

# Winners of the SAMIP Innovation Challenge announced

The winners of the South Africa Media Innovation Program's (SAMIP) first Innovation Challenge has been announced. The nine winners are; Children's Radio Foundation, Mosêlê, *Digest*, Hashtag Our Stories, Media Factory, The New Era, Pocket Reporter, Not Yet Uhuru Radio and Volume News.



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Bilal Randeree, the programme manager for SAMIP, said that the winners will share a pool of grant money to help them meet specific goals that will advance their projects. “This is just the beginning for SAMIP – we are excited to help these organisations financially so that they can grow and focus on their products and audiences,” Randeree said.

In addition to the grant funding, the organisations will have access to expert mentoring and expertise for the next three years, to help them become financially sustainable. “We were overwhelmed by the energy and excitement around the SAMIP Innovation Challenge – we were expecting about 100 entries, but ended up receiving more than 200,” said Mohamed Nanabhay, deputy CEO of MDIF, who chairs the SAMIP Advisory Committee.

## Accelerating digital media innovation

MDIF, a not-for-profit investment fund for independent news organisations in countries where access to independent media is under threat, manages SAMIP. The Open Society Foundation of South Africa and Omidyar Network initiated SAMIP, supporting it with \$4m over the next three years to accelerate digital media innovation among independent media outlets and encourage new entrants.

The Innovation Challenge was announced at SAMIP's launch event on 31 August 2017. The Advisory Committee, that helped select the nine winners, includes political commentator Justice Malala, Omidyar network investment principal Khuram Hussain, *Mail & Guardian* journalist Pontsho Pilane, media consultant and lecturer Dinesh Balliah and M&C Saatchi Creative Spark CEO, Matthew Buckland.

"I am very hopeful with where independent media is going," says Pilane. "Working in this industry with print sales going down and large-scale layoffs, the SAMIP applications have made me very hopeful." Pilane highlighted Media Factory, a startup that has been incubated at the Wits JamLab in Braamfontein, that she sees as the "Tinder of journalism."

## **Improving the quality of journalism**

Founded and led by Nelisa Ngqulana, Media Factory aims to create a virtual newsroom staffed by freelancers in rural and out-of-reach areas that can be accessed by large media houses looking for local reporting. Balliah picked out *Digest*, a financial literacy newsletter aimed at Millennials, as a good example of the type of innovation required in the local media space.

"Financial literacy is critical in the current economic climate and in South Africa, and ordinarily this knowledge is steeped in jargon that only a few will understand. The newsletter in itself and the languages it aims to deliver its content in is very transformative," says Balliah.

Buckland believes that the Pocket Reporter app will help improve the quality of journalism – the app guides rookie journalists in the storytelling process while still in the field.

## **Volume and standard of applications**

OpenUp has partnered with the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) in rolling out the app to dozens of community newspapers across the country and translating it into all the official languages of South Africa. "There is a need for a tool like this, and it's delivered in a practical and accessible manner as a mobile companion. I can see journalists using this and benefiting from it," Buckland added. Besides creating hyperlocal content and assisting journalists in storytelling, other projects also targeted women, which Pilane believes is an important issue.

Pilane notes that women have been excluded from the conversation and, in a country like South Africa that experiences high rates of violence against women, it was refreshing to see that some of the finalists were not only female-led but also created content aimed at those voices that have been silenced.

Hussain said that he was impressed by the volume and standard of applications. "It is incredibly encouraging to see the nine Innovation Challenge finalists representing both the geographic breadth as well as the depth of media innovation in South Africa. With the winning submissions ranging from new approaches to integrating existing tech platforms into core operations through to experimentation with new digital tools to reach a broader audience, it will be exciting to see these innovations implemented and the delivery a broad spectrum of positive impacts."

## **Diversity in applications**

"The diversity in the applications and the finalists are commendable considering how the transformation in the local media landscape is important for the future of the industry," said Justice Malala.

