There are many ways that a sexual experience can change your life. Finding out that you can’t get Plan B One-Step because your local pharmacy isn’t following the law shouldn’t be a factor in the equation.

In late June of this year, the FDA approved Plan B One-Step emergency contraception to be made available without a prescription, available over the counter, and able to be purchased without an ID. It was a long-fought victory for advocates of reproductive health, rights, and justice across the United States. However, it brought to light how precarious access to emergency contraception is for those who find themselves in a situation that warrants a simple product that works on a tight timeline of 72 hours.

A must-read [report](http://www.nativeshop.org/images/stories/media/pdfs/Plan-B-Report.pdf) released in 2012 by the Native American Women’s Health Education Resource Center provides indisputable evidence that access to reproductive health care hinges on where you live. Their report was bold and laid bare the reality that only 10% of the Indian Health Service clinics they surveyed had Plan B available over the counter. Layered into this research is the fact that more than 1 in 3 Native American women will experience sexual assault in their lifetime. In these particular areas of rural isolation and economic insecurity, access isn’t a theoretical exercise.

It’s within this gap of lived experiences versus policy implementation that a project called [Where is Your Plan B?](http://whereisyourplanb.com) seeks to fill. I had the privilege of meeting Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, the Executive Director of [The Media Consortium](http://www.themediaconsortium.org), a few months ago at an event that sparked the following email conversation about the project, how this unique editorial collaboration isn’t a one-time deal, and how you can [take action](http://whereisyourplanb.com/take-action/) in your own neighborhood.

Ginger: *How was this project born?*

Jo Ellen: [The Media Consortium](http://www.themediaconsortium.org), an international network of independent progressive news outlets, has been experimenting with editorial collaboration since its founding in 2006. At our annual meeting in 2013, a group of over 26 reporters, representing 19 different outlets, came together to talk about the possibility of collaborating around reproductive health and justice issues. We were fortunate enough to find a willing partner in [Quixote Foundation](http://www.quixotefoundation.org), and designed our WhereisYourPlanB project as a pilot project to test what kind of impact we could have in this sector.

We also wanted to test how well local and national outlets could work together, since fights over reproductive rights are increasingly local. So we partnered with the [Association for Alternative Newsmedia](http://www.altweeklies.com), which represents local weeklies. For the pilot, we brought together 4 local weeklies (Austin Chronicle, Leo Weekly, Portland Mercury, and Santa Fe Reporter) and 5 national outlets (Bitch magazine, In These Times, Making Contact Ms. Magazine, and Public News Service).

Ginger: *What has been the most surprising response so far?*

Jo Ellen: Actually, what surprised me most was the journalists' choice to focus on emergency contraception. I had assumed the journalists would want to write about abortion. But when I brought them all together, and asked them what story they thought would most benefit from a collaborative effort, they landed on the implementation of Plan B One-Step.

The second biggest surprise for me was how many of our web visitors participated in our crowdsourcing effort. The [website](http://www.whereisyourplanb.com) contains the stories each of our outlets wrote, plus a fun video we put together, and a form that invites anyone to go to their local pharmacy and tell us whether Plan B One-Step is available over the counter without a prescription (as it should be).

I thought the video would be the main attraction of the website, but visitors spent the most time on our crowdsourced map. In the first week the site was up, 7% of the visitors to the site actually went to their local pharmacies and filled out the form! What it showed me was that people really are passionate about reproductive health, and are willing to spend their valuable time to protect our reproductive rights.

Ginger:  *How can journalists be a better bridge between reproductive health and reproductive justice groups? Do you think using shared language more explicitly would help bridge that gap? There is a difference between the two groups/strategies, which is something I didn’t realize until I participated in a* [*CoreAlign*](http://corealign.org) *meeting this summer.*

Jo Ellen: Well, Dick Tofel of [ProPublica](http://www.propublica.org) probably has made the definitive statement on the difference between advocates and journalists. To paraphrase him, it's not where they start; it's where they end up. Our journalists, like reproductive justice activists, start with the point of view that all women should have access to reproductive health and the right to make choices about their reproductive futures. However, once our journalists start reporting on a story, they will go wherever the story takes them. Activists can't do that--they have to spin a story so it matches their point of view.

As it turned out, our journalists found that the activists were right--that despite the FDA ruling mandating that Plan B One-Step be available over the counter without a prescription to all women of childbearing age, many women did not have easy access to this emergency contraception. [Women in ICE detention](http://inthesetimes.com/article/15806/immigrant_detainees_have_no_plan_b/) and on [reservations](https://soundcloud.com/makingcontact/native-american-activists) have no access to Plan B. Many pharmacies were still asking women [for their IDs](http://leoweekly.com/news/when-b-stands-barriers) before selling Plan B to them, or were keeping the drug in the pharmacy [instead of on the shelf](http://msmagazine.com/blog/2013/10/06/top-5-roadblocks-to-plan-b-access/).

