FOUNDATION

Limelight

Message from the founder

A free and independent press, in which investigative journalism can be conducted in a safe, transparent and verifiable way, is of utmost importance for a democratic society. This has never been more evident than during the past decade – in times of both peace and war.

Limelight Foundation offers financial and non-monetary assistance to mainly European initiatives and organizations that are committed to the free flow of independent information. We founded Limelight Foundation in March 2021, and I am proud that we have achieved so much in such a short period of time.

Most of our support to date, fortunately, has been given during times of peace. However, over the past few weeks and with regard to the war in Ukraine, we have learned what philanthropy can do in times of urgent need: within a few days, and together with a range of other European foundations, we have been able to provide crucial and immediate support to journalists in Ukraine.

As well as providing financial support, we aim to promote the use of software and tools that enable journalists and researchers to do their work safely and efficiently. Open source initiatives will play an important role in this regard. We also intend to support the development and use of open source projects.

In the years to come, we will keep promoting a strong and free information ecosystem. We will do so by supporting new and existing organizations, collaborating with other funders and, hopefully, also by growing the size of our fund. As recent events have unfortunately shown, this is needed now more than ever: because, for journalists, doing your work without fearing for your life, is far from self-evident.

John Caspers, founder and board chair of Limelight Foundation
Amsterdam, March 2022

Contents

1. Introduction

Last summer, Forbidden Stories broke the news about how the phones of hundreds of journalists and activists across the world had been infected by spyware. Often at the request of state actors, this spyware kept track of who these people talked to, where they went, and what they were working on. The so-called Pegasus Project revealed how certain actors are not afraid to use invasive and sophisticated surveillance tools to silence journalists, in the process depriving citizens of crucial information about their government's' wheeling and dealing.

The news reminded me of a movie I saw when I was 18: Minority Report, starring Tom Cruise and directed by Steven Spielberg. In the film, three mutated human beings called Precognitives were able to see events in the future and help the police prevent crime. Just the thought of committing a crime could be observed by these Precogs and would be enough to get that person arrested and locked up – without a warning or a trial. Minority Report depicted a highly technological and controlled world, in which

a government had curtailed civil liberties under the veil of preserving law and order and keeping people safe. To me, the film was an intriguing, though somewhat overstated, thought experiment. Typical dystopian science fiction. Or so I thought.

Fast forward to the summer of 2021, and with the Pegasus Project in mind, the film does not seem that hypothetical or overstated any longer. The Pegasus Project demonstrates how free and independent information is perceived as highly inconvenient by some. It also shows how technological possibilities can be at odds with core democratic values and principles. And it reveals that developments like these do not just take place in far-away countries. They happen close to home in Europe, too. The recent war in Ukraine is a clear and tragic testament to that.

Committed to the free flow of independent quality information, and concerned with trends going against this, we founded Limelight Foundation to promote a strong and free

information ecosystem in the digital age. We want independent information to be available and accessible to all. We need it to hold power accountable, to talk to fellow citizens and policy makers, and take informed decisions about our private and public lives. Free and independent information is the fuel for democracy.

It is no secret that the production and distribution of quality information finds itself fundamentally challenged on multiple fronts today: press freedom is in decline, in Europe, too; a digital revenue model that works miracles for journalism has not been invented yet; and digitization, once welcomed for its democratizing potential, now also shows itself to be a force that can damage public discourse and the wider democratic fabric. At the same time, there are developments to be hopeful about: journalists and civil society organizations describing what is wrong, raising awareness about it and making proposals for how we can do better.

In this annual report, we look back on 2021, Limelight Foundation's first year of existence. It has been a year of making a lot of practical arrangements to get up and running. We are happy that we have also been able to issue a first series of grants to organizations that are doing essential and important work to protect and strengthen our information ecosystem. We have outlined all nine of them in this report.

Limelight Foundation hopes to support the work of journalists and civil society organizations for many more years to come, helping them achieve their goals. It is a work in progress, and we have only just started.

