plus Australia and New Zealand) – and, indeed, 16% of funded projects received their funds in currencies other than U.S. dollars. Nevertheless, 64% of the funded Kickstarter journalism proposals were for projects to be conducted within the borders of the United States, while 34% were to be conducted in foreign countries. Only a small percentage of proposals (2%) were for projects that explicitly were to be carried out in both the U.S. and one or more other countries.

The foreign-based projects touched all seven continents – at least 64 countries in all, from Tonga to Iraq and from Cuba to South Africa as well as the Palestinian Territories. Beyond the U.S., the UK had the greatest number of projects at 53, followed by Canada at 22. Other countries had somewhere between one and seven projects.

Nearly two-thirds of funded Kickstarter journalism projects based in the U.S.

% of funded journalism projects to be conducted in each geographic area



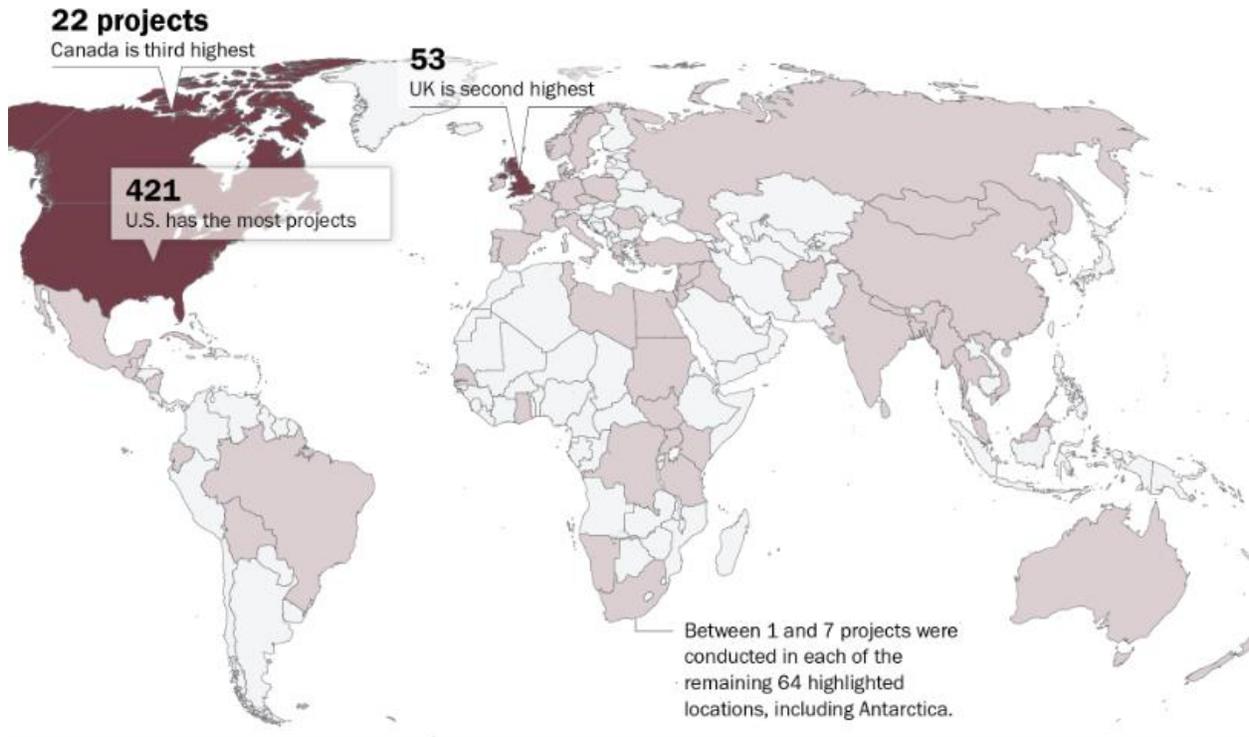
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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⁵ US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Italy, Austria, Belgium, Switzerland and Luxembourg.

