

**Audio Transcript**  
Episode 183 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series  
*with Mike Blinder*



[Philanthropy and local journalism, as seen through the eyes of the giving community](#)

In this 184<sup>th</sup> episode of “E&P Reports,” we explore the world of philanthropy through the eyes of those who are in charge of where the money goes with [The Chronicle of Philanthropy](#)'s editor Stacy Palmer who offers insights into the whys and hows big donors are motivated to support local journalism.



[music]

**0:00:03.8 Announcer:** This is E&P Reports, a vodcast from Editor and Publisher Magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884. Serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

**0:00:17.0 Mike Blinder:** And greetings once again. Mike Blinder, publisher of E&P Magazine. If you will indulge me, if you're listening on your favorite podcast platform of choice, we urge you to follow this program. Watching on YouTube, there is a subscribe button below the bell to the right. Hit those two things in any order. No, I think it's bell first. Whatever. No, it's subscribe first, bell second, whatever. You will get an update each and every time we upload this weekly vodcast series E&P reports. I am honored to have a very important person in the industry with us today. Stacy Palmer, greetings, welcome.

**0:00:57.4 Stacy Palmer:** Happy to be with you.

**0:01:03.2 MB:** I'm honored to have you, Stacy. You have been the top editor for the Chronicle of Philanthropy since 1988. Is that how long you've been with this organization?

**0:01:08.9 SP:** I helped found it, yes. Before we even published, I was working on it to really figure out how could we do a newspaper that covers non-profit organizations and foundations.

**0:01:19.2 MB:** Fascinating. Since I've been in the media industries since 1979, I've been... I started one of the first digital newspapers in the United States in 1998. I now published the... If you look it up in Wikipedia, The Voice of the Newspaper Industry. I have never heard of your organization, so please forgive me. We're gonna learn together.

**0:01:40.0 SP:** [laughter] Let me tell you about it.

**0:01:42.7 MB:** The Chronicle of Philanthropy. That's gonna be our topic today. A publication focused on philanthropic works, by the way, a huge, huge topic obviously today in the news publishing industry. So I'm gonna learn a bit about Stacy's world and so will you on the backside of this message.

**0:02:00.5 Announcer:** This episode of E&P Reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. BLOX Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management, and more. Join the over 2000 news publishers worldwide that power their ongoing digital transformation with BLOX Digital, serving over 141 million monthly users who view over 6.5 billion pages of content each year. You can trust BLOX Digital to empower you, to connect you at scale with the



community you need to reach. BLOX Digital, formerly TownNews, now reimagined to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond. Learn more at [bloxdigital.com](http://bloxdigital.com).

**0:03:05.4 MB:** All right, Stacy, I'm gonna read from your website and then you tell me if this is who you are. The Chronicle of Philanthropy is the premier source of news opinion and advice that non-profit, professionals, foundation, executives, board members, fundraisers, and others rely on to stay up to date and guide their decision making. Okay. That's you, correct?

**0:03:24.3 SP:** It is indeed.

**0:03:30.1 MB:** You are a magazine like me. Do you actually publish and print? You cut trees down, and?

**0:03:36.2 SP:** Yes. We still publish and print. We have a monthly magazine. We started out as a biweekly newspaper and then we decided that wasn't really working very well in the online age. So now the magazine wraps up big ideas and the kinds of things people wanna read, and every day we're publishing on the website.

**0:03:45.7 MB:** So you like me keep looking at those costs going up and up for newsprint, but you still believe in print like I do. I'm not...

[overlapping conversation]

**0:03:52.6 SP:** Our readers do, you know? And we're really taking our signal from them. They really still very much like print. It's a smaller number than it used to be, for sure.

**0:03:58.6 MB:** Of course.

**0:04:02.2 SP:** Until they stop loving it, we're gonna keep publishing it in the way that they like it.

**0:04:09.2 MB:** It's funny that people... Sometimes I go to conferences and everything's digital digital. Why do you even bother? I have loyal people that love holding that thing. And moreover, we enjoy making the covers. That's one of my wife's... And we're in business together. That covers a big decision. I put it loud and proud on all my site pages because there's something about a magazine cover. Don't you agree that just...

