

Helping to measure the reach and readership of funding recipients in the journalism sector

An opportunity for specialised information collection designed specifically for the NZ journalism sector

“We knew there was a real gap to close to be able to demonstrate the impact of the content that was funded and how audiences engaged with it,” says Amie Mills, Head of Funding at NZ On Air.

The team wanted to find a way to gather viewership data, improve how they were able to measure impact, and create a scalable and repeatable process to report on it.

The Public Interest Journalism Fund (PIJF) was a \$55m Government initiative designed to provide targeted, short-to-medium term support for public interest journalism during the COVID-19 induced downturn.

Administered by NZ On Air, the PIJF allocated funding over 26 months from May 2021 to June 2023.

Measuring the direct impact of journalism has always been a challenge within the news media industry. NZ On Air is also tasked, under the Broadcasting Act, with reflecting New Zealand culture and identity, and needed to achieve this through the allocation of funding to diverse publishers and journalists.



Supporting smaller publications through the data collection process

The PIJF supported a broad spectrum of publishers, who came with varying levels of inhouse tech support resources and data literacy. Smaller outlets such as local newspapers and Iwi Radio didn't have any IT support; compared to larger publishers with dedicated teams already doing similar tracking and analysis of content.

As a result, NZ On Air needed to flex to work across publishers with varying needs and different concerns. "The challenges at each end of the spectrum were very different," said Sarah Donaldson, NZ On Air's Audience and Media Strategist. "It's a big ask of these smaller companies to say, "and as part of this funding that you're receiving, we expect regular and detailed reporting back from you".

Conversely, the large platforms who had the expertise raised concerns around the commercial sensitivities of data sharing and privacy.

"We needed to work with the bigger platforms to ensure we could demonstrate that we were only accessing the data on content we were funding, and nothing else", said Michelle Sun, who was responsible for data analysis and reporting. "We needed to be able to give confidence to publishers that only those within NZ On Air had access to the data, and it was important that only funded content was tagged."

"Another key consideration was Māori

data sovereignty. "AgileData has been outstanding at helping us in this regard. The team were able to have conversations about where data was stored, how we used it, and how it is shared back to publishers. NZ On Air doesn't see everything that comes out of the publisher - and publishers do not have access to each other's data. AgileData were able to talk with depth and credibility about data collection, cleaning, storage, management, privacy and protection; and helped create trust with Whakaata Māori, for example, and show how we are adhering to data compliance standards."



Designing the right solution from the ground up

A lot of new publishers who had never applied to NZ On Air's general funding scheme were applying for PIJF funding. "Seeing so many new publishers come to NZ On Air was the perfect opportunity to pilot a tool we know we've always needed, and one that we knew we would want to roll out beyond the PIJF," said Amie. In collaboration with Digital Marketing agency Contagion, AgileData set up VIEW, a tool that built dashboards for each individual publisher as they were allocated funding, to track and measure funded content engagement and reach.

The dashboards took data that was complex to look at and simplified it in a way that made it easy for technical and non technical team members alike to be able to understand. This ability to cut through the volume of data was invaluable for NZ On Air, who were able to quickly and easily understand how content was performing.

Tracking and measurement

During the funding period, the team provided weekly reporting and tracked over 100,000 pieces of PIJF content across devices and regions.

"It was a powerful mechanism to show just how incredible the impact of the PIJF was. The insights we gleaned helped our understanding of each individual platform, the relationship between different platforms, and how content performed across them."

Through the tool, NZ On Air also realised there was greater interest and demand for the Open Justice and Local Democracy Reporting schemes than previously thought.



"Open Justice court reporting has been hugely successful in terms of viewer numbers, and without VIEW we would not have had insight on this."

Furthermore, the average duration of engagement with content exceeded the industry average. The team were also surprised by how frequently Kiwis were engaging with PIJF content. "They were averaging 1.8 pieces of content per week. We were not expecting our audience to be reading more frequently than they were before."

A critical aspect of the PIJF was to support a diverse range of stories and publishers. A portion of funding was allocated to Māori and Pasifika journalists to elevate NZ culture and identity. The importance of these voices and stories is reflected in the engagement that was able to be demonstrated in the reporting of long-tail viewership. The ability to produce individual publisher dashboards was a value-add for smaller publishers, who for the first time were able to access insights on viewership, reach and engagement, and see the impact of their work.

Rolling out the tool beyond the PIJF

After the PIJF funding allocation phase came to an end, the team went on to create a Video on Demand VIEW dashboard that is still heavily utilised today. "Video on Demand is a critical tool that helps us understand how the content we're funding is performing across Linear TV and VOD." said Sarah. "We've obtained fascinating TV show insights about how viewership of previous seasons lifts when a new season launches, for example".

The team assesses viewership trends like number of content streams, content completion rate, year-on-year growth, decline, and long tail views.

Now, when production funding applications for screen content come into NZ On Air, the team look at the data to help them make funding allocation decisions. "This is data we didn't have easy access to previously- and it paints a much stronger picture and informs funding conversations, allocations and strategy."

AgileData also supported the team with their annual reporting. "We had two different systems housing data that we needed to bring together. AgileData were able to aggregate these two systems manually to help us collate data for our annual reports."

"AgileData has been absolutely incredible. To be able to interpret what we're after and create something digestible for us has been so helpful. Whenever we have had issues come up or data that didn't look quite right - AgileData have always been able to help us out."