

**Submitted by: The Media Consortium, a project of the Foundation for National Progress**

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**Final Report on the Media Policy Reporting and Education Project**

**Summary**

The primary aim of the Media Policy Reporting and Education Project is to increase and deepen the quality of reporting on media policy issues by training reporters in the media policy beat. The vision of the project is to build trust between reporters, media outlets, policy advocates, and grassroots activists in order to open up a pathway for creating the kind of impact that leads to real, lasting social change.

In 2013, the Media Consortium recruited 7 outlets and 10 reporters to the MPREP program, brought a total of 19 reporters to the National Conference for Media Reform, and brought 6 reporters to the FCC TownHall in Oakland. Introducing new reporters and editors to the media policy field was our biggest success this year.

*A belated thank you for allowing me to participate in the Media Reform Conference in Denver last April, and for letting me participate in the discussions that you and The Media Consortium held there around the topics of media transparency, net neutrality and the digital divide. These discussions were quite eye-opening for me and marked the first time I've had a chance to do a deep dive into these issues that have become so important as journalists like me -- and journalism -- move into a new era.—*Nick Coleman, The Uptake.

*"The Media Policy Reporting and Education Project has allowed The Nation to deepen our coverage of media policy issues and invest in an exciting emerging journalist, Leticia Miranda."*—Kate Murphy, The Nation

**Evaluation**

Quantitative Benchmarks:

* 7 outlets participated in MPREP: In These Times, Generation Progress, Making Contact, The Nation, News Taco, Public News Service, and Truthout
* 10 reporters were trained through MPREP: Ken Rapoza and Cole Stangler (ITT), Emily Crocket and Doug Bair (Generation Progresss), Salima Hamirani and George Lavender (Making Contact), Leticia Miranda (The Nation), Jesse Luna (News Taco), Mark Scheerer (PNS), and Mike Ludwig (Truthout)
* 19 reporters attended NCMR thanks to a second travel grant from MDF.
* 6 reporters attended the FCC Town Hall on January 9,2014; 5 via a travel grant from the MPREP fund
* 3 in-person events and 7 phone briefings were held in 2013.
* 66 stories were produced: 27\* feature stories plus 39 story versions from PNS

This year, over 22 reporters were involved in the MPREP program, either as reporters in the regular program or as invitees to NCMR. In addition, over 10 reporters were enrolled in our regular MPREP briefings. Each of these reporters have said that they want to continue to participate in the program. Indeed, several of our alumni, including reporters from FSRN and NAM, attended NCMR with our group and attended at least one of our other briefings. In short, we had significant success as a training program this year.

2013 was not a good year for independent media outlets, however. Several of the outlets involved in the program underwent significant personnel changes during the year, which hampered the production of content. Generation Progress reorganized, during the course of which MPREP reporter Emily Crockett left in March 2013 and was not replaced by Doug Bair until October 2013. Similarly, Ken Rapoza at In These Times could not continue in the program, and was replaced mid-year with Cole Stangler. Nick Coleman of the Uptake had planned to assign a reporter to the regular MPREP program, but a financial crisis prevented the Uptake from participating as they had hoped. Sue Salinger of KGNO had looked forward to participating, but the Boulder floods in May directly impacted her house and prevented her from doing any extra work in 2013. And Making Contact had told us from the start that they could produce no more than three reports, given the costs to them of a weekly radio show. As a result, the number of reporters was not reflected in the quantity of content.

Because a few reporters dropped out, we ended the year with an extra $2500 we had not anticipated. We are using this money to send 5 reporters to the town hall with FCC chair Tom Wheeler on January 9, 2014.

Qualitative Benchmarks

Several of our reporters and outlets (Mike Ludwig, Truthout; Mark Scheerer, PNS; Making Contact) have now been with the MPREP program for 2-3 cycles. The consequence has been an observable increase in the quality of the reporting from these outlets.

*