

Bristol Cable AGM 2017

Location: Malcolm X centre, St Pauls, Bristol.

Date and time: 5th April 2017, 6.30pm-9pm.

Attendees: 104

Minutes taken by: Ellen Segalov

Supporting documents provided at the AGM

Agenda [\[1\]](#)

Finance [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)[\[5\]](#)

Directors [\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)

Introduction and housekeeping

Introduced by Izzy Tarr, social media coordinator

Welcome and housekeeping.

The aim of the evening is to input into decisions and activity for the coming year. To involve members in building the movement for community owned media in the city.

The coordinating team is here to serve the co-op, the membership are the bosses. Mandate of the members is needed in order to go forward.

The AGM agreed the rules of the co-op to ensure a respectful meeting.

1. The Year in Review

Introduced by Izzy Tarr, social media coordinator

Highlights from this year include:

- Increase of print run from 20,000 to 30,000 from last year
- More regular content online
- Developed social media communications
- Events for members
- The first Media Lab training course completed by 15 participants
- Journalism with impact: Exposed the finances of companies behind the housing crisis in Bristol, the University of Bristol divested from fossil fuels after a Cable investigation supported a divestment campaign. Making sense of plans for the NHS, schools, mayoral elections and devolutions, giving voices to people in the city.
- For the future.... we need to grow membership at a faster rate, include a broader range of communities, and implement better systems for running the organisation.

2. Electing Directors

Process explained by Adam Cantwell-Corn, operations coordinator

This year there are 5 vacancies and 6 candidates.

Question – What is the process through which directors scrutinise and hold to account the co-ordinators?

Clarification – Directors meet on a quarterly basis. At each meeting a member from the team presents the finances and others issues to the boards and they are held to account in this way.

Anonymous voting took place.

3. Finances

Introduced by Alec Saelens, operations coordinator

The objective is to move towards financial sustainability in balance with political aims including journalism, workshops, training and events.

Documents provided on each table:

- Last year's accounts
- Figures behind percentages
- Summary of forecasts x 2
- Glossary

Income has been over £100,000. This is double from the previous year. This is possible due to a diversification of revenue, increased membership, advertising income, speaker income and expansion of events.

Primarily finding has come from grants, in particular Logan Foundation grant. This allowed the big step forward of paying contributors and co-ordinators. However still not at the level of being able to pay contributors to the level that we would like.

Ideally to match expenditure we would have 3,300 members paying £2.50 a month. At the current rate this would take 20 months. There is a pattern, in the third month after an edition the sign up rate is at its lowest. This shows that the print editions is what is really enticing new members.

On tables participants discussed the accounts.

After group discussion the floor was opened for questions:

Question – Can you clarify that the grant income is because of £40,000 from the Logan Foundation and that is not going to happen next year?

Answer – That is not certain at this point. In the forecasts the grant funding has reduced significantly and does not include another Logan grant.

Question – Are the events on both diagrams the same events that produce income and expenditure?

Answer – Yes, these will be the same events.

Proposal from a member - Everyone here tonight increases their membership 50p a month. Recognised that this is hard at the moment but from the end of the month this will be possible. Also that if everyone here present got one new person to join that would be another 100 people. Also that advertising should be used to raise more money, particularly the back page.

Vote – Will everyone here agree to increase their membership by 50p?

Result – Overwhelming YES!

Question – Has the Cable not already invested in a lot of equipment and software required to create media?

Answer- The Cable is lacking in these resources.

Group exercise – Members used the documentation provided to express opinions on priorities for expenditure.

4. Campaigning Journalism

Introduced by Lorna Stephenson, production editor

There has never been a membership mandate for campaigning journalism. Lots of publications do this, from national to local. The Cable has been doing this in an unplanned way decided by the group of coordinators.

Examples of where the Cable has provoked change; housing developments; Bristol University fossil fuel divestment; police and surveillance.

Questions have come up within the co-ordinator team when discussing this, for example:

- Do we have a mandate?
- What sort of campaigning should we be doing?
- How can we know what issues are important to membership?
- If we are too political could it put potential members off?
- Would campaigning contribute to an “echo chamber”
- Should we be state Cable positions or seek to campaign through reporting?

Group discussion on tables about above points

After group discussion the floor was opened for questions:

Question – Could the Cable not sometimes present more than one point of view, for example on a particularly complex issue?

Answer – So far the Cable has used campaign journalism on topics it has felt to be straightforward. For more complex issues this level of mandate is needed.

Question – How much does the Cable have guidelines in place to help inform what topics we might do campaigning journalism about?

Answer – Ethical guidelines already exist in editorial statement.

Question – Can you clarify if you mean party politics when talking about being explicitly political?

Answer – The Cable has always avoided being party political.

Table activity – Campaigning Journalism. Participants were asked to rate their agreement with statements concerning issues around campaigning journalism.

