

## How the Kauffman Foundation has stepped up its storytelling amid journalism's fake news fallout

*If press releases are dead, print journalism is dying and distrust in media is festering, is brand journalism the solution? For this Kansas City nonprofit, an audience-first, story-focused editorial approach has provided a mix of opportunities and challenges to better inform and inspire audiences. The game-changer? A mindshift from viewing audiences as a set of demographics to individuals with flexible motivations and interests that may waver in intensity based on the subject matter. In making this shift in its approach to storytelling, the Kauffman Foundation has carved out an opportunity for itself — and potentially other philanthropies — to become trusted sources of news and information that can balance meeting these audiences' needs and wants while still subtly elevating larger social missions where other traditional and journalistic news providers can't.*

**By Valerie Hellinghausen**

In 2018, Larry Jacob asked an audacious question:

*What if the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation were its own media company?*

As vice president of Public Affairs for the Kansas City-based nonprofit, Jacob is used to asking tough questions as a leader, whether in the world of philanthropy or the political sphere.

“[I] ask an audacious question not with the idea that we’re actually going to do that, but what can we learn from asking that type of question,” said Jacob. “That's just the way that I approach the work, because if you don't, then you're doing the same stuff.”

For the foundation, doing more of the same wasn't going to cut it. In the last decade, changes in the news media and philosophy at the foundation had come to a head. So, in 2018, the Public Affairs team worked with Atlantic 57, a media consulting agency borne out of The Atlantic magazine, to revamp the foundation's approach to storytelling. From this work, the foundation has carved out a unique place for itself as a branded journalism newsroom that aims to inform and inspire its audiences.

[Branded journalism](#) is still a relatively new concept, but the media industry at large has been looking to better understand and reach audiences for years. Brand like [Red Bull](#) [have been leading the way with content marketing](#) that encourages audiences not to buy an energy drink but to see themselves and their lifestyles in the stories a brand tells. At the same time, newsrooms like [The New York Times](#) are looking to bake [design thinking into an entire story's experience](#) from the code up in order to create meaning and better connect with an audience's interests and motivations.

While the goal to change the way stories are told to better reach audiences might be the same for many in the media industry, the Kauffman Foundation's experience serves as a

unique example in how audience-first, brand-focused editorial storytelling can both challenge and create new opportunities for other nonprofits and businesses to increase engagement and potentially affect social change.

### **A ‘perfect storm’ of changes**

Three years ago, when Jacob started at the foundation, he recognized there was a “perfect storm” brewing that would alter the course of the Public Affairs department. For one, local media had been severely cut in Kansas City and across the country, said Jacob. As a result, the foundation couldn’t solidly rely on external media sources to get out the foundation’s message.

In additions to changes in the media climate, the foundation had begun to move away from its primary focus on research. Kauffman recognized that in order to fulfill its founder’s mission, it had to build relationships with others outside the foundation’s walls in order to make social change. In short, the foundation had to work and talk with people — not talk at them.

“The mission of the foundation in the simplest of terms is: You’re born. You get tools throughout life. You take or make a job. You give back to society,” explains Jacob. “To effectively do that for more people —especially those that had been historically marginalized due to race, gender, location— and to fulfill Mr. Kauffman's legacy of overcoming all of that doesn't happen with money. It just can't. There's not enough money to do that.”

While neither money nor media coverage could fulfill this mission, it also became apparent that the current structure of the Public Affairs team couldn’t support its new philosophy either.

Prior to 2018, the Public Affairs team formula was consistent with others seen in typical corporate communications says Director of Editorial Keith Mays. The foundation would create a new program, release new research or host an event, and it would issue a news release alongside some kind of media relations effort.

“It was an ivory tower situation where it was like, 'Here's this important thing. Drop it out of the ivory tower. You're welcome',” said Mays.

“There was value to that certainly for a specific audience,” added Jacob. “But to tell the foundation's story, it wasn't really giving the full picture of what we were trying to accomplish.”

### **Telling the story of the foundation**

In order to fulfill its mission, the foundation knew it needed to build stronger partnerships with its grantees and other audiences who could be motivated to take action.

