



## Building the Bureau Local: a user guide

*The Bureau Local is a collaborative, UK-wide investigative network. It was launched in 2017 to support, reinvigorate and innovate local investigative reporting in the UK. After completing its initial two-year funded experiment, the team is laying out its story, learnings and frameworks for those seeking to replicate or take parts of the model to their countries, cities or sectors. The German not-for-profit news organisation CORRECTIV was inspired to take on the model - calling it CORRECTIV.Lokal - and their case study is included.*

### GUIDE

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## The Bureau Local story

### Our origins

*The [Bureau Local](#) was built on the belief that holding power to account is crucial for a just and equitable society. We believe that both local and national journalism are integral to that accountability.*

In the wake of Brexit, communities across the UK were demanding to be heard. More power was being given to public bodies outside London while the collapsing commercial model for news meant that local papers faced debilitating cuts to their staff and resources. The capacity for investigative journalism where it was urgently needed was, and still is, extremely limited. You can read our position on the state of local media in the UK [here](#).

Launched in March 2017, the Bureau Local set out to address these challenges by building a collaborative, investigative network of local reporters.

Over the course of the Bureau Local's first two years, the UK media landscape saw continued local closures and increasingly strained resources for reporters - and the narrowing group of existing regional investigative journalists - to produce local investigative reporting.

This made it challenging for journalists to take on collaborative projects with the Bureau Local but nonetheless we saw local reporters fight to tell the stories of their communities. The data, leads and resources shared by the Bureau Local and its network provided support to the ecosystem, and reinvigorated it. Despite time and resource restraints, reporters seized opportunities and collaborated on local and nationwide projects with the Bureau Local with whatever time they could give. One reporter in the network said: "The Bureau Local matters because it offers us a structured framework in which to conduct local investigations of national importance."

The Bureau Local network quickly grew to include those from industries and communities outside journalism due to a recognition that gaps in accountability need to be addressed. Here are some of the reasons reporters and citizens of expertise said they wanted to participate in the Bureau Local:

- *"I have never felt more disconnected from UK politics than at present."*
- *"Investigative journalism is non-existent where I live."*
- *"We need more authoritative local journalism supported by facts and research."*
- *"I care about the untold stories, worry about the dearth of investigative journalism in traditional newsrooms and hope to pool my knowledge and journalism skills with [the Bureau Local]."*
- *"I believe that the highest standards of journalism are being eroded. I want to help address this."*

Two years on, the network has more than 1,000 members and includes reporters from local, regional and national outlets, hyperlocal bloggers, technologists, community-minded citizens and specialist contributors. Instead of seeking to support and innovate local journalism by only working with reporters, the project stepped outside itself and invited citizens to take part so they could provide expertise, learn more on the issues and mobilise their communities around stories.

As we see it, collaboration is the new competition. On our online platform, coders helped journalists with tech tasks; designers built visualisations for newsrooms; members of the public provided information; experts brought forward contacts and insider knowledge; journalists shared resources, quotes and findings.

The Bureau Local took investigations to citizens offline too. We held 'collaborative reporting days' - meetups in physical spaces across the country where network members could work together on investigations ahead of publication. These are open to local reporters and members of the public.

- Ahead of the snap election in 2017, two statisticians joined the Bureau Local in building a model to estimate the number of new voters per seat - data not published by the government. At our meetups in five cities across the UK, students helped adjust the model to improve its accuracy and local reporters shaped a narrative that led to the [reveal that 77 seats had a surge in new voters that meant they could swing, potentially threatening Theresa May's majority](#). In the end, half of those seats did indeed swing.
- Local politicians, carers, civil servants and technologists came along to more events (in five cities across England) to scrutinise the cuts proposed to local government budgets, leading to the Open Data Institute in Leeds publishing a visualisation of their council's spending, the Women's Budget Group producing a public calculator and the whole network analysing financial documents to create a criteria that could be used to show [which councils were heading toward crisis](#).

