



THE SPIN WAR

Revealed: Documents Show Bill Gates Has Given \$319 Million to Media Outlets

Sifting through over 30,000 grants in the company's database, MintPress can reveal that the Gates Foundation has bankrolled hundreds of media outlets and ventures, to the tune of at least \$319 million.

by *Alan Macleod*

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November 15th, 2021

By **Alan Macleod**

SEATTLE — Up until his recent messy divorce, Bill Gates enjoyed something of a free pass in corporate media. Generally presented as a kindly nerd who wants to save the world, the Microsoft co-founder was even unironically christened “Saint Bill” by *The Guardian*.

While other billionaires’ media empires are relatively well known, the extent to which Gates’s cash underwrites the modern media landscape is not. After sorting through over 30,000 individual grants, *MintPress* can reveal that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) has made over \$300 million worth of donations to fund media projects.

Recipients of this cash include many of America’s most important news outlets, including *CNN*, *NBC*, *NPR*, *PBS* and *The Atlantic*. Gates also sponsors a myriad of influential foreign organizations, including the *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* in the United Kingdom; prominent European newspapers such as *Le Monde* (France), *Der Spiegel* (Germany) and *El País* (Spain); as well as big global broadcasters like *Al-Jazeera*.

The Gates Foundation money going towards media programs has been split up into a number of sections, presented in descending numerical order, and includes a link to the relevant grant on the organization’s website.

Awards Directly to Media Outlets:

- NPR- \$24,663,066
- The Guardian (including TheGuardian.org)- \$12,951,391
- Cascade Public Media – \$10,895,016
- Public Radio International (PRI.org/TheWorld.org)- \$7,719,113
- The Conversation- \$6,664,271
- Univision- \$5,924,043
- Der Spiegel (Germany)- \$5,437,294
- Project Syndicate- \$5,280,186
- Education Week – \$4,898,240
- WETA- \$4,529,400
- NBCUniversal Media- \$4,373,500
- Nation Media Group (Kenya) – \$4,073,194
- Le Monde (France)- \$4,014,512
- Bhekisisa (South Africa) – \$3,990,182

- El País – \$3,968,184
- BBC- \$3,668,657
- CNN- \$3,600,000
- KCET- \$3,520,703
- Population Communications International (population.org) – \$3,500,000
- The Daily Telegraph – \$3,446,801
- Chalkbeat – \$2,672,491
- The Education Post- \$2,639,193
- Rockhopper Productions (U.K.) – \$2,480,392
- Corporation for Public Broadcasting – \$2,430,949
- UpWorthy – \$2,339,023
- Financial Times – \$2,309,845
- The 74 Media- \$2,275,344
- Texas Tribune- \$2,317,163
- Punch (Nigeria) – \$2,175,675
- News Deeply – \$1,612,122
- The Atlantic- \$1,403,453
- Minnesota Public Radio- \$1,290,898
- YR Media- \$1,125,000
- The New Humanitarian- \$1,046,457
- Sheger FM (Ethiopia) – \$1,004,600
- Al-Jazeera- \$1,000,000
- ProPublica- \$1,000,000
- Crosscut Public Media – \$810,000
- Grist Magazine- \$750,000
- Kurzgesagt – \$570,000
- Educational Broadcasting Corp – \$506,504
- Classical 98.1 – \$500,000
- PBS – \$499,997
- Gannett – \$499,651
- Mail and Guardian (South Africa)- \$492,974
- Inside Higher Ed.- \$439,910
- BusinessDay (Nigeria) – \$416,900
- Medium.com – \$412,000
- Nutopia- \$350,000
- Independent Television Broadcasting Inc. – \$300,000
- Independent Television Service, Inc. – \$300,000
- Caixin Media (China) – \$250,000
- Pacific News Service – \$225,000
- National Journal – \$220,638

- Chronicle of Higher Education – \$149,994
- Belle and Wissell, Co. \$100,000
- Media Trust – \$100,000
- New York Public Radio – \$77,290
- KUOW – Puget Sound Public Radio – \$5,310

Together, these donations total \$166,216,526. The money is generally directed towards issues close to the Gateses hearts. For example, the \$3.6 million *CNN* grant went towards “report[ing] on gender equality with a particular focus on least developed countries, producing journalism on the everyday inequalities endured by women and girls across the world,” while the *Texas Tribune* received millions to “to increase public awareness and engagement of education reform issues in Texas.” Given that Bill is one of the charter schools’ most fervent supporters, a cynic might interpret this as planting pro-corporate charter school propaganda into the media, disguised as objective news reporting.

