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Income strategies and fundraising for media projects and community radio

Income strategies (beyond just grants)

I. Types of income

A sustainable community radio / media project will aim to combine multiple income sources. Some illustrative ideas:

Income stream	Description / tips	Risks / constraints to watch
Core grants / public funds	Apply for grant programmes that cover operating costs, staffing, training, outreach, infrastructure.	Grants are often time-limited, competitive, and come with heavy reporting/monitoring burdens.
Project / programme grants	Seek funding for specific projects (e.g. a youth media training programme, podcasting initiative, community reporting, outreach).	Project funding is less reliable for covering core overheads.
Sponsorship / on-air underwriting	Local businesses or institutions pay for underwriting ("this segment is brought to you by ...") or sponsor programmes.	In the UK, community radio licences limit how much revenue you can derive from advertising/sponsorship (often a cap of 50%) and some geographic restrictions.
Membership / listener contributions / donations	Encourage community members to subscribe, donate, join as "friends of the station."	Income can fluctuate; needs good stewardship and communication.
Events & live fundraising	Host concerts, community events, "open studio" days, auctions, radio marathons, fundraising drives.	Requires upfront costs, volunteer capacity, risk if ticket sales don't meet expectations.
Merchandise / product sales	Branded merchandise (T-shirts, mugs, etc.), CDs, compilation albums, etc.	Margins can be small; inventory management necessary.
Services for third parties	Offer podcast production, training, studio hire, media consultancy to local groups, schools or NGOs.	Must ensure your "commercial" work stays within what is allowed under your licence and doesn't overextend capacity.
Partnerships & consortium funding	Partner with community organisations, arts bodies, local authorities, media organisations, or even universities to bid for joint funding.	May require alignment of missions; partnership management overhead.
Social investment / community shares	In some cases, community radio stations can raise investment or community shares, particularly if structured as a social enterprise or cooperative.	Need to ensure compliance with regulations, investor expectations, and that the model makes sense financially.

Income stream	Description / tips	Risks / constraints to watch
In-kind support	Seek in-kind contributions (e.g. donated equipment, volunteered services, free studio space, pro bono media support) to reduce costs.	These don't pay the bills but can reduce your burn rate.
Local authority / municipal support	Some local councils, regional cultural bodies, or devolved administrations may provide funding for local media, civic engagement, inclusion projects.	Political and budget pressures may make such funding volatile.

II. Examples of UK funders & grant programmes for community radio / media / arts

Here are funders and schemes that either explicitly support community radio or more broadly back arts, media, community projects — which community radio stations can often fit under.

Funder / scheme	What they support (relevant to radio)	Notes / tips
Ofcom — Community Radio Fund (CRF)	A core fund specifically to support Ofcom-licensed community radio stations to cover core costs (management, volunteer coordination, outreach, admin).	For 2025–26, approx £901,742 is available. Grants will be made as a single lump sum, must be spent within ~14 months. www.ofcom.org.uk
National Lottery / Big Lottery Fund	The National Lottery Community Fund supports community projects, social initiatives, education, inclusion etc.	Radio stations can frame projects (e.g. training, inclusion, digital access) to fit their grant categories. https://tnlcommunityfund.org.uk
Arts Council England	Through its open funds and cultural funding programmes (National Lottery Project Grants, etc.), supports arts, cultural organisations, creative projects.	If your station has a creative arts or cultural dimension, mix of programming, you may qualify. https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/
Power to Change Trust	Supports community businesses in England.	If your radio station is structured as a community enterprise, you can explore their programmes. https://www.powertochange.org.uk/

