



Deaf Journalism Europe

**BUSINESS MODELS
FOR DEAF-LED NEWS/
MEDIA ORGANISATIONS**



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Overview

The results of the surveys conducted by the consortium of the Deaf Journalism Europe (DJE) project in six participating European countries reveal a strong preference within deaf communities for a dedicated form of news provision. There is a clear inclination towards news items delivered directly in the national sign language, presented by a deaf signer, and produced by a deaf-led media organisation. At the same time, the findings indicate an expectation that such news services be made available free of charge. This presents a considerable challenge for the media companies and organisations involved, as it limits their capacity to offer these services on a sustainable basis. This document provides a range of tools and models intended to serve as inspiration for developing a well-founded business plan. This document has been published digitally on our joint website: www.deafjournalism.eu.

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1. Introduction

In most European countries, the provision of news in sign language is primarily delivered by public broadcasters and financed with public funds. This is often achieved by including (hearing) sign language interpreters on screen. However, various academic studies have shown that this form of news and information accessibility is insufficient for many deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals; they often struggle to fully understand the interpreted content. These issues are discussed in detail in a separate policy recommendation document, included as Deliverable D4.4 of the Deaf Journalism Europe project.

1.1. Multiple news sources in sign language

In light of Article 21 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, entitled *Freedom of expression and access to information*, it is not only essential that deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens have access to comprehensible information, but also that they can access multiple sources of information in their national sign language.

Six European deaf-led media organisations have undertaken efforts, co-funded by the European Commission, to produce their own news content in the national sign language of each participating country. The results of the surveys carried out by the DJE consortium in six participating European countries (see Deliverable D4.1) reveal a clear preference within deaf communities for this type of news provision. At the same time, the survey results indicate that not everyone is willing to pay for such services once the DJE project concludes. There is a prevailing expectation that these news services remain freely accessible, funded by the government.

1.2. Economic challenges

In practice, public funding for sign language news provision is often granted exclusively to public broadcasters. As a result, alternative deaf-led sign language news sources rarely receive structural support. Many deaf-led media organisations across Europe struggle with this lack of long-term (government) funding and are therefore often reliant on short-term projects to maintain operations, including the production of news content.

The constant need to seek additional funding imposes a significant mental burden on both management and staff. Moreover, many of these organisations face difficulties in recruiting new deaf employees with the required training background and skills. This is partly due to the longstanding structural disadvantages experienced by deaf people in mainstream education, and because the sector is highly specialized, serving a relatively small community.

Commercial news media typically rely on advertising revenue and aim to reach a broad audience. This presents a challenge for deaf-led media organisations operating in a niche market. In view of the desire to maintain a degree of independence from both government

funding and commercial advertisers, a subscription-based model may offer a potential solution.

However, discussions with various deaf-led media organisations in Europe suggest that a subscription model is often unfeasible in practice. This is not only due to the limited size of the potential subscriber base within the deaf community – resulting in insufficient revenue to cover operational costs – but also due to a prevailing mindset in which free access to information is taken for granted. This may be because deaf people, on average, tend to have a more vulnerable economic status compared to the general population. This is largely the result of being severely discriminated against and disadvantaged in the fields of education and the labour market in many European countries. Additionally, they may not always be fully aware that access to various news sources, such as newspapers and news apps, often requires payment, and that the so-called “free” news services on national broadcasters are in fact funded through taxation.

1.3. Key questions

Despite the challenges, the subscription model developed by Médiapi, the French DJE project partner, demonstrates that direct financial support from within the deaf community is attainable – provided it is accompanied by strong community-building efforts. Nevertheless, Médiapi continues to face challenges in securing a sufficient number of subscribers. A dedicated marketing plan was developed for this purpose (see Deliverable D4.2), aimed at encouraging deaf individuals to take out a subscription.

This deliverable addresses a number of key questions raised by deaf-led media organisations, based on the findings of the DJE surveys:

- How can the competitiveness of deaf-led news services be enhanced, in order to demonstrate clear added value for subscribers, advertisers, and sponsors?
- What differentiated strategies can be employed to reach new and hard-to-reach audiences, and to expand the scope, depth, and diversity of both content and outreach to better meet the expectations of viewers and potential subscribers?
- Is Médiapi’s business model transferable, or are there alternative economic models to consider? What are the opportunities and limitations of the various approaches?
- What are the operational costs, and how can the production of deaf-led news services be organised as cost-efficiently as possible?
- How can journalistic and technical skills be strengthened to address concerns regarding the quality of deaf-led news provision?