Crowdfunded journalism projects spread over all seven continents

Number of funded journalism projects to be conducted in each geographic area



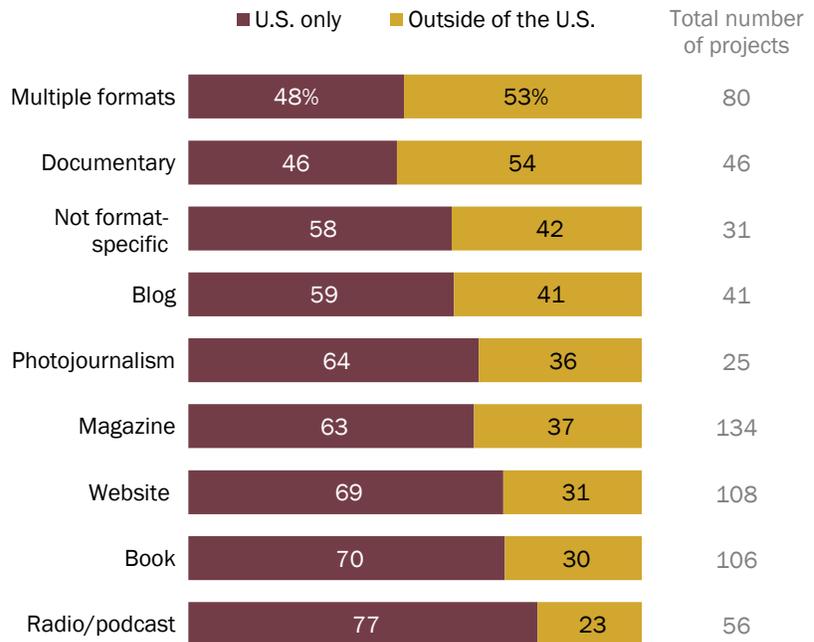
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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Among the types of journalism projects produced, documentaries and multimedia works were the most likely to have a non-U.S. focus, with roughly an even split between foreign and domestic. For all the others, though, U.S.-based projects were the majority, with audio works and books the most tilted toward U.S. – 77% and 70% respectively.

Documentaries and multimedia projects most likely to be conducted in foreign lands

% of funded journalism projects conducted in each geographic area by project type



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

Note: Apps, newsletters, newspapers, research papers and zines accounted for fewer than 20 projects each and are not shown here. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Travel is an integral feature of many journalism projects

Pew Research Center also studied the project narratives (both text and video) for evidence indicating that travel was an integral feature of the proposal. If a project was described as being geographically based in one city or one metropolitan area or region, researchers concluded that travel was not likely to be fundamental to the project. However, if the description specifically mentioned multiple locations, or traveling through different states or to different countries, travel was considered to be integral to the project. Using these criteria, travel was a core component of 38% of funded journalism projects overall.

Travel is a core component of many funded Kickstarter journalism projects

% of funded journalism projects by geographic area that include travel



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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Foreign projects were more likely to include travel than were domestic ones: Fully 54% of non-U.S./international projects included travel, compared with 29% of domestic ones.⁶

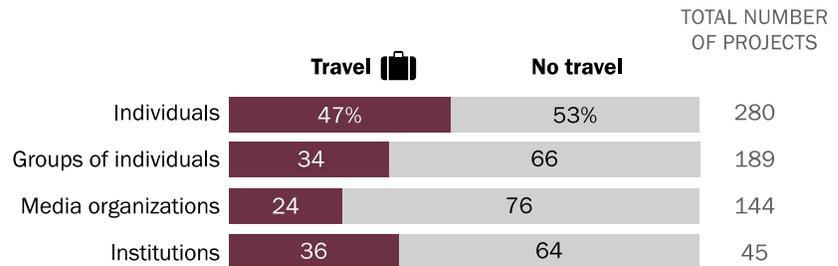
Single individuals who produced projects were more likely than other groups to include travel as a part of a proposal – 47% of these projects, compared with just over one-third of projects from small groups of individuals (34%) and institutions (36%), and about a quarter (24%) of those from media outlets or organizations.

⁶ Two of the 13 U.S.-international projects did not explicitly mention travel, so they could not be coded as such, but the two projects had people based both in the U.S. and abroad.

In many instances, the proposal narratives indicated that the funds requested were largely (if not exclusively) to cover travel expenses such as airfare, gas or hotels. For example, a Jewish educator proposing to [host small, interfaith gatherings](#) sought “funding to cover the costs of airfare, car rental and food,” while two friends seeking to blog about their [drive from the U.S. to the southern end of Chile](#) needed funds for a cargo boat to transport them and their truck over a roadless part of their journey. The journalism school of Stony Brook University successfully turned to Kickstarter for funds to send [16 student journalists to Kenya](#), as did TucsonSentinel.com in their project to send a team of photographers, editors, reporters and coders to document the complexity of the [Arizona-Mexico border](#).

