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THE INFORMATION ECONOMY ALLIANCE

*A New Framework for Independent Publishing, Shared Access and Public-Interest
Information*

FOUNDATIONAL PAPER

Administered by SCRIBE
Social Centre for Research for Inclusive, Better and Equal Life

Invitation-based accreditation • independent publishing • shared access • public-interest information

The Information Economy Alliance

A New Framework for Independent Publishing, Shared Access and Public-Interest Information

The Alliance exists to ensure that serious independent publications can be found, trusted, approached and heard.

Abstract

The Information Economy Alliance is a new initiative created to strengthen independent publications and news services operating outside the largest mainstream media institutions.

It is administered by SCRIBE, the Social Centre for Research for Inclusive, Better and Equal Life.

Independent publications perform essential public functions. They investigate subjects neglected by larger organisations, preserve specialist knowledge, serve communities that receive little sustained coverage, develop new editorial models and provide routes into public debate for writers and researchers who would otherwise remain unheard.

Yet these publications frequently operate without the infrastructure available to major media groups. They may have limited access to sources, legal resources, syndication opportunities, institutional recognition, specialist contacts, data, funding and professional networks. Their work may be valuable while remaining difficult for readers, contributors and potential partners to assess.

The Information Economy Alliance exists to address this imbalance.

It establishes an invitation-based network of independent publications that have demonstrated seriousness, editorial purpose and compatibility with the Alliance's principles. Selected publications may receive Information Economy Alliance accreditation, become members of the Alliance, gain access to exclusive or restricted news sources made available to SCRIBE or the Alliance, and receive honorary membership in SCRIBE.

The accreditation is not a government licence, statutory registration or guarantee that every published statement is correct. It is a private institutional recognition awarded by the Information Economy Alliance. Its purpose is to identify independent news services that merit greater attention, access and cooperation.

The Alliance seeks to create an information economy in which public importance is not determined solely by institutional size, advertising power or proximity to established media networks.

1. Introduction

The modern information environment is both abundant and concentrated.

More material can be published than at any previous point in history. A small organisation can operate a website, commission reporting, publish research, conduct interviews and reach international audiences with limited physical infrastructure.

At the same time, authority, access and visibility remain concentrated.

Large media organisations benefit from established reputations, public-relations contacts, press databases, legal departments, syndication systems, institutional relationships and habitual access to decision-makers. Their journalists are often recognised immediately as legitimate participants in public life.

Independent publications may not receive the same treatment.

They can be excluded from announcements, ignored by official communications teams, denied access to events, overlooked by potential sources and treated as inherently less serious despite the quality of their work. Their smaller scale may be mistaken for lower value. Their independence may be treated as an absence of legitimacy rather than a different model of publishing.

The Information Economy Alliance is founded on the belief that this imbalance weakens public knowledge.

A healthy information environment requires more than a small number of dominant institutions. It requires specialised publications, local reporting, independent analysis, experimental editorial models and serious outlets willing to address subjects that established organisations may consider too small, too difficult, too unconventional or insufficiently profitable.

The Alliance exists to help those publications operate with greater recognition and collective strength.

2. The information economy

Information is not merely content.

It is a social and economic resource.

Information shapes:

- public understanding
- institutional reputation
- consumer decisions
- political priorities
- investment
- research
- cultural memory
- community identity
- access to opportunity
- the visibility of people and problems.

The term “information economy” refers to the systems through which information is gathered, interpreted, exchanged, restricted, commercialised and made authoritative.

Within this economy, different organisations possess unequal power.

Some have immediate access to governments, companies, researchers, campaigners and public figures. Others must rely on public documents, secondary reporting or unsolicited submissions. Some publications can command attention through their name alone. Others must prove their legitimacy repeatedly.

The Information Economy Alliance seeks to make this economy more open to serious independent participants.

It does not seek to erase differences between publications or claim that every independent outlet is trustworthy. Independence alone is not evidence of quality. Small publications can make serious mistakes, publish weak material or operate irresponsibly, just as large publications can.

The Alliance instead creates a framework through which selected independent news services can demonstrate institutional commitment, gain shared access and participate in a network based on common standards.

3. Why independent publications matter

Independent publications often provide forms of value that are difficult to reproduce within large media organisations.

