2021
Fundraiser Report
May 12th to June 14th, 2021

$172,795 raised for 43 of Chicago’s independent media outlets

#SaveChicagoMedia
ABOUT CIMA

The Chicago Independent Media Alliance, a project of the Reader Institute for Community Journalism, is made up of 69 outlets covering the African American, Latinx, Asian American, Polish, immigrant, LGBTQ, and other Chicago communities. CIMA believes there is no better way to reach the city’s most underserved communities than through community media outlets for and by those communities. We stand for information, accessibility, and equity.

CIMA launched in 2019 as a response to the industry’s revenue decline. CIMA’s mission values collaboration over competition in the media ecosystem. CIMA believes in business and editorial partnerships to secure the overall independence of independent media. We aim to create a successful path to a self-sustaining media ecosystem.

Our sixty-nine partners in the alliance include traditional print newspapers, independently produced podcasts, dynamic video production studios, and nonprofit newsrooms focusing on key issues that affect the fabric of the city. CIMA coordinates revenue projects to assist in strengthening the local media landscape. In 2020, CIMA hosted peer-to-peer trainings, a networking space for Chicago’s local outlets, consultation with media kit development. In 2021, CIMA will continue hosting peer-to-peer trainings and will launch a Chicago media directory.

As an emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CIMA responded by creating Chicago’s first-ever media joint-fundraiser in May, 2020. The campaign, put together in three weeks, raised more than $160,000 for 43 members, including $60,000 in matching funds from local foundations. More than 1,000 individuals donated, with two-thirds opting to support all outlets. The effort brought in new visibility and amplification of a wide range of media voices.

CIMA 2021 CAMPAIGN

In its second year, the Chicago Independent Media Alliance still found a dire need for emergency funds due to the ongoing pandemic into 2021. We built the fundraiser campaign based on feedback received at the end of our first campaign. That feedback can be found on page 9 of our 2020 fundraiser report.

The 2021 campaign took six months to create, including time to rebuild our fundraising website and to coordinate logistics, promotion, and marketing. The fundraiser was 34 days—one month with a three-day extension.

Individual donations were matched for the first 28 days. Individual donations were tripled from June 9-14.
1. **AirGo Radio**: Podcast and media hub showcasing people reshaping Chicago for the most equitable and creative.

2. **Block Club Chicago**: Block Club Chicago is a nonprofit news organization dedicated to delivering reliable, nonpartisan and essential coverage of Chicago’s diverse neighborhoods.

3. **Borderless Magazine**: Borderless Magazine is a nonprofit news outlet covering immigration issues in the Midwest.

4. **Bronzeville Life**: Bronzeville Life is not about geography, it’s about a lifestyle. Bronzeville Life provides coverage for Chicago’s African American community.

5. **Chicago in Arabic**: Chicago in Arabic is a media outlet bringing Chicago news into focus in Arabic.


7. **Chicago Public Square**: Free daily email news roundup for Chicago. The Reader poll’s pick for Best Blog.

8. **Chicago Reader**: The Reader, founded 1971, is Chicago’s in-depth and curated guide to culture, politics, and more.

9. **CHIRP Radio**: CHIRP is your live, local community radio station focused on independent music and culture.

10. **Cicero Independiente**: A volunteer-run, bilingual, independent news outlet for and by residents of Cicero.

11. **City Bureau**: Nonprofit civic journalism lab serving Chicago’s south and west sides.

12. **Current Magazines**: South Shore Current Magazine: Good news from Chicago’s Cultural Soul Coast—the southeast and southern shore communities. The West Side Current Magazine: Good news from Chicago’s west side—focused on pride, honor, and value of community.

13. **E3 Radio**: E3 Radio is an online station playing queer and independent music. Queer radio done right.

14. **Evanston Roundtable**: The Evanston RoundTable is the community’s leading source of news about local government, schools, civic and artistic activities, and other important issues facing Evanston.

15. **Free Spirit Media**: Opportunities for emerging creators (ages 14-25), primarily from communities of color, to produce and create.

16. **Gazette Chicago**: Gazette Chicago is a free, independent newspaper serving ten Chicago neighborhoods, committed to unbiased news coverage that tells all sides since its founding in 1983.

17. **Gozamos**: Gozamos is an independent online magazine and community of journalists, bloggers, and progressive activists covering culture, music, and politics.