Network members said:

- *"I am not a journalist but the BL gives me the opportunity to use my skills to participate in/contribute to journalism, and I think that's immensely valuable."*
- *"The Bureau plays a crucial role in supporting and shining the spotlight on many stories that could otherwise go unreported."*
- *"I think the Bureau Local is a very positive, welcomed way to strengthen local journalism and I hope it continues to grow."*
- *"Bureau Local is my community."*

With our members, we have published over **350 exclusive local, investigative stories** in just two years covering domestic violence service provision, alleged racial profiling during immigration checks, deaths of homeless people and local council spending pressures. The following revelations were only made possible through the power of the network:

- Newly registered voters and those abandoned by their previous party hold the power to swing 71 constituencies in England and Wales (2017). Full story [here](#).
- Local authorities across England have cut their spending on domestic violence refuges by nearly a quarter (24%) since 2010. More than a thousand vulnerable women and children have been turned away from refuges in just six months (2017). Full story [here](#).
- Some of the smallest councils in England have built up huge debts by buying supermarkets, business parks and offices, tying the future of their public services to the uncertainty of the property market (2018). Full story [here](#).
- Key hospitals across England depend on the European Union for more than one in five doctors or nurses (2018). Full story [here](#).
- An average of 11 homeless people a week have died in the UK in the last 18 months - a total of 800 homeless deaths documented in full for the first time (2019). Full story [here](#).
- The local government funding crisis has become so dire that councils in England are being forced to sell thousands of public spaces, such as libraries, community centres and playgrounds. In a double blow to communities, some local authorities are using the money

raised from selling off buildings and land to pay for hundreds of redundancies, including in vital frontline services (2019). Full story [here](#).

- British citizens are stopped by immigration officers ten times a day on average, prompting fresh accusations people are being targeted because of their skin colour. Nearly a fifth of all people stopped and asked to prove their immigration status are British - a proportion which has remained unchanged for almost seven years (2019). Full story [here](#).

These stories led to:

- New government guidance recommending that [safeguarding adult reviews](#) are held each time a homeless person dies - with immediate local change in Leeds, Brighton, Hackney, Malvern and Oxford.
- The first-ever [official statistics](#) on homeless deaths being produced by the Office for National Statistics who consulted us on their methodology. The Scottish and Northern Irish equivalents are set to follow suit.
- A [parliamentary debate](#), citations in a House of Commons Library [report](#) and a [government consultation](#) on domestic violence provision.
- Following our reporting on risky council investment practices, James Brokenshire - the Secretary for Housing, Communities & Local Government - stating he would discuss intervention with the Treasury.
- Calls from MPs across the country for change to immigration spot checks.

We also experimented with new ways to tell stories with our community. We took our [domestic violence investigation on the road](#), with the theatre show *Refuge Woman*. This one-woman show was written and performed by Cash Carraway, a survivor who had worked with us on the investigation. Her performance shed a light on her own experiences using refuges and provided a powerful critique of her experience with the media.

We took the show to seven locations across the UK: key cities and towns where local journalists had worked with us on the collaborative investigation. Regional journalists and those working in the sector came on stage after each performance to discuss the issue in each local context. Through this innovative combination of investigative journalism and theatre, we informed people in new ways, sparked debate and reached new audiences. Perhaps most importantly, we supported a survivor of domestic violence to tell her story in her own words. Cash has gone on to write a book with Penguin Random House and the Bureau Local *Refuge Woman* tour won Innovation of the Year at the Drum Online Media Awards (2019).

Audience members said: “It was pure, real, raw & honest”; “Cash is a voice to be listened to and a voice for those that can’t be heard”; “Cash, thank you for teaching me more than prison taught me”; “The Bureau of Investigative Journalism gave us insight and detail we wouldn’t get via the [traditional] media.”

The Bureau Local has been described as “one of the most positive and effective interventions in local journalism in the UK for some time” and has won multiple awards - for its journalism and its model - including the Nesta/Observer 50 ‘New Radicals’ list, the ‘Be Better With Data’ Lovie Award, Big Issue’s ‘Top 100 Changemakers’ and the Innovation prize at the British Journalism Awards (2017) and the European Press Prize (2018).



### **The team**

*The approach to building the core team that would launch, run and build this innovative initiative was one of the most important factors in shaping the Bureau Local.*

The Bureau Local is a project within the Bureau of Investigative Journalism - a UK non-profit dedicated to tackling underreported, systemic issues through deep and rigorous journalism. In 2017, the Bureau set out to build a network to support local investigative reporting. It was inspired by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and their [Panama Papers investigation](#), which brought together journalists around the world to collaborate on an investigation into the rogue offshore finance industry. The Bureau thought there could be an innovative way to apply this concept to a single country.