**0:04:36.1 SP:** Absolutely. And we love the fact that it focuses us 12 times a year. We have to say what are the most important things going on in philanthropy or the things that you need to know? The cover helps us really draw attention to it. I would do that whether we... Even if we abandoned print, we'll probably keep that concept of saying, "Here are the really key things you need to know."

**0:04:50.8 MB:** I keynoted a conference last year, you may never heard of Niche Publishing. It's all people like you and I, B2B publishers, and I'm gonna be going to their convention in New Orleans. But one of the things I always say is, I'm loud and proud about saying I'm a magazine 'cause there's so many bloggers in my space. People just get up and start publishing content. But when you say you're that magazine, as you said, it's almost like that differentiator. Does that make sense? I don't

know why I'm discussing this. It's nothing to do with philanthropy. Just you and I are both magazine publishers, but you have a website obviously, like I do newsletters, all multimedia. Here we are on a vodcast. I think that's a word you can play in Scrabble. I'm not sure, did I make that up? Anyway, no, so I'm assuming like me that you're into all forms of media.

**0:05:30.9 SP:** Absolutely.

**0:05:31.1 MB:** Okay. So you focus on decision makers. Like I focus my magazine on executives, C-suite executives in the noon [0:05:38.3] \_\_\_\_ publishing business. Let me be clear with you. We define those as people who craft news content. I have this always on my desk. Three bullets. You have to craft journalistic content. You have to find an audience for it. You have to monetize it. Those are the three things we define as news publishing at E&P and we're mostly the executives. Monetize is the key word where you come in. [laughter] Because, I mean, I just got back from a huge conference down in Florida called Burrell. I don't if you've heard of them. It's huge. It was all about advertising, but a lot of philanthropy discussions are there.

**0:06:09.3 SP:** Mm-hmm.

**0:06:10.8 MB:** We interview. I mean, I'm a very good friend of Steve Waltman. I dunno if you're familiar with him.

**0:06:13.0 SP:** Very much so. Yes, he's published in our pages often.

**0:06:19.1 MB:** Yeah. And then now he's doing his own amazing cool stuff on advocacy. So who do you find as your audience? I gave you my three bullets. Who does Chronicle of Philanthropy touch on a monthly or daily basis?

**0:06:36.4 SP:** So we bring together people at all kinds of non-profits and foundations. So it can be big organizations like the American Red Cross, it can be Harvard University, it can be the tiny food bank down the street. So the people who lead those organizations, the people who are involved in fundraising for those organizations, and then in the foundation world, it's the presidents of the foundations, the trustees, the people who are thinking about strategically, where should I give my money? We also have a number of philanthropists, including people who are part of the giving pledge who are giving billions and billions of dollars, who also use our pages to start thinking about, where are the needs? Where can I give more money? And how do I do it smartly? So those are the big audiences. We love it when people at other levels in the organization also choose to read us, but we're aimed at the people who are generally in the top leadership positions.

**0:07:25.3 MB:** The reason that we're having this interview is we got one of your pressers about how you have achieved the pinnacle of non-profit status. You used to be under ownership or whatever you call it, of another organization, now you're completely truly independent. Why is that important? 'Cause it got a lot of buzz. I mean, I picked up. Some would say, "Okay, who cares? You are still helping non-profits." Why was that big for you? Why was that a big deal?

**0:07:53.6 SP:** I think non-profit news is really where all the cool kids are these days, all the innovation is happening there. I'm not sure we would have done this 10 years ago, but there's so



much change happening. And non-profit identity allows you to really focus on impact over the margin. Now, we have to be sustainable, we need reporters and we need to pay a reporter. So whether you are a for-profit or a non-profit, those things don't matter, but being able to say that we're gonna make our decisions based on what stories have the most impact, make the most difference, that's part of why we went to non-profit status. The other reason is that we decided to expand our mission and to say we really think that the mainstream press needs to cover philanthropy better, they pretty much ignore it, and this is a vital area that needs much more coverage. So that's the expanded part of our mission, and we are attracting foundation grants to help us do that, which is what we can do it by having a non-profit status.