They may focus on:

- a particular region
- a specialist industry
- a cultural or intellectual movement
- a neglected community
- a narrow field of research
- public-interest investigations
- emerging political or social questions
- commentary excluded from conventional editorial boundaries
- long-term coverage of issues that mainstream media address only briefly.

Their scale can also provide advantages.

Smaller publications may be able to:

- respond quickly
- experiment with format
- maintain close relationships with readers
- devote attention to highly specific subjects
- publish work that does not need mass-market appeal
- preserve unusual archives
- develop expertise through sustained specialisation
- provide platforms for new writers and researchers.

These strengths are often accompanied by vulnerability.

Independent outlets may depend heavily on one or two editors. They may have little negotiating power with platforms. They may struggle to establish credibility with sources. Their reporting may disappear if the organisation closes. They may lack access to professional support, secure information channels or collaborative networks.

The Alliance is intended to preserve the advantages of independence while reducing some of its structural disadvantages.

4. Founding purpose

The Information Economy Alliance has been created to:

- empower serious independent publications
- improve their access to sources and information
- provide institutional recognition
- encourage cooperation between member publications
- strengthen editorial standards without imposing uniformity
- make it easier for sources to approach independent media
- create routes through which information can reach appropriate specialist outlets
- support publications that serve a genuine public, cultural or informational purpose
- expand the range of organisations recognised as participants in public-interest journalism.

The Alliance is not intended to create a central editorial authority over its members.

Member publications remain independent. They retain control over their identities, editorial positions, coverage and methods, subject to any terms attached to membership or use of shared information.

The Alliance provides recognition, access and cooperation rather than ownership.

5. Administration by SCRIBE

The Information Economy Alliance is run by SCRIBE.

SCRIBE is the Social Centre for Research for Inclusive, Better and Equal Life. It is an independent research and campaign organisation concerned with better, more inclusive, more equal and more private forms of everyday life.

SCRIBE provides the Alliance with:

- institutional administration
- policy development
- accreditation decisions
- relationship management
- source handling
- publication standards
- membership records
- public documentation
- oversight of awards and recognition
- a wider intellectual and social framework.

The Information Economy Alliance remains a distinct initiative with its own purpose and membership.

Its relationship with SCRIBE allows participating publications to connect independent journalism with wider work concerning public understanding, social inclusion, institutional accountability and freedom of information.

6. Information Economy Alliance accreditation

The Alliance awards accreditation to selected independent news services.

Accreditation is invitation-based.

A publication cannot obtain accreditation merely by paying a fee, displaying a badge or describing itself as a member. The Alliance may identify publications itself, consider recommendations or invite a publication to provide information for review.

Accreditation recognises that, in the Alliance's judgement, a publication has demonstrated sufficient seriousness, public purpose and editorial substance to participate in the network.

Relevant considerations may include:

- a clear editorial identity
- a record of publication
- evidence of original reporting, analysis or specialist value
- responsible treatment of sources
- willingness to correct significant errors
- transparent ownership or operation
- distinction between editorial material and advertising
- respect for privacy and dignity
- compatibility with the purposes of the Alliance
- absence of deliberate fabrication or systematic deception
- a genuine independent publishing function.

Not every accredited publication will use the same editorial philosophy.

The Alliance may include publications with different political, cultural or intellectual perspectives. Accreditation should not be interpreted as agreement with every opinion published by a member.

The recognition concerns the publication's participation in the Alliance and its assessed institutional qualities, not universal endorsement of its contents.

7. The meaning and status of accreditation

Information Economy Alliance accreditation is a private institutional accreditation.

It is issued by the Alliance under standards developed and administered by SCRIBE.

It is not:

- government approval
- statutory press regulation
- a broadcasting licence
- a professional licence
- university accreditation
- UKAS accreditation
- legal certification that every article is accurate
- immunity from criticism or liability
- an official determination that a publication is unbiased.

Accreditation means that the Alliance has invited and recognised the publication as a qualifying independent news service and admitted it to Alliance membership.

The distinction is important.

The accreditation is intended to become a respected mark within independent publishing because of the quality of its membership, the seriousness of the standards applied and the practical value of participation.

Prestige must arise from the integrity of the system rather than from exaggerated claims.

8. Membership benefits

Accredited publications become members of the Information Economy Alliance.