The Bureau hired a director who had experience in innovating in the UK media and running multi-disciplinary journalism teams with a data and investigative lens: Megan Lucero, formerly Data Editor of *The Times and Sunday Times*. She initially focused on setting up a core team that would look and think differently from traditional media. If the project was to succeed in innovating and changing the way media operated in the UK, it had to do so within its own team from the outset. She sought reporters who had experience both in and out of London, those with private and state educational backgrounds and a team that would bring local, investigative and data experience. Lucero believed these qualities were crucial for a local investigative project and spoke to some of the diversity challenges that limited traditional newsrooms. It took two rounds of recruitment to find the right team that fitted these requirements and it required a different recruitment process to those of traditional newsrooms - reaching out to community reporting projects, union groups and universities out of London, for example.

Alongside the director, the investigative team consists of:

- Investigative data journalist x2: Investigative data reporters working with the network and wider team to dig into vital stories untold locally and nationally.
- Data lead x1: Applying computational methods to the investigative challenges in the reporting, building databases for the stories and standardising and simplifying the data in order to make it available and accessible to reporters and the public.
- Community organiser x1 (currently fulfilled by two team members as a job share): This role was not originally scoped in the first hiring round but after the rapid growth and diversity of members, was added as a key role working to support and build communities around investigations.



It is important to note that a progressive decision was made at the outset that the 'investigative team' roles would be equal in salary and status. The idea behind this was that for the project to succeed it needed skills in journalism, data and community organising and that those were valued equally. This thinking will expand and evolve as the organisation grows.

The team, [which you can read about here](#), sits at the heart of the Bureau Local's collaborative network. The collaborative ethos of the whole project was established internally. All members share in running the team's social media, building and supporting the network, supporting each other's investigative projects - i.e. assisting in the running of events, fact-checking the journalism, promoting the work, etc. They work as project teams, with a full-time investigative journalist working alongside a half-time data lead and half-time community organiser for each investigative project.

All team members work on more than just the journalism - they also open up the process for others to collaborate, build communities and mobilise around their stories. This is a very new way of working for 'traditional' investigative journalists and has been a big piece of learning for the team over the past two years.



### **Building blocks**

*Once the team was hired, they started to build foundations for the future together. They wrote their mission statement as a group, articulating their why, how and what before taking it to a wider community that would in turn help build on it.*

If you are interested in building something similar, you should start by establishing a framework that seeks to address your own specific challenges and aspirations, and to do so in conversation with both the people affected by, and who can influence, that ecosystem. For example, when the Bureau Local launched, the team went out on a listening and learning tour. We travelled to the US, to learn from those fighting similar problems in the industry, and then across the UK to speak to local newsrooms, union groups and community reporters. We established frameworks (below) but allowed them to evolve with our experiences because of our agreed values of ambition, experimentation, agility, openness and collaboration. We have spent two years experimenting and will continue to.

### **Why**

We believe that holding power to account, both locally and nationally, is crucial for a just and equitable society. And we believe local journalism is integral to this accountability. But local investigative journalism is under threat:

- Digitisation has increased the amount of information available and how people access it.
- Traditional commercial models for news are collapsing.
- The closure and consolidation of local news outlets have created a democratic deficit and exacerbated issues of representation and relevance for some communities.
- The way the public accesses information is changing and so is the news industry's relationship with communities.
- There is increasing disconnect between what matters to local people and news coverage.
- The news industry faces challenges of trust, relevance and value.

In response, the Bureau Local believes:

- In the UK, the devolution of power to local bodies combined with a long-term austerity policy is cause for more local journalism, not less. Seeking out a solution is critical.
- This is our industry to protect, ours to find solutions for. But we believe journalists cannot and should not save our industry alone.
- We care about the sustainable development of our local communities. We recognise this is not just about news. It is about our information ecosystem and to strengthen it, we need a wide, collaborative approach.
- Vital local information and accountability can and should be achieved through collaboration with all players in the process - journalists, civil society, those in power and those affected.
- At the very core, we are seeking to improve our communities' access to and action on information - through open resources, collaboration and community participation and journalism.
- We believe inclusion and representation should be at the heart of our approach - in our team, our network and the communities and topics we report with and on.
- We are not here to compete or to find the silver bullet. We are a collaborative organisation that stands in solidarity with others and contributes what it can to our industry and wider society. We welcome plurality and encourage growth and new players to address problems.

## **What**

Bureau Local is a collaborative, investigative network revealing stories that matter to communities across the UK. Members of the network include regional and national news outlets, local reporters, hyperlocal bloggers, technologists, community-minded citizens and specialist contributors.