18. **Growing Community Media**: with Austin Weekly News (West Side of Chicago from Garfield Park to
Austin and Wednesday Journal of Oak Park & River Forest (independent, intensely local, covering Oak Park and River Forest).

19. **Hyde Park Herald:** Hyde Park Herald is a weekly community newspaper rich in history and journalistic excellence.

20. **Injustice Watch:** Injustice Watch is an investigative newsroom that exposes systemic inequities in the justice system.


22. **Invisible Institute:** Invisible Institute works to enhance the capacity of citizens to hold public institutions accountable.

23. **La Raza Newspaper:** The voice of Chicago’s Latino community for 50 years. La Raza ha sido por 50 años la voz de la comunidad latina de Chicago.

24. **Loop North News:** Loop North News serves the Loop and Near North neighborhoods of downtown Chicago.

25. **Midway Minute:** Midway Minute is the morning outlet for Chicago sports.

26. **Mild Sauce:** Mildsauce is an extra tasty blog driven by discourse. Based on discussion, young multi-media journalists of color visit spaces, events, and other professionals in Chicago.

27. **Newcity:** The publication of record for Chicago culture.

28. **North Lawndale Community News:** Providing news and information on resources and events that improve the lifestyle of individuals and families.

29. **Paseo Podcast:** A weekly Puerto Rican podcast dedicated to telling stories by, from, and about the Puerto Rican Community.

30. **Polish Daily News:** Polish Daily News is the largest and the oldest Polish language newspaper in Chicago. Since 1908 it is a destination of choice for tens of thousands of Poles in Chicagoland looking for reliable news, vivid coverage of events happening in their community and effective classifieds section.

31. **Public Narrative:** Public Narrative exists to balance public health, safety and education narratives affecting marginalized communities.

32. **Rebellious Magazine for Women:** Rebellious Magazine is a feminist news and culture website.

33. **Rivet:** Rivet tells the world’s stories and makes them engaging and fun.

34. **Sixty Inches from Center:** Midwest-focused arts publication and archiving organization that supports BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, disability, and women’s culture.

35. **SoapBox Productions and Organizing:** Film and social activism non-profit specializing in multimedia storytelling for equity and structural change.
36. **South Side Weekly**: Independent, nonprofit newspaper for and about the south side of Chicago.

37. **Streetwise**: Empowering those facing homelessness with access to employment to work toward self-sufficiency with dignity.

38. **StudentsXpress Magazine**: A magazine of art and writing by students in CPS, preK-8th grade.


40. **The Daily Line**: The Daily Line does critical reporting on policy and politics for professionals.

41. **Third Coast Review**: Chicago’s online arts and culture magazine, specializing in quirky, underground aspects of the arts scene.

42. **Windy City Times**: Windy City Times is an award-winning newspaper serving the Chicagoland LGBTQ community since 1985.

43. **Win-TV**: Win-TV Chicago is a Korean TV operating 24/7, and producing its own local news, documentaries, and talk shows covering all issues affecting Korean communities in Chicago and the United States.

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**Step by Step: How the Second Annual CIMA Campaign was Created**

### STEP 1: Building SaveChicagoMedia.org

How SaveChicagoMedia.org was constructed: The public was able to donate to CIMA’s newly constructed site savechicagomedia.org from May 12 through June 14, 2021. The website offered the option to donate one amount to be split evenly among all of the outlets, or donors can select one or more outlets to give a specific amount.

- WordPress was used as the hosting platform. We used YITH WooCommerce, an open-source commerce plug-in built on WordPress to receive funds. Stripe was used as the payment infrastructure system. While our website is a donation site, we had to construct the website as an e-commerce site on the backend. Therefore, while a donor was asked to donate, the website read their donation as a transaction. Each donation the website read as an order.

- Each outlet was responsible for creating its Stripe account using its business bank accounts. Outlets were asked to connect their Stripe account to the backend of savechicagomedia.org. By doing this action, outlets were prompted to make an account which allowed them to see reports of live donations as they came in. Their reports allowed them to see what type of donation they had received (to all, donation split with other outlets, or individual donation), the total amount, and the date the donation was made. Outlets were able to download as CSV files or pdf.

- Fundraiser participants having their access to live reports was a new feature.

- While orders gave outlets more authority over their donation tracking, donor emails were not recorded in their reports and had to be manually exported by the CIMA team after the fundraiser ended.