More than 200 applications from all corners of the country were received since the call to action was made. There was an equal distribution of nonprofits, startups and private organisations all looking to secure funding, either to get their ideas off the ground or to expand what they have developed.

In the upcoming months, SAMIP will be accepting applications for general entry into the program. Media owners, practitioners and entrepreneurs are advised to visit the SAMIP website to sign up for more details.

Below is more information on the finalists and their projects:

## Children's Radio Foundation

Children's Radio Foundation (CRF) is a Cape Town based radio station that uses radio to create opportunities for information sharing, dialogue, leadership, advocacy and community building among youth. CRF seeks to extend the capacity, reach and impact of their community radio partners through the integration of WhatsApp into their reporting, broadcast, and outreach platforms. In addition to integrating WhatsApp into reporting and broadcast, partner radio stations CRF seeks to distribute weekly WhatsApp-driven newsletters for youth, showcasing jobs and educational opportunities, profiling local youth, and discussing news and community concerns.

## Collective Media Primary Cooperative Limited

Collective Media Cooperative is a new venture based in Johannesburg. Collective Media Cooperative seeks to make media work for audiences and media workers who have been structurally excluded from ownership, education and training, and representation in South African media. Their project, Mosêlê, is a digital platform that on the frontend aims to be the 'Uber for journalists and media professionals', and on the back-end, a resource planning and project management tool.

## Digest

*Digest* is a newsletter that seeks to increase financial awareness in South Africa by providing financial news in a quirky and millennial-friendly format. *Digest* seeks to develop an app that will simulate a WhatsApp conversation and provide financial news in multiple languages. The languages they seek to focus on are Zulu, Xhosa and Afrikaans. They currently have over 700 subscribers in the 4 months since launch, with a 38% open rate.

## Hashtag Our Stories

Hashtag Our Stories is a Durban based company that creates citizen journalism shows, with mobile phones and for mobile audiences, in every language. Their project seeks to train and create a network of citizen journalists in all nine provinces, who will contribute stories to community Facebook groups.

## Pocket Reporter

Pocket Reporter is a project created by Open Up, formerly Code 4 South Africa, and is co-managed with the Association of Independent Newspapers (AIP). OpenUp is a Cape Town based NGO that uses civic technology to inform, empower and activate citizens. The AIP is a national organisation that advances the interests of local independent media outlets in South Africa.

Pocket Reporter is a mobile digital toolkit that assists journalists at community newspapers to report more effectively. This project seeks to present an innovative approach, supporting journalists to dig beyond basic details and to access datasets containing information about demographics, municipal finances, crime, and others.

## Not Yet Uhuru Radio

The Soul City Institute for Social Justice is a national social justice NGO that caters for Young Women and Girls (YWG) and the communities they live in. Soul City's feminist radio station, Not Yet Uhuru Radio, will cater for YWG and the communities they live in. 'Not Yet Uhuru' will be a mix of talk radio and music. The radio station seeks to serve as a platform for engagement with and between women, to challenge patriarchy and build a feminist consciousness in South Africa.

## Volume News

Volume News is a Johannesburg based new venture that seeks to bring local news back to community radio stations.

Volume News seeks to make use of technology tools to ensure that every community in the country can produce and distribute Volume News via their community radio station. For the station, Volume News provides the capacity to recruit local reporters to produce news stories and tools to support newsgathering, content ingesting, broadcasting and monitoring. In addition, Volume News seeks to build a devoted team of partner-reporters in every district of South Africa, that will generate local news in 11 official languages.

## **Media Factory**

Media Factory is a mobile content agency for citizen journalists across South Africa. Their project seeks to create a virtual newsroom that will connect news editors to reliable and verified freelancer journalists and connect freelance journalists, working outside the main media centres in SA to news editors who require their experience in covering breaking news.

## **The New Era**

The New Era is an initiative aimed at digitising 8 community newspapers in Mpumalanga province. The New Era will be focused on digitising community media organisations. Their project also seeks to develop a cross-platform interactive mobile App for the Mpumalanga community print sector.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>