**0:08:51.6 MB:** Wow, you just nailed it. You just said to me your mission is to get mainstream press, my audience...

**0:08:57.6 SP:** You bet. [laughter]

**0:09:00.5 MB:** Cover. No wonder you got on this program so quick, 'cause you're a guy, you reached out, we really want you to... Now, they are all about you now. I mean, in Main Street, you know what happened. I was first of all, thank you. I was afraid when I checked you out, like stalked you in the internet, looked at your organization, been in the same place, and say it again, I figured you didn't even know who E&P was because you're working with Red Cross. We don't talk to those people. You know my magazine and you know my audience. Fascinating that you know the perfect storm hit our industry over the past 10 years. Number one, here comes the internet, we lose jobs, homes and cars, three critical ways that we were getting our money to supply journalism. Then comes the recession of 2008. There goes two things. We've lost inserts and now Google and Facebook take a whole mass of money off the table that we used to rely on in local advertising revenue.

**0:09:50.4 MB:** I don't know if you're familiar with the legislation we've been trying to get through Congress to get tax credits and what have you to fund journalism. That all fell through at the last minute, and now we've got... And with the House, as weird it is... I'm I allowed to be political? Yeah, the House is weird as it is right now, the odds of that going through are slim. So we're coming to you now heavily, help us support journalism and you want us to promote philanthropy more. So there's a meeting coming here, right? Am I making sense? There's more and more...

**0:10:24.1 SP:** I think what's fascinating right now is to watch how much interest there is in the foundation world and among big donors about funding local journalism. Grant givers are very, very concerned about the fact that democracy is falling apart because we don't have strong journalism. So we are covering that and watching that a lot. Our own decision to go non-profit was based on the idea that we need to innovate and to do things differently. We needed a change in status. And we also needed to be an independent organization, not part of our parent organization. So that's what made us decide it was a good decision. But like any good non-profit, we have diverse revenue stream, so I care about things like our job ad revenue, our advertising from corporations that want to give to us and those kinds of ways, so we look very much like a traditional news organizations plus we get some philanthropy funding.

**0:11:16.6 MB:** And I'm gonna use some metaphors. Are you familiar with Abernathy and the report

called The News Desert Report that comes out every year?

**0:11:23.4 SP:** Oh, yes. [laughter]

**0:11:24.6 MB:** So we got this News Desert report that comes out that keeps talking about the fact that more and more communities are losing their voice, and then I always throw in the second way that I'd like to apply that, then the people become thirsty, 'cause you're in a desert. So they start drinking the water of fake news and odd things and big... So communities, this is a fact, start to fail without journalists. Okay?

**0:11:46.8 SP:** Exactly. Yep.

**0:11:48.9 MB:** And how philanthropy organizations that may not have looked towards helping fund local journalism are now out there saying, "Wait, we believe in the Constitution, we believe in this democracy will help." However, now that that spigot is turned on, and we're just starting to report on this, there's some dollars going into weird places. Does that make sense? There's no one...

**0:12:12.3 SP:** Well philanthropy can give wherever it wants to give, and that's both the good and the bad about philanthropy, and that's what makes it so much fun to cover. You can look at the gifts that billionaires or big foundations give, and sometimes you'll say, "That's brilliant, that's gonna save the world," and other times you'll say, "Wait a minute, why is all that money going to cause X or Z", but philanthropy has the freedom to do it. Now, there are tax subsidized so that they can't be paid for yachts and jets and all of those kinds of things, you have to stay in the rules, but the idea of philanthropy is it's our innovation engine to say, "What are the kinds of things we ought to experiment." And one of the areas that we do a lot of coverage is saying, let's say foundation X decided that they were gonna cure cancer, announced that 10 years ago. And we come back and say, "Well, did they do it and how did they do it? And why didn't they do it?" Nobody is holding people accountable for all those promises, that's one of the problems of philanthropy, and why it's so important for the press to pay attention to it is these are tax subsidized dollars, you and I are subsidizing them, and yet nobody's really watching to make sure that they're doing what they said they were doing.

**0:13:14.8 MB:** I have two topics I'd like to address with you since you... You are pretty much the expert, your organization or the... You are the ones studying the philanthropic world. But the first thing I wanna discuss with you is this wacky world of how media has been vilified by a certain part of our political culture. I'm trying to say this nicely, not wacko, is that... Why the way I just said it, and it's on the record. You know, the media's the enemy, the people, all media leans far left. You get my drift? The moment you even say Wall Street, I mean not... Excuse me, that was saying that. You say Washington Post, New York Times, oh, far left. It's all this. That's not the case. Is it not? I mean, media, there is still true journalism that is being funded out there and the philanthropic world sees that. Or do they start to believe the Kool-Aid, they're here in your humble opinion?

