

How to Save Investigative Journalism?

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[Propublica](#) is a £5 million funded newsroom devoted to investigative journalism. 25 of the world's best diggers will gather in one place to focus exclusively on shining critical journalistic light in to shady corners. This sounds like a wonderful way to counter the negative trend identified by [Nick Davies](#) among others, of cutting back resources on investigative journalism in mainstream commercial media. But how on earth will it work?

[Propublica](#) is a not-for-profit American organisation funded by some very wealthy and generally liberal philanthropists. In that sense it is a bit like the excellent [OpenDemocracy.net](#) which publishes fine analytical writing on international affairs and global issues. That is also funded by Foundations. It's boss Tony Curzon-Price tells me that it 'sells brains to foundations.' The charities want to influence debate and promote ideals and these foundation-funded journalism bodies help them do it. It feels like a win-win scenario.

I am certainly looking forward to [Propublica](#) but I am not convinced. Partly, this is about them having a particular agenda. But it is more that I wonder if you can have good and efficient investigative journalism in isolation like this.

When I was on [Channel 4 News](#), for example, **every** journalist was an investigative journalist. Everyone competed to get good stories so that they could convince the editor to be given more time and resources to dig deeper. The specialists were particularly good at coming up with carefully cultivated scoops but everyone chipped in with the kind of journalism that goes beyond just reporting the day's events.

I wonder if by putting a bunch of hacks in a room and telling them that all they have to do is investigate is the best way to boost the quality overall. By isolating them from competition will they loose their edge? By elevating them do you draw a false distinction between investigative and other news? And by letting them graze in this National Park of journalism do you ignore the ecology of the rest of the news world?

I wish [Propublica](#) well and hope it acts as an inspiration for others rather than an admission of defeat.

Similar thoughts from an American blogger, [Scott Rosenberg here](#).

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