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**Contact: Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Director**

**Media Policy Reporting and Education Project**

The ability to support, oppose, or change government policies is essential to the functioning of a participatory democracy. In just the past five years, such opportunities to participate increasingly are only available online.

The lack of digital access impacts poor, rural and ethnic communities most obviously and often most directly. However, even those who believe they have excellent access may find, on closer inspection, that doors they once thought open are being shut, as multinational corporations from AT&T to Facebook define the digital infrastructure as a private service to be controlled and monetized, rather than as a public utility for the public benefit.

We need journalists to tell this story. Yet, the policies that guide the development and use of media are usually adjudicated and legislated without context. The result is that it is hard for journalists—even those who follow the media policy beat--to educate the public as to how media policy will impact specific communities, rights, or issues.

The Media Consortium, a national network of over 50 independent news media outlets, proposes to address this need for better media policy coverage through our Media Policy Reporting and Education Project. MPREP has three central goals:

1. Educate a cohort of reporters on media policy;
2. Build stronger collaborative bonds between independent media, media policy advocates, and progressive policy advocates;
3. Impact the national conversation about media reform in order to support a more just media policy.

After focusing primarily on educating reporters for our first two years, we are now ready to launch the next phase of our project, which will focus on building bonds between independent media, media policy advocates, and advocates in non-media policy areas in order to meet the need to educate and engage the public about the very real ways in which media policy impacts their lives.

**Why the Media Consortium?**

The Media Consortium (TMC) has a proven track record of successfully training reporters and building strong bonds between reporters, media outlets, and policy outlets.

We Educate Reporters. Our MPREP program has been up and running for 18 months, as a result of the generous support of the Media Democracy Fund. The training program itself has consisted of briefings on media policy topics by experts in the field, plus mentorship relationships we build between these experts and individual reporters. The briefings are publicized and are open to all TMC members as well as to those at our sister organizations.

TMC staff recruit a corps of MPREP reporters who are required to attend the trainings and publish at least 9 stories on media policy over one year. Since 2011, The Media Consortium has trained journalists at 12 outlets in media policy, who in turn have pushed out over 130 stories on media policy, reaching a combined online audience of 1.7 million.

The story is not just in these numbers, but in the change of perspective our briefings and mentorship program have brought to the journalists in our program:

*The Media Consortium program opened my eyes to the wider concern of media policy analysts and media policy in general. Whereas I used to consider it more related to news gathering and the impacts of big media on the content and idea landscape, now I am thinking more about the tools and equipment used to transfer media, from low powered FM to the tightly policed social networking sites that people use to discuss news and politics. Overall, this TMC grant gave me a chance to look broader at media policy in this country. -- Kenneth Rapoza, columnist, In These Times; business writer, Forbes*

We Build Infrastructure. The Media Consortium’s vision is to build a progressive infrastructure of independent media and policy organizations that has real power to inform, educate and engage the public on matters of public policy. We believe we best achieve that impact by developing closer partnerships with our allies in the advocacy world.

* In 2011, the Media Consortium worked closely with Common Cause, People for the American Way, Public Citizen, the Center for Media and Democracy, and four other organizations to run a set of stories on the Citizens United Ruling. Our #campaigncash tag became a major meme.
* In 2012, we worked with Occupy groups to set up a weekly national briefing call that has kept Occupy in the news; our May Day 2012 collaboration changed the prevailing reporting about that day.
* To create our Media Policy briefings, we have created a new infrastructure linking independent journalists to media policy experts. With the assistance of Media Democracy Fund staff, as well as the former staff at the Media and Democracy Coalition, TMC staff reached out to eleven organizations dedicated to media policy: the Center for Media Justice, the Center for Rural Strategies, Color of Change, Consumers Union, the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Free Press, the National Hispanic Media Coalition, New America Foundation/OTI, Prometheus Radio, Public Citizen, and Public Knowledge. As a result of our efforts, staff at these organizations generously agreed to mentor reporters, provide briefings, and work with Media Consortium staff to identify breaking media policy stories.

*Being able to work directly with journalists and independent media to frame media policy stories as human interest or social justice deepens and broadens our reach and impact. Whether on the issues of prison phones, or the potential impacts of cuts to the low income programs of the Universal Service fund, we were able to help journalists shape a story that described the real harm in understandable terms that didn't bury the story in a hard to access tech blog.—*amalia deloney, Center for Media Justice

**MPREP 2013: Linking Media Policy to Hot Policy Areas**

MPREP for 2013 will build on our current successful program—we will continue the strategy of recruiting a corps of MPREP reporters and provide them with briefings on breaking media policy stories. The short-term goal will continue to be to increase the number of media policy stories and thus bring greater public attention to media policy.

