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Audio Transcript

Episode 231 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with Mike Blinder

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[Addressing America's Divides: The Chronicle of Philanthropy's newest chapter](#)

Join us for this episode of 'E&P Reports' as we delve into The Chronicle of Philanthropy's groundbreaking initiative led by senior editor Drew Lindsay. Discover how their innovative online platform, 'The Commons,' is poised to tackle America's deep divides head-on. From political polarization to socio-economic disparities, explore how The Chronicle is fostering dialogue and understanding in an era of increasing division and uncertainty.



[music]

0:00:03.9 Intro: 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.

0:00:19.1 Mike Blinder: And greetings once again, Mike Blinder, Publisher, E&P Magazine. As always, we urge our audience who's listening to this program on a podcast platform to please follow us. Those that watch us on our YouTube channel, hit the subscribe button below, ring the bell or click it to the right, and you'll get an update each and every time we upload this weekly vodcast series dedicated to the news publishing industry, E&P Reports. I've got a new friend on the show, Drew Lindsay. Drew, welcome to the program.

0:00:50.0 Drew Lindsay: Thanks Mike. Glad to be here.

0:00:50.1 MB: You are Senior Editor of Special Projects at a publication we actually featured just a year ago with your CEO, Stacey Palmer, it's called The Chronicle of Philanthropy.

0:01:04.1 DL: Correct.

0:01:04.6 MB: Let's do the elevator pitch, and that show resonated, by the way, it was one of our biggest listened to shows because I'm in an industry, as you know, we have all these thousands of news media executives listening to you that think or pray or hope that philanthropic dollars will flow down to them. Your mission is to talk to the donor community and those that ask for the money, is that your audience? And what is going on?

0:01:28.4 DL: If you think about us like American Banker, we are covering the nonprofit and philanthropic industries. So in a sense, we are reporting on what happens with everything from the local soup kitchen all the way up to Bill Gates and his dollars. So, we're reporting on the industry. And our readership is largely nonprofit leaders, philanthropists, donors, grantmakers and such. We're an independent nonprofit news organization. We spun off from a for profit about a year ago, as a nonprofit over the past year. So we're excited about that. The philanthropic dollars we have are for helping us build and sustain a business side that we've never had before. So we're really excited about all this.

0:02:07.9 MB: Lots to talk about.

0:02:08.9 DL: Yep.

0:02:09.5 MB: We're going to pack it into 20 minutes on the backside of this message.

0:02:13.3 Intro: This episode of E&P reports is exclusively sponsored by BLOX Digital, formerly Town News. 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.



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0:03:17.1 MB: Okay. Well, let's first stay at 50,000 feet if we can, Drew.

0:03:22.3 DL: Sure.

0:03:22.4 MB: Again, my industry, news publishing, which remember, legacy transmitters presses don't matter anymore.

0:03:31.1 DL: I understand.

0:03:31.2 MB: They matter as far as your heritage. We're basically all have one mission in the news publishing industry, and that is to inform and enlighten the community. And we're the only industry in the constitution, blah, blah, blah. We must survive in a Madisonian democracy, and we're going through this crisis financially. Money flows now into our industry as donors believe in that necessary part of our society. But the problem has been some claim it's all part of a good old boys club or good old girls club. You see what I'm saying? Or it's not going to red communities. Or it's flowing into inner city things, which are important, but what about the small town in Arkansas that loses its voice?

0:04:13.8 DL: Sure.

0:04:14.8 MB: Where is your publication first? 'Cause I know you're a senior editor there, you're part of this reporting structure. Where are you in first reporting on the necessity of survival of free press unfettered in our government?

0:04:28.7 DL: Well, I think we're here to talk a little bit about our new vertical, which is looking at the country divides and what's happening. Key to that has been a lot of the funders are for recognizing, I think, that local news is critical to creating an information ecostructure that people can trust. People don't trust national organizations, they don't trust government. So, there are funders who have committed, you probably know, the press forward initiative.

0:04:54.3 MB: Yes, of course, yes.

0:04:55.0 DL: Yeah. So, that's one of the steps that falls into this category of, we have to rebuild trust in America, we have to close these divides, and local news is seen as one of the places to do that.

0:05:03.3 MB: Now, you just teased that I was going to flip that letter in a moment, Vanna. You have been given the job of launching a brand new vertical. And I know your organization is launching a vertical is a big deal for you guys.

0:05:19.3 DL: Sure is.

0:05:21.9 MB: And this one is an interesting one, because it's about, as you just said, a divide in our society that now funders believe has to be solved. Am I saying that right? Give us...

0:05:33.2 DL: Sure. Let me give you the background. Again, I think people 10 years ago or so talked about polarization as something just afflicting Congress and politics, and why can't we get along in the House and the Senate and that kind of thing. Obviously, over the past 10 years, polarization has become something that threads through every part of life. And I think what we're covering and recognizing, we saw, as reporters in the field, we saw a growing number of funders and nonprofits who had come to the conclusion, we can't get our work done on housing, we can't get our work done on charter schools or anything that we want to pursue because the country is so divided. So, they have started to put together efforts on a whole range of things to try to build across divides, to try to build community, to try to engage people at the local level, that civic well-being, in a sense, at the local level. So what we're doing is building a vertical that's going to report on all these efforts, that's going to take a look at the various strategies, that's going to try to take a look at what's effective, "Oh, here's a new pilot out here, let's take a look at what its premise on, what strategies is it approaching."