Based on the robust business plan of the French project partner Médiapi, the experiences of the other project partners, and the survey results, this document offers a range of tools and models designed to inspire the development of a well-founded business plan. This is intended

to support the financial sustainability of deaf-led news provision in national sign languages and to safeguard the right of deaf sign language users to accessible information.

2. Positioning and competitive strategy

To strengthen the position of deaf-led news services within a media landscape where interpreted news broadcasts are often regarded as the norm – by governments, national broadcasters, and even some members of the sign language community (including hearing interpreters) – it is crucial to articulate a clear positioning. This positioning can serve as a foundation for developing a business plan, marketing strategy, or public relations materials aimed at potential investors, sponsors, advertisers, and subscribers.

2.1. Mission and vision

The mission and vision of deaf-led media organisations in Europe are rooted in a fundamental human right: the right of deaf sign language users to access information in their own language. Academic research shows that the interpreted news broadcasts of public service broadcasters are insufficiently comprehensible for many deaf individuals. This has led to increased awareness among deaf citizens that the right to information not only entails the presence of sign language, but also that the content must be understandable.

Furthermore, these organisations emphasise the importance of multiple (independent) news sources in national sign language, which contribute to more nuanced opinion-forming within the deaf community. This aligns with the principles enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, particularly Article 21 on freedom of expression and access to information (see also Deliverable D4.4).

The mission is formulated as follows: *"To provide daily high-quality news in national sign language, presented by deaf signers, tailored to the linguistic and informational needs of the deaf community, with the aim of achieving full inclusion."*

The vision reads: *"To realise inclusive news consumption for deaf sign language users, whereby they enjoy equal access to comprehensive news content in their own language, on par with hearing citizens. At the same time, the aim is to ensure equal opportunities for deaf news and media professionals within the media sector."*

2.2. Core values

This section outlines the key principles that enable a deaf-led media organisation producing news in national sign language to differentiate itself from competitors (see also Deliverable D4.4):

- **News 'in' the national sign language:** Rather than simply adding (hearing) sign language interpreters to conventional news programmes, a 'deaf framework' is applied. This avoids the translation of visual media without consideration of the specific features and structures of sign language, which can result in unnatural interpretations influenced by spoken language norms (a 'hearing framework').
- **News production led by deaf people:** The entire news production process is managed by deaf professionals, with particular attention given to presentation by deaf news anchors who are native signers. As members of a cultural-linguistic minority themselves, they have an innate understanding of how news is most effectively consumed by deaf audiences. In addition, the employment of deaf journalists and media workers contributes to a more inclusive and representative media landscape.
- **Responsive to the linguistic and informational needs of deaf sign language users:** Deaf people often have limited access to news compared to hearing individuals. To avoid reliance on a single interpreted news broadcast (e.g. one evening broadcast on a public channel), deaf-led news services tailor their selection of news items to the needs of deaf signers. Instead of relying on conventional translation or interpretation, the concept of *transcreation*¹ is used. This combines linguistic translation, cultural adaptation, and creative reinterpretation of news content, ensuring the final output aligns with sign language norms and is more easily understood by deaf audiences.
- **Co-creation with the deaf community:** In line with the principle of “nothing about us without us”, there is continuous collaboration with the deaf community. As the deaf-led media organisation is an active part of the community, there is ongoing exchange, ensuring that the news offering remains aligned with developments in sign language usage and the general knowledge base of the average deaf signer.
- **News from a deaf perspective and 'Deaf news':** Mainstream news is presented from a deaf perspective, highlighting deaf experiences and viewpoints. This enables deaf individuals to identify with both the content and the mode of delivery. In addition, deaf-specific news items – which are often overlooked or neglected by mainstream media – are covered.

2.3. Strategic considerations

While editorial independence is a core value, financial stability is essential for the sustainable production and distribution of news in national sign language. This applies not only to deaf-led media organisations aiming to develop long-term daily news services, but also to deaf audiences, who benefit from regular and reliable access to such content. In order to prevent deaf sign language users from having only sporadic or occasional access to high-quality news provision in their sign language due to short-term projects and voluntary staff efforts, a solid

¹ Linder, S. (2023). *Analysing the understandability of news "with" and "in" Sign Language: subtitle*. (Master's thesis for European Master in Sign Language Interpreting).

business model for deaf-led media organisations is essential. This model should ensure a stable income stream and allow for effective long-term planning.