“We didn’t have the money or the expertise to make the kind of social change that we wanted,” said Mays. “If we keep everyone at arm’s length, a step removed, and kind of do everything through the media, then we wouldn’t necessarily be making the kind of authentic connections that we needed in order to do the kind of work that we want to do.”

In order to build these authentic connections, the foundation needed to better understand its audiences. And amid faltering trust and financial stability in traditional media, the foundation and other nonprofits had an opportunity to become a trusted source of information, said Matt Pozel, senior multimedia writer and producer in Public Affairs.

“I don’t want to be too much of a curmudgeon, but I think you can make the argument that whatever the traditional media was they completely missed the boat,” said Pozel. “If they had known what their audience wanted, if they knew what the messages were, then they wouldn’t be in the situation that they are today.”

“It is so discouraging to see how just flat out to have leaders that have no regard for the truth. What’s real or what’s not real. What’s authentic. So, in some ways I feel like it’s more of our responsibility to fill that void because there are segments of society that are working against that,” said Pozel.

To fill this void and learn how to more effectively tell stories than traditional media had in the past, the Public Affairs team hired consultants from Atlantic 57 to help craft a new editorial strategy and processes. Over the course of 2018, this work led to forming what the team calls an “audience-first, story-focused” approach.

Under this approach, Atlantic 57 helped the Public Affairs team define a set of audience typologies that are based on people’s motivations and interests, rather than demographic information like age, gender, location or race. These typologies are meant to keep audience at the forefront of all editorial planning and communication.

“What we’re trying to do at a higher level and sort of an uncommon level that we talk about is to think about audiences more broadly by their larger beliefs, their world beliefs,” said Mays.

“People outside this building aren’t necessarily going to be interested in us patting ourselves on the back. That’s not an effective way to get our information out there or get our priorities out there,” said Mays. “However, people out there as all people are interested in a good story.”

For Editorial Manager Julie Scheidegger, a good story has to go beyond interesting people, and that’s where typologies come in. If Kauffman knows what motivates its audiences, it can create content that can motivate people to take action to further the foundation’s mission.

“We need people to be motivated to do something by our content,” said Scheidegger. “Whether that’s follow us on Twitter, it’s a like and a share or a follow — something

really, really small — all the way up to ‘I went to this event.’ ... There’s so many different levels, but we need our content to motivate people.”

### **Rethinking the traditional news beat**

While audience comes as a first priority in content creation under this approach, keeping a sharp focus on what stories the foundation is telling and why is also important. Through the work with Atlantic 57, Kauffman developed a number of coverage areas it has continued to narrow down. The coverage areas serve as an umbrella over what ideas and conversations the foundation wants to create content about. These areas, ideally, should align with the interests and motivations seen in the typologies Atlantic 57 helped Kauffman identify.

“The coverage areas basically keep front-of-mind what are some of the core values, said Chris Newton, digital marketing specialist at the foundation. “It gives us that lens and perspective to start there when we’re thinking about a new story idea.”

In this sense, the coverage areas Kauffman has adopted are different from traditional news beats, which tend to be more focused on an area of subject matter that stakeholders feel audiences need to be informed about.

With this shift in thinking, the foundation has gotten away from reporting the “what” of a story and instead has pushed itself to focus on the “why.” Prior to 2018, event coverage and stories talking about what the foundation had accomplished would’ve garnered a write-up without question. Now, the foundation looks to see how an event or other topic is of use or interest to the audience, and what that action that might motivate an audience to take.

“It’s difficult because again we’re not journalism. We can’t just kind of follow the trends of the day. And we have to kind of shoehorn what the foundation cares about and what message it’s trying to get across,” said Miles Sandler, the foundation’s director of engagement in education.

“On the flip side, I think a foundation has a really unique role in this kind of communication space and editorial space because there’s a social mission,” said Sandler. “We consistently have to have this drumbeat of values that we’re trying to communicate because we are trying to shift behaviors.”

