Report Back on NCMR Travel Grant

Submitted by Jo Ellen Green Kaiser for

The Media Consortium

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**I. Summary**

On March 1, the Media Consortium received a grant for $10,000 from the Media Democracy Fund to send reporters with a special interest in media policy to the National Conference on Media Reform in Denver, April 5-7. Free Press gave the reporters in this cohort a press pass so that registration fees for this group were waived.

Each reporter was required to attend a special session titled Building Better Media Policy from the Ground Up, that was created jointly by TMC’s Executive Director and the Free Press conference program coordinator, Josh Stearns. In addition, reporters were encouraged to attend a pre-conference webinar and a first day morning meeting to orient themselves. Finally, reporters were asked to provide a written response detailing their experience at the conference.

Who Went

The Media Consortium combined these funds with $1700 from our 2013 $30,000 grant from the Media Democracy Fund to send 19 reporters to NCMR. Of these reporters, 10 are enrolled in the MPREP program and as part of that program were guaranteed $500 in travel funds plus could apply for additional monies.:

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| Campus Progress | Emily Crockett |
| In These Times | Ken Rapoza |
| The Uptake | Nick Coleman |
| Truthout | Mike Ludwig |
| The Nation | Leticia Miranda |
| PNS | Mark Sheerer |
| Making Contact | GeorgeLavender |
| Making Contact | Salima Hamirani |
| News Taco | Jesse Luna |
| KGNU/NFCB  | Sue Salinger |

The nine additional reporters requesting and receiving grants were:

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| FSRN | Alice Ollstein |
| Yes! | Molly Lunn |
| Yes! | Emily Stoner |
| New America Media | PeterSchurmann |
| New America Media | SuzanneManneh |
| Mother Jones | Jacques Herbert |
| Chicago Reporter | Rui Kaneya |
| GWW | Linda Jue |
| Grist | Susie Cagle |

Basis for Giving Grants

The average amount granted to MPREP reporters was $690 (excluding Sue who is based in Denver). The average amount granted to non-MPREP reporters was $483.

Grants were based on a set of assumed costs:

$450 for travel

$250 for hotel (assumed shared room x 2 nights)

$200 for food

All MPREP reporters were given $500 in travel grants. Additional monies to MPREP reporters, plus monies to other TMC reporters, were allocated based on application. Non-MPREP grantees had to explain their interest in media policy; all grantees had to state need. Final amounts were determined by TMC after talking to the reporter and the outlet. No reporters were turned away, though some received less in travel grant money than they had requested.

Required Session

Building Better Media Policy from the Ground Up took place on Saturday, April 6 at 2:00pm. Attendance was required for all reporters receiving TMC travel grant money. All reporters actually did attend.

The session was designed to address a recurring problem in media policy reporting: too often, journalists can’t translate media policy into stories that appeal to their audiences. Part of the problem is the highly technical aspect of some media policy—the MPREP program is designed to address that. However, Media Consortium staff have found that media policy advocates often don’t understand the kinds of sources, information and angles that reporters need to produce a compelling story.

The session brought together policy activists who know how to tell compelling stories—Todd Wolfson, Carrie Biggs-Adams, David Green, Nicole Hansen and amalia deloney. As often happens when discussions get brewing, the session turned into a lively back and forth on the role of advocacy in journalism, spurred by the journalists’ desire to work closely with sources they also were covering.

As a direct result of this session, Mike Ludwig wrote a story for Truthout about Carrie Biggs-Adams’ presentation, and in their evaluations reporters particularly singled out amalia deloney as a source, Wolfson’s media mobilizing project as an important “solutions journalism” story to tell, and online surveillance (David Green and Nicole Hansen’s topic) as a topic they wanted to pursue.

Self-Evaluation by Reporters

Reporters were asked to answer two questions about their experience at NCMR. Their answers are summarized here:

**1. Describe one thing you learned at NCMR that you didn't know before (can be an experience you had or a person you met as well)**

* The power of the field came through: “I learned that [media reform activists are able] “to create powerful, rapid and organic uprisings against bills [like SOPA] that would hamper the internet.” Reporters also learned about different aspects of the field: I learned a new perspective on the intersection between art, policy and activism at another panel. The founders of CultureStrike discussed how artists are often relegated into production roles in activist efforts and their creative process is not respected as "real" activism.
* In general, many of our reporters were surprised at how many other independent news outlets were interested in covering the same topics they cover. They realized “we can collaborate” with each other. “The biggest takeway … is the networking.”
* Meetings with specific people in the field were important, specifically Bob McChesney, Carrie Biggs Adams, amalia deloney (mentioned by several reporters), Jamie Kilstein, Matt Filipowicz, Joe Macare, Rania Khalek, Astra Taylor, and Susie Cagle. One reporter wrote that it was great to meet people in real life that s/he follows on Twitter.
* Internet privacy was big: “Internet privacy and the very real threat that SOPA/CISPA pose to individuals and journalists.” Likewise, “The role hackers play in saving our democracy” and surveillance, “especially how internet policy relates to data mining and monitoring.” “I was especially interested in Seeta Pena Gangadharan's contributions to the panel. She described how the steps some activists and technologists recommend to secure one's identity online” are difficult for most computer users.
* Media consolidation was another top topic: Todd Wolfson’s story about “Comcast and the telecom lobby’s impact in the Philadelphia area. This could be a story I pursue this year.” Likewise, “a great analogy from Harold Feld on an Internet policy panel: Providers like Comcast want to charge Netflix more because Netflix consumes a lot of broadband. That's like saying phone companies should charge Domino's Pizza, and people who order from Domino's, more because a lot of phone traffic goes there.”
* And other specifics: “Alex Friedmann of Prison Legal News outlined the kickbacks companies get from prison phone calls in a way that I hadn't heard before.” “I learned how broad an impact media coverage has had on immigration struggles.”