Nearly half of funded projects produced by individuals included travel

% of funded journalism projects by producer type that include travel



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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Journalism projects attracted nearly \$6.3 million in backing

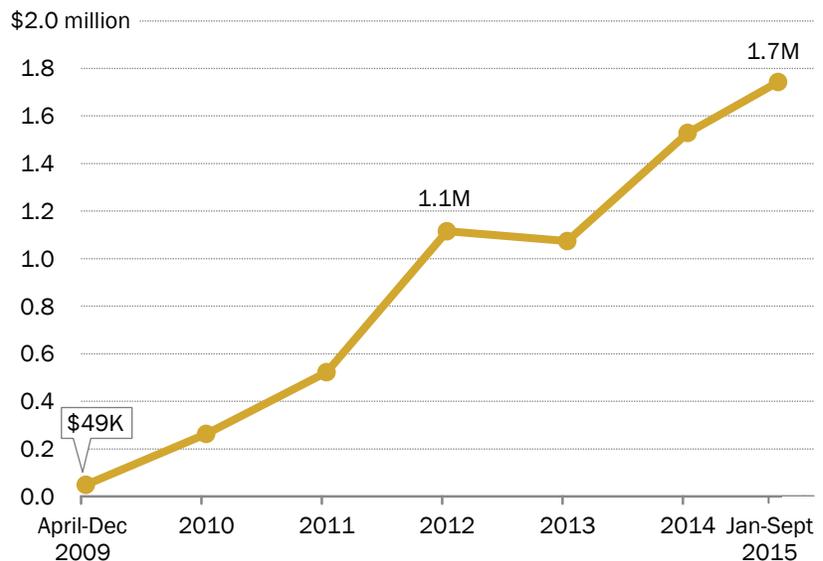
In all, the 658 funded journalism projects garnered a total of almost \$6.3 million in backing. With one exception in 2013, funding grew year over year, with 52% of this – nearly \$3.3 million – raised within the past two years, 2014 and 2015.

This \$6.3 million over the six and a half years exceeded the total funding requested for these projects (\$4,907,136) by almost \$1.4 million dollars. The amounts asked for varied greatly, from a low of \$1 for a project to provide [online reviews](#) of shows, restaurants and entertainment in Las Vegas to a high of \$100,000 for the proposal from [Civil Eats](#).⁷

The majority of projects, 66%, raised just a small amount over their original ask – up to 124% of their goal, suggesting that the extra dollars were spread out fairly evenly. Eight projects attracted in excess of 500% of what was initially requested, with six of those having initial funding goals of \$600 or less.

Funds pledged to Kickstarter journalism projects grew nearly every year from 2009 to 2015

Total funds raised for funded journalism projects by year



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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⁷ The vast majority of the projects (84%) requested funding in U.S. dollars (554 of 658 projects). For this analysis, funding amounts requested in other currencies were translated to U.S. dollars using conversion rates as of Sept. 15, 2015, on [Oanda.com](#). Researchers also analyzed the total amount of funds both requested and pledged in foreign currencies using [OECD](#) average monthly conversion rates as of the month that the projects were launched on Kickstarter. The analysis revealed that the difference between the two methods produced only a 1% difference in the total overall level of funding across all projects.

Overall, website-based projects attracted by far the largest share of revenue, \$1,829,451 or 29% of the total. That substantially exceeds the 16% of all projects they accounted for, meaning they made up fewer projects but tended to have a higher price tag.

The next most lucrative project categories were magazine projects (\$1,029,438, or 16% of total), multimedia projects (\$950,800, or 15%) and book projects (\$849,431, or 13%); these categories' shares of funding dollars were more in line with the share of projects they accounted for (20%, 12% and 16%, respectively).

Website proposals attract the largest share of total journalism dollars

Project type	Total funds received in U.S. dollars	% of total dollars	% of funded projects
Website	1,829,451	29	16
Magazine	1,029,438	16	20
Multiple formats	950,800	15	12
Book	849,431	13	16
Radio/podcast	429,385	7	9
Documentary	406,957	6	7
Blog	179,820	3	6
Photojournalism	130,462	2	4
Newspaper	129,982	2	2
Not format-specific	271,203	4	5
Total	6,296,812	100	100

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

Note: Apps, newsletters, zines and research papers each received <1% of total and were not shown here. Numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.