0:06:40.0 DL: So we really want to report on this field. And part of it is we're going into an election year, we're in an election year, and a lot of the questions about the country's divides are going to surface in terms of politics, but we all know that those divides are much deeper. We're looking at income inequality that has grown tremendously over the past 10 years. That's a divide that divides people, racial inequality, racial equity, the real divide in terms of race in the country. We're going to look at rural and urban divides and why is it that they're so separated there. So it's not just a red blue thing we're going to be looking at, we're going to look at all kinds of divides.

0:07:13.8 MB: But when you say things like income inequality, there are some political implications there. Some would say, how woke of you? How do you guys straddle the center politically when you discuss some issues that... I'm not trying to pick sides here.

0:07:30.6 DL: No, I understand.

0:07:32.3 MB: But how do you stay away from that perception that anything that has to do with all this is far left wokeness? How do you guys make sure you're always in the center?

0:07:43.9 DL: Sure. I think, any good journalist, you're trying to listen to all sides. We are creating this as our vertical is called The Commons. And the idea is that we're going to bring lots of perspectives into that place with our launch, which we've talked about, which will happen tomorrow. We have essays from a number of leading players in the field, Darren Walker at Ford, Rachel Pritzker, who's the head of the Democracy Funders Network. But we've also got critics coming in saying, big philanthropy whose wealth and their assets have come from enormously wealthy people, how can they go about closing divides? Are they the right players? So we're gonna raise critical perspectives as we go along with this. And I think when you look at income inequality, I think I told you I did a piece down in the Appalachians, a profile of a woman down there who has... She's been embraced by philanthropy. She's doing all this work. But as she's gotten into it,



she's realized there are a lot of bias against Appalachia. There's a lot of bias against rural people. They assume we're dumb. They assume we don't know what we're doing. So, we're gonna take a look as we go along as reporters, as independent journalists at those divides.

0:08:50.4 MB: So again, you referenced the fact that we are doing this interview on the day before your launch. So those that were listening to the recording 15 years from now, the date of your launch is April 2nd, 2024.

0:09:00.5 DL: Correct.

0:09:02.2 MB: We're going to be releasing this on April 1st because we always release our broadcasts on a Monday. So now that you've discussed your... And your first feature will be about this woman in Appalachia, correct?

0:09:13.1 DL: That's one of the pieces we're rolling out. We've got about 20 pieces of content that'll be going up on the second.

0:09:19.6 MB: Okay. So let's assume I'm a news publishing entity in Appalachia before this article. And I know that my community has that inequality bend. Let's be honest. Some say that the liberals just fly over square states looking down with thinking that all you guys do is drink beer and go bowling. We know there's that common misperception in that.

0:09:47.6 DL: Sure.

0:09:48.1 MB: What can I do as a local news publisher if I agree with your stance now? The Chronicle of Philanthropy has decided this is such a major issue that we're gonna help inform funders to help bring our country together. What can I do as a news publisher?

0:10:06.0 DL: I think as a news publisher, you're probably doing exactly what you're doing and in providing, being an independent, trustworthy news source. I think you also ought to look at, and this is what some of the funders are doing and how I came to the woman in Appalachia that I wrote about. Some of the funders are trying to identify people in communities who are deeply committed to their communities, who are doing work within their communities and bringing people together where they take off their red shirt or their blue shirt or wherever they come from and get people to work together on doing projects to improve the community. That's the kind of work that gives people pride in where they live. It brings people together. So that's what I would urge the local newspapers to do is to find those people and hold them up a little bit to what they're doing and the work they're doing.

0:10:49.5 MB: Would you be willing to take a suggested story or amplify a story that a local publisher does in some cities?

0:10:58.9 DL: Absolutely, no. We can't be everywhere. And I'd love to hear from folks all over the country. We're planning to get our reporters out, to get myself out around the country. But folks like the people listening to this broadcast are on the ground are going to have great ideas.



0:11:10.8 MB: Well, it's amazing 'cause every reporter wants to help influence change, right?

0:11:13.8 DL: Right.

0:11:15.9 MB: Imagine if you do uncover a story and then you tip off your publication and then a funder reads about it and suddenly this, it grows. This could be amazing.

0:11:27.5 DL: Yep.

0:11:27.6 MB: Do you mind if I ask?

0:11:29.7 DL: Please, please.

0:11:30.7 MB: I don't want to, you know, I don't want to steal your sizzle with your launch, but can you tell us another story that will be debuted in comments?