**0:14:08.8 SP:** Oh, I think philanthropy is distressed by the fact that there just aren't resources for local journalism. So they know that quality journalism isn't happening. When people aren't going and covering the school boards for example, that is not a good thing. That means people aren't voting in a way that makes any sense because they don't have any information. That's the kind of

thing that motivates foundations to say, "I wanna make sure there is somebody who is able to go and cover those kinds of things." So it's usually motivated by this desire to say, what's happening when people don't have the right information, they're not making good decisions. So watching what the hedge funds have done to many newspapers, that's what's led philanthropy to say, "Wait a minute, there's a role for us in funding some of this stuff," but philanthropy doesn't wanna do it forever. They wanna say, "I'm gonna give you three years of seed money, you need to develop a sustainable way of running your operation." So that's where the rubber hits the road, right? Because we all have to figure out ways that philanthropy isn't gonna be there forever.

**0:15:08.9 MB:** Okay, so now I'm gonna mention some guests that just appeared on a broadcast before you. And they're some of my favorite people in the news publishing industry. Have you ever heard of the Baltimore Banner and Stewart Bainum?

**0:15:21.8 SP:** Yes, absolutely. Yes. We're watching them very closely.

**0:15:27.8 MB:** Imtiaz has been on this show three or four times. Even Stewart Bainum has been on the program. You most probably followed his magical journey trying to buy Tribune Media. And then finally he said, "Screw it, I'm out of it. We're gonna start our own publication." Imtiaz, I had him on a panel at my conference last year. We did a little TED Talk and he said these words to the audience, 'cause he's non-profit, right? There's that word, non-profit.

**0:15:48.9 SP:** Yes, they are.

**0:15:51.0 MB:** And somehow this industry believes through certain Kool-Aid, they're reading that non-profit is your solution. Just go non-profit and TMT, that's just a way of doing the books. He's running a business. You follow? And he actually said these words on the stage. He said, "I broke the mold because I fired someone last week." And I said, "Why?" He goes, "Yeah. That someone came up to me and said, 'You can't fire people in a non-profit world. [laughter] We don't fire people.'" He said, "I do." Where is philanthropy today? Is it still a good, warm, and fuzzy public broadcast? I mean, or do they understand that we gotta make money as a business even if we're non-profit, right? I mean a sustainable news journalism business, do they look at those things now and say, go find some? I mean, where's the philosophy today is or it's still all let warm and fuzzy, if I may ask?

**0:16:38.5 SP:** What's exciting about what's going on in non-profit journalism is there are all these organizations that have just started and so they're reinventing how things work. And what I see them looking at is saying, "I don't need to only do traditional journalism." During COVID, for example, they were reporting on what was going on in their communities, about what was happening, but they were also saying, "We're gonna help you get vaccinated." And they would set up registration stands and do those kinds of things and get more engaged in the community and say, "Part of what we need to do is serve the community," instead of being stand back journalism and saying, "We're just gonna report on the problems that nobody's getting vaccinated, we're actually gonna do something about it." So that engagement is something that, I think, is a new way of thinking about journalism. So I think that's how they're redefining it.

**0:17:24.0 S1:** Non-profits know that if... I mean, if you can't pay the bills, you can't pay the bills. It

doesn't matter whether you're a non-profit or for-profit. Many of the rules are the same. And it's the same way in every organization. So I think it would be... And in a lot of ways it's harder to run a non-profit. You depend on the public and foundations and other kinds of things. So this myth that somehow the non-profit world is soft, it's extraordinarily frustrating to the people who every day make their organizations work and struggle to do good with very little resources.

**0:17:57.6 MB:** I have a feeling that's... This is just my two cents. That is a paradigm that is starting to shift. If people say, "I don't like the corporate world, I don't like the business, I don't like the habla, everything's going for the dollar, I'm entering the non-profit world," those people better understand you're gonna enter a world that still needs to hit a bottom line whether the top line is for profit or not, correct?