The Gates Foundation has also given nearly \$63 million to charities closely aligned with big media outlets, including nearly \$53 million to BBC Media Action, over \$9 million to *MTV*’s Staying Alive Foundation, and \$1 million to The New York Times Neediest Causes Fund. While not specifically funding journalism, donations to the philanthropic arm of a media player should still be noted.

Gates continues to underwrite a wide network of investigative journalism centers as well, totaling just over \$38 million, more than half of which has gone to the D.C.-based International Center for Journalists to expand and develop African media.

These centers include:

- International Center for Journalists- \$20,436,938
- Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism (Nigeria) – \$3,800,357
- The Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting – \$2,432,552
- Fondation EurActiv Politech – \$2,368,300
- International Women’s Media Foundation – \$1,500,000
- Center for Investigative Reporting – \$1,446,639
- InterMedia Survey institute – \$1,297,545
- The Bureau of Investigative Journalism – \$1,068,169
- Internews Network – \$985,126
- Communications Consortium Media Center – \$858,000
- Institute for Nonprofit News – \$650,021
- The Poynter Institute for Media Studies- \$382,997

- Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (Nigeria) – \$360,211
- Institute for Advanced Journalism Studies – \$254,500
- Global Forum for Media Development (Belgium) – \$124,823
- Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting – \$100,000

In addition to this, the Gates Foundation also plies press and journalism associations with cash, to the tune of at least \$12 million. For example, the National Newspaper Publishers Association — a group representing more than 200 outlets — has received \$3.2 million.

The list of these organizations includes:

- Education Writers Association – \$5,938,475
- National Newspaper Publishers Association – \$3,249,176
- National Press Foundation- \$1,916,172
- Washington News Council- \$698,200
- American Society of News Editors Foundation – \$250,000
- Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press- \$25,000

This brings our running total up to \$216.4 million.

The foundation also puts up the money to directly train journalists all over the world, in the form of scholarships, courses and workshops. Today, it is possible for an individual to train as a reporter thanks to a Gates Foundation grant, find work at a Gates-funded outlet, and to belong to a press association funded by Gates. This is especially true of journalists working in the fields of health, education and global development, the ones Gates himself is most active in and where scrutiny of the billionaire's actions and motives are most necessary.

Gates Foundation grants pertaining to the instruction of journalists include:

- Johns Hopkins University – \$1,866,408
- Teachers College, Columbia University- \$1,462,500
- University of California Berkeley- \$767,800
- Tsinghua University (China) – \$450,000
- Seattle University – \$414,524
- Institute for Advanced Journalism Studies – \$254,500
- Rhodes University (South Africa) – \$189,000
- Montclair State University- \$160,538
- Pan-Atlantic University Foundation – \$130,718
- World Health Organization – \$38,403

- The Aftermath Project- \$15,435

The BMGF also pays for a wide range of specific media campaigns around the world. For example, since 2014 it has donated \$5.7 million to the Population Foundation of India in order to create dramas that promote sexual and reproductive health, with the intent to increase family planning methods in South Asia. Meanwhile, it allotted over \$3.5 million to a Senegalese organization to develop radio shows and online content that would feature health information. Supporters consider this to be helping critically underfunded media, while opponents might consider it a case of a billionaire using his money to plant his ideas and opinions into the press.

Media projects supported by the Gates Foundation:

- European Journalism Centre – \$20,060,048
- World University Service of Canada – \$12,127,622
- Well Told Story Limited – \$9,870,333
- Solutions Journalism Inc.- \$7,254,755
- Entertainment Industry Foundation – \$6,688,208
- Population Foundation of India- \$5,749,826 –
- Participant Media – \$3,914,207
- Réseau Africain de l'Education pour la santé- \$3,561,683
- New America – \$3,405,859
- AllAfrica Foundation – \$2,311,529
- Steps International – \$2,208,265
- Center for Advocacy and Research – \$2,200,630
- The Sesame Workshop – \$2,030,307
- Panos Institute West Africa – \$1,809,850
- Open Cities Lab – \$1,601,452
- Harvard university – \$1,190,527
- Learning Matters – \$1,078,048
- The Aaron Diamond Aids Research Center- \$981,631
- Thomson Media Foundation- \$860,628
- Communications Consortium Media Center – \$858,000
- StoryThings- \$799,536
- Center for Rural Strategies – \$749,945
- The New Venture Fund – \$700,000
- Helianthus Media – \$575,064
- University of Southern California- \$550,000
- World Health Organization- \$530,095
- Phi Delta Kappa International – \$446,000
- Ikana Media – \$425,000