Membership may provide access to the following benefits.

Institutional recognition

Members may identify themselves as accredited members of the Information Economy Alliance.

They may use the approved Alliance accreditation mark in accordance with its usage rules.

The mark provides readers, contributors, sources and potential partners with a visible indication that the publication participates in a recognised independent-media network.

Access to Alliance news sources

The Alliance may receive information, announcements, documents, statements, research, contacts and story leads from sources that approach SCRIBE or the Alliance directly.

Some sources may choose to make information available:

- exclusively to the Alliance
- first to Alliance members
- only to selected specialist members
- under embargo
- subject to confidentiality
- through a secure or restricted process.

Accredited members may receive access to relevant material according to subject, capacity, confidentiality and source instructions.

Membership does not guarantee access to every source or item.

Source matching

The Alliance may help match sources with publications suited to their information.

For example, a specialist source may be better served by a focused independent publication than by a general national outlet. The Alliance can identify member publications with the relevant audience, expertise or editorial interest.

Shared opportunities

Members may receive:

- interview opportunities
- press invitations

- calls for contributors
- research leads
- document releases
- requests for comment
- collaborative publishing opportunities
- access to briefings
- notices from other member publications.

Collaboration

Alliance members may work together on:

- shared investigations
- interviews
- research
- data projects
- public-interest campaigns
- republishing arrangements
- events
- joint statements
- source protection
- specialist coverage.

Participation in a collaboration remains voluntary.

Network membership

Members become part of a developing network of independent publications.

The Alliance may maintain private or public directories, communication channels, meetings and briefings for members.

Public listing

Accredited publications may be listed in the official Information Economy Alliance directory.

The directory may include:

- publication name
- website
- editorial focus
- geographic or specialist area
- accreditation date
- membership status
- contact route
- relevant partnership or disclosure information.

Honorary membership in SCRIBE

Each accredited news service receives honorary institutional membership in SCRIBE.

This recognises the publication as a contributor to SCRIBE's broader work concerning public knowledge, social inclusion and better systems of everyday life.

Honorary membership may include:

- recognition on SCRIBE's website
- invitations to relevant SCRIBE activities
- opportunities to contribute to consultations and publications
- access to selected SCRIBE resources
- participation in relevant research or campaign discussions.

Honorary membership does not automatically provide voting rights, governance authority or ownership of SCRIBE unless this is expressly granted under a future membership structure.

9. Responsibilities of accredited members

Membership creates opportunities, but it also creates responsibilities.

Accredited publications should:

- represent their accreditation accurately
- avoid implying government or statutory recognition
- protect confidential and embargoed information
- distinguish reporting from paid promotion
- correct significant factual errors where identified
- avoid knowingly publishing fabricated evidence
- comply with applicable law
- respect source agreements
- avoid using Alliance membership to intimidate critics or misrepresent authority
- notify the Alliance of material changes affecting eligibility
- use the Alliance mark only in approved forms.

Members are not required to become politically neutral or editorially uniform.

They are expected to act in a way that does not render Alliance recognition materially misleading.

10. Sources and exclusive access

One of the Alliance's central functions is to make independent media more accessible to sources.

People and organisations often possess information that deserves publication but do not know which independent outlet to approach.

The Alliance may provide a central route for:

- whistleblowers
- researchers
- campaigners
- community organisations
- small businesses
- authors
- specialists
- public-interest sources
- institutions seeking appropriate independent coverage.

Sources may submit:

- statements

- press releases
- documents
- research
- corrections
- story proposals
- interview offers
- evidence
- announcements.

The Alliance will not guarantee publication.

It may assess whether material is relevant, credible and appropriate before forwarding it to members.

Where material is provided exclusively, the Alliance should clearly record:

- the scope of exclusivity
- the relevant period
- permitted recipients
- embargo terms
- attribution requirements
- confidentiality conditions
- whether independent verification is required
- whether publication rights are shared or limited.

Exclusive access should create genuine informational value rather than artificial scarcity alone.

11. Editorial independence of members

Alliance membership does not transfer editorial control to SCRIBE or the Information Economy Alliance.

Member publications remain responsible for:

- deciding what to publish
- verifying information
- complying with law
- obtaining necessary responses
- protecting sources
- correcting mistakes
- distinguishing fact from opinion
- maintaining their own editorial policies.