In turn, activists found our crowdsourcing form very useful; I know a group in West Virginia used it for an organizing campaign. And now that our collaboration is over, we are porting our website over to the Office of Population Research at Princeton, which runs an [Emergency Contraception website](http://ec.princeton.edu). The researchers are going to merge our data with theirs, and may even be able to use the site to collect new data. We are very happy about that.

Ginger: *One of the project's goals is to get beyond the choir. Who are those people “beyond the choir” and who is the choir? We make assumptions about who is pro-choice all the time without ever asking how folks feel about access to services, a different angle to the same problem.  I'm reminded of Dorothy Allison’s quote from Talking About Sex, Class & Literature, “Traditional feminist theory has had a limited understanding of class differences and of how sexuality and self are shaped by both desire and denial." I think about that space between desire and denial all the time yet rarely see or hear stories framed in this way.*

Jo Ellen: Absolutely. In fact, every story could benefit from the lenses of race, sexuality, gender and class. One way our journalists try to get at those intersections is to talk to people most impacted by them--women in detention centers, for example, or on reservations, or living in rural areas. It's a bigger problem to reach an audience that is similarly diverse.

On the business side, most non-profit news organizations now are making their budget by appealing to a very deep but narrow audience. These are the people who donate, share, comment, etc. These audiences are usually pretty homogeneous as well. Readers of a feminist blog, for example, may be white women ages 16-36 who identify as queer-positive, or black women ages 24-38 who identify as queer-positive, or white women ages 45-70 who identify as either straight or lesbian (I'm drawing from real sites). However, the same blog won't capture all of those demographics. Their audiences are siloed.

One of the main reasons we are experimenting with editorial collaborations is to merge these siloed audiences. If we place 10 stories on one site, and drive all their audiences to the same site, with the same hashtag, then we hope we will get a conversation going among the different audiences. It's hard to measure success on that score without some pretty fancy analytics, but we definitely see some cross-pollination. We'd like to do a lot more of that.

Ginger: *How will you know this project has been successful and what is next? How will this project maintain those critical collaborations?*

Jo Ellen: One measure of success was just getting our outlets to all work together--to share stories in advance, to publish on time, to promote each other's work. And we were definitely successful at doing so.

A second measure of success was drawing people's attention to the implementation of Plan B One-Step, which was, on the whole, a pretty obscure policy change unless you happened to need emergency contraception right before or after the policy went into effect. Luckily, we are running a complex metrics experiment right now and were able to use that to measure the impact of the WhereisYourPlanB effort--and we found we created a 5% increase in conversations about reproductive health in the twitterverse during the week we launched the site. That may have been a coincidence, but it is an interesting statistic.

A third measure of success that we didn't expect to have was providing new tools and techniques to the policy and advocacy community. The reproductive health community was surprised by how effective our website and crowdsourcing tool was, and I think learned a lot about the power of online storytelling to move people to action. We were very happy to see the Association of Emergency Contraception pick up the site.

WhereisYourPlanB was meant to be a proof of concept--and it worked. We'd really like to extend the project by tackling a series of 2-3 other topics in reproductive health and justice in 2014. We'd like to experiment with the number of outlets we can bring into a collaboration, and we'd like to see whether we can work with policy and advocacy groups in advance to shape a website that they can later use. We really want to do another crowdsourcing project, to see if we can bring up the numbers and get a viral effect.

Our aim is to inform, educate and engage the public, and we'd love to continue the experiment to go deeper especially into the engagement piece.

Ginger: *Is there any thought or connections to be had around collaborating on education campaigns to expose Crisis Pregnancy Centers?*

Jo Ellen: I leave the decision about what stories to follow to the reporters. I trust reporters to know where a good story is and what needs to be dug up and brought into the light. It's been absolutely essential through our entire process to give reporters complete independence on editorial content.

Ginger: *Do you have any thoughts about language on the site to be more trans inclusive?*

Jo Ellen: English is not a very flexible language for gender neutrality, and journalists need to be able to tell stories in ways that will be legible to as many people as possible. On the other hand, I realize that language can exclude--and has been used to exclude--those whose gender and sexual identifications are not dominant. How we write, and speak, needs to evolve to be as inclusive as possible. I look to sites like feministing and bluestocking itself for guidance.

For more information on how to be informed, take action, and break down barriers visit [whereisyourplanb.com](http://whereisyourplanb.com).

*Ginger Hintz - Contributor*