Merel Borger, director Limelight Foundation

2. Limelight Foundation: Why, what, how

why

< vision & mission >

what

< strategy &
priority areas >

how

< way of working >

Why

Citizens need access to independent information to be able to make informed decisions.

However, the production and distribution of independent quality information finds itself fundamentally challenged on multiple fronts. To name but a few: press freedom is in decline, public trust in media is under pressure, journalism's business model is broken, and digitization can clash with core democratic values.

Limelight Foundation aims to counter these trends. We promote a strong and free information ecosystem to make independent information available and accessible to all.
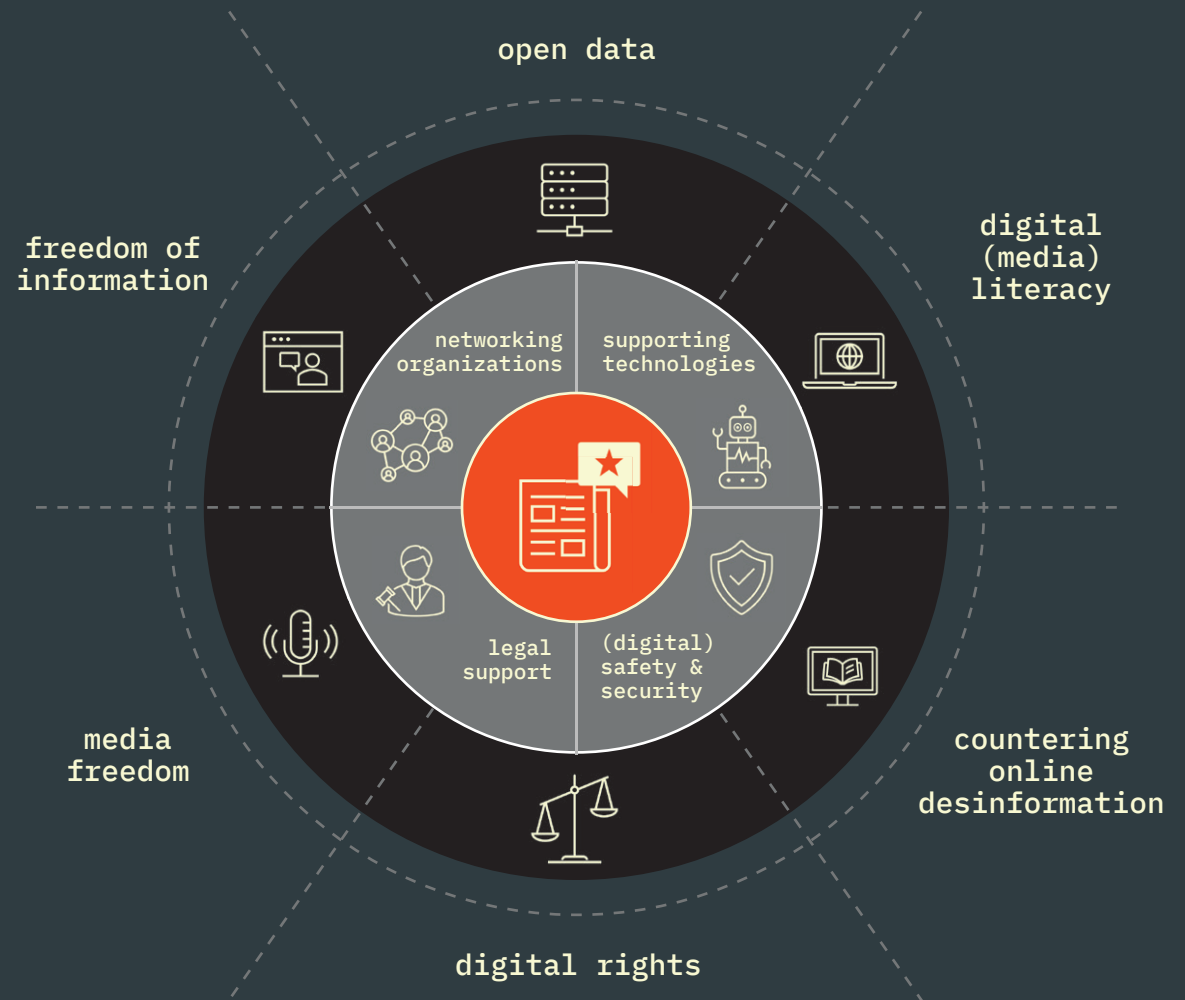
why