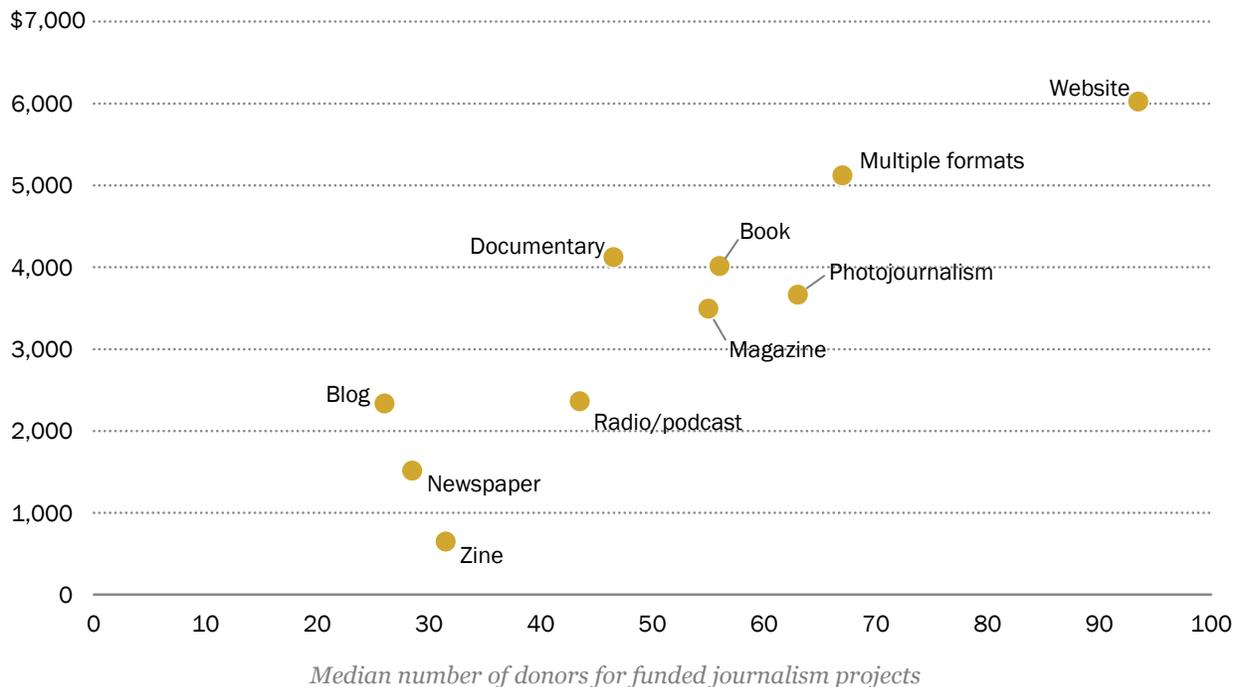
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The journalism projects also displayed a wide variation in the total number of backers they attracted – from one to [3,116](#), with a median number of 54. The median dollar amount per project was \$3,711.⁸

There are again differences by project type, but as indicated in the graphic below, the general trend of more backers equaling a greater total dollar amount holds true. The magazine-related category, for example, had a median number of 55 backers and \$3,498 dollars raised per project, while multimedia projects saw a median of 67 backers and \$5,126. The website category, though it did not have the largest number of projects overall, attracted both the largest median number of backers (94) and dollars (\$6,028).

Journalism project types vary widely in amount pledged and number of donors

Median dollar amount pledged per project



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

Notes: Categories with fewer than five projects each (app, newsletter and research paper) were excluded. The median – or midpoint – is employed here rather than average, due to outliers at the high end of the spectrum that push the average far above the midpoint.

