Report Back on MDF Grant

Granted October 2010 for MPREPP

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For The Media Consortium

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**I. Summary**

In October 2010, the Media Consortium was awarded a grant to create a Media Policy Reporting and Education Pilot Program. The aim of the program was to raise the issue of media policy to a new level of public awareness by supporting quality reporting and efficient content delivery. The program was designed to run for a six month period, from February 2011 to May 2011, to test the concept.

Participants in this program included:

AlterNet, Mother Jones, Truthout, GritTV, Feet in Two Worlds, Public News Service, and the George Washington Williams Center in partnership with NYCMA and New America Media.

**The pilot program included three components:**

**1. Education:**

The Media Consortium organized 4 briefing calls between Media Consortium reporters and media policy experts.

What is the Future of Broadband + NCMR planning

* Amina Fazlullah, Policy Counsel, Benton Foundation.
* Bryan Mercer, Digital Inclusion Director and Web Strategist, Media Mobilizing Project
* Jennifer Ettinger from Free Press

What Will They Consolidate Next? An In-Depth Look at Future Trends in Media Consolidation

* Matt Wood of the Media Access Project,
* Josh Stearns Free Press,
* Bruce Kushnick, a telecommunications industry analyst and a founding member of Teletruth, a customer advocacy group

Net Neutrality Vs. The Mobile Web

* Jamilah King, Colorlines.com,
* amalia deloney, Grassroots Policy Director for the Center for Media Justice,
* Laura Montoya, campaign coordinator for the Media Literacy Project

The Future of Radio

* Brandy Doyle, Prometheus Radio
* Megan Sheehan, Vermont Workers’ Center
* Dr. Traci L. Morris, Native Public Media

In addition, reporters were strongly encouraged to attend the 2011 National Conference for Media Reform.

**2. Reporting**

Support for regular and consistent reporting by four media outlets on media policy news.

In the six month period, over 80 stories were produced from 9 different outlets.

(This total number includes 20 short reports from Truthout, and multiple story created by the Public News Service for distribution to different states.)

**3. Distribution**

The Media Consortium paid a blogger to produce a biweekly round-up of the best reporting on media policy by members as part of our Media Wires program.

Nine posts were published. The blog was free for any organization to reprint. We saw around 140 total reprints of the blog across our network and between 10-15 orgs picked it up on a regular basis including firedoglake, HuffPo, Rabble.ca, In These Times, Yes! Magazine, Oakland Local, Colorlines, Free Speech TV, and The American Prospect, as well as participating organizations.

**II. Evaluation**

As a pilot program, the Media Policy Reporting and Education Project succeeded.

1. Education

The original hope was to create 10 briefing calls over six months; instead, we only were able to create 4 plus an intensive gathering at NCMR. One reason for this was that TMC staff went through a difficult transition in 2011 as Director Tracy van Slyke left and Erin Polgreen was left to run the entire Consortium as temporary director as well as to run the Media Policy program.

On the other hand, the briefing calls proved very successful, with 10 reporters attending each call. One unexpected value was the way the calls brought together the media policy experts themselves. Reporters also told us informally that the calls were not only educational, but provided them with important access to key sources. Such policy briefing calls would become the key to future TMC programs.

2. Reporting

We had hoped to attract four outlets to the program, and instead attracted nine. Reporters responded to the content of the briefings and produced several standout stories:

* NAM’s two part series on LPTV. A previously undercovered story about the impact of LPTV—and the positive side affects from digital conversion for ethnic communities. LPTV station managers have contacted NAM to connect with other organizations mentioned in the story.
* AlterNet’s 5-part series by David Rosen and Bruce Kushnick on media consolidation’s impact on public dialogue and consumers.
* Feet in Two World’s working with NPR’s The World to air a segment on how young immigrants are using social media to organize around dream act.
* Truthout’s remarkable community engagement with the over 20 stories they’ve produced as a result of this project. In particular, Nadia Prupis has really come into her own as a media policy reporter. Her final article was shared via social media with 3195 people.

The hope of the project had been that generously funding reporting would lead to higher quality stories. What we found was that many of these stories benefitted from hands-on editing from Media Consortium staff, which went beyond the scope of the project. One lesson from that was to screen applicants to the program better to ensure editorial/production as well as reporting capacity at each outlet. Another lesson was that the program does take siginificant resources from the Media Consortium staff, and so requires that TMC staff be adequately funded.

Program manager Erin Polgreen also noticed that the program lacked a way to track metrics and audience. She researched a pixel ping system that would allow us to track click-thrus; we implemented that for the MPREP 2012 program.

2. Distribution

While our media policy blog, the Wavelength, got pretty decent pickup, it generated a surprisingly low number of clickthrus to member content, especially compared to the other blogs we were running—about 2500 clickthrus total. One reason might have been the content, and the audience education curve.

In general, we noticed through 2011 that the Media Wires blogs got increasingly less pickup as social media became more dominant, and such blogs were discontinued in 2012.

**Conclusion**

The Media Policy Reporting and Education Pilot Project met the success indicators we had set:

* The briefings provided an excellent education to reporters, leading directly to story creation. Nadia Prupis is a key example.
* Participants produced important reporting that informed and educated the public.
* Participant reporting made an impact, both through reach (such as Feet in Two World’s collaboration with NPR) and through activating readers (such as AlterNet’s series on media consolidation). In addition, the reporting had the unlooked-for result of sparking dialogue within the media policy world (viz NAM’s reporting on lptv).
* The MediaWires program did reach 140 outlets and engage new readers.

As a result of this pilot project, the Media Consortium asked for and was granted funds for a second year of the program.