Given the high societal value of news provision in national sign language – fulfilling a critical need that enables deaf people to exercise their right to information and freedom of expression – it is essential that such news services, or at least a portion thereof, remain freely accessible. Free news publications not only support outreach to a broader audience, but also contribute to the development of an active and engaged deaf community. This approach increases the visibility of deaf-led media organisations and enhances their recognition through community engagement and goodwill. In turn, this can stimulate other income sources such as subscriptions, donations, and sponsorships.

3. Growth strategies

To enhance the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of deaf-led news provision in national sign languages, and to ensure it continues to offer added value to its followers, a range of growth strategies can be deployed. These strategies aim to broaden both the reach and the content offering of the service, in terms of volume, depth, and diversity.

The core news content package may be made freely available by the deaf-led media organisation, in line with its role as a socially responsible enterprise and its commitment to the deaf community. Additional packages offering specialised or in-depth content may be made available to followers through a paid subscription model, should they wish to access such content.

The Ansoff Matrix offers a valuable strategic tool in this regard, helping to identify potential avenues for expansion. It supports the media organisation in determining appropriate growth strategies with the goal of generating additional revenue, which can subsequently be reinvested in expanding the news offering or reaching new target audiences.

	Existing market	New market
Existing product	Market penetration	Market development
New product	Product development	Diversification

Table 1 – The Ansoff Matrix

3.1. Market penetration

The aim of market penetration is to increase the reach of existing news content within the current target audience. By offering a free news bundle, a deaf-led media organisation can attract a larger following, for instance by increasing visibility on social media channels.

At the same time, existing followers may be encouraged to subscribe to more extensive or in-depth news content. Efforts to strengthen audience loyalty can also be supported through

promotional campaigns or other marketing initiatives, as outlined in Deliverable D4.2 (Marketing Plan).

In addition, the distribution network can be strengthened and expanded – for example, via newsletters, a mobile application, additional social media platforms, or even a television channel. An increase in click-through rates, followers, and viewership can ultimately lead to additional income through sponsorship and advertising.

3.2. Market development

Market development focuses on reaching new target audiences with the existing news content in national sign language. These may include hard-to-reach groups such as older deaf individuals with limited access to digital media, deaf people residing in care facilities, or deaf migrants. Reaching such groups may require an adapted marketing communication approach, in which physical and in-person interactions – for example through deaf clubs, community centres, or care institutions – play an important role.

In addition, hearing sign language users represent an interesting target audience, such as interpreting students and sign language interpreters. Deaf, hard-of-hearing, or late-deafened individuals who acquired sign language later in life and wish to maintain or develop their language skills also constitute a valuable audience.

External organisations such as schools, educational institutions, libraries, cultural centres, and research bodies may also be considered potential target groups.

Finally, the existing news offering can be made more accessible to a broader group of non-sign language users, through the addition of subtitles or written transcripts. This responds to the needs of, for example, hearing relatives and family members of deaf individuals, policymakers, and other professionals who interact with the deaf community. It may also benefit deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who do not (yet) use sign language (fluently).

3.3. Product development

In addition to the current (free) news offering, new (paid) products may be developed for the existing target audience. Possible options include:

- **Educational formats** in national sign language on topics such as elections, healthcare, or technology;
- **Debate programmes** in which current issues are discussed from multiple perspectives, aiming to stimulate critical reflection and dialogue;
- **In-depth interviews** and **vodcasts** with a human-interest focus;
- **Investigative journalism** content covering exclusive and often overlooked news stories;

- **Other formats** developed in response to audience demand or through co-creation with the community.

3.4. Diversification

While the introduction of a new product – aligned with the existing offering – in a new market carries significant (financial) risks, it may also create new opportunities. Potential initiatives include:

- Lexicon videos featuring terminology and jargon from current affairs. These videos may be informative not only for deaf individuals wishing to stay up to date with (new) terminology in sign language, but also for interpreters and interpreting students;
- Content in International Sign (IS) to reach deaf communities abroad;
- Tailored news programmes for deaf children.