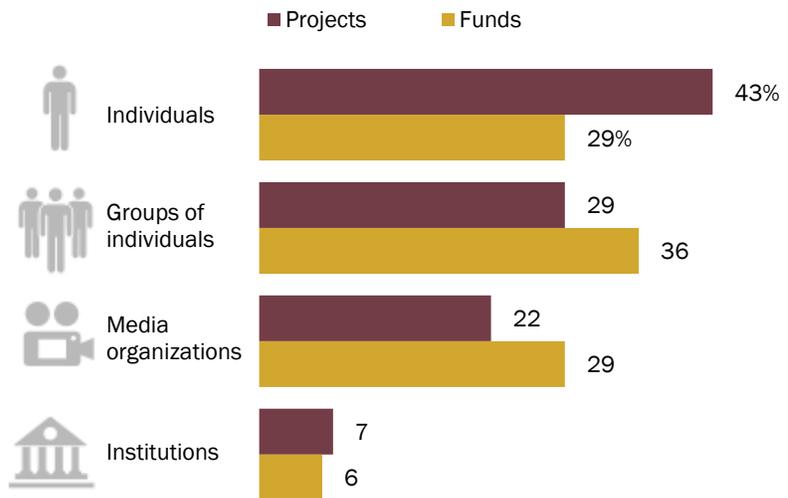
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⁸ For this analysis, the median – or midpoint – number of backers and dollars is used rather than the average, due to outliers at the high end of the spectrum that push the averages far above the midpoint.

Looking at the share of total funding flowing to various types of producers, projects from small groups of individuals attracted the largest share (36%), slightly outpacing the 29% of projects they account for. Single individuals' projects, on the other hand, brought in a far smaller share of funds (29%) than of projects (43%), while media organizations were more on par – 29% of total funds compared with 22% of projects.

Individuals account for a larger share of projects than of funds raised; for media outlets, it's the reverse

% of...accounted for by each producer type



Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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Kickstarter journalism projects feature both startups and expansions

Pew Research Center studied the descriptions of the individual projects to determine if they were wholly new endeavors, or if the projects were more accurately described as some kind of expansion of an existing project. A project was considered an expansion of something that already existed only if the narrative or video specifically pointed to a verifiable entity or work which related directly to the proposal at hand. For example, a [book-related project](#) about protests in Wisconsin that sought funds to provide copies of the already-written book to a number of state senators was clearly an expansion. A proposal to launch [The Breeze](#), a free publication to be produced by the youth of Central Vermont, on the other hand, was a startup.

Media organizations lead in expansion projects

% of funded journalism projects by producer type that are startups or expansions

	Startup	Expansion	TOTAL NUMBER OF PROJECTS
Groups of individuals	67%	33%	189
Individuals	63	37	280
Institutions	42	58	45
Media organizations	10	90	144
All projects	51	49	658

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of publicly available Kickstarter data April 28 2009-September 15 2015.

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Using these criteria, the Center found that these funded projects were almost evenly split between startups and expansions (51% vs. 49% respectively). But there were notable (if perhaps unsurprising) differences between who tended to request funding for a startup versus who sought funds for an expansion of a project that was already underway.

Media organizations focused much more heavily on expanding existing efforts (90% of projects). For example, The Vancouver Observer sought to expand its coverage of energy issues with the [Tar Sands Reporting Project](#), and the [International Policy Digest](#) turned to crowdfunding to help increase interactive features on the home page as well as to initiate a partnership agreement with Agence France Press. Individuals and groups or collectives, however, were nearly twice as likely to seek funds for startup projects as for existing ones: 63% of individual projects and 67% of those from groups. For example, prior to the 2012 presidential election, a journalist launched a project to [travel through U.S. swing states](#), talking to residents about their views in order to post them on his website; and a small team sought funds to launch [Gummie](#), the first urban magazine in Johannesburg, South Africa. Institution-based journalism projects were the most balanced, with

42% startups and 58% expansion. Startup efforts included one from a Canadian school looking for funds to [send a student to an event](#) to write a blog post and another from a charter school raising funds for a [yearbook for middle-schoolers](#); expansion projects, meanwhile, included an [upgrade from newsprint to glossy paper](#) for a commencement magazine, as well as a request for funds to [offset a shortfall in campus funds](#) for a student publication.

Journalism projects are a small piece of the crowdfunding pie

Even as the Journalism category on Kickstarter has grown, it remains one of the smallest of the other 14 categories on a number of levels. To compare the various funding categories on Kickstarter, researchers needed to rely on data through Aug. 31, 2015 (rather than Sept. 15 as the rest of the report does), because this was the last day that data across all categories were captured.