0:11:36.3 DL: Sure. I think one of the interesting things is we looked at a pollster who works at a think tank called Populous, who has been doing private opinion surveys. So when you take a public opinion survey, it's often, you know, what's your most important issue to you today? And they'll say immigration or housing or education as such. What private opinion surveys do is ask a range of sort of set making questions in a sense. Tell us which of these sets of characteristics about these issues you agree with. And that allows the pollsters to determine what is the real opinion of a person. This pollster has done a ton of this work and what he's found is, while there are people on the extremes that are loud and dominate discussion, the large majority of Americans have a lot in common, even on the values and priorities they have for the country. So, that was an eye opener for me. And one of the things he said is that... He's a neuroscientist and he said the brain actually responds to the voices that are loudest and are heard most often. And people assume there's a lot more division out there than there is. There's a lot more commonality. We just don't hear about it. So that to me was a fascinating look. We've got a story with some of his data and charts to reflect what he's arguing.

0:12:54.3 MB: Oh, no, that's fascinating.

0:12:56.4 DL: Yeah.

0:12:56.9 MB: To me, because we just featured our cover piece for last month was on polling and how...

0:13:02.9 DL: Oh, interesting. Yeah.

0:13:04.4 MB: And how it can be completely totally because media, I don't want to go off topic. Media loves polling because it creates a topic you can resonate, right? And so that's why media sponsors polls. It's amazing how media rarely says, and we got it wrong.

0:13:20.3 DL: Yeah. No, no.

0:13:22.6 MB: So this is fascinating. I also like the fact that this this gentleman's a neuroscience.

0:13:27.2 DL: Yeah.

0:13:27.3 MB: So, he's not just showing numbers, but he's showing that that how those numbers are crafted. Fascinating. Can I bug you for one more?

0:13:37.2 DL: Please, yeah. Yeah.

0:13:38.3 MB: Yeah. Go ahead.

0:13:39.1 DL: We have a great and we talked to us before the show that that all media is trying to grow and change. We've done very little multimedia, but we're launching or with this launch, we have a interview with our conversation between Robert Putnam, who's the author of *Bowling Alone*, and Eric Liu, who's really one of the leading civic engagement advocates in the country. It was terrific conversation. We put them together because they're friends, actually, Eric was a grad student of Putnam's back in 1997 when Putnam was just writing *Bowling Alone* and his syllabus was drafts of chapters. So, Eric and Robert got together and they talked really about how do we get into this mess, how we the way we are in terms of divides and how do we get out? And Putnam looked back to the progressive era in the early 1900s when you had high inequality, you had high polarization, and he looked at things like local community action, the social gospel, bringing people together to work. So, fascinating conversation. Putnam's had a book that probably nobody's heard about, came out in the pandemic called *The Upswing*, which is really about here are the solutions for a problem that we're in. So it was great conversation.

0:14:45.3 MB: Now, this is fascinating. And again, will this vertical be behind the paywall or can anybody get the comments?

0:14:52.0 DL: We're putting it outside the paywall. We feel like as we said at the beginning, the elections are going to drive a lot of conversation about divides. And we want our content and what philanthropy is doing to be part of that conversation. So everything we're going to produce is going to be outside the paywall.

0:15:06.5 MB: It's almost like this is your evangelizing content now. It will be bringing more eyeballs to your brand.

0:15:13.5 DL: You know what? Yeah. I don't I want to say we're going to be critical journalists. And looking at this, it's not like we're cheerleading here for anything. We want to be looking at the at the effectiveness of some of this work, looking at what really works in this space. So it's not just cheerleading, but it's such an important issue for the country where to look at it. And again, we're seeing this growing movement among funders and somebody really has to take a look at what they're doing, how they're spending their money? Is it working? So that that's part of our impetus.

0:15:43.7 MB: If I may put my own editorial slant, it's my program. I can do whatever the hell I want on my show. It's so needed 'cause so many of the news entities we report on are far in one direction or another. And the opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. So if you can drum up some anger, you're paid. You're page. That engagement goes up, page views go up, what have you.



But in a way, that's just keep fanning that flame. I once said on this program two years ago, I should just reread Bonfire of the Vanities.

0:16:13.9 DL: Yeah, no.

0:16:15.0 MB: That was before social media. You know get it?

0:16:18.4 DL: Yeah. Yeah.

0:16:19.1 MB: You just get one issue and you flame it. This is actually something I think we all should be touching. So if any of our news publishing audience wants to sample The Vertical, which is live within a few hours of this broadcast, where are they going? How do they find it?

0:16:32.4 DL: So the web address is philanthropy.com/thecommons.

0:16:36.5 MB: The Commons.

0:16:36.6 DL: That is the name for our Vertical. It is called The Commons. If you just go to philanthropy.com/thecommons or just go to philanthropy.com and it'll be in the navigation bar. You'll see it there.

0:16:45.6 MB: If someone wants to suggest a topic to you and work together with you, maybe with their local reporting. And it sounds like you're very welcome to it. What is your contact information?

0:16:56.1 DL: I'm drew.lindsay, L-I-N-D-S-A-Y @philanthropy.com. You can also send an email to thecommons@philanthropy.com. Either way, it'll get to me.

0:17:04.9 MB: Drew Lindsay, senior editor, Special Projects at the Chronicle of Philanthropy. Amazing work, exciting stuff. And thank you for sharing it with us today.

0:17:14.1 DL: Thank you. Terrific to be on