Table activity - Perspectives on the Cable.

A second exercise asked participants to rate their agreement with statements on some aspects of the Cable which did not fit in other agenda points (see supporting materials)

BREAK

INTERRUPTION – DREW ROSE, DIRECTOR, introduced the coordinators of the Bristol Cable and invited them to the front for a big round of applause because they are amazing!

Izzy (social media coordinator) reminded everyone that what is fed-back today will continue to be discussed at members meetings.

5. Democracy and decision making

Introduced by Koel Mukherjee, media coordinator

The coordinators need to know from members what decisions they would like to be involved in and how they would like to be involved.

The Cable aspires to be a fundamentally democratic organisation but we need to clarify how we do that in practice.

Currently there is a funnel system, members make decisions at AGM and then coordinators apply these to specific issues on a day to day basis.

Sometimes there are decisions where it isn't clear if they should be taken to the membership or not.

We need to find a balance between overburdening membership with decisions, being democratic, and being effective.

Currently members are invited to get involved in decisions through:

- Loomio - online discussion and decision making forum 300 members have signed up, those who have not can do so by emailing membership or at the AGM in person.
- Monthly members' meetings.

Question – Are decisions taken by the board of directors?

Answer – No, this is an advisory body not executive.

Group discussion on tables. Points for discussion, what does 'owning your own media' mean to you? How democratic do you feel the Cable is?

After group discussion the floor was opened for questions:

Question – Pointed out the difference between consultation and decision making. The need to allow members to be consulted but that coordinators need to be able to make decisions.

Answer - Please leave any extra ideas you have on the back of your feedback sheet and we will also minute them.

Suggestion – For the same agendas/proposals to be shared on both Loomio and members' meetings to allow different platforms for members to participate in making a decision.

Answer - We will try this out.

Clarification – From Mike Jempson, director on the board: In between AGMs the directors are ensuring that the decisions that are taken by the coordinators are scrutinised and are in line with co-op charter.

Question – A gap about where larger decisions about policies and guidance are made. How do members have input into these more fundamental decisions?

Answer - Our policy documents, e.g. the advertising charter, have been ratified by membership at previous AGMs. Amendments have been discussed and ratified at AGMs.

6. Should we take money from Google?

Introduced by Lucas, data, distribution and membership coordinator.

Current financial situation is difficult. Explanation of the significance of grant money in reaching where we are today.

Google Digital News Initiative is a grant available for news organisations that we could apply for. Explanation, including who has received the grant before and what the parameters, terms and conditions of it are.

The deadline for applying for the Google Digital News Initiative grant is in 2 weeks.

If the grant was successful, the money would be used to make a membership system that works properly, create infrastructure, develop online decision-making platforms, redesign the website, increase multimedia, focus on membership strategy and reaching new communities, share in other cities etc.

But, it's Google. What would it mean for us to take money from Google? How would it change the way people think of the organisation?

Question – Who has used Google in the last month?

Answer – Most people have.

Question – We all get sucked into this large corporation; do we want the Cable to be sucked into this as well?

Answer – Google would have no say in what we do and we are not included in data systems, we would retain full independence.

Question – Are there alternative grants?

Answer – This is one of the few substantial grants that is available. There is one another one, Power for Change from the Lottery, but what does it mean to be associated with Lottery funding over Google anyway?

Answer (from the floor) – There are very few grant opportunities for journalism. Many funders don't want to put money into things they fear might be political or controversial. In the UK and Europe very few opportunities, there are more in USA.

Question – With regard to T&Cs. What involvement would Google have in end result?

Response From Bureau of Investigative Journalism – They have received this grant. Recipient sets milestones and then has to report on those. Only have to report against milestones that were set by us. Google do not participate in this.

Question – What proportion of income for coming year would this represent?

Answer – This is not clear. A large amount.

Question – Would the Cable be able to publish an article outlining the reservations if we received this grant? Would it impact integrity of Cable in this way?

Answer – It seems from the terms that it doesn't impact on editorial independence.

Suggestion – Google are putting up this money as they have been criticised by mainstream media for taking over news. They are showing they support innovation. Additionally, the things that are proposed to do with the money are institutional; why not have a running podcast as something that is new and innovative and visible with the money?

Response – Grant wouldn't fund content. It is for innovation, which our membership model is.

Question – Can it be used for match funding? This could allow the Cable to leverage more funding from other sources.

Answer - We will find out.

Table discussion on this issue followed by ballot voting.

Director's results announced:

- Kate Whittle

- Kate Oliver
- Ben Sansum
- Drew Rose
- Nathan FitzPatrick

Thanks and closing from Izzy. Outcomes and minutes will be shared via email as well as votes and opinions. We hope to see lots of people at the monthly members meetings. Please tell people about the AGM, use social media and let people know this is what it's like to be part of owning your media!

Raffle!