This unique role provides the foundation a mix of freedom and newfound constraints in what it decides to cover. Unlike a newspaper or other media outlet, the foundation isn’t concerned with being objective or unbiased and providing full coverage of an issue or event. However, that doesn’t necessarily make storytelling any easier.

“Since we don’t have to do that, we are freed to give it our own angle and that Kauffman lens,” said Scheidegger. “We can go farther beyond that, and it’s harder. That’s the problem. It’s so much easier just to say, ‘OK. Well, we did individual school grants, so

let's put out a thing that says we put out individual school grants. This is how much we gave. This is the schools that received it. OK, great job, guys. Done'."

"But that's not going to do anything," said Scheidegger "That's not going to motivate anything more than maybe a transactional audience member. We can't just say we gave them money to go and do all these really boring things. Show the result — that's what we have to do, and it's much harder."

In 2018, Scheidegger found that one key way to show the result while avoiding being self-congratulatory is to highlight other voices beyond Kauffman's. When Scheidegger looked to craft a story around MORTAR, one of the foundation's grantees that is Cincinnati-based and looking to catalyze entrepreneurial growth, she let MORTAR speak for itself.

"It was really, really important to me with that video, especially with our increasing work with diversity, equity and inclusion, to make sure that that video was done through the correct lens with the correct voice," said Julie.

So, Scheidegger went to Managing Partner and Creative Director Allen Woods at MORTAR. When she asked Woods who could best tell the story of MORTAR's impact, his response was immediate: Chanel Scales. Scales, a graduate of the MORTAR program, was living in Atlanta when [MORTAR reached out to its graduates with an opportunity to open a retail shop in Cincinnati's thriving Over the Rhine neighborhood](#).

"I just kind of trusted that Allen knew what he was doing, what he was talking about," said Scheidegger.

And she was right to. Scales' voice and her journey to opening her own fashion retail store, Own Lane Shoetique, wound up being a natural fit for the story. Later that spring, MORTAR wound up playing the video of Chanel's story as it welcomed its 18th and 19th new cohort of participants.

"That was the intangible that we can't necessarily measure," said Scheidegger. "I was looking through the stories and looking at all their pictures and stuff, and there I saw Chanel's video playing to this huge crowd of new MORTAR folks. And that to me said more than anything else. Because I was like, 'Oh my god. We did it.' We created a video that sounded like them. That was their voice. It wasn't Kauffman from on high. We still said all the things we wanted to say. We still created the story, the narrative we needed people to hear, but we did it in Chanel's voice and with MORTAR's voice."

For Scheidegger, the story was a powerful lesson in how new diverse voices can tell their own story with facets of Kauffman's mission still shining through.

"We don't always need to be the voice. We can empower and uplift and amplify the voices of the people we serve in their communities and let them speak clearly about what they're dealing with," said Scheidegger.

To do this requires maintaining a delicate balance, however. The foundation has to constantly weigh satisfying audiences' interests and motivations with communicating larger foundational goals and messages around strengthening economies through entrepreneurship and education. If the latter comes off too strong, there's the potential for audiences to see content as pure spin, instead of informative and inspirational storytelling. There's also concerns around what telling grantees stories will implicate about continued financial support from the foundation. But when done right, however, the potential impact can be powerful, making this difficult work even more worthwhile, says Sandler.

"We're trying to shift perspectives. We're trying to provide the opportunity for people to see what else they can do around these social issues," said Sandler. "That to me is kind of the higher calling. We always need to keep that at the forefront, and then help connect that to things that are going to get eyeballs on it."

In maintaining the tenuous balance between connecting the foundation's mission and an audience's motivations, Scheidegger believes that's how the foundation can further establish a trusting relationship with audiences who are interested in making social change, too.

"People now want to feel like not only can they trust us and believe us, but that they know people here, said Scheidegger. "That really is something that we can do that other places can't is build that trust in a real way. To really have people trust us not only because we're an authority in the space, but because we are humans who are trying to within this weird philanthropic role with billions of dollars behind us try to work with people to move the needle."