< vision & mission >

What

Limelight Foundation supports journalism and civil society organizations committed to a strong and free information ecosystem.

what

< strategy & priority areas >

This word 'ecosystem' is somewhat of an abstract term, but we make a conscious choice to use it. It conveys that, next to supporting journalism, other key functions and preconditions need to be in place to ensure that quality information can be freely produced, distributed and discussed.

The figure on the right shows how we look at the information ecosystem and the three circles Limelight Foundation invests in:

1. the production and distribution of independent quality information;
2. the key infrastructure for journalists to do their work;
3. the necessary preconditions in the wider enabling environment for quality information to flourish.

open data

digital (media) literacy

freedom of information

networking organizations

supporting technologies

legal support

(digital) safety & security

media freedom

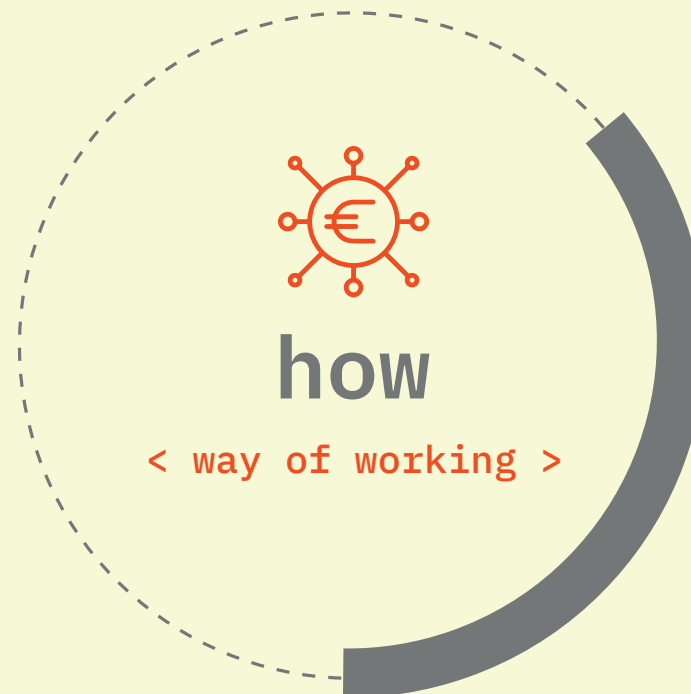countering online desinformation

digital rights

How

- Limelight Foundation is active in the Netherlands and Europe.
- We have an annual budget of €3 mio.
- We support organizations that are independent of vested (political, commercial, private) interests.
- We provide donations and non-monetary assistance.
- We work together with other foundations when joining forces can result in more impact.

Funding
The funder of Limelight Foundation is John Caspers, who provides us with an annual budget of €3 mio.

how

< way of working >

"There's a crack in everything,
that's how the light gets in."

<Leonard_Cohen>

3. Who we support

<overview of donations in 2021>

In 2021, we provided nine organizations with a grant. The donations are shown in this chapter, in alphabetical order.

Bellingcat

Well-known for its open -source investigations, the journalists and volunteers behind Bellingcat have uncovered many key stories over the past seven years. Ranging from the downing of the MH17, revelations around the poisoning of Skripal and Navalny, and investigations of weapon systems used in the Syrian civil war. With our support, Bellingcat can hire a security expert to strengthen its digital defense. This will help Bellingcat protect its journalists and sources for the many stories to come.