## **How**

We join forces on investigations with the aim of strengthening our information ecosystem, holding power to account at both a local and national level and telling stories that matter to communities. We focus on mobilising people around our journalism and ensuring we report with, not just on, the communities we cover. We run online and offline community forums, meetups and live journalism events to bring our stories to wider audiences. Here's how the Bureau Local works:

### Choose what to investigate

There is a wealth of underreported stories in the UK. So, as a small team trying to make an impact, the Bureau Local criteria for stories requires that they: a) are local and national - they must show a systemic problem and also have an impact locally b) provide data or other evidence that can be

sliced across the country - this could be crowdsourced or gathered centrally c) are best done with a community or network i.e. utilise the power of people across the country.

#### Dig!

Investigative work takes time and can lead to dead ends. We apply a rigorous investigative process but also work with local communities to shape the investigative leads. We ensure there is a strong story that hits our criteria and will be worthwhile before opening it up to the network.

#### Build evidence at scale

With each investigation, we gather relevant information and ensure that the datasets/evidence will be accessible to the public so they can find out how issues play out in their area.

We see data as more than numbers on a spreadsheet. To us, it is a vital insight into what is happening in and around communities. It also provides an ever-growing bank of evidence to drive local and national accountability. When we investigate an issue, we do the heavy lifting to harness data centrally and simplify the investigative process for journalists and the public.

#### Collaborate across industry, knowledge and experience

Once we have strong investigative leads and a robust wealth of evidence to share across the country - often in the form of data - we then open up our investigative idea/project and invite others to collaborate in order to spark, local investigations and better the story.

We bring in those a) affected by the issue b) those with knowledge on the issue c) those that can change the issue and d) those who want to report with us or contribute knowledge or a skill.

We believe that by building a community of journalists, techies, designers, concerned citizens and people with specialist knowledge that contribute to investigative reporting, all of us will benefit from new 'acts of journalism'. We collaborate with journalists from all backgrounds, platforms and sizes but also work with people outside the news industry.

#### Make local information open and accessible (reporting recipes)

We then open up our data, code and methodologies, and write reporting recipes to make it easy for anyone to follow, join in or expand on our investigations.

All interested collaborators must agree to Bureau Local terms before they get access to the investigation. They must agree to a) the embargo date set out by the Bureau Local b) credit the Bureau Local in their work c) share their findings with other collaborators d) adhere to any guidance or caveats we put on the data/evidence we provide.

Once potential collaborators agree to these terms (in writing or on a digital form) they are invited to a private channel on our online platform, Slack, and are given access to our reporting recipes and data files.

The reporting recipes give a) the context behind the investigation b) a guide to understanding and querying the data/evidence c) our key findings d) questions and leads to follow locally e) other resources of use. The recipes play a key role in improving the accessibility of local information and ensuring it reaches people in a clear and actionable way.



The recipe is opened up to collaborators during the investigative process, then released publicly at the end, with the aim of encouraging more local reporting and public scrutiny.

### Connect the dots to reveal systemic issues at scale and drive change

By making local information open and accessible we hope to spark local reporting that tells the stories of the real people the data represents. Collaborators share findings in our private Slack channel, in online news meetings and in documents used to track shared information.

As reporting takes place across the country, we then connect the dots to create a national picture.

Our collective reporting method produces broader and deeper investigations than would be possible by any individual newsroom, allowing us to shine a light on systemic issues and hold those in power to account. Our team stay on top of policy and legislative timetables and build community and impact plans. The combined local and national focus increases the impact of the story through community mobilisation, increased visibility and action that sparks change.



### **The specifics**

*Bureau Local has developed processes which ensure our journalism is watertight, that the stories reach a wide audience and that we are in regular contact with our members.*

Internal communications - We use the online platform [Slack](#) for day-to-day communication with members. Private Slack channels are created with members who have agreed to the terms and conditions of a specific investigation (embargo date, data caveats, sharing findings), then data, reporting recipes and findings are shared in that private channel to enable discussion and collaboration. Our public #newsroom channel is where we share stories, hold fortnightly 'open newsrooms' to discuss a problem or topic as a community and share knowledge and expertise. There are other channels to support the network e.g. one for resources, another for meeting up.

External communications - We communicate publicly about new collaborations and share impact from stories or opportunities via a regular newsletter. We use Twitter as a means of sharing stories, celebrations and successes, as well as boosting reach and impact.