In addition, subscribers may also be offered access to a broader range of content produced by the deaf-led media organisation, beyond news alone. This could include other (fictional) videos, documentaries, entertainment or human-interest video series, events, cultural programming, educational initiatives, and more.

4. Economic models

As stated in Article 21 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – “Freedom of opinion and expression and access to information” – many deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals expect information intended for the general public to be made freely available in their national sign language. However, in practice, it is evident that this news provision is not truly “free.” Public broadcasters, for example, are generally funded by public means, to which deaf and hard-of-hearing citizens contribute through taxes or similar public funding systems.

For deaf-led organisations, it remains a significant financial challenge to structurally produce high-quality news content. To prevent these organisations from continuing to operate on a voluntary basis, draining themselves purely out of social commitment, it is necessary to explore various economic models that can generate structural income. Each model must be evaluated for its strengths and weaknesses, with the aim of finding a sustainable and appropriate funding model. The choice of one or more economic models requires careful consideration between societal relevance and financial feasibility.

4.1. Government-funded model

Within Europe, this model is primarily applicable to public broadcasters who receive subsidies from governments or other forms of public funding. This generally occurs within the framework of legal obligations that governments have to make public information accessible

to deaf citizens. The implementation of this mandate is often entrusted to a public broadcaster through an agreement that includes stipulations for making (news) programmes available in national sign language and/or accessible through the use of sign language interpreters.

It would be a valuable opportunity if public broadcasters – who often lack sufficient internal expertise – could outsource this task to an external media company with specialised knowledge in sign language media. A good example of this is Denmark, where the sign language media company Døvefilm is responsible for producing news content in *Dansk Tegnsprog* (DTS), the Danish Sign Language. These news items are subsequently distributed by the national broadcaster, Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR).

4.1.1. Advantages

Government funding often provides financial stability, typically within multi-year grant periods. This grants sign language media companies access to broader production and distribution resources, including the use of footage from public broadcasters – which can significantly reduce the cost of news footage licences – and broadcast via television, an important channel for especially older deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences.

Outsourcing production to an external sign language media company that understands the language and information needs of the target audience offers additional benefits for the public broadcaster. The obligation to provide news in national sign language is often seen as a burden rather than an opportunity. Instead of minimising this accessibility requirement by employing (hearing) sign language interpreters, a high-quality news production can be achieved.

Additionally, involving multiple sign language media companies in the execution of this task can stimulate the market. Competition between these companies could improve the quality of news provision in sign language.

4.1.2. Limitations

There are also some limitations to this model. There is a risk of limited editorial independence, due to political influence or the strict hierarchical structure of national broadcasters, which are often led by hearing individuals without sign language proficiency. As a result, there is sometimes less room for news items specifically targeting the deaf community – such as, for instance, the Deaflympics – often under the guise of an inclusive editorial policy that prefers to avoid content tailored to specific target groups.

An additional risk arises when solely relying on government funding. In such a case, there is little room to develop alternative income sources. Moreover, this could lead to a situation where deaf citizens have access to only one news source in sign language – that of the public broadcaster – potentially limiting their ability to form fully informed opinions.

4.2. Subsidy or grant-funded model

There are various subsidy and grant opportunities at both national and European levels to support the journalistic, cultural, and creative sectors. One example is the European project Deaf Journalism Europe, which made news content available in sign languages through co-funding from the European Commission (via the Journalism Partnerships programme). This programme supports cross-border projects aimed at strengthening the wider news media sector.

4.2.1. Advantages

This model often encourages new initiatives and innovative projects, such as investigative journalism, cross-border collaborations, or the use of new technologies and platforms. With these subsidies and grants, journalists and media organisations can focus on producing high-quality, in-depth content without the pressure of political influence, commercial interests, or advertising revenue.

Subsidies and grants can be especially useful for projects that focus on less commercial but socially valuable topics, such as niche content, minority perspectives, or local journalism. This can contribute to supporting a broader range of news in sign language, which might otherwise be difficult to achieve within a fully commercial model. Additionally, European programmes often provide access to networks of other media projects, organisations, and journalists, which can enhance the impact of news in European sign languages.