BITS OF FREEDOM

Bits of Freedom

Bits of Freedom is a Dutch civil society organization defending privacy and freedom of communication online. Limelight Foundation provides Bits of Freedom with core support. This enables them to hire an additional policy adviser who will advocate for strong encryption in The Hague and better platform regulation in Brussels.

civitates

Civitates

Civitates is a consortium of 16 foundations committed to upholding public values in Europe. Limelight Foundation provides multi-annual funding to Civitates' subfund for public interest journalism in Europe. By pooling resources with other foundations, we have been able to provide 11 journalism organizations from across Europe with core support for the next three years. The organizations supported are: Magyar Jeti / 444.Hu (Hungary), Direkt36 (Hungary), Investigative Reporting Project Italy (Italy), Bellingcat (the Netherlands), Fundacja Pismo (Poland), OKO – Foundation Centre for Civic Monitoring (Poland), Divergente (Portugal), Átlátszó Erdély (Romania), Press One (Romania), Pod Crto (Slovenia), and Civio (Spain).

Digital Freedom Fund

The Digital Freedom Fund (DFF) works to advance digital rights in Europe. They do this by helping other civil society organizations engage in strategic litigation to improve digital rights. DFF assists these partners with financial support and facilitates skills building and networking between them. Limelight Foundation provides DFF with a multi-annual core grant, so that they can help more civil society organizations in building effective strategic litigation efforts.

Drawing the Times

Drawing the Times is a platform for graphic journalism, exploring how visual storytelling can sometimes inform, entertain and engage audiences on complex societal issues more powerfully than text can. Limelight Foundation provides support for a new cross-border project on climate change. Founder and graphic journalist Eva Hilhorst teams up with graphic novelist Judith van Istendael to investigate how graphic storytelling can translate scientific facts into an engaging narrative that makes climate change tangible.
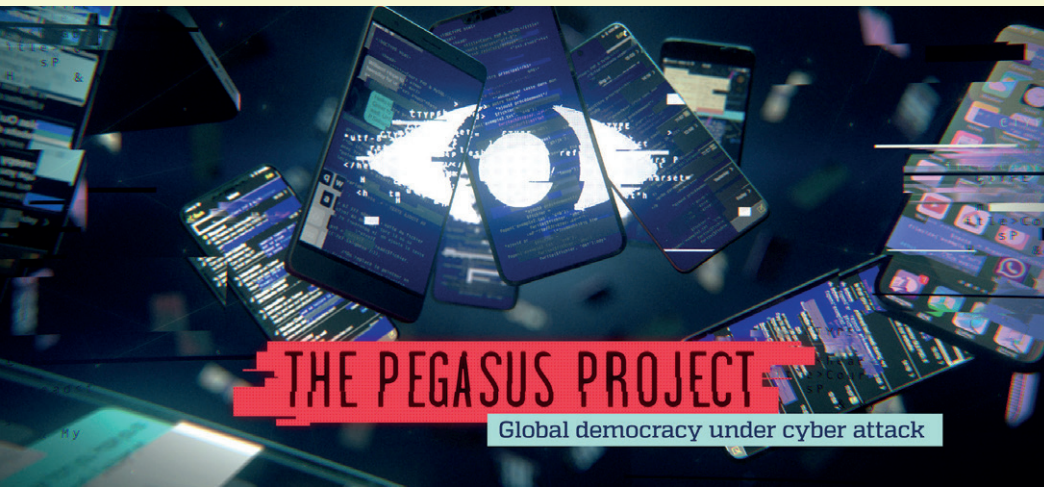
forbidden | stories

Forbidden Stories

Forbidden Stories is an international not-for-profit that protects and continues the work of reporters who are no longer able to continue their investigations. In doing so, they send a strong signal to enemies of a free press: even if you succeed in stopping a single messenger, you will not stop the message. Since 2017, Forbidden Stories has coordinated and published investigations about, among others, journalists facing threats covering corruption (Daphne Project), environmental damage (Green Blood), and, most recently, spyware (Pegasus Project). Limelight Foundation provides Forbidden Stories with multi-annual support to keep telling the stories of journalists under threat.