Funder / scheme	What they support (relevant to radio)	Notes / tips
National Trusts and Foundations such as Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Garfield Weston, Allen Lane Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation etc.	Large independent foundation(s) funding arts, education, social change, communities.	Can fund core costs or “riskier” projects that might not attract conventional funding. See Directory of Grant Making Trusts https://www.dsc.org.uk/publication/the-directory-of-grant-making-trusts-2026-27/
Local / regional trusts and foundations	Search your area’s community foundation; they may have discretionary small grants and be more flexible.	Local Community Foundations e.g. multiple small/medium local donor funds; rolling calls. £ typically £500–£5k+ depending on fund; rolling. Position bids around inclusion, youth skills, health voices. E.g. www.llrcommunityfoundation.org.uk
Youth, music & skills	Run presenter/producer bootcamps, youth playlists, podcasts	Youth Music – Catalyser Fund / NextGen - music participation & early-career creatives; stations can partner or host. Catalyser: £30,001–£300,000 (watch 2026 round). NextGen: up to £3,000 to individuals https://www.youthmusic.org.uk/funding/i-need-funding/catalyser-fund?utm_source=chatgpt.com
Cultural / creative funds	Funds aimed at innovation, regeneration, media/tech, digital inclusion, creative industries (e.g. heritage bodies, regional arts funds).	These may require you to position your project in terms of innovation, inclusion, outreach, digital access. https://www.ukri.org/councils/innovate-uk/ The UK’s Modern Industrial Strategy / Creative Industries Growth Plan Creative Places Growth Fund (Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region, North East, West of England, West Midlands and West Yorkshire).

Funder / scheme	What they support (relevant to radio)	Notes / tips
University / academic / media collaborative grants	Work with universities or research institutes to apply for joint grants (e.g. media studies, digital inclusion, journalism).	That can also bring in “match” resources in kind (researchers, students).
European / cross-border media funds	For international or collaborative projects (e.g. media for social change, cross-cultural radio).	Note: Brexit effects may limit new funding from EU schemes, but some pan-Europe or cross-UK schemes may still exist.
Local authorities / devolved governments / arts councils of devolved administrations	These may run local grants or seed funding programs for arts, culture, or media access at the local level.	Investigate your local council’s arts / community grants. See next iteration of UKSPF

III. Major UK crowdfunding & fundraising platforms

Platform	Type(s) supported	Key advantages / notes	Things to check / limitations
Crowdfunder.co.uk	Donation / rewards / community causes	Prominent in UK for charity / community projects; no platform fee for charities. Crowdfunder UK	Check transaction fees, payment processors, and timing of fund disbursement.
JustGiving	Donation / peer-to-peer fundraising	Very widely known, trusted brand; integrates with social giving & Gift Aid. JustGiving	You’ll likely pay a fee / commission; also, donors’ experience & competition matter.
Spacehive	Civic / community infrastructure / local “place-based” projects	Good for community / public space improvement projects; allows combining grant contributions with crowd contributions. https://www.spacehive.com/	Projects often require verification / viability checks; campaign strategy must align with public interest.
Kickstarter	Creative / arts / reward-based projects	Strong for creative, media, audio / arts projects; big reach. https://www.kickstarter.com/	It’s internationally oriented; UK projects must comply with rules & possibly have shipping / reward logistics.

Platform	Type(s) supported	Key advantages / notes	Things to check / limitations
GoFundMe (UK site)	Donation / cause / personal / community	Easy to set up, trusted; flexible goals. https://www.gofundme.com/	Platform / payment fees apply; donors expect clear narrative; sometimes less ideal for "project + reward" models.
WhyDonate	Donation / cause-based crowdfunding	UK platform focused on causes and nonprofits. https://www.gofundme.com/	Check what support or visibility they offer; fees / service terms.
Triodos Crowdfunding	Ethical / impact investment & crowdfunding	For organisations with environmental, social or sustainable missions; direct investment model. triodoscrowdfunding.co.uk	More complex than simple donation crowdfunding; potential financial risk; compliance/regulation.
Funding Tree	Equity / debt / peer-to-peer for businesses & social enterprises	Regulated UK platform allowing business / social enterprise finance. https://fundingtree.biz/	Complexity of financial models; you must meet investor due diligence; more overhead.
Crowdcube	Equity crowdfunding	If your radio station is structured as a company and you offer shares, this is one of the main UK equity platforms. https://crowdcube.io/index	Strict regulatory rules (FCA), investor expectations, and risk.
Abundance Investment	Ethical / impact investment / bonds	For organisations doing sustainable / environmental / infrastructure work. https://www.abundanceinvestment.com/	More suited to "investment" projects rather than pure donation campaigns.
Eureeca	Equity fundraising	For SMEs raising capital via equity model. https://eureeca.com/	As with equity platforms, higher legal / regulatory burden.
Angels Den	Business / angel investment	Helps connect businesses / social enterprises to angel investors; sometimes hybrid crowdfunding models. https://www.angelsden.com/en-gb/	Not purely donation crowdfunding; typically for organisations with growth potential.

Further information:

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