Data and fact-checking - The Bureau has a robust data and fact-checking process. There must be original documentation for every fact and piece of data reported or published and this must be checked independently of the person compiling, writing or editing the piece of work. Producing open

data requires there to be a robust amount of information checked. This is why our tech lead plays such a vital role in the Bureau Local process. The data building, checking and producing can amount to at least 50% of the work we do.

**Outputs** - For widest reach, the Bureau of Investigative Journalism model is to co-publish with local and national media. We aim to report with print, television and radio whenever possible on national stories and to have a local partner (any platform) in each affected area. The Bureau Local does not publish local stories but supports local outlets to do so.

- [Stories](#) - all of the copy on our site is licensed under Creative Commons and can be used and cited by any person or publication.
- [Open resources](#) - our reporting recipes, data, methodologies and code are all open to the public.
- [Local partners/publications](#) - we share the work of our local collaborators, although we are not legally responsible for their output.



#### **What we've learned**

*The Bureau Local has helped fill a fundamental gap in the UK information ecosystem. Here are some lessons learned along the way.*

People want to access information about their communities in order to improve their lives.

Reporters, experts and citizens have a real appetite for participation in this - investigative reporting can empower activists working for social change.

Not only did local journalists and storytellers need a means to collaborate in order to utilise resources and increase impact, but citizens wanted and needed to be part of this too.

There is a lot of untapped talent, and a desire to use this talent for public interest accountability. At the same time, new techniques and means of utilising this talent are needed. Community organising takes work and project management, organising and mobilising skills and resources are needed - these are not always core newsroom skills. And while local reporters are keen to collaborate, there are a shrinking number of them and they face increasing time and resource pressure.

We experimented with a 'Local Story Fund' to commission local investigative stories and put some of our fundraised money back into local spaces. This produced great local output but was time and resource intensive and difficult to support. We are mentioning this far down in the report because it

is an initiative that is still being worked through. Going forward, the Bureau Local plans to try allocating funds for local people to produce work to supplement our existing investigative streams so that we can better support this programme.

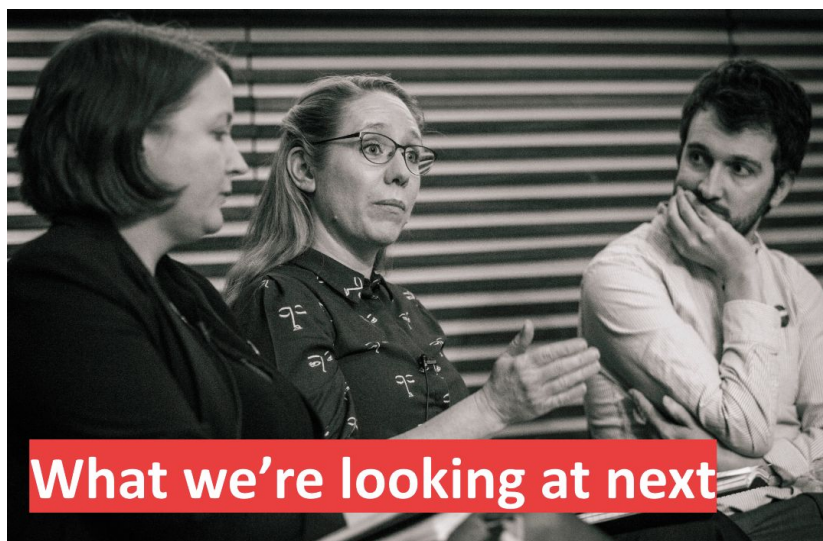
We discovered firsthand, through many of our investigations, that power is not being held to account on issues that touch everyday people's lives - in particular, the most vulnerable.

We found that collaborative reporting and an agreed embargo date can lead to a surge of MPs, activists and campaigners making noise around a story, as each reporter reaches out to their local influencers. This makes impact more likely.

The direct relationships the Bureau Local has had with communities - through openness, participation and storytelling that truly reflects local experience - has improved trust in journalism. This must be improved and expanded on.

The Bureau Local delivered a unique kind of impact as an innovator and change-maker within public interest journalism itself, with high demand from event organisers and sector journalists for us to share our experience and learnings.

Inclusive and participatory models - like that of the Bureau Local - are needed to build a positive and meaningful future for journalism collectively.