The Alliance may provide information, but the receipt of material from the Alliance does not make it automatically true.

Members should apply their own editorial judgement and verification procedures.

SCRIBE and the Alliance may decline responsibility for how a member uses information unless SCRIBE or the Alliance directly commissioned, controlled or co-published the work.

12. Independence from mainstream media

The Alliance is created to empower publications outside the largest mainstream media institutions. It is not created merely to oppose mainstream media.

Large media organisations can produce important, rigorous and valuable journalism. Independent publications can produce weak or irresponsible work. The distinction between mainstream and independent media should not be converted into a simplistic distinction between falsehood and truth.

The Alliance's concern is structural.

A small number of dominant organisations should not possess exclusive cultural authority to determine:

- which issues deserve attention
- which sources are considered legitimate
- which voices enter public debate
- what counts as journalism
- which specialist subjects are economically worth covering.

The purpose of the Alliance is to broaden participation in the information economy.

It is a project of plurality, not automatic hostility.

13. Accreditation decisions

Accreditation may be awarded following an internal review by SCRIBE or an appointed Alliance panel.

The process may consider:

- the publication's website and archive
- editorial policies
- public corrections
- ownership and funding
- representative articles
- complaints or controversies
- source practices
- public-interest value
- the publication's stated purpose
- whether membership would strengthen the Alliance.

The Alliance may request further information.

An invitation may be:

- accepted
- declined
- deferred
- offered conditionally
- limited to a trial period.

The Alliance is not obliged to invite every eligible publication.

Accreditation is partly an assessment and partly the formation of an institutional relationship. Capacity, subject balance, risk and strategic relevance may therefore be considered alongside minimum standards.

14. Levels and categories of recognition

The Alliance may initially operate a single accreditation category.

As it develops, it may establish categories such as:

Accredited Member

A recognised independent news service with full Alliance membership.

Specialist Member

A publication recognised for concentrated expertise in a defined field.

Emerging Member

A newer publication with clear potential but a limited publishing history.

Corresponding Member

A publication, journalist or information service participating in selected Alliance activities without full accreditation.

Honorary Member

A person or institution recognised for significant contribution to independent publishing or the public information environment.

Any categories should be explained clearly so that readers can understand their meaning.

15. Accreditation marks

Accredited publications may be permitted to display an official mark.

A mark might state:

**Accredited Member
Information Economy Alliance**

or:

**Information Economy Alliance
Accredited Independent News Service**

The mark should link to an Alliance verification page wherever practical.

The verification page may show:

- the accredited publication
- its current status
- accreditation date
- category

- website
- any relevant conditions
- whether the accreditation remains active.

The mark must not be used:

- after accreditation ends
- on unrelated organisations
- to imply approval of a specific article unless stated
- to suggest statutory regulation
- in a materially altered form
- to promote deceptive or unlawful activity.

16. Suspension and withdrawal

Accreditation may be reviewed, suspended or withdrawn.

Possible grounds include:

- deliberate fabrication
- systematic publication of materially deceptive information
- misuse of confidential sources
- serious misrepresentation of accreditation
- undisclosed ownership changes
- repeated failure to correct major errors
- unlawful use of Alliance information
- unauthorised sharing of restricted material
- conduct fundamentally incompatible with the Alliance's purposes
- inactivity over a substantial period
- refusal to provide information necessary to verify continued eligibility.

Suspension may be used while a serious issue is investigated.

The Alliance should distinguish between:

- disagreement with an editorial position
- an ordinary mistake
- a pattern of negligence
- deliberate deception
- conduct that fundamentally undermines accreditation.

Accreditation should not be removed merely because a member publishes criticism of SCRIBE or the Alliance.

17. Complaints and review

People may submit complaints concerning:

- misuse of the Alliance mark
- false claims of membership
- serious conduct by an accredited publication
- conflicts of interest
- accreditation decisions

- mishandling of confidential information.

The Alliance may:

- request evidence
- seek a response from the member
- dismiss an unsupported complaint
- recommend corrective action
- issue a warning
- suspend accreditation
- withdraw accreditation
- publish an explanatory decision where appropriate.

The Alliance is not a statutory press regulator and does not replace legal remedies, publication complaints procedures or professional regulation.