- Stripe charged a .30 cent fee per transaction and the fee was automatically included in the total donation amount. A privacy policy was created to inform donors how their emails and information would be used.
STEP 2: Implementing a Fundraising Committee

Our second step was creating an internal member fundraising committee. This committee assisted the development of the fundraiser by offering their input, advice, and suggestions with monthly meetings leading up to the fundraiser. CIMA members were asked via Google survey if they would like to join a fundraising committee in February 2021. The committee was composed of 6 to outlets who came together in March 2021 and met once a month.

STEP 3: Promotion & Marketing

The third step was organizing and creating the theme, messaging, advertising, and marketing of the campaign. As Chicago’s local media ecosystem was still feeling the economic brunt of the pandemic, the fundraising committee crafted language and visuals that were reflective of local journalists and independent media during 2020. We worked with local artist and head designer of South Side Weekly, Hayley Tweedell, to create the new artwork. We reused our campaign video from 2020, created by Emma Kumer, with an updated script and narration. CIMA members: Gozamos, Polish Daily News, and Chicago in Arabic all narrated and translated the narration in Spanish, Polish, and Arabic for their audience.

ARABIC  ENGLISH  SPANISH  POLISH

The fundraising committee assisted in choosing language that spoke to why independent media still needed economic support into 2021. We used the 2020’s language as a starting point for our promotion in 2021. For example, we reused the #SaveChicagoMedia hashtag first used in 2020 because of its success and familiarity.

Campaign slogans:
1. Investing in local media = funding your community.

2. Local stories are a reflection of the communities we live in. What interests Chicagoans, what concerns Chicagoans, what makes Chicagoans. Donate today to ensure your local newsroom continues reporting the stories that matter to you.

3. 63% of independent media outlets saw their revenue drop due to the pandemic. Donate today to ensure your local newsroom continues reporting the stories that matter to you. #SaveChicagoMedia

4. While the pandemic disrupted the flow of daily life, the need for accurate local information only escalated. Donate today to ensure your local newsroom continues reporting the stories that matter to you. #SaveChicagoMedia

Chicago Reader head designer, Amber Huff, designed print, digital, and social media ads before and during the campaign for fundraiser participants. In order for outlets to personalize the graphics associated with the outlet’s branding and style, CIMA shared all raw files of designs.
While the pandemic disrupted the flow of daily life, the need for accurate local information only escalated. Donate today to #SaveChicagoMedia

The following images were used to promote the campaign throughout the 31-day run and extension period. Variations of the advertisements here began to circulate on our launch date, May 12th. Each of the 43 media outlets had their advertisements designed in their appropriate dimensions.

63% of independent media outlets saw their revenue drop due to the pandemic. Donate today to #SaveChicagoMedia

Investing in local media = Funding your community.
#SaveChicagoMedia
Local media outlets are essential.

When COVID-19 caused media organizations to close their newsrooms and go remote, the reporting did not stop. They held local government accountable ... documented historic moments for social justice ... shared the humanity behind tragedy.

Meanwhile, the funding for that work was drying up.

Local storytellers continue to need your help.

Investing in local media is funding your community.
Give today to help us do the work that matters.

Donate now at savechicagomedia.org

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Variations of the campaign art were shared in print, websites, and social media channels.

Halfway through our campaign we created new imagery in the form of GIFs to show what a $20, $50, or $100 donation does for a local and independent media outlet.

More examples of our social media promotion can be found on Twitter by searching the #SaveChicagoMedia

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A fundraiser to support 40+ independent Chicago media outlets:

1. AirGo
2. Block Club Chicago
3. Borderless Magazine
4. Bronzeville Life
5. Chicago in Arabic
6. Chicago Music Guide
7. Chicago Public Square
8. Chicago Reader
9. CHIRP Radio
10. Cicero Independiente
11. City Bureau
12. Current Magazines
13. E3 Radio
14. Evanston Roundtable
15. Free Spirit Media
16. Gazette Chicago
17. Growing Community Media
18. Gozamos
19. Hyde Park Herald
20. Injustice Watch
21. Inside Publications
22. Invisible Institute
23. La Raza Newspaper
24. Loop North News
25. Midway Minute
26. Mild Sauce
27. Newcity
28. North Lawndale Community News
29. Paseo Podcast
30. Polish Daily News
31. Public Narrative
32. Rebellious Magazine for Women
33. Rivet
34. Sixty Inches from Center
35. Soapbox Productions and Organizing
36. South Side Weekly
37. StreetWise
38. StudentsXpress Magazine
39. The Beverly Review
40. The Daily Line
41. Third Coast Review
42. Win-TV Channel 24
43. Windy City Times
To market the campaign, we leveraged the power of the 43 media outlets who participated to promote within their channels and to their audience. CIMA’s main avenues for promotion were on our social media channels, Twitter and Facebook, and Mailchimp newsletter.