#### Questions we're asking

*It's been two years of fast growth and a lot of learning. Here's what we're thinking about as we move into our next phase.*

As a **journalism** project, how does Bureau Local manage the balance between journalism and community? As a **collaborative** project, how does it do the "work" in network? As an **innovative** project, how does it create stability while still having the flexibility to evolve and be agile?

**How can we be more inclusive?** How do we ensure journalism reflects the true state of the nation and tells stories that reflect the diverse communities and issues of the UK? How can we be driven by our network and wider communities and change the power dynamic between traditional journalists and citizens so stories are truer, richer, reflective of the UK and grounded in trust?

## Future plans

To date, the Bureau Local has focused its collaborative process in the story development phase of the investigative process. We decide on an investigation and then open up the data, methodology and findings with a community to connect the dots and spark change. The story finding has typically sat with Bureau Local and the storytelling has sat with the network, or anyone else who has picked up on our findings. As the Bureau Local looks to the future, it is working to include its network and relevant communities of expertise and experience more in the story finding and storytelling process.

The Bureau Local made two notable experiments in each of these areas in the past two years. In 2017, a Bristol Cable journalist heard of immigration officers in his city making questionable stoppages. He obtained data, not just for Bristol but for ten other cities, then shared it with the Bureau Local network, resulting in a collaboration with multiple other network members - a successful network-initiated 'storyfinding' experiment. And the Refuge Woman theatre tour, mentioned previously, took our [domestic violence investigation](#) to communities across the country by collaborating with a survivor who is also a talented performer - a powerful community 'storytelling' experiment.

We believe that in order to inform communities, we must work hard to reach them beyond the narrow and traditional pool of news readers and social media users. As people access information in new ways, we must change the way we find and tell stories and ensure our work is inclusive and accessible. We want to focus on reporting with, not just on, the communities we cover and mobilise them around our journalism.



### Sharing the model

*Bureau Local would love to help new projects launch in other countries and sectors. If you are inspired, here are some questions to ask.*

**What's your mission?** Think about your aim and why it matters. Talk to people outside your own circles, get at the heart of the problem you are trying to solve and spend time thinking through your work, ideally with your team and others who will likely be affected by the project. Articulate your mission and project aims and call on others to join you. Within the first month of launching the Bureau Local, we had 250 people signed up! We then had to figure out how to serve and collaborate with everyone...



**How do you challenge existing structures in order to build something new?** It was important to build our project differently - especially if we aimed to change our industry. This can be hard to do but we tried to challenge presumptions on a day-to-day basis. How can we build a team with a fair and transparent pay system? How do we recruit so our team is diverse and inclusive and reflects perspectives outside the London bubble? How do we challenge 'competitive' culture and create a collaborative one? How do we open up our work and our process so we can learn from those outside our team, our cities, our perspectives, our industry?

**Who do you want to take part? How are you going to get the word out?** We made the choice to build a community of individuals rather than organisations. Instead of going to the editors of the local papers, we approached reporters. This was important to us to build a network of people who actively participate and contribute. It was also important to us to get outside London and diversify our community. We had an existing platform through the wider Bureau, so we could use those channels to shout about the work, but we also travelled around the country talking to people. We found it useful to find places where people were already gathering to talk about journalism and community: conferences, union meetings, interest groups. Our plan was to build communities of communities. There are already many groups of interest meeting up, we worked with them rather than setting up our own.

**How will you store people's data? How do you manage trust and expectations?** We ensured we were [GDPR](#) compliant, drew up a [privacy policy](#) that articulated our principles and communicated it with our members. Whatever you are doing to build your community, make sure you are transparent in your process and communicate with your members. Failure to do so can negatively impact on trust.

**How do you engage people once they've signed up?** We started with lofty dreams of the whole network immediately piling in with great tip-offs and tonnes of time to work on projects. We've learned just how pressed many people are for time and that we need to keep any asks realistic. We have also learnt that providing a specific ask/assigned task is more likely to come off if you can offer something in return (e.g. provide leads, exclusive data and resources), but also that a specific ask is better than an overly vague one.

**Do you have the time?** Don't underestimate the amount of extra work coordinating a network can be. These things take time, resources and project management. We continually underestimated how much time it took to a) collect and standardise local datasets for the whole UK b) get a community of people on board c) coordinate people on digging, sharing and storytelling.

**Where will people gather?** Think online and offline. We use Slack as a platform for day-to-day chat, fortnightly 'open newsroom' meetings and also contact members via bulletins. But there are other networking tools, such as Facebook groups, to consider. We also found physical space to be important in bringing people together. That is why we have run 'collaborative reporting days' and live storytelling events across the UK.