- Seattle Foundation – \$305,000
- EducationNC – \$300,000
- Beijing Guokr Interactive – \$300,000
- Upswell- \$246,918
- The African Academy of Sciences – \$208,708
- Seeking Modern Applications for Real Transformation (SMART) – \$201,781
- Bay Area Video Coalition- \$190,000
- PowHERful Foundation – \$185,953
- PTA Florida Congress of Parents and Teachers – \$150,000
- ProSocial – \$100,000
- Boston University – \$100,000
- National Center for Families Learning – \$100,000
- Development Media International – \$100,000
- Ahmadu Bello University- \$100,000
- Indonesian eHealth and Telemedicine Society – \$100,000
- The Filmmakers Collaborative – \$50,000
- Foundation for Public Broadcasting in Georgia Inc. – \$25,000
- SIFF – \$13,000

Total: \$97,315,408

\$319.4 million and (a lot) more

Added together, these Gates-sponsored media projects come to a total of \$319.4 million. However, there are clear shortcomings with this non-exhaustive list, meaning the true figure is undoubtedly far higher. First, it does not count sub-grants — money given by recipients to media around the world. And while the Gates Foundation fosters an air of openness about itself, there is actually precious little public information about what happens to the money from each grant, save for a short, one- or two-sentence description written by the foundation itself on its website. Only donations to press organizations themselves or projects that could be identified from the information on the Gates Foundation’s website as media campaigns were counted, meaning that thousands of grants having some media element do not appear in this list.

A case in point is the BMGF’s partnership with ViacomCBS, the company that controls *CBS News*, *MTV*, *VH1*, *Nickelodeon*, and *BET*. Media reports at the time noted that the Gates Foundation was paying the entertainment giant to insert information and PSAs into its programming and that Gates had intervened to change storylines in popular shows like *ER* and *Law & Order: SVU*.

However, when checking BMGF's grants database, "Viacom" and "CBS" are nowhere to be found, the likely grant in question (totaling over \$6 million) merely describing the project as a "public engagement campaign aimed at improving high school graduation rates and postsecondary completion rates specifically aimed at parents and students," meaning that it was not counted in the official total. There are surely many more examples like this. "For a tax-privileged charity that so very often trumpets the importance of transparency, it's remarkable how intensely secretive the Gates Foundation is about its financial flows," Tim Schwab, one of the few investigative journalists who has scrutinized the tech billionaire, told *MintPress*.

Also not included are grants aimed at producing articles for academic journals. While these articles are not meant for mass consumption, they regularly form the basis for stories in the mainstream press and help shape narratives around key issues. The Gates Foundation has given far and wide to academic sources, with at least \$13.6 million going toward creating content for the prestigious medical journal *The Lancet*.

And, of course, even money given to universities for purely research projects eventually ends up in academic journals, and ultimately, downstream into mass media. Academics are under heavy pressure to print their results in prestigious journals; "publish or perish" is the mantra in university departments. Therefore, even these sorts of grants have an effect on our media. Neither these nor grants funding the printing of books or establishment of websites counted in the total, although they too are forms of media.

Low profile, long tentacles

In comparison to other tech billionaires, Gates has kept his profile as a media controller relatively low. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos's purchase of *The Washington Post* for \$250 million in 2013 was a very clear and obvious form of media influence, as was eBay founder Pierre Omidyar's creation of First Look Media, the company that owns *The Intercept*.

Despite flying more under the radar, Gates and his companies have amassed considerable influence in media. We already rely on Microsoft-owned products for communication (e.g. Skype, Hotmail), social media (LinkedIn), and entertainment (Microsoft Xbox). Furthermore, the hardware and software we use to communicate often comes courtesy of the 66-year-old Seattleite. How many people reading this are doing so on a Microsoft Surface or Windows phone and doing so via Windows OS? Not only that, Microsoft owns stakes in media giants such as Comcast and AT&T. And the "MS" in *MSNBC* stands for Microsoft.

