

# Independent Regional Media: A Fragile Existence

## Media struggle to look past daily challenges to build for the future

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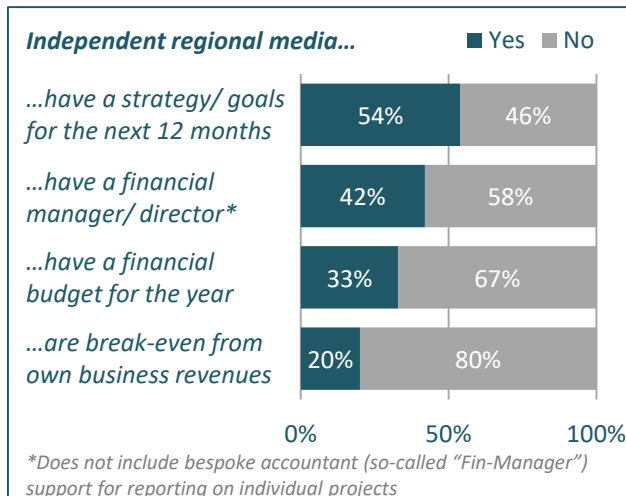
*Disclaimer: The following report is based on a survey and follow-up interviews conducted in September-October 2018 with 24 independent regional media in Ukraine*

Independent media provide an essential service by giving their regional audiences an important, alternative source of information and by being a voice to better governance. However, poor planning, gaps in team set up and operational inefficiency are holding them back from achieving greater scale and building sustainable organizations for the long term.

### No roadmap for the future

Regional media typically lead a transitory existence. Most organizations are small (4-15 FTEs) and were created around an initial idea that won donor support or are transformed public or corporate entities. Less than half engage in commercial activities of any type.

Typically, there is no culture of planning or systemic organization of work. Just over half



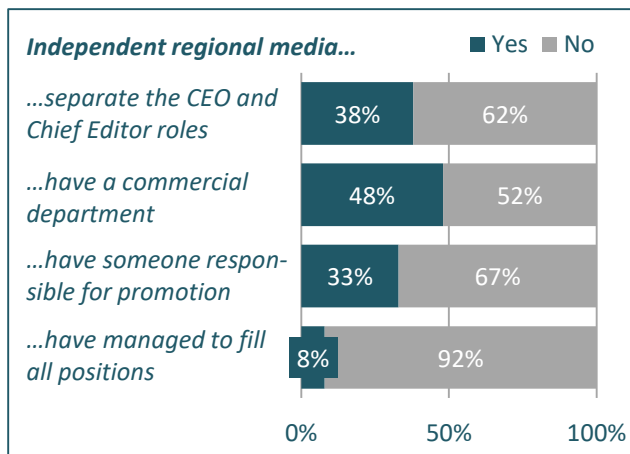
have set goals for the next 12 months, while only 33% of media have prepared a financial budget for the year ahead.

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Financial planning as a function often erodes from lack of use (or never existed to begin with) – fewer than half of media have financial managers to plan activities. Unsurprisingly, 80% cannot survive without subsidies or donations.

### Critical gaps in team setup

Regional media are often set up around an initial group of founders (mostly comprised of journalists and lacking the diverse skill sets needed to run an organization).



Too often they do not address these gaps as they grow, unlike typical start-ups or SMEs that become more structured. Instead, their staffing is based on the editor's needs rather than commercial or organizational logic, leading to persistent functional or skill gaps.

Functional gaps are a major problem as these media do not benefit from natural feedback mechanisms – there are no voices in the organization arguing to respond to changing audience or commercial partner needs.

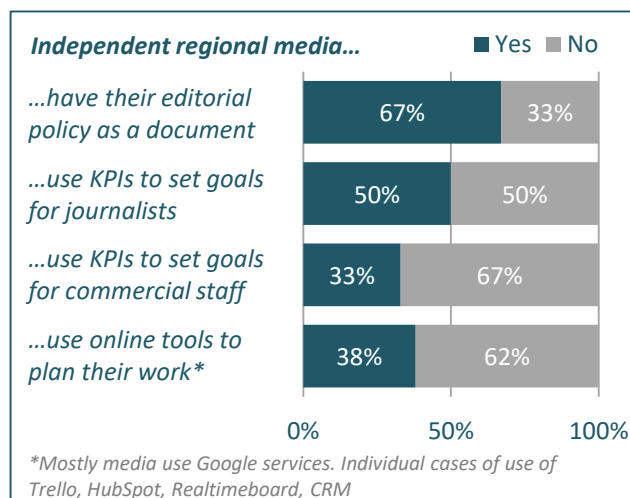
### Only 8% of surveyed media have managed to fill all open positions

Further, limited financing (low salaries), know-how and time mean editors are unable to fill all positions, preserving lop-sided organizations.

### Stuck in inefficient daily operations

Editors typically lack the time and energy to develop long term plans and structure their media as they are stuck in the day to day.

Half of organizations have no KPIs for journalists (even fewer for other staff), whilst



those that do have unclear ones (e.g., being truthful). Similarly, work processes and division of responsibilities are ad-hoc, which is both inefficient and puts pressure on already over-worked and stressed teams.

This acts both as an impediment to growth and will increase if media end up growing (in case of larger grants). Without clear structure and KPIs integrating new functions or staff is difficult, and will prevent outlets from scaling, limiting their positive impact.

### Recommendations:

- Support editors and CEOs in organizing day to day work more efficiently to avoid burn-out or teams breaking up as pressure and the quantity of work increase in the pre-electoral period
- Creation of “matching-funds” support mechanisms to encourage growth of commercial activities
- Direct support toward creating long-term sustainable media. The most urgent needs (as defined by the media themselves):
  - 88% want a strategic planning session
  - 83% want consulting support with their financial planning and budgeting
  - 92% want help to work with alternative sources of funds (i.e., not just grants)

### Media Development Foundation

MDF is a media expertise hub and center of excellence that seeks to empower journalists and support the growth of sustainable independent media in Ukraine and CEE.

Contact us at [ourmail.mdf@gmail.com](mailto:ourmail.mdf@gmail.com)

Sign up to our newsletter by going to:

[www.mediadevelopmentfoundation.org](http://www.mediadevelopmentfoundation.org)

### Respondent demographics:

- 24 independent regional media outlets (from 18 out of 24 oblasts of Ukraine):
- Respondent media channels: 1-Radio; 3-TV Channels; 7-Newspapers; 23-Websites
- Independence defined as having an independent editorial policy, no pressure from owner and no paid stories (“jeansa”)