Over this time period, the number of proposed journalism projects over the seven-year time frame lagged behind every category but Dance, which saw just slightly fewer proposals (2,858). And Music and Film & Video both outpace it grandly, with more than 40,000 proposed projects each. However, Dance saw the highest rate of successful funding – 64% of all projects compared with Journalism’s 22%. Here, though, Journalism is more on par with a number of other categories including Fashion, Technology and Crafts. And in raw dollars, Journalism is again near the bottom, accumulating a mere sliver compared with the over \$350 million that went to Games, roughly \$250 million to Film & Video and \$140 million to Music. Dance-related efforts, on the other hand, were close to Journalism at \$8.6 million.

Kickstarter’s Journalism category trails nearly all others by a number of measures

Category	# of proposed projects	# of funded projects	Success rate	Total dollars raised in millions
Dance	2,858	1,789	64%	8.7
Theatre	8,555	5,165	61	29.9
Music	41,350	20,956	51	140.2
Comics	6,395	3,108	50	39.1
Art	19,406	7,956	42	47.7
Film & video	49,850	18,603	38	246.7
Design	16,176	5,251	34	280.6
Games	19,274	6,191	33	351.6
Publishing	27,062	7,890	30	66.4
Photography	7,929	2,304	30	18.7
Food	16,080	4,188	27	64.3
Fashion	12,958	3,078	24	57.1
Crafts	4,840	1,122	24	5.4
Journalism	2,951	655	22	6.3
Technology	16,926	3,319	20	285.7

Source: Kickstarter data as of Aug. 31, 2015.

Note: For this comparison across categories, researchers relied on Kickstarter data from Aug. 31, 2015, because this was the last date that this information was captured. Success rate is calculated from total number of proposed projects minus the number of live projects at the time (Aug. 31, 2015).

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Methodology

This report examined funded projects in Kickstarter’s Journalism category between April 28, 2009 and Sept. 15, 2015. The aim of the research is to gain a better understanding of the status and dynamics of crowdfunding in the context of journalism. Kickstarter, [recently reincorporated as a public benefit corporation](#), is one of two larger-scale and broad-based crowdfunding platforms, but currently the only one with a distinct offering for journalism projects. The other, [Indiegogo, launched in 2008](#), offers categories for film, photography, transmedia and video/web projects – but does not have a specific journalism genre. Another effort, [Beacon](#), launched in 2013 as a platform dedicated to crowdfunding journalism based on a subscription model but now focuses more on partnerships and matching funds. Several other narrowly targeted crowdfunding platforms dedicated to journalism entered –and left – the space within the past few years, including [Spot.us](#) for community-funded journalism, [Contributoria](#) and [Indie Voices for independent media](#), [Emphas.is for photojournalism](#) and [Vourno for video journalism](#). An analysis of Kickstarter, then, while not completely exhaustive of all possible journalism-related crowdfunding, seemed an appropriate way to gauge the status and dynamics of this emerging arena.

For this project, researchers analyzed publicly available data for the 2,975 proposed projects in Kickstarter’s Journalism category between April 28, 2009 and Sept. 15, 2015, with an in-depth examination of the 669 journalism projects that received full – or more than full – funding.⁹ (For more on the manual coding of this study click [here](#).)

Data gathering proceeded in two stages. In the first, researchers used automated tools to obtain a list of all projects in the Journalism category and to extract basic data about each project. In the second stage, the 669 funded projects were manually coded for a number of specific elements not broken down in the publicly available data, including the type of producer, what specific types of journalistic endeavors were being presented to potential backers, the geographical orientation and whether a project was a new initiative or an expansion of ongoing work.

It is worth noting that when Kickstarter first launched as a crowdfunding platform in April 2009, there was no dedicated category for Journalism. The company made the decision in mid-June 2014 to introduce two new categories: [Journalism and Crafts](#). At that time, the company also

⁹ During the data cleaning process, 11 projects were removed, resulting in 658 projects for analysis.

retroactively recategorized earlier, relevant projects into the Journalism category, and created five new Journalism subcategories going forward: Audio, Photo, Print, Video and Web.

Researchers reached out to Kickstarter staff on several occasions during the early stages of this project to obtain more knowledge about the specific content of the Journalism and other categories, how the categories were assigned, the format and structure of the data on the website and the basic methodological approach of our research. All research decisions and editorial input were made in-house.