Media Gates keepers

That the Gates Foundation is underwriting a significant chunk of our media ecosystem leads to serious problems with objectivity. “The foundation’s grants to media organizations...raise obvious conflict-of-interest questions: How can reporting be unbiased when a major player holds the purse strings?” wrote Gates’s local *Seattle Times* in 2011. This was before the newspaper accepted BMGF money to fund its “education lab” section.

Schwab’s research has found that this conflict of interests goes right to the very top: two *New York Times* columnists had been writing glowingly about the Gates Foundation for years without disclosing that they also work for a group — the Solutions Journalism Network — that, as shown above, has received over \$7 million from the tech billionaire’s charity.

Earlier this year, Schwab also declined to co-report on a story about COVAX for *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, suspecting that the money Gates had been pumping into the outlet would make it impossible to accurately report on a subject so close to Gates’s heart. Sure enough, when the article was published last month, it repeated the assertion that Gates had little to do with COVAX’s failure, mirroring the BMGF’s stance and quoting them throughout. Only at the very end of the more than 5,000-word story did it reveal that the organization it was defending was paying the wages of its staff.

“I don’t believe Gates told *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* what to write. I think the bureau implicitly, if subconsciously, knew they had to find a way to tell this story that didn’t target their funder. The biasing effects of financial conflicts are complex but very real and reliable,” Schwab said, describing it as “a case study in the perils of Gates-funded journalism.”

MintPress also contacted the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for comment, but it did not respond.

Gates, who amassed his fortune by building a monopoly and zealously guarding his intellectual property, bears significant blame for the failure of the coronavirus vaccine rollout across the world. Quite aside from the COVAX fiasco, he pressured Oxford University not to make its publicly-funded vaccine open-source and available to all for free, but instead to partner with private corporation AstraZeneca, a decision that meant that those who could not pay were blocked from using it. That Gates has made over 100 donations to the university, totaling hundreds of millions of dollars, likely played some role in the decision. To this day, fewer than 5% of people in low-income countries have received even one dose of COVID vaccine. The death toll from this is immense.

Unfortunately, many of these real criticisms of Gates and his network are obscured by wild and untrue conspiracy theories about such things as inserting microchips in vaccines to control the population. This has meant that genuine critiques of the Microsoft co-founder are often demonized and algorithmically suppressed, meaning that outlets are strongly dissuaded from covering the topic, knowing they will likely lose money if they do so. The paucity of scrutiny of the world's second-richest individual, in turn, feeds into outlandish suspicions.

Gates certainly deserves it. Quite apart from his deep and potentially decades-long ties to the infamous Jeffrey Epstein, his attempts to radically change African society, and his investment in controversial chemical giant Monsanto, he is perhaps the key driver behind the American charter school movement — an attempt to essentially privatize the U.S. education system. Charter schools are deeply unpopular with teachers' unions, which see the movement as an attempt to lessen their autonomy and reduce public oversight into how and what children are taught.

All the way to the bank

In most coverage, Gates's donations are broadly presented as altruistic gestures. Yet many have pointed to the inherent flaws with this model, noting that allowing billionaires to decide what they do with their money allows them to set the public agenda, giving them enormous power over society. "Philanthropy can and is being used deliberately to divert attention away from different forms of economic exploitation that underpin global inequality today," said Linsey McGoey, Professor of Sociology at the University of Essex, U.K., and author of *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy*. She adds:

"The new 'philanthrocapitalism' threatens democracy by increasing the power of the corporate sector at the expense of the public sector organizations, which increasingly face budget squeezes, in part by excessively remunerating for-profit organizations to deliver public services that could be delivered more cheaply without private sector involvement."

Charity, as former British Prime Minister Clement Attlee noted, "is a cold grey loveless thing. If a rich man wants to help the poor, he should pay his taxes gladly, not dole out money at a whim."

None of this means that the organizations receiving Gates' money — media or otherwise — are irredeemably corrupt, nor that the Gates Foundation does not do any good in the world. But it does introduce a glaring conflict of interest whereby the very institutions we rely on to hold accountable one of the richest and most powerful men in the planet's history are quietly being funded by him. This conflict of interest is one that corporate media have largely tried to ignore, while the supposedly altruistic philanthropist Gates just keeps getting richer, laughing all the way to the bank.

Feature photo | Bill Gates listens during the “Accelerating Clean Technology Innovation and Deployment” event at the COP26 U.N. Climate Summit, Nov. 2, 2021, in Glasgow, Scotland. Evan Vucci | Pool via AP

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