One way Kauffman has successfully found to work with people was in its Inclusion Open for 2019. Instead of making a request for papers (RFP) through email, newsletter or some media relations effort, Kauffman welcomed its applicants in. Through Facebook Live, the foundation hosted an open forum to discuss the RFP and answer questions from people across the country that were tuning in.

"It spoke the language of the people that we're trying to reach," said Kayla Smalley, digital content coordinator. "It wasn't like us being like gatekeepers to the money. We really wanted to level with people."

In the end, the Facebook Live video converted views into hundreds of applicants for the RFP, said Smalley. Being able to anticipate those conversions, however, isn't as simple.

"That's a metric that you find out later," said Smalley. "But in the moment, I thought it was interesting to take a look at the amount of viewers throughout the duration of the video. Because if it's irrelevant to a bunch of people, they're going to click in, watch for a couple seconds, and click back out because it's not what they expected. But we had a very

steady, consistent viewership throughout the entirety of the Facebook Live. So, that gave me confidence to say, 'We are talking to the right people'."

While the live-streamed video converted into applicants, it also has translated into more trust for the Public Affairs team. In turn, that trust has become stronger bedrock for building a news beat and relationship with sources, says Scheidegger.

"I'm getting to the point —especially with the Inclusion Open folks because I've been able to do so much with Chris and Natalie [that] I can DM or call quite a few people in their portfolio and be like, 'Hey, what's happening in Tennessee?' You know, 'what's up in Chattanooga today?' And really work the beat in terms of starting to be able to tell real stories and not just these superficial or drop-in kind of stories," said Scheidegger.

### **Defining and measuring success**

Overall, just how much Kauffman is moving the needle is still difficult to track. While the new editorial approach provided useful frameworks like the typologies and coverage areas that have seen pockets of success, these aren't easy to execute on or replicate.

"The typologies have helped us get aligned in vocabulary and general understandings," said Newton, but there's still more that the Public Affairs team needs to drill into in order to make the typologies more useful when it comes to gathering data and learning about audiences.

"For example, on paid advertising targeting and social channels, it's not like you can go to Facebook and say, 'Hey. Give me anyone who is a futurist'," said Newton. "There's not really that data segment in Facebook that can be targeted. If someone has an interest of futurist on their Facebook account, we could target them, but it's not that widely used is what we've found. So, those typologies have not been actionable for us."

That being said, the Public Affairs team has seen success since adopting its audience-first, story-focused editorial approach. However, the foundation defines this success differently.

According to Mays, editorial success can be broken down into a dichotomy of success based on traditional engagement or on outcomes and actions taken.

In the first category, the foundation is looking for interactions audience members have with content online. This could come in the form of sharing or "liking" a story or leaving a comment on it. In a broader sense, engagement could also simply look at how many people have viewed a story or watched a video.

Newton cites a [Facebook post the foundation made during the NFL playoffs](#) in January as an example of success in terms of traditional engagement.

"Here's an example of success. It's not as much editorial, but we made a post about Ewing Kauffman. There was a picture of Ewing Kauffman with the owner of the Kansas

City Chiefs when they were breaking ground for the sports complex that now the Chiefs and the [Kansas City] Royals play at,” said Newton. “That was our single, that post was the most liked post, the most reached and engaged. Basically, every metric when it comes to Facebook was far and away the best that we've ever done on Facebook in a given day or on a single post since the Facebook account has been created, what, 10 years ago.”

According to Newton, that one Facebook post probably saw more reach than all of Kauffman’s blog posts in early 2019 and the same engagement as five or six blog posts combined on [Kauffman Currents](#). While the timing may have seemed to most like an obvious opportunity to share about part of the foundation’s legacy in Kansas City, the fact that it was done in a stand-alone post on Facebook represents a shift for the foundation. Ten years ago, the Kauffman Foundation might have ignored posting about football altogether, as it would have been considered irrelevant to their work and audience in the research world. And even three years ago, when the editorial function of Public Affairs was just taking shape, the strategy might have been to write an article and share it everywhere without considering the uniqueness of each distribution channel or the different audiences engaging there.