18. Information privacy and source protection

The Alliance may handle sensitive information.

Its approach should reflect SCRIBE's broader commitment to privacy.

The Alliance should:

- collect only information reasonably needed
- avoid unnecessary source identification
- limit internal access
- record confidentiality and embargo conditions
- use secure communication where proportionate
- avoid publishing personal information without justification
- distinguish anonymous, confidential and off-record information
- explain that no digital system can guarantee absolute security.

A source should not assume that information is confidential merely because it was sent to the Alliance. Confidentiality should be agreed clearly where it is required.

The Alliance will not deliberately use source access as a pretext for mass data collection or intrusive profiling.

19. Public-interest orientation

The Alliance exists to support information with public, cultural, specialist or community value.

This does not mean every member must operate as a charity or avoid all commercial activity.

Independent publications need sustainable revenue. Members may use:

- advertising
- subscriptions
- sponsorship
- commissioned work
- memberships
- donations
- grants

- commercial publishing
- events
- affiliate relationships.

The relevant question is whether these activities are represented honestly and whether editorial recognition can be purchased secretly.

The Alliance may support commercially sustainable independent media while opposing undisclosed pay-to-publish practices presented as independent journalism.

20. Long-term development

The Information Economy Alliance may evolve into a broader support institution for independent media.

Possible future activities include:

- shared press and source databases
- secure submission systems
- collaborative investigations
- legal-information resources
- training
- editorial templates
- research grants
- fellowships
- annual conferences
- awards
- syndication systems
- archival support
- emergency assistance for threatened publications
- shared technology
- collective purchasing
- publication directories
- public education concerning independent media
- representation of member interests.

Development should follow actual need and capacity.

The Alliance should not imitate the bureaucracy of larger institutions merely for appearance. Its purpose is to create practical value.

21. Measures of success

The Alliance's success should be measured by more than the number of badges issued.

Relevant measures include:

- whether independent publications gain useful sources
- whether exclusive information reaches appropriate audiences
- whether members collaborate
- whether sources are more willing to approach independent media
- whether accredited publications become easier to identify and verify

- whether specialist stories receive wider attention
- whether members improve their editorial practices
- whether independent outlets gain sustainable relationships
- whether the public information environment becomes more plural
- whether valuable publications survive and grow.

Prestige is meaningful only where it reflects real value.

The Alliance should therefore seek to make accreditation desirable by making membership useful and selective.

22. Foundational principles

The Information Economy Alliance is guided by the following principles.

Independence

Publications should be able to participate without surrendering their editorial identity.

Access

Serious independent outlets should have better routes to sources, documents and institutional information.

Plurality

The information economy should contain many kinds of publications rather than a small number of dominant voices.

Integrity

Accreditation should be based on genuine assessment and should not be available merely for payment.

Accuracy

Members should make reasonable efforts to distinguish truth, interpretation and opinion.

Correction

Credible publications acknowledge and correct significant mistakes.

Privacy

Sources, contributors and ordinary readers should not surrender unnecessary personal information.

Transparency

Material ownership, funding and conflicts should be disclosed where they affect how work is understood.

Cooperation

Independent publications can remain distinct while sharing access, knowledge and opportunities.

Public value

Information should not be considered important only when it attracts the largest possible audience.

23. Conclusion

Independent publications are not peripheral to the information economy.

They are part of its essential infrastructure.

They preserve specialist knowledge, investigate neglected subjects, represent communities, test new editorial forms and widen the boundaries of public discussion. Their weakness is often not a lack of value, but a lack of access, recognition and collective infrastructure.

The Information Economy Alliance has been created to address that problem.

Through invitation-based accreditation, membership, source access, collaboration and institutional recognition, the Alliance will help qualifying independent news services operate with greater authority and opportunity.

Its accreditation is not a substitute for scrutiny. It is an invitation to greater participation and responsibility.

Its membership is not an attempt to make every publication identical. It is a way of allowing independent organisations to remain independent while becoming less isolated.

Its purpose is not to declare war on established media.

Its purpose is to ensure that the power to gather, interpret and distribute important information is not reserved for the largest institutions.

A stronger information economy is one in which serious independent publications can be found, trusted, approached and heard.

That is the purpose of the Information Economy Alliance.

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