In addition to this short-term strategy, we now will begin to pursue a much more difficult and longer term strategy designed to better inform reporters, non-media policy organizations, and the public about the ways in which media policy intersects with the issues closest to their heart—thus achieving a long-term goal of making the public more ready to engage in media policy issues. This strategy requires that we expand our media policy training to reporters with non-media policy beats, and expand our partnerships to policy advocates in areas not traditionally covered by media policy.

Work Plan

We will continue to offer briefings on breaking media policy issues and to create mentorship relationships between MPREP reporters and media policy experts. Outlets hosting MPREP reporters will once again receive a small stipend of $1000 per outlet to incentivize their participation in the program and in return, MPREP reporters will be asked to file either 6 text-based stories or 1-2 feature-length radio stories (or 3-5 radio shorts). Payment rates are reduced for stories because reporters are getting educated, so part of their payment is, essentially, in-kind.

This year, however, MPREP also will identify at least three and up to five hot non-media policy areas around which both our reporters and the media policy advocates we work with are excited about developing collaborations (see appendix). Our preliminary research has pointed us to three broad areas:

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| **“Hot Issue”** | **Media Policy Focus** | **Media Policy Expert** | **Issue Expert** |
| Campaign Cash | FCC Disclosure Rules; Media Consolidation | Free Press | Common Cause |
| Criminal Justice | Data privacy; wireless monopolies; prison phone monopoly | Center for Media Justice | TBD |
| Environmental Justice | Broadband Access; wireless monopolies | Center for Rural Strategies | Urban Habitat; Earth Island  |

TMC staff will begin each collaboration by convening a roundtable of both media policy experts and experts from the specific policy focus to identify one or more issues in the policy area that integrate media policy and are currently or likely to soon be in the news.

TMC staff will then bring together MPREP reporters with reporters at outlets that specialize in the issue area to create partnerships to pursue the story. Outlets will apply for and receive mini-grants to cover the cost of their collaboration and the stories the collaboration produces. TMC staff will create briefings using experts from the roundtable and will track stories produced. Many of these collaborations will serve a dual-use of being part of our metrics project, which means that deeper engagement metrics will be tracked for these collaborations.

Benchmarks:

* Recruit at least 5 new MPREP reporters;
* Train and support MPREP graduates with the goal of continuing their reporting;
* Create at least 68 original high impact stories and up to 200 stories total;
* Deepen relationships between independent media and media policy organizations;
* Develop new media-policy-based relationships with non-media policy organizations;
* Provide quantitative evidence of MPREP story click-thrus through the use of pixel ping HTML tag embedded in every report
* Provide quantitative evidence of the spread of media policy stories through the mediascape as part of our Innovation and Incubation Metrics Lab.

**Sources of Support**

We ask the Media Democracy Fund to support the infrastructure costs of the MPREP project. The dollars coming directly from MDF will cover the cost for project management and a media policy intern, along with the cash incentive for outlets to train new reporters in the MPREP program. In the past, we were able to run the entire program on MDF funds.

This year, we plan to leverage all of our grant funding in support of the MPREP program. The Media Consortium regularly applies for funding for editorial collaborations—we have a proposal out at Park for a natural gas collaboration, and are creating a proposal for Glaser Progress around Citizens United. We will leverage those monies to support a media policy focus for some of the reporting done as part of those grants. Likewise, we already have a pot of $100,000 in hand to fund collaborations as part of the Metrics Lab.

Finally, the Media Consortium is working on a long-term plan to create enough earned revenue to subsidize our basic overhead and staffing costs. The Community Journalism Training Institute will train volunteers with advocacy organizations to become community journalists. We are currently creating the business plan for this endeavor.

The Media Democracy Fund’s support for the MPREP pilot project was critical to helping us formulate our theory of change and move our project forward. We ask you to continue that support by providing us with a grant of $30,000 to fund MPREP in 2013.

**Appendix One**

In 2012, MPREP reporters found that media policy stories had the largest reach when they illuminated a related policy issue.

The chart below shows how many hits (recorded by our embedded pixel ping) that FSRN received for each media policy story they have run in 2012 to date. FSRN editors suggest that audiences appreciated stories on the electronic disclosure of political ads on broadcast TV because those stories had a clear connection to the Citizens United ruling. Editors at other outlets have agreed that the FCC disclosure issue got the most traction of all the media policy stories they ran this year, and for the same reason.

The clear relationship between the FCC story and the public interest in Citizens United has encouraged media outlet editors and producers to believe that there is a real opportunity to expand the media policy audience by linking media policy to other issues. Their enthusiasm is in part driving this current proposal.