For Pozel, who originally suggested sharing the photo and its history on social media, the post was an opportunity to highlight Ewing Kauffman’s legacy as one for the people.

“I think nostalgia is a pretty powerful thing,” said Pozel. “I don't want to always look back to Ewing Kauffman. I want people to feel like they’re a part of that. And I think when you look at that Facebook post about the breaking ground, when you read the comments people did take it to where what it meant to them.”

For Newton, finding a way to mix speaking to audience’s interests and feelings while still offering up timely content could continue to reshape what success looks like in Kauffman’s content. The key to that, however, will be ensuring that the foundation’s targeting is highly specific when the audience isn’t as passionate or broad as, say, football fans during playoff season.

“That kind of success could be the new normal,” said Newton. “But that’s not going to happen unless we continue to improve the way we target. Improve our content and our messaging, so that the people who are most likely to engage and react to something are the ones actually being targeted by it in the posts.”

The second category, success is based more on the social outcomes of the story. This is looking at what actions or results can be tied back to the content that was created. These correlations are often difficult to make and difficult to track. As such, some members of the Public Affairs team have taken to calling them “the intangibles.”

“What we found in creating this framework was that when it comes to measuring editorial and just measuring content, we kind of have to stop at just the engagement level if we're wanting to drill down,” explained Newton.



The challenge in being able to draw lines between a story and an audience member's action is twofold. For one, it requires strategic thinking from the outset about what specific action the audience is expected to take. The second piece is ensuring that there is the technological capability to track the action.

"It's almost as if for every story or every time we pitch an idea or we're like 'this is in the hopper,' we should identify as a team, 'OK, what are maybe one or two actions that if someone reads this and they walk away, what is the one or two things we really wish they would do next? What's their next step as a reader?' It could be interesting because it might do things to help people get to trigger that action," said Newton.

"But we don't do that because we don't have to. Because we're not like a for-profit business that needs revenue in order to keep the lights on," he added.

Nevertheless, the foundation still sees this success in its work. In December 2018, Kauffman reported on [how an organization has adapted and scaled literacy education in Kansas City](#) to reach more individuals and families.

"I don't think it's done that great, but we know that it reached at least one right person," said Mays, who reported on the story. "It led to that program, Literacy KC, being adopted by one of the large corporations in town as their charity of choice for the upcoming year. And it's going to make a huge difference to that nonprofit. We know that they learned about Literacy KC on our website."

"The great takeaway from that one was then Literacy KC got a huge amount of money from a local corporation. And now that's going to further their work. It was because of that video," added Scheidegger. "That's huge, and it's not how many retweets did it get. But that's a real thing."

For Mays, this story helped shift the way he and the Public Affairs team at large understand success and view the influence their storytelling can have.

"It's a totally different kind of impact, said Mays. "I hadn't really thought in those terms until it happened about how important it is to those people in organizations that we choose to feature. What a difference that can make that's not necessarily about mass numbers, but it's about reaching the right people."

With the right targeting technology and consistent efforts to motivate and provide the opportunity for audiences to take specific, concrete actions, nonprofits like the Kauffman Foundation might be better able to effect the social change they hope to see in the world.

### **How to keep moving forward**

After a year of solidifying the approach in theory, Jacob and the rest of the Public Affairs department have to decide how to move forward with what they have learned from their attempts to answer the question of whether the foundation could be its own media company. While it is not entirely its own media company today, the shift in editorial

approach has put storytelling and what audiences are motivated by at the forefront of what they do, rather than solely highlighting the foundation's programs and initiatives.

"We have a relatively short fuse on proof that this approach works," said Jacob. "We're not going to do this for 10 years if it's not working, which is where the measurement comes in and why we have to show there's benefit back to the foundation."

Other philanthropies and nonprofits may face similar timelines to prove an audience-first editorial approach will add value to a company's work. Based on conversations with Public Affairs team members, these three areas are of key importance to focus on in order to take new thinking and frameworks about audiences to a place where there is actionable, measurable success.