Automated data acquisition

On Sept. 15, 2015, researchers accessed Kickstarter’s page listing all projects in the “Journalism” category (<https://www.kickstarter.com/discover/categories/journalism>).

Using an automated process that can extract information from Web pages, researchers extracted the links to all 2,975 projects classified in the Journalism category at that time. Researchers then used a different automated process to visit each project’s page, download the HTML code, and automatically extract some information:

- Project status:
 - Funded (reached end date and achieved goal)
 - Unfunded (reached end date but did not achieve goal)
 - Cancelled (withdrawn by creator before reaching end date)
 - In process (not yet reached end date)
- Number of backers
- Amount pledged
- Goal amount

Among these 2,975 projects, 1,941 were classified as unfunded, 246 as cancelled, 119 as in process (“live”) and 669 as funded. For this analysis, researchers focused on the 669 Journalism projects with a funded status.

Manual coding of Kickstarter projects

Two experienced researchers, specifically trained for this project, manually coded the 669 funded projects by considering the information contained in all but one section of the individual project profiles – including “Created by,” the entirety of text descriptions of the projects, and videos, when present. (The one category not included in the coding analysis was the Rewards section.) The unit of analysis for this study was the individual Kickstarter project.

The six variables used in this study, briefly described, were:

- Year of launch
- Geographical region – Denotes where the project was to be conducted. Researchers coded for one of three options:
 - U.S.
 - Non-U.S
 - U.S./Non-U.S. combination
- Travel – Denotes whether or not the project involved travel beyond a single metro area or single region.
- Producer type – Researchers coded for one of four options:
 - Single individual: A single individual with no stated affiliation with any media outlet or organization, or other institution and acting on his or her own behalf.
 - Group of individuals: A group of two or more individuals, with no stated affiliation with any media outlet or organization, or other institution and acting on their own behalf.
 - Media outlet or organization: Any kind of outlet or organization whose primary mission is to produce news or information, and was in existence

prior to the proposal's launch on the Kickstarter platform. When an outlet or organization was named as the project creator but did not, in fact, yet exist, researchers defaulted to single individual or group of individuals, as appropriate.

- Institution: Any kind of public or private institution other than a media-focused one. Included schools at any level (elementary through university), nonprofits, and for-profit businesses.
- Primary product – Describes the primary kind of journalism being produced by the project. Researchers coded for one of 16 options:
 - App
 - Audiobook
 - Blog
 - Book
 - Documentary
 - Exhibit
 - Magazine
 - Multiple format
 - Newsletter
 - Newspaper
 - Photojournalism
 - Radio/podcast
 - Research paper

- Website
 - Zine
 - Other/Not format-specific
- Startup or Expansion – Designated whether the project was a wholly new initiative, or if it existed in any tangible form prior to the launch of the proposal on Kickstarter. Examples of expansion projects would include one for a print edition of something that already existed online, or funds to print a book when the research or reporting had already been completed.

Upon the completion of the coding of the 669 projects, the data cleaning process identified 11 projects among those that had been coded as “other” that contained no mention of journalism or the intent to produce a journalism product, and these 11 projects were removed from the dataset prior to the analysis, resulting in a dataset of 658 projects.

The vast majority of the projects (84%) requested funding in U.S. dollars (554 of 658 projects). For this analysis, funding amounts requested in other currencies were translated to U.S. dollars using conversion rates as of Sept. 15, 2015, on Oanda.com. Researchers also analyzed the total amount of funds both requested and pledged in foreign currencies using OECD average monthly conversion rates as of the month that the projects were launched on Kickstarter. The analysis revealed that the difference between the two methods produced only a 1% difference in the total overall level of funding across all projects.

Intercoder testing

Two experienced researchers worked together to learn and refine the codebook.

In order to demonstrate the validity of the coding rules that were specific for this project, intercoder testing was conducted on all of the six variables. Both researchers coded two sets of 10 projects and one set of 50 projects during the training process, and then completed coding a final intercoder set of 70 projects (slightly more than 10% of the total dataset) prior to conducting the actual coding.

The coding results for the set of 70 projects were assessed using Cohen’s Kappa.

The intercoder results according to Cohen’s Kappa were:

- Year of launch: 1
- Geographical location: .895
- Travel: .909
- Project creator: .916
- Primary product: .933
- Startup or expansion: .827