Social media was the main vehicle our campaign utilized to drive donations to savechicagomedia.org. We utilized our Facebook and Twitter accounts to promote the campaign daily. Every week we shared our most up-to-date fundraising amount to encourage people to donate. During the last week of our campaign, we shared daily dollar updates and created special messaging announcing the triple match the last 4 days of the campaign. Our announcement led to an influx of donations during the extension period of the campaign.

Outlets in the fundraiser shouted out other outlets and highlighted their great work and best reporting. CIMA’s collective strategy was to promote and shout out other outlets involved in the fundraiser on social media with the end goal to drive donors to donate to all. Then, outlets promoted themselves and encouraged donations to their outlets on their channels, such as newsletters, publications, etc. to drive donors to donate to them directly.

CIMA utilized a Mailchimp newsletter to ask for donations and share campaign updates with our 2020 donors. In 2020, 964 people donated to our fundraiser. By the end of our second annual campaign, 931 people donated to our campaign. CIMA sent two email blasts per week to our donors.

CIMA hosted three Facebook Live sessions during the last two weeks of the fundraiser. The conversation focused on each outlet’s work during the 2020 pandemic and how further funding would help support their work as independent media outlets.

The first Facebook Live session moderated by CIMA coordinator, Yazmin Dominguez, featured Jhmira Alexander, president of Public Narrative, Anna DeShawn, founder of E3 Radio, Dave Hamilton, creative director of StreetWise, and Jesus Del Toro, publisher of La Raza newspaper.

The second Facebook Live session moderated by CIMA coordinator, Yazmin Dominguez, featured Daniel Kisslinger, co-founder of AirGo Radio, Noor Shawaf, Senior Editor of Sixty Inches from Center, Aaron Cynic, reporter for Third Coast Review, and Caullen Hudson, Founder of Soapbox Productions and Organizing.

The third Facebook Live session featured panelists who have each founded their own independent media organizations throughout their decades-long career in Chicago. They discussed how the local and independent media landscape has transformed while making plugs for donations. The four panelists involved were CIMA founders and co-publishers, Karen Hawkins and Tracy Baim, publisher of Third Coast Review, Nancy Bishop, and publisher of Chicago Public Square, Charlie
STEP 4: Fundraiser Training

Outlets mentioned in their feedback from 2020 they did not feel fully prepared or equipped to fundraise due to the sudden emergency response and quick turnaround. A week before the 2021 launch date, CIMA hosted a one-hour training on best fundraising practices and strategies. Topics centered on how to properly thank donors, how to successfully ask for donations, how to grow your newsletter list during fundraising, etc. The training was intended for all members who are new to fundraising or would like to freshen up on their fundraising skills before our fundraiser’s launch May 12. The training was led by City Bureau’s Director of Growth Strategy, Andrew Herrera, and CHIRP Radio’s General Manager, Shawn Campbell. Both CIMA members had an extensive background in fundraising and expressed interest in leading a fundraising training. Both received a stipend of $500. Fundraiser participants had an hour to ask questions related to their own fundraising and the CIMA fundraiser.

CIMA’s 2021 Match

In 2021, CIMA raised $77,500 in matching dollars. CIMA co-founder Tracy Baim reached out to local foundations, with assistance from David Hiller, former head of the McCormick Foundation.

**Participating Foundations in 2021 Match:**

- $25,000 McCormick Foundation
- $20,000 MacArthur Foundation
- $20,000 Joyce Foundation
- $5,000 Feinberg Foundation
- $5,000 David Hiller
- $500 Nancy Bishop
- $2,000 ANONYMOUS

**TOTAL** $77,500

Results

By June 14, we had more than 900 donations to our 2021 campaign with two-thirds choosing to have their donation evenly split between all 43. We raised $95,295 in public donations with $77,500 in matching donations from local foundations. Crossroads Fund hosted the matching funds. The total that CIMA brought into Chicago’s local media ecosystem was $172,795.