### **1) More consistent, agnostic channel usage**

Under the audience-first, story-focused editorial approach, audiences are the top priority, and then the nature and focus of a story is meant to ultimately guide which communication channels are used. However, existing preferences for some channels, like a company's owned website and email newsletters, may still prevail over other channels. At Kauffman, this struggle is seen when it comes to valuing social media channels like LinkedIn and Instagram as equally important storytelling platforms to established blogs and communication streams.

"I think that there's still a bias towards (Kauffman) Currents, towards using a website channel with a long-form story," said Kim Wallace Carlson, director of engagement in entrepreneurship at the foundation.

With that being said, Wallace Carlson adds that the thinking around channels has started to shift. Social media is more prioritized, but there still are times where channels are seen as just a means of distribution — not an opportunity to host content unique to a platform and the audiences that may already exist there.

"There is still room to grow in thinking about how you do unique channel-based storytelling or channel-based campaigns," explained Wallace Carlson. "I still think that we are using some channels such as Twitter or Facebook purely as distribution. We haven't totally leveraged those channels for channel-specific content that only lives on Facebook or only lives on Instagram or only lives on Twitter. But I think it feels like we're warming up to it, but it's just a matter of figuring out how to do that and how to build in the time to do that and really think about it. Versus creating once and publishing everywhere."

Time is key to consider, too, in that the audiences need consistency in channel usage.

"From a communications strategy standpoint, I really don't like it when we use platforms sporadically," explains Lauren Aleshire, senior content marketing specialist in Public Affairs.

“I think it’s ineffective when we use Instagram for one day and then don’t use Instagram again for another month. Anyhow, I think we have to take both of those things into consideration. You know, making sure we’re communicating in some kind of ongoing basis or some kind of regular, scheduled cadence so that we can engage our readers no matter what platform it is.”

## **2) Better information collecting and sharing**

While the Public Affairs’ team has started to define and work toward measuring its successes under this new approach, the next step comes in how — and whether — to communicate and tie that success to a company’s larger work as a whole.

Aleshire cites this as one of the main difficulties Kauffman faces in navigating how the editorial approach aligns with the rest of the foundation’s work.

“We’re doing this work. We’re telling the stories. Everyone agrees it’s valuable work,” said Aleshire. “But how is it then specifically tying back to strategies? Frankly, even tying back to dashboards and the way that we communicate with people and our numbers.”

Without this clarity, Aleshire says there is a disconnect between the Public Affairs team and other programmatic departments in understanding the how editorial work at the foundation can further its larger mission.

“When I’ve written editorial work, there hasn’t been the expectation that it has an impact on the immediate goals of the program,” said Aleshire. “It’s kind of an added bonus. It’s great to be telling that story. It’s great to be raising awareness of it. People are excited about the spotlight, but as far as increasing the immediate metrics? It honestly hasn’t been part of the conversation and I think that’s probably where the disconnect is existing.”

Jacob says this disconnect isn’t unusual in this line of work, however. Nonprofits have a unique difficulty in that, while there are certain business objectives, at the end of the day there isn’t a product to sell. And while programmatically a philanthropy may want to see hard numbers on progress toward its mission, it takes time to draw those connections.

“We have real people that I can point to to show that. But we don’t have enough of them, so we’re hamstrung when we want to activate,” said Jacob. “If you want a vibrant economy, you need a lot more people, especially those that have been pushed aside, to get better skill sets through education. Better opportunities to start businesses. Better networks. Those are the types of things that we need a lot more people to champion. And that’s what we’re trying to create overall. And that’s a shift away from a communications internal agency to a public affairs approach that’s more focused on the strategy.”

And Jacob is right. The Public Affairs team set a goal of increasing overall audience engagement by 20 percent in 2019. To do this, the foundation will need to see increases

in things like views and clicks on content as well as new followers or subscribers to newsletters.

So far, page views have been up consistently compared with monthly numbers from the 2018. In March 2019, the foundation had 11,735 page-views — that's up 28 percent from February 2018 and up 7 percent from March 2018. Overall, social engagement, social followers, and email subscribers and clicks were down from the previous month, which saw spikes in most of these areas following the release of several research initiatives as well as events like the State of Entrepreneurship and Inclusion Open.