**2. Based on what you learned at NCMR, what topics/ areas would you like TMC briefings to cover--what do you want to learn more about? what do you want to cover?**

* **More briefings on FCC issues**, particularly the human impact of FCC policy. Note: In policy briefings, I'd like to see an emphasis on the narratives of WHO has the power to do WHAT in these technocratic policy issues. Who are the stakeholders? What is the PROCESS by which some of these changes would take place? Say--what is the FCC doing, who in the FCC is doing it, why should we care, what should they be doing instead, or who should be doing something instead of the FCC?
* **Briefings on local media policy** work: look at Mag-Nets efforts in DC, Media Mobilizing Project and PhillyCam in Philly, Allied Media Project in Detroit, etc.
* **Media consolidation**, especially the political ramifications of a dwindling mainstream press and corporate schemes to dismantle community infrastructure.
* **Online surveillance and internet privacy** issues
* **Broadband access**--specifically the digital divide and efforts to set up neighborhood broadband networks and wi-fi zones. Focus on local empowerment, like the media mobilizing project.
* “Is Facebook a Threat to a Free Press?”

NCMR-related Stories Produced/Published by NCMR Reporters

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| Mark Scheerer | PNS | ["Corralling the Internet--sample story"  http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/31789-2](%22Corralling%20the%20Internet--sample%20story%22%C2%A0%20http%3A//www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/31789-2)Eight different versions of this ran in CO, NY, NH, MA, NV, MN, ME and VA, reaching 130 outlets |
| Alice Ollstein | FSRN | [http://fsrn.org/audio/former-fcc-commissioner-michael-copps-media-consolidation-and-threats-public-airwaves/11853](http://fsrn.org/audio/former-fcc-commissioner-michael-copps-media-consolidation-and-threats-public-airwaves/11853%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) |
| Ken Rapoza | In These Times | http://inthesetimes.org/article/14897/the\_new\_new\_journalism/ |
| Jesse Luna | News Taco | Http://www.newstaco.com/2013/04/11/ten-things-i-learned-at-ncmr13/ |
| Mike Ludwig | Truthout | http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/15655-labor-report-four-major-tv-news-networks-ignore-unions |

**II. Evaluation of Grant**

The Media Consortium sucessfully fulfilled the terms of this grant.

* We leveraged $10,000 to bring 19 reporters to NCMR
* Reporters made personal connections with each other that will support the ongoing MPREP program
* Reporters made connections with valuable sources in the media reform field
* Reporters learned how wide the media policy field actually is, and how deeply media policy affects all Americans, but particularly the most vulnerable.
* Free Press and other media policy activists benefitted from being able to tell their stories to reporters, make personal connections to reporters, and explain their work to reporters.
* The Building Media Policy Reporting from the Ground Up session provoked thought, story ideas, and ongoing connections for the journalists.

**III. A Compelling Story**

Reporter Jesse Luna’s trip to NCMR encapsulates why this kind of project is so important. Jesse works full time for SEIU721, and part time at TMC member News Taco, an outlet offering news, critique and analysis from a Latino perspective.

As he writes in his blog, this was Jesse’s “first exposure to the media reform community.” NCMR gave him an opportunity to understand media reform issues that particularly intersect with the Latino community, like media consolidation and prison phone charges. He made personal connections with Free Press and other media reform organizations, but also with Presente, the “move on” of Latino politics and with Peter from New America Media, the association of the ethnic press. These connections to Presente and NAM will help News Taco leverage its role as a Latino outlet more effectively.

Finally, Jesse is a professional communicator (via the union) but had not dug deeply into media reform issues. At our Building Media Policy Reporting session, he met Carrie Biggs-Adams, whose work at CWA is focused on that intersection of labor and media reform. Now, Jesse is interested in taking the media reform discussion back to SEIU, and also in working with TMC to open up more opportunities for labor reporting by independent media.

It is these kinds of rich connections that can’t be quantified that make a travel grant so powerful.

**IV. Budget Attached.**

**Short Summary:**

$ 8850 Travel Grants to 19 Reporters

$ 700 Fiscal Sponsor Overhead (7%)

$ 350 Pizza Party

$ 100 Travel for Project Manager (supplement)

$10000

**Variance:** We spent $350 of the Travel grant on a pizza and beer party at FSTV. The goal of the party was to encourage networking among reporters—and to feed them!

At the last minute, one reporter gave back $250 she had been granted for lodging (she stayed with friends). We reassigned $150 of that to another reporter, and $100 towards the project manager’s travel.