**How open will you be?** When working on investigations the natural impulse is to keep your cards close to your chest. We have worked hard to find a balance between trusting our network and getting them involved early, but also ensuring we don't get scooped or put out half-baked

information. You will be surprised at how much reporters and citizens will collaborate. Building a community of trust goes a long way in establishing this.

**How will you ensure accuracy?** We write detailed reporting recipes and produce accessible open data (with a great deal of time dedicated to the data and fact-checking process) so that the whole community can collaborate while working from a strong foundation. We write notes about the data to ensure we support accurate reporting on the figures. We keep the network informed on legal advice we get but are also clear that we are not legally responsible for their output.



## Funding and positioning

### **Making the work sustainable**

*Gathering the resources to support a nationwide project was a very important part of designing the Bureau Local.*

For those interested in utilising the Bureau Local model, it is important to consider where the resources are coming from and how it will be supported - independently as its own project (needing all of its own resources), completely embedded in an existing organisation (using an organisation's existing resources) or a combination of both (the Bureau Local model).

Bureau Local was structured as a project of The Bureau of Investigative Journalism (TBIJ). As such, the team sits within the TBIJ management, governance, publishing and fundraising structures, with the Bureau Local director representing the team alongside other TBIJ leads. While it could have been more embedded into TBIJ culture (as CORRECTIV have done when replicating the model), the Bureau Local exists within the wider organisation but has its own strategy and tech and community resources.

In its initial phases, the Bureau Local was entirely funded by grantmakers. In order to secure significant levels of funding or investment, the project had clear goals and implementation plans, as well as a robust budget. Its launch was made possible because TBIJ won significant initial investment of €662,000 from [Google's Digital News Initiative](#). One of the conditions of this grant was that the Bureau contributed a further €284,000 (30% of the project costs for 2.5 years) and supported the project with management and infrastructure, including fundraising.

We were successful in bringing on board other funders during the initial development period, such as Open Society Foundations, which supported the Bureau Local with a grant to continue its work



and manage its fast-growing community, including adding another member to the team, a full-time community organiser.

Grantmakers remain key in the next phase of development for the Bureau Local and we have brought on board a consortium of funding partners to support the project's development over the next three years. One important development in terms of funding has been our ability to diversify the types of grantmakers that support the project. We have been able to move beyond supporters of journalism and non-profit media and have gained funding from grantmakers who have never supported journalism before and whose interest is in supporting civil society and vulnerable people.

The final consideration regarding funding is to plan for sustainability. Now that we have shown a clear demand for this project, we must ensure its future. A key focus of the next three years will be to explore funding outside the Bureau Local itself and take a market approach to supporting the local investigative reporting ecosystem. We were awarded funding to undertake a research and scoping exercise in this area and we will require additional funding going forward to resource our business development activity.

## DIY...with help!

*In the two years it took to shape the Bureau Local, the team was met with unique challenges - ones that if they had the opportunity, would have been welcomed with guidance and support from someone who had experienced it before them. That's why in addition to this user guide, the Bureau Local is putting some time aside to support a limited number of partners who want to use the model in their country, city or sector. We're making this a fee-based service so that we can properly provide design, development and deployment resources to accelerate new networks seeking to apply the Bureau Local methodology. It is designed to help answer questions and integrate learnings quickly and efficiently, while focusing on the unique needs of each community. If you are an interested organisation, funder/foundation or community group, please get in touch by emailing our director at: [meganlucero@tbijcom](mailto:meganlucero@tbijcom).*

### Case study - **CORRECTIV.Lokal** By Justus Von Daniels

# THE BUREAU LOCAL



**CORRECTIV**

#### **CORRECTIV.Lokal**

*CORRECTIV.LOKAL launched in November 2018, directly inspired by the Bureau Local model. The Bureau Local team worked with them in an advisory capacity.*

## **Common Goals**

CORRECTIV launched in 2014 as the first non-profit newsroom in the German-speaking region. We believe journalism is a means to ensure an informed and just society and we investigate injustice and abuses of power. We're a team of 35 with a structure resembling that of the Bureau.

As a non-profit newsroom, CORRECTIV aims for our journalism to be community-driven and strives to grow investigative capacity for both journalists and citizens. Alongside our investigative projects, we focus on journalistic education and cooperation with communities, through activities such as debates, an online training academy and the first festival for journalism in Germany in 2017.