**0:18:18.9 SP:** Exactly. I mean, the way people often think about it is there's the double bottom line. You have to make sure that you and your revenue pay your bills and do all those things. And you have to prove that you're making a difference. That's why you get tax exempt status is that you have impact and you're doing something and you need to report to the public and say, "Here's why what we're doing mattered." So you really have to look at both things, but it's not like you don't... You get to escape having a budget and having to meet it. You still have to pay staff. And in journalism, we know the biggest cost is the talented people we all hire. Without them, we can't do good journalism.

**0:18:49.7 MB:** So I'm gonna... As we start to bring this journey together at close, and this is not gonna be your first appearance on the show, like you are now going to be... We're gonna get you a green room and we're gonna get you the jacket for three or four... You'll be part of the family here. I gotta ask you, you've got the audience now. You've got 3,000 or 4,000 news media executives that listen to this program often on, depending on the topic. The microphone is yours. Stacy, what do you wanna say to them right now about the philanthropic world, the need to help your world get better coverage, as you said, the mainstream media, go ahead. You got the mic bulletted out from me now. Gimme the elevator pitch. We're all in. Go.

**0:19:28.1 SP:** Terrific. Well, I would remind people that 2 out of every 11 Americans works for a non-profit organization. We cover business, we cover government. We would never ignore an industry that employs so many people. And yet we do. And we need to remember that these are the people who we count on to do good works. The Red Cross comes in when a disaster happens. Well, what would happen if they disappeared? But do we really look at them in a critical way? Do we look at education, museums, things that improve our quality of life, let alone the safety net groups. We need to examine them. Are they doing the job well or not? What help do they need? How can we do it better? There are tons of fascinating stories that readers would care deeply about, that we are just missing by not covering it. We announced a fellowship program we do for local journalists yesterday and one of the non-profit ex experts who follows me on LinkedIn wrote in and said, "Thank God you're doing this."

**0:20:22.3 SP:** Because it's not all about scandals at veterans organizations, which the media seems to think those are the only things that matter in terms of covering philanthropy. There's a whole lot out there. And you know, I have to say that that's something we're just missing terrific stories and they're also stories that can be tough stories, very strong accountability stories, but also plenty of stories that help you think about what you can do better in your community. People wanna be



empowered. If we wanna talk about attracting young people to the news, let's talk to them about how they can solve problems. That's what they wanna hear about. So I would urge everybody to think about it. We are here to help. We are really eager to do that. So any of your listeners can be in touch with me and I'd be happy to talk to them about how they can cover the non-profit world better.

**0:21:10.7 MB:** Segue. Let's turn that next letter [0:21:11.6] \_\_\_\_\_, if someone does what is speak to you or explore the Chronicle of the Philanthropy, what is your email address, Stacy?

**0:21:21.0 SP:** It's stacy.palmer@philanthropy.com.

**0:21:24.4 MB:** And I bet people have trouble saying philanthropy.

**0:21:27.5 SP:** People do. When we first started, people wondered whether we were the Chronicle of Philandering [laughter], which could be a publication that would've made a lot more money than we did, but we did not choose that path.

**0:21:37.4 MB:** Oh, it's it amazing, isn't it? All right, and of course the website is... Go ahead.

**0:21:42.1 SP:** Philanthropy.com.

**0:21:44.0 MB:** Think about that, that they own philanthropy.com. You like me, were in this...

**0:21:47.8 SP:** We started early.

**0:21:48.7 MB:** Yeah, same here. I was carrying around a Toshiba laptop in like 1995 and no one knew what we were doing. Stacy, this has been a real pleasure and honor and I have a feeling that we're going to help you be that megaphone too to the industry as well.

**0:22:04.2 SP:** We would love that.

**0:22:05.4 MB:** Because it's gonna be symbiotic. If we get a better understanding of you, you get a... And you keep, I'm not gonna say better because you're on it. I was nervous that I'd have to... You didn't really understand the perils of this industry, the challenges in our democratic... You know, you understand that Canada and Britain, the government helps [laughter] and somehow they still have a democracy. We got this stupid document called the Constitution that keeps the press totally completely, which I prefer between you and I...

**0:22:32.7 SP:** Yes.

**0:22:33.0 MB:** Unfettered yet that prevents us... That causes a challenge now as we have to stay in business in order to do our job. Thank you for your time and thank you so much for being part of the program. You stay well and keep up the good work.

**0:22:44.7 SP:** Thank you for asking me. I really appreciate it.