*E3 Radio raised the most funds in this year’s campaign reaching a total of $26,035.*

*The Chicago Reader raised the second-largest amount with a total of $18,722.*

*Rebellious Magazine for Women raised the third largest amount with a total of $16,718.*

*CHIRP Radio raised the fourth largest amount with a total of $15,376.*

*Block Club Chicago raised the fifth-largest amount with a total of $12,231.*

Our second annual joint-media fundraiser gave the Chicago Independent Media Alliance a national spotlight. Our model has been adopted by the Center for Cooperative Media in New Jersey and the Neighborhood Media Foundation in Ohio. The Institute for Nonprofit News was interested in learning more about how it was built to adopt techniques to share with their regional non-profit partners.
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<th>OUTLET</th>
<th>MATCHING TOTAL</th>
<th>GRAND TOTAL</th>
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<td>AirGo Radio</td>
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Feedback & Lessons

Seventeen outlets of the 43 which participated in the 2021 fundraiser submitted anonymous feedback. The area in which we received most feedback was related to the triple match portion of our campaign and promotion. Near the end of the campaign, we as a group decided to make a triple match for the final few days of the campaign, to incentivize more donations.

Feedback related to the match

“It’s tough to figure out the balance with distributing funds equally among all groups and rewarding those who work hard to promote the campaign. It can be awkward to encourage donors to give to your personal organization rather than giving to all, but at the same time, it wouldn't seem right if some outlets did a ton of work to promote and others did little to none and everyone ended up with the same amount. I don't know what the answer is, though.”

“The changing match formula was a little bit challenging. There's not always a great answer, though. You always need to respond to a campaign and tweak it as needed to spur giving, and adding that 3x match at the end clearly was effective. It's tough, though, because sometimes what you end up doing is training your donors not to give until the very end, since they learn there might be a benefit (e.g. a larger match) if they wait. Sometimes it's actually good to use something like a multiple match mid-campaign to spur giving when things have slowed down (e.g. two-and-a-half weeks into the campaign, messaging that, "for the next 72 hours only, all gifts up to $40,000 will be matched 2:1!").”

“I understand the rationale behind the ‘matching funds for individual organization donations,’ but I haven’t found a good way to say ‘Give to us and not to everyone else.’ I hope we can find a way to get matching funds without putting CIMA members against one another.”

“I know I’ve mentioned it before, and this would be a development issue, but one idea would be that each organization has a unique link to share (e.g. savechicagomedia.org/1, savechicagomedia.org/2, etc.) and that link is associated with the outlet, so all donations coming from that link could be sourced back to the outlet, but it still doesn't solve all the issues, especially when you get into organizations wanting to maximize matches.”

Feedback related to the promotion

“If we could incentivize collective giving over giving to an individual org, I think that would make the campaign purpose a bit clearer and make it so that the larger orgs can commit more resources to promoting the spirit of the campaign.”

“If we could have a slightly smaller cohort of groups so the money doesn’t get split up quite so many ways, and make it so that the match only goes toward collective donations, NOT donations to an individual org, I think that would make it easier to get everyone on board with the benefit of
putting organizational resources behind promoting the campaign/movement and not just their own newsroom.”

**Feedback related to planning**

“More organized collaboration opportunities. We all did some of that this year but there could be more organized activities like specific features for media teams, interviewing each other, etc.

“Build up social media numbers (starting now) for CIMA and all members to help improve results. Stay in touch with donors and general audiences throughout the year, let them know CIMA exists more than one time a year.”

**Next Steps**

The Chicago Independent Media Alliance will host its third annual fundraiser in Spring, 2022. Similiar to last year, we will build upon this year’s feedback as the model is fluid and receptive to change. We plan to continue growing our membership and advocating for more funding and resources for Chicago’s local and independent media outlets.

If you are interested in connecting with CIMA leadership, please contact CIMA co-founder, Tracy Baim, or CIMA coordinators, Yazmin Dominguez and Savannah Hugueley.

*tbaim@chicagoreader.com*
*ydominguez@chicagoreader.com*
*shugueley@chicagoreader.com*

Thank you.