We have a lot in common with Bureau Local:

We share the aim for more transparency. Our approach is to be as open as possible. We often challenge public authorities or companies, insisting they meet their legal obligations to open databases or making documents publicly available. Transparency is also an element of our educational work - we offer training for the public to learn how to use their right to freedom of information.

We also work on new ways of collaborating with other media and develop new approaches for journalistic storytelling. For instance, we publish some stories in the form of comics and also create theatre pieces based on our investigations. Most importantly, we share the aim of wanting to create impact with our journalism.

## **CORRECTIV.Lokal - modelled on Bureau Local**

Our goal with CORRECTIV.Lokal is to build new ways to strengthen local reporting through data-driven, investigative stories and create a network that can spark national debates. We want to make investigative work and new methodologies usable for a wide community so we can tell stories collaboratively. We also want to educate the public in the journalistic process. The Bureau Local has found a way to organise collaboration effectively. They created a sustainable network of journalists, citizens and experts with whom they are able to tell extraordinary stories.

It was essential for us to learn how they did it. In preparation for our launch, CORRECTIV.Lokal benefited from a comprehensive workshop at the office of the Bureau Local in London and then hosted the Bureau Local's director at our offices in Berlin. Now, both organizations share and advise via online video on a bi-weekly basis.

### Here are a few of our key learnings:

- The Bureau Local is very inclusive - it includes both journalists and interested experts as members of their network. People can offer all kinds of skills, from legal expertise to tech developing.
- It is vital to have a community manager who organises the members which might have various backgrounds: some are journalists, some are experts who want to contribute for special purposes.
- A network should consist of individuals, not newsrooms or institutions. Individual journalists are more likely to contribute to a network and to develop stories for their media.
- In order to collaborate with multiple journalists and experts on the same topic, an elaborate workflow and communication system is required. The reporting recipe concept was key as we adapted the Bureau Local model - it is an excellent way to develop stories and allow for

collaboration which utilises the best qualities of the members of the network. It is also a useful tool for sharing work with local partners.

- Handling a team of local journalists demands a specific organisational structure and levels of communication ie the Bureau Local's newsletters about upcoming projects and their common workspace on Slack.
- Bureau Local built a new way to include and collaborate with communities in the investigative process. Their approach changed the structure of their newsroom and required different skillsets, workflow and management. From journalist, to editor, each role in the newsroom was redefined to think about serving communities around the journalism.
- Alongside the online network, hosting events in different regions brings the network together. We have taken this on at CORRECTIV.Lokal and have created regional groups for which we organise meetings or hackdays on a regular basis.

### **How we have added to the model**

At CORRECTIV, we launched CrowdNewsroom - a tool that enables structured, crowd-based investigations. Citizens can participate in an investigation and see the results firsthand. The tool allows us to collect structured information and individual stories from thousands of citizens. We hope to develop this further for crowd-sourced projects within the CORRECTIV.Lokal network, potentially enabling local partners to create their own crowd-sourced investigations.

Education is an important element of CORRECTIV. We offer courses and tutorials for our network members but also for the public about collaborative methods, including our experience with CORRECTIV.Lokal projects.

### **Common challenges and ambitions**

We were inspired by the Bureau Local's approach to investigate stories with local partners in a collaborative way. Now that CORRECTIV.Lokal has built a structure for its own network, we have been developing concepts alongside the Bureau Local and learning and improving the project in new ways. We have been in regular conversation with the Bureau Local and regularly share experiences relating to stories, workflow and strategies.

As local journalism faces challenges to uphold its business structure, it is important to find new ways to allow issues to be investigated at a local level. Both projects show multiple ways of making collaborative working possible. In particular, we've found that data-driven stories or defined topics that resonate with multiple communities makes collaboration easier.

Going forward, both organisations are seeking to ensure their networks become interdependent. The aim would be that the networks collaborate and share knowledge locally and organically - not with a dependence on CORRECTIV or the Bureau to facilitate.

On a broader level, the Bureau Local and CORRECTIV.Lokal want to redefine how journalists and citizens come together. The Bureau Local has created spaces where citizens are involved in the process of their journalism and CORRECTIV has engaged its members and the public through the forum of education. We feel this is just the beginning of the work and look forward to many years of developing and growing this model in partnership with the Bureau Local.



*The partnership and knowledge-sharing between the Bureau and CORRECTIV was made possible because of support from Rudolf Augstein Foundation.*