4.2.2. Limitations

This economic model is often more suited for temporary projects, as subsidies or grants are typically one-time or limited in duration. This makes it difficult to guarantee long-term stability for daily news provision in sign language. Small-scale and limited-reach sign language companies and organisations dependent on subsidies or grants are often vulnerable. There is considerable uncertainty, as submitting an application does not guarantee approval of the budget, and competition with other applications can be fierce.

Additionally, it is more challenging to build a sustainable audience with this model. It also introduces administrative complexity, as applying for subsidies and grants often requires regularly submitting detailed proposals.

4.3. Advertisement-based model

While only a limited number of sign language media organisations utilise this economic model, it is applied to generate supplementary income. A noteworthy example is Taubenschlag, which provides news in German Sign Language (DGS). This is made possible through advertising on

the website, allowing certain news content to remain freely accessible. Advertisements can also be integrated into newsletters or news videos.

4.3.1. Advantages

As it is important for sign language media organisations to make some socially relevant news items freely accessible, this model offers an interesting advantage: it does not require direct purchasing effort from the public. Moreover, a larger reach can lead to higher advertising revenues, incentivising the expansion of the news provision's reach.

Potential advertisers for news in sign language are often found among organisations that offer products and/or services to deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. By advertising via these news platforms, they increase their visibility within a specific customer segment that is harder to reach through traditional media.

4.3.2. Limitations

A significant disadvantage of this model is that many advertisers target broader audiences, making niche content such as news in sign language less appealing. Moreover, advertising revenues are often unstable and sensitive to market trends, seasonal fluctuations, and economic conditions. Over-reliance on this income source can undermine the financial foundation of a media organisation.

There is also a risk of quality degradation: to increase advertising revenues, media companies may be tempted to publish "clickbait" headlines or superficial content, compromising journalistic integrity and audience loyalty. The increasing use of ad-blockers also hampers the effectiveness of this model.

4.4. Subscription model

In this model, users pay a subscription to access (full) news content. Sign language media companies such as Médiapi (France) and manua (Germany) adopt this model to receive direct support from the deaf community, typically via monthly or annual contributions.

For individual users, several subscription types are available:

- **Freemium:** basic content is freely accessible, while exclusive content is only available to paying members.
- **Hard paywall:** full access to all content is only possible with a paid subscription.
- **Discounted rates:** reduced rates for specific groups such as students or individuals in poverty.
- **Family subscription:** access for multiple family members at a lower rate.
- **'Pay what you want':** subscribers choose their own contribution, with access to all content (sometimes including extra benefits).

- **Micropayments:** payment per article or bundle, without requiring a subscription.
- **Membership with additional benefits:** in addition to access to exclusive content, members receive benefits such as participation in events.

There are also subscription forms for professional use, such as team or corporate subscriptions for multiple employees, and educational licences for colleges, universities, or libraries.

4.4.1. Advantages

This model offers the potential for a stable and predictable income stream through regular payments from subscribers. This provides greater financial continuity, if attention is paid to customer satisfaction and loyalty. Subscribers often feel more connected to the medium, which increases interaction and engagement. Moreover, this model reduces dependence on advertising, which benefits editorial independence.

4.4.2. Limitations

A paywall may discourage potential new readers, especially in a context where many people are accustomed to free news. In a small and specific niche market, such as a deaf community, it can also be challenging to attract enough paying members to cover the relatively high production costs – such as those of news videos in sign language.

Additionally, subscribers often have high expectations regarding the quality of content. Because they are paying, they expect clear added value and a consistent, high-quality experience.

4.5. Donations

Donations are voluntary contributions from both users and non-users, such as “allies” (see deliverable D4.2.), which can support a small and independent sign language media organisation. This model resembles a “pay-what-you-want” approach, where a user is not limited to fixed subscription options on a monthly or annual basis but can decide how much they wish to contribute. At the same time, access to the news content is maintained. In some countries, donations offer tax advantages, which can increase willingness to support. Bequests can also be considered a form of donation.

4.5.1. Advantages

The donation model offers the advantage of allowing the media organisation to operate independently of commercial influences. Moreover, it keeps news content freely accessible, contributing to a broader public information provision.

4.5.2. Limitations

A significant disadvantage of donations is the irregularity and unpredictability of income. This complicates long-term planning and the structural payment of staff. Furthermore, the success of this model heavily depends on the extent to which potential donors feel connected to the medium's mission. It requires ongoing efforts in community-building and targeted communication to maintain this engagement.