All of that is to say that the foundation is seeing growth and learning from these new examples of where the editorial approach has been applied, but the numbers aren't exactly conclusive.

Still, collecting this data and making sure its shared among departments is key to building knowledge and better understanding of the value of this new editorial approach. Processes might change, but people change much slower, said Sandler. Knowing this, she realized that she can start to shift her own colleagues on the Education team to begin understanding the editorial function and decision-making in Public Affairs more readily if she's providing examples of where there has been success.

"I realize that I wasn't showing any analytics to the Education team. So, I'm expecting them to go on this ride with me of using other channels when I'm not actually showing them like, 'Well, this is actually how much more eyeballs and how much more engagement we got putting this thing on social versus putting it on our Currents piece'," said Sandler.

"So, you have to show them the evidence for them to start to sway their opinion," Sandler said. "And I just realized that feedback loop, I wasn't providing it on the Education team. ...I can't just say, 'Hey guys! Facebook is the place to be at for your Education content.' I have to show them why am I making that decision? How is that actually going to help them programmatically?"

Showing this information will become simpler as the Public Affairs team continues to work on aligning its digital properties and platforms with a new customer relationship management (CRM) system in 2019.

"Not being able to track with where our different audiences are engaging with us at, it makes it harder to tell a full picture," said Aleshire. "We can speculate who we think our people are on Facebook based on demographic information and based on Facebook's targeting, but without also seeing the way that they interact with our other materials, we're just speculating."

### **3) Educating and shifting the mindset of the foundation as a whole**

Beyond refining technological capabilities and functions, refocusing overarching strategy has been further complicated as once-traditional internal communication roles have been expanded and redefined to better align with the new editorial approach. At the Kauffman Foundation, Public Affairs serves more roles than just as an editorial newsroom, explained Mays. Nevertheless, Mays says a pivot in editorial approach can provide an opportunity to rethink how much effort should be put toward a company's corporate communications role over editorial roles and other methods of communicating in order to meet larger strategic objectives.

"We're still an organization that's generating ideas and content. I don't want to downplay the fact that we kind of have a traditional corporate communications role, certainly the department does. And that we need to let the world know about what the foundation is doing," said Mays. "But it's sort of, from an editorial sense, part of what we're about. It's not all of what we're about."

One way this balance of traditional communications and editorial storytelling was demonstrated was in the Public Affairs' approach to a video created to present to the foundation's board, said Senior Video Producer Matt Long.

"We could've done — and we were going down the road of producing a piece — where all these people talk about how great 1 Million Cups is," said Long. "But they wanted to hear from direct whether it was an organizer and how its impacted their community, or it was an entrepreneur and how having presented 1 Million Cups has impacted their company directly."

In the video, individual stories of were presented to show the range of impact the national program has had in educating, engaging and supporting entrepreneurs since its inception in 2012. As a result, Long says the video illustrated how editorial storytelling can make the programmatic work of the foundation more genuine and relatable to audiences.

"People can see themselves in the problems that an entrepreneur is facing might be similar to the problems a colleague is facing," said Long. "You're still trying to get your angle in there about the value of 1 Million Cups but through a very real person that other entrepreneurs can identify with."

With that being said, Long believes there's still value in producing content in a more traditional way, where a video might focus more on explaining a concept or what a new program is about. And there's no doubt that the foundation will still need to produce that content from time to time. But now, examples like the 1 Million Cups board video can show others in the foundation how storytelling can be another effective method of communicating their work with those inside and outside of the foundation.

Nonetheless, whether editorial takes up part or the whole of what Public Affairs does at Kauffman, for now Public Affairs has to combat that confusion and close disconnects with other departments, according to Wallace Carlson.

“We have to do all of it,” says Wallace Carlson. “But right now, we’re leaning in one way, and it’s causing some confusion and tension around our program teams.”

