

## **“Gates: Money and Motivations” - Part A**

*(This case was prepared by University of Georgia journalism student Katie Barlow for JOUR 5170, Advanced Studies in Journalism, based on secondary sources cited below.)*

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation was founded to tackle global poverty and poor health in developing countries. The foundation provides grant money to researchers, journalists, scientists, doctors, and policymakers contributing to healthy policy and promotion. They have donated nearly one billion dollars in grants to advocacy and policy programs that, “[go] to analyses of policy questions, such as the best way to finance vaccines for poor countries. But the “advocacy” side of the equation is essentially public relations: an attempt to influence decision-makers and sway public opinion. The ultimate goal is to boost funding and focus from governments, businesses and other foundations for the battle against disease and poverty — particularly now, as Congress considers deep cuts in foreign aid.” The Foundation has provided nearly \$50 million dollars for journalist training and non-profit journalism such as NPR and PBS.

Discuss:

Should these organizations accept money from a foundation with a specific agenda? Would accepting this money impede their ability to report accurately and fairly? Is it courageous to report on these stories with donated funds? Would it matter if stipulations were attached to the funds?

## **“Gates: Money and Motivations” - Part B**

These funds are attached to reporting requirements stipulating that stories must cover areas such as HIV, malaria and TB; poverty in the developing world; and education in the United States. Gates has given \$3.3 million to Public Radio International, \$5 million to NPR, and \$1 million to Frontline. The Foundation says it does not provide specific mandates but rather a list of potential story ideas. This makes employees of companies receiving aid uneasy covering anything involving the Gates Foundation for fear of accusations of conflicts of interest. “Guardian health Editor Sarah Boseley has said she often shies away from coverage of the foundation — positive or negative — for fear of being accused of a conflict.” (The Guardian received \$500,000 in general funding with the possibility of matched funds.)

Discuss:

Should a non-profit news organization accept funding with stipulations? Would it make a difference if they were in need of money to continue their reporting? Is it courageous to accept these funds when facing dire economic constraints? Is there an ethical line drawn between non-profit news organizations and for profit news organizations accepting these funds? Is it courageous to report negatively on the Gates foundation if your employer receives funding?

### **“Gates: Money and Motivations” - Part C**

For the first time, a for profit news company received funding for a global health reporting initiative. ABC’s Diane Sawyer launched “Be the Change: Save a Life” as the result of this funding. This programming maintains a positive tone focusing on the available solutions to global health problems. This positive element is a possible reflection of Melinda Gates new approach to media interactions striving to encourage media outlets to report specifically on solutions to problems.

Discuss:

Does this represent a conflict of interest? Is it courageous for a for profit news company to accept these funds? Is it courageous for a for profit news company to accept the “encouragements” of the Foundation head? Does this cloud fairness and accuracy in reporting? Is fairness and accuracy the first priority in stories about death, disease, and poverty? Does the media have an obligation to report on these stories regardless of funding?

## **“Gates: Money and Motivations” - Part D**

“The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, a health-care think tank, has received nearly \$20 million from Gates to provide global health information and analyses. That includes media fact sheets and reporting guides, a free video library for journalists and an influential daily roundup of global health news.

Gates gives money to policy magazines such as Health Affairs and Global Health Magazine, and has funded scientific journals to publish articles on global health. Scientists trained in a Gates-funded program to "engage policy makers, thought leaders, the media and the public" brief lawmakers and write op-ed pieces that appear in newspapers and on news sites.

In the field of education, where Gates' emphasis on teacher quality and small schools has been hotly debated, a \$500,000 grant to the Brookings Institution aims to "re-engineer media coverage of secondary and postsecondary education." Education Week magazine has received \$4.5 million from the Gates Foundation.”- The Seattle Times

Discuss:

Is it possible for a private foundation to have a majority influence on national and international media? Is there such a thing as too much influence? How much is too much? Does it seem like the Gates Foundation has too much influence?

## **“Gates: Money and Motivations” - Epilogue**

On February 3, 2011, Seattle Times reporters Sandi Doughton and Kristi Heim wrote an article detailing the precise influence and monies given by the Gates Foundation to media outlets. They provided quotes from the Foundation, companies who had received funding, employers who were both comfortable and uncomfortable with the funding, and questioned the “largesse” of the Gates influence on international media. The Seattle Times had received a \$15,000 Gates grant in 2010 to report on stories of homelessness.

Discuss:

Was it courageous for Doughton and Heim to report on the Gates Foundation?

### **Works Cited**

[http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2014280379\\_gatesmedia.html](http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2014280379_gatesmedia.html)

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/Pages/bill-melinda-gates-letter.aspx>