SIDNfonds

Grip on Disinformation

To get to grips with disinformation, we have joined forces with the Dutch SIDN Fund that promotes 'a strong internet for all'. Together, we have supported nine initiatives to gain more insight into online disinformation. To name but a few: Deepfake Proof, a tool developed by Duck Duck Goose to detect deepfakes online; Twid, a browser plugin developed by researchers from the Radboud University to evaluate the authenticity of Twitter messages; and RadiTube, a search engine that indexes radical and conspiratorial content on YouTube, allowing journalists and researchers to investigate this content and identify radical channels on the platform.

THE PEGASUS PROJECT
Global democracy under cyber attack

Understanding radical YouTube communities

LIGHTHOUSE REPORTS

Lighthouse Reports

Lighthouse Reports is a non-profit journalism organization based in the Netherlands. They coordinate and execute cross-border investigations combining traditional journalistic methods with new techniques such as open source intelligence and data science. With core support from Limelight Foundation, they aim to continue creating spaces to investigate critical issues like migration, climate and conflict.

THE OTHER ROOM

Niemand die het ziet
(There's a war going on, but no one can see it)

Film maker Ester Gould (Schuldig, Klassen, Strike a Pose) and journalist Reijer Zwaan (former vice editor-in-chief Nieuwsuur and documentary Strike a Pose) have taken on a new film project, this time about cyber surveillance. In Niemand die het ziet (There's a war going on, but no one can see it), they provide a sneak peek into the work and world of intelligence agencies, digital espionage and cyber warfare, underlining the importance of open and fact-based information. The film is set to appear in spring 2023.

NIEMAND
DIE HET ZIET

4. Who we are

<our people>

<board>

John Caspers
Internet entrepeneur,
co-founder of i.a. Adyen,
founder of LimelightFoundation

Joseph Peeraer
Founder of multi-utility
company Budget. Current role:
Founding partner of deeptech
VC Positron Ventures

Hannah de Jong
Lawyer specialized in privacy
& compliance. Head of Group
Legal at Inter IKEA.
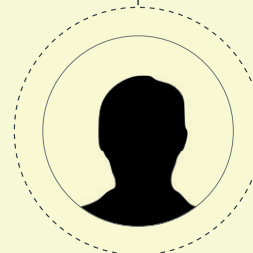
<organization>

Merel Borger - Director
PhD in journalism studies, previous
roles: program manager Public Interest
program at Adessium Foundation, former
journalist at NOS and NPO (Dutch
public broadcasting)

Floor Milar – Program manager
Background in law, editing &
publishing. Previous roles at
De Correspondent and the Dutch
Association of Journalists

<advisory_board>

Currently looking for members

5. Financial summary 2021

<Balance_sheet_at_31-12-2021>

ASSETS	(in €)		LIABILITIES	(in €)	
Current assets			**Reserves**		
Accounts receivable	5,495		Other reserves	68,329	
		5,495	Reserved for donation to be made in January 2022	350,000	
Cash & cash equivalents		1,885,366			
			Total		418,329
			Long-term liabilities		
			Accrued liabilities	859,000	
					859,000
			Short-term liabilities		
			Accounts payable	3,532	
			Accrued liabilities	610,000	
					613,532
Total assets		**1,890,861**	**Total liabilities**		**1,890,861**

<Income and Expenditure statement for 2021>

	2021
	(in €)
Income	
Donations received	3,000,000
Total income	3,000,000
Expenses	
Donations allocated	2,445,500
Staff costs	73,703
General operating costs	56,541
Other costs	5,928
Total expenses	**2,581,672**
Net result	418,328
Reserved for donation to be made in January 2022	350,000
Other reserves	68,329

Credits

Content
Limelight Foundation

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