Wallace Carlson says the solution here will be thinking more about how the Public Affairs team and departments like it can better serve as a strategic partner to its other program areas — even in an editorial capacity.

“I think we have a lot of opportunity for more collaboration between departments to really understand what the needs are, and if and how storytelling can help,” said Wallace Carlson. “So, what are the needs from a total cross-foundation perspective? What are the needs from program perspective? What are the needs from individual leadership perspectives?”

Alleviating this confusion and tension will take time and more conversations with different stakeholders, says Jacob. Where 2018 was spent building the new editorial approach at the foundation, Jacob says in 2019 the Public Affairs department will concentrate on showing how the new approach to storytelling can help them to serve the larger foundation’s mission.

“It’s going to be messy if you’re trying to retrofit this into any organization that has any legacy whatsoever,” he said. “There’s going to be overlap for a while. There’s going to be a ton of ambiguity. People are going to freak out for a while. You’ve got to keep them together long enough so they can get through that and keep them talking enough so that they can get through that and hopefully get to the other side of it.”

### **Upholding a legacy**

Despite these internal growing pains from the editorial shift, the fact remains that storytelling is something that — alongside programmatic efforts in education and entrepreneurship — the foundation has been doing for decades.

After working at the foundation for 25 years, Long says while storytelling might not be the foundation’s lifeblood, it definitely is in its blood.

“It’s part of our DNA,” says Long. In fact, it’s become ingrained in the routine he and Matt Pozel have created when they sit down to interview people for stories.

“I think we come from a history organizationally of telling stories,” says Long. “Matt [Pozel] sits down with people. I’ve heard this hundreds of times. His stall as I’m getting a microphone ready, or setting a light, part of his stall tactic is to say, ‘Thanks for sitting down with us. We’re the Kauffman Foundation. As you know, video is one of the ways we tell stories.’ He doesn’t know that they know that, but that’s what he always tells them. He tells them, ‘this is one of the ways we tell stories.’ And we do.”

For Pozel, who came to the foundation 20 years ago as a writer, storytelling wasn’t always done through video or an editorial lens, but storytelling always had purpose.

“I feel like from the first time I discovered I had an ability to write something and reach people was like a magic moment,” said Pozel. “But then it was also that moment to be cognizant of I can influence people. I can play off of people's emotions. I can create something that is legitimate or illegitimate, and I need to be careful about how I apply that.”

Over the past few decades, the foundation has told stories differently whether it be in writing or video, to explain and highlight programmatic areas or to inform and inspire audiences under this new approach.

“Marion Labs had a studio where they produced. They had their big corporate stuff that they produced pieces for, but they also had an in-house studio where they would produce marketing pieces and pieces for their associates. And that’s how some of this started,” said Long.

Explaining program initiatives and providing more marketing-style videos is still an important function of Public Affairs. However, now there’s more opportunity to weigh which approach — whether it be informative, promotional, editorial or something else entirely — will help guide creating content that will be most effective in resonating with audiences and sharing the foundation’s mission.

“We’re still telling the stories, we’re just doing it a different way now,” said Long. “There’s a lot more intentionality to who we’re thinking about, who we’re going to produce these pieces for. But in some respects, I feel like we could probably rationalize any approach.”

For now, the foundation is still working through the challenges of infusing branded journalism into the work the Public Affairs team does both for its audiences and other associates at the foundation. No matter how stories are told or how successful the new “audience-first, story-focused” editorial approach is, Long is confident the foundation won’t stop telling stories.

“We’re all storytellers. I mean everybody on this staff is some form of a storyteller,” said Long. “I mean that’s what they love to do. But why organizationally? You know, why did Ewing Kauffman sit down before he passed away and commit to 6 or 7 hours of telling stories about his life? He was convinced to do it by Bob Barrett at the time. But Bob Barrett was the communications director of the Kauffman Foundation at the time and knew there’d be enough [value in hearing these stories of Mr. Kauffman’s life](#).”

“It just feels like we have a visual history,” Long said. “I just feel like I’ve been able to be part of that legacy through telling stories through video. So, however we do it, that’s just what we do.”