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

 **415-878-3862/joellen@themediaconsortium.com**

Looked at from one perspective, 2013 was the year of media policy. The Edward Snowden revelations underscored the need for the FCC to create a much more robust set of policies around data privacy, and reminded us all of the increasing concentration of digital and cellular communications in just a handful of companies. This story promises, if anything, to continue into 2014 with new disclosures from Snowden and the likely reappearance of the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act.

For those who have long followed media policy, however, 2013 was a critical year for an entirely different set of reasons. Not only was a new chair named, but the FCC is embarking on a set of policies around the IP transition that have the potential for determining who will have access to digital and cellular communications in years to come. In particular, topics that impact the underserved and underpresented, such as spectrum allocation, e-rate, and broadband access—along with the related issues of net neutrality and media consolidation-- will be critical loci of policies in the coming year.

Unfortunately, the stories around the IP transition are simply not as compelling as either the Snowden revelations or the CISPA legislative fights. In part, that is because policies like e-rate and broadband access don’t have obvious good guys and bad guys. In part, it is because these stories are much harder to understand, let alone tell.

That is why, in 2014, the Media Consortium’s Media Policy Education and Reporting Project is more necessary than ever. Our monthly background briefings give reporters the education and sources they need to tell these stories. Access to activists reminds reporters that ordinary people—the people in their audiences—are directly impacted by media policies. And, in turn, the reporters’ questions help policy experts frame their messages so that they can be better understood by a larger public.

In 2013, we saw the power of in-person events to bring more reporters to the media policy beat; to become more open to a wider variety of media policy issues; and to learn how to develop their own sources. In 2014, we plan to leverage our close relationship with CMJ and Free Press to create a 2-day intensive workshop at the FCC as a catalytic event for our year of policy briefings.

**An Ongoing Policy Project**

The Media Consortium, an international network of over 65 progressive, independent news organizations, is proud to have run the Media Policy Reporting and Education Project for the past three years with the generous support of the Media Democracy Fund. Over these three years, the Media Consortium has a proven track record of successfully training reporters and building strong bonds between reporters, media outlets, and policy outlets.

Reporter Education

The training program consists of background 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 to publish at least 6 stories on media policy over one year. Since 2011, the Media Consortium has trained 18 journalists at 12 outlets, who in turn have pushed out over 216 stories on media policy.

In addition to the regular briefings, the Media Consortium, again with the support of the Media Democracy Fund, has arranged for MPREP reporters to travel to NCMR in 2011 and 2013. In 2013, this opportunity was supplemented by several special presentations at NCMR geared to Media Consortium. Along with NCMR in April 2013, MPREP reporters were given the chance to hear from and meet former FCC commissioner Michael Copps at the Media Consortium’s annual meeting in February 2013. In January 2014, at least five of the current MPREP reporters will be attending new FCC chair Tom Wheeler’s first town hall, in Oakland CA.

Strengthening the Media Policy Field

These in-person events for reporters were made possible due to the close relationships the Media Consortium has built with advocates and experts in the media policy field. Common Cause arranged for Mr. Copps to attend the Media Consortium’s February meeting; Free Press generously offered room and program space for MPREP reporter events at NCMR; and the Center for Media Justice is providing special access to the Oakland FCC event for MPREP reporters.

In 2013, the Media Consortium included experts from 12 different policy organizations on our briefing calls, ranging from beltway players like Public Knowledge and New America Foundation to organizations focused on grassroots and community policymaking like NHMC, ILSR, and CMJ. The relationships we build with these organizations are symbiotic—the experts provide our reporters with background briefings, off-the-record insight, and on-the-record quotes; the reporters provide the experts with an opportunity not only to get their message out, but to refine it through the off-the-record give and take.

**Proposed MPREP 2014: At the FCC**

The goals of the Media Policy Reporting and Education Project are:

* to educate as many reporters as possible about media policy;
* to increase the quantity and quality of reporting on media policy;
* to insure that stories are written on media policy topics that are not often found in the news;
* to contribute to building the media policy field

The work plan for 2014 reflects both our experience with this project and our goals.

Continue monthly background briefings.

The monthly background briefing structure that we have developed has been successful in training journalists and building the field. Monthly briefings allow us to introduce a variety of topics, and to keep topics timely for reporters who must have a news angle for every story they publish.

While the briefings themselves require a significant amount of work by a project manager to create, both reporters and media policy experts find that they offer good value. The most significant measurement of that value is financial: we cut grant money to outlets for this program in 2013, yet a larger number of reporters participated and the stories they wrote were generally of higher quality.

*“Participating in the program again broadened my knowledge of many issues in contemporary media. Jo Ellen Kaiser's tele-briefings generated a number of good stories for PNS as she rounded up well-prepared experts on a variety of topics, all of whom seemed especially versed in making complicated subjects easily understood*.”—Mark Scheerer, Public News Service

Benchmarks for briefing program:

* Enroll 10 reporters at 7-8 outlets; at least half of the reporters should be new to the media policy program. We will seek outlets and reporters that are geographically, racially, and ethnically diverse and that reach a diverse set of audiences.
* Provide 10-12 briefings through the year, drawing on different policy experts for each briefing.
* Contract with reporters to produce at least 5 feature stories during the course of the year, with at least 3 of those stories on topics introduced during the program. (Create at least 50 original high impact stories).
* Survey alumni of MPREP to see if they are still producing media policy stories; create focus group to learn how to involve them in current program.

Send 10 Reporters to a 2-day Workshop at the FCC

Bringing 19 reporters to NCMR was enlightening. We found that the trip raised enthusiasm not only for our media policy program, but for many of the less-well-publicized stories within media policy. Stories that emerged from NCMR included a piece on how media consolidation impacts union workers; data security threats faced particularly by immigrants; and the loss of lifeline service for seniors.

We propose creating a similar swell of enthusiasm by bringing 10 reporters to the FCC in 2014. The workshop will provide face-to-face meetings with policy experts; teach reporters how to use FCC briefings as source material; and show how to translate what is mostly dry, legal content into compelling stories about real people.

The Center for Media Justice, which puts on a similar event for policy insiders, has agreed to partner with the Media Consortium in creating this workshop. TMC and CMJ have agreed to jointly seek funding for the project management and content of the workshop; from MDF, we are only seeking travel funds for the reporters.

Benchmarks for FCC workshop:

* Bring 10 reporters to the FCC for a two-day workshop.
* Reporters should emerge able to use FCC documents as sources for stories.
* Reporters should emerge with new contacts among DC-based policy experts.

Measuring Success for the Project

* Enroll at least 5 **new** reporters and 3-4 **new** outlets in the program, so that we can increase the venues for media policy reporting
* Deepen the understanding and expertise of both new and returning reporters and outlets—this is primarily a qualitative measurement, though we can look at the length of stories and the number of sources referenced.
* Deepen relationships between independent media and media policy organizations;
* Provide quantitative evidence of the spread of media policy stories through the mediascape as part of our Innovation and Incubation Metrics Lab.

**Conclusion**

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 along with a small cash incentive for outlets to train new reporters in the MPREP program. In addition, we request travel funding for 10 reporters to attend a two-day workshop in DC.

The Media Democracy Fund’s support for the MPREP pilot project is helping us train a growing corps of media policy reporters. We ask you to continue that support by providing us with a grant of $35,000 to fund MPREP in 2014.