4.6. Sponsorship & partnerships

Unlike the advertisement-based model, which primarily involves selling advertising space based on reach and clicks, the sponsorship and partnership model typically goes further. This is a business-to-business relationship between a sign language media company and another company or organisation that actively wishes to support, promote, and endorse inclusivity.

4.6.1. Advantages

Rather than a distant relationship, as in advertising, this model involves a long-term and strategic partnership. This can involve both commercial businesses and non-profit organisations, such as a national deaf association or an institution conducting research into sign languages. These parties may have an interest in the existence of accessible news in the national sign language, such as in relation to the right of deaf citizens to information, language planning, or the dissemination of new signs.

Sponsorship does not necessarily have to be purely financial. It can also take a material form, such as providing free workspace or recording studios. These contributions can help reduce the operational costs of sign language news provision, which supports the sustainability of the initiative.

4.6.2. Limitations

There are risks associated with this model. There may be a certain dependence on external financiers, which can put editorial independence under pressure. Especially when sponsors have certain expectations or are linked to sensitive themes in news videos, ethical tensions may arise. For example, when a sponsor becomes involved in controversial events or negative reporting, such as fraud or scandals. Even if editorial independence is maintained, the perception of influence might arise among the public.

4.7. Hybrid models

To strengthen the financial sustainability of news provision for a niche audience, such as deaf sign language users, it is often advisable to combine various economic models. By generating income from multiple sources, financial risks are spread, thereby increasing the resilience of

the media company. However, this hybrid approach brings additional challenges in terms of management, organisation, and strategic alignment.

4.8. Other models

In addition to the models discussed earlier, there are other ways to generate supplementary income for the production of daily news in national sign language:

- **Organising paid events:** Sign language media companies can host lectures, webinars, or community meet-ups. These activities are not only financially interesting but also contribute to strengthening rapport with the audience. However, they require significant organisation and incur costs, making them less suitable for small teams without a broad reach.
- **Offering journalistic services to third parties:** Media companies can, for example, conduct investigative journalism for organisations such as a national deaf association lobbying on policy issues impacting the daily lives of deaf people. They can also produce video reports of deaf-related activities for third parties.
- **Selling licences to third parties:** This includes sign language researchers, research institutions, or technology companies working on automatic translation systems between spoken languages and sign languages (Sign Language Machine Translation). There is strong demand for high-quality video data in this context. Licences can also be sold to (commercial) TV broadcasters, who, given the declining interest in traditional TV and the rise of streaming services, are looking for ways to enrich their broadcasts. This provides an opportunity to reach a segment of senior deaf people, while broadcasters can also contribute to their inclusivity policy.
- **Joining overarching initiatives** such as the European Deaf Media Association, which offers additional opportunities. The Deaf Journalism Europe project was established to connect sign language media companies, journalists, and videomakers across Europe. By pooling resources such as editorial work, costs can be shared, leading to new forms of content and financial collaboration.

5. Operational and financial strategy

Although developing a uniform and efficient operational and financial plan for a sign-language media organisation providing daily news is challenging—given that each organisation across Europe operates within its own national framework and follows its own approach and methodology—this document aims to provide an overview of potential costs. Additionally, an investigation is made into how profits can be generated using various income sources (as discussed in the previous section), enabling the possibility of expanding into new products and/or customer segments over time.

5.1. Determining factors for costs

To produce an accurate cost estimate, the following factors must be taken into consideration, as they can significantly affect the total costs:

- **Number of news videos per day:** The number of videos that need to be produced daily directly determines the workforce required.
- **Number of days per week:** Does the organisation provide news coverage over the weekend, or is it limited to weekdays (Monday to Friday)?
- **Leave days and public holidays:** Are there planned vacation periods or public holidays on which no news will be produced? For example, will there be a summer or winter break? If so, how long will these breaks last?
- **Type of journalistic work:** Does the work involve in-depth investigative journalism, or is existing journalistic content converted into sign language (through 'transcreation')?
- **Duration of news videos:** The longer the videos, the fewer news items can be presented per day with the same amount of workforce.

Clear communication with followers, subscribers, and funders is essential, so they are aware of the volume of news content they can expect.

5.2. Start-up costs

Given that many sign-language media organisations already have the necessary recording and editing equipment, the following is a list of start-up costs specifically required to establish a daily news service in sign language:

- **Recording Equipment:** Cameras, lenses, memory cards, tripods, autocue system, etc.
- **Recording Studio:** This could be a green key studio (where a blue or green background is replaced with an image in post-production) or a full news studio with the required décor. In both cases, good lighting is essential for a professional appearance.
- **Computers and Editing Software:** Specialised software for video editing, often requiring an annual subscription.

5.3. Daily operational costs

Based on the experiences within the Deaf Journalism Europe project, it has been found that two full-time workers can typically produce three to five news videos in sign language per workday. The necessary workforce per day is as follows:

- **News editor (half-day):** Responsible for researching, selecting, analysing, and developing news stories, and for converting the content into a suitable format for sign language.

- **Presenter (half-day):** Reads and prepares the news content, converting it into sign language for the camera via a transcreation process.
- **Video technician (full-day):** Responsible for recording and post-production, including publication on various distribution channels.

To operate cost-effectively, one person can combine the roles of news editor and presenter, reducing the preparation time for camera presentation. Additionally, AI tools can be used to speed up and improve the efficiency of the workflow.

Using freelancers can lower costs since freelancers generally do not have rights to paid leave or compensation for public holidays, unlike permanent employees. An additional advantage of freelancers is that they can bring greater diversity in representation. Freelance work thus provides flexibility in both costs and content. However, permanent employees tend to provide more stability and consistency, which is important for the continuity and long-term planning of the organisation. They are also typically more committed to the mission and culture of the organisation, which positively impacts the quality and reliability of the news service.

Finally, consideration must be given to additional costs for licensing image material (such as news photos and video footage). The use of AI-generated images can reduce these costs, although depending on the nature of the news and ethical guidelines, this may not always be the best choice.

5.4. Additional costs

In addition to the costs outlined above, other expenses should be considered, including:

- **Marketing costs:** For managing marketing campaigns, attracting new customers and subscribers, community-building, promoting customer loyalty, and communicating with advertisers, sponsors, and donors.
- **Management costs:** Costs for planning and other administrative follow-up.
- **Training costs:** Training and further education for deaf journalists and presenters, as access to regular training programmes for this target group is often limited.

5.5. Revenue distribution

The costs listed above are associated with providing a basic package of news videos in sign language. This package does not include extensions such as in-depth reporting, interviews, investigative journalism articles, transcriptions, or subtitles. Section 3 of this document already discussed potential growth strategies that can be realised based on profits from existing products and customers.

It is recommended to operate lean: creating maximum value for the customer (in this case, the viewer or subscriber) with minimal resource waste. To prepare a break-even analysis, the amount of income required to cover operational and additional costs must be calculated.

There are several ways income can be distributed and generated:

- Based on market research, the amount a customer is willing to pay monthly or annually for a subscription can be determined, taking into account the number of news videos per day. The required number of subscribers can then be calculated to fully cover the costs. If necessary, the subscription price can be increased to improve profitability, but the potential negative impact on growth or subscriber retention must be taken into account.
- Additional income sources such as donations, advertisements, and sponsorship can be deducted from the required subscription income. Based on this, a portion of the videos can be made available for free to the general public.
- Additional income, such as government support and subsidies, can be used for the production of extra content.

5.6. Example

The following example illustrates how a sign-language media organisation can calculate its cost structure and revenue strategy using the above tools. This is a simplified simulation. In practice, the calculation is more complex, as additional elements such as employee taxes, training costs, marketing, and distribution must also be considered.

Example: *A sign-language media organisation not structurally subsidised by the government has decided to produce five short news videos per workday, from Monday to Friday (a total of 261 workdays per year). The videos contain the daily news highlights.*

Personnel costs:

- Editorial and presentation work is assigned to a pool of deaf freelancers, each earning €400 per workday. One freelancer is employed per day.
- Additionally, the organisation employs two permanent video technicians, who alternate recording and editing duties (to cover for sickness or leave). One full-time video technician costs €2,100 gross per month.
- For administration, marketing, and communication, one permanent employee is employed for one day per month, at a cost of €213 per month.

Currently, there is no decision to purchase licences for image material.

Overview of Annual Costs:

Item	Cost per unit	Quantity	Subtotal
Freelance	€400/day	261 workdays	€104,400.00
Video technician	€2,100/month	12 months	€25,200.00
Management & marketing	€213/month	12 months	€2,556.00
Total:			€132,156.00

Through fundraising, €26,000 was raised from donations and sponsors. The remaining €106,156 must therefore come from subscription income.

Market research within the deaf community shows that the average willingness to pay for a subscription is €110 per year. Internally, it was decided to set a subscription price of €120 per year. Taking into account the expected income from other sources, the number of subscribers required to break even can be calculated as follows:

$$\text{Subscription Price} \times \text{Number of Subscribers} = \text{Required Income}$$

$$€120 \times \mathbf{885 \text{ subscribers}} = €106,200$$

Overview of Income:

Source	Rate	Quantity	Subtotal
Donations and sponsors	Fixed rate	Annually	€26,000.00
Subscribers	€120/year	885 subscribers	€106,200.00
Total:			€132,200.00

Sponsors and donations thus account for approximately 20% of total income, while subscriptions account for approximately 80%. Based on this, it was strategically decided to offer **one of the five videos per day for free**, while the remaining four would be exclusive to subscribers.

After analysing the first operational period, it was found that the number of subscribers grew faster than expected. For the following year, the organisation expects 1,500 subscribers, representing an increase of 615 subscribers and €73,800 in additional income (€120 subscription price × 615 subscribers).

Based on this positive development, it was decided to further invest in customer loyalty (market penetration) and expand the content offering, for example with in-depth interviews, debates, and investigative journalism (product development).

6. Quality management

The results of DJE surveys indicate that respondents have concerns about the quality of sign-language media organisations. Specifically, there is room for improvement in journalistic and technical skills, as many deaf employees have not had the opportunity to undergo formal training in these areas. This is partly due to structural discrimination within education and the labour market.

Additionally, within some segments of the deaf community, there is a relatively low level of media literacy: do viewers understand how journalism works? Are they familiar with the principle of editorial independence? And how do deaf professionals navigate the tension between their professional role and their personal involvement within the same community?

To ensure and improve the quality of news provision within a sign-language media organisation, the following recommendations are made:

- **Embedding journalistic standards:** Develop an internal training programme to coach deaf editors, journalists, and presenters in the fundamental principles of journalism. Create an accessible and visually supported toolbox to accompany this training. Subsidies or grants can be applied to support this initiative, or partnerships can be formed with journalism education programmes in higher education.
- **Strengthening media literacy within the deaf community:** Implement various initiatives to enhance the critical thinking abilities of the public. This could include educational video segments on the channel (e.g., on topics such as "how to recognise reliable news?" or "what is fake news?"), organising workshops, and launching awareness campaigns via social media.
- **Ensuring editorial independence:** Transparency with the public is crucial in this regard. Clearly communicate how the news is produced, where the funding comes from, and how editorial independence is guaranteed.
- **Building networks and partnerships:** Membership in journalistic networks can contribute to professionalisation and quality improvement. This includes organisations such as the National Council for Journalism or the European Deaf Media Association.

7. Conclusion

This document addresses the economic challenges faced by sign-language media organisations in Europe. The greatest obstacle is the lack of structural funding. To achieve sustainable solutions, it is crucial for these organisations to position themselves strongly in relation to other, often government-funded, sign-language news outlets.

While the majority of deaf viewers clearly prefer news from "their own" sign-language media organisations, it is equally essential that multiple independent sign-language news sources exist. Only in this way can the right to form opinions be safeguarded.

To ensure financial sustainability, a hybrid funding model is the most effective. This model spreads financial risks across various income sources. At the same time, building a strong community is of great importance, with a loyal following willing to contribute to the organisation's continued existence. By combining innovative funding strategies, sign-language media organisations can not only survive but also grow—while retaining their core function of providing free accessible news to the deaf community.

Establishing a daily sign-language news service entails significant start-up and operational costs, ranging from the purchase of equipment and studio set-up to hiring qualified freelancers and permanent staff. By strategically using various funding sources and implementing effective cost management, the organisation can develop a sustainable financial model with room for long-term growth and diversification.

Finally, sign-language media organisations must continue their efforts to strengthen the quality of their journalistic and technical operations. This can be achieved through organising internal training programmes, promoting media literacy among deaf sign-language users, ensuring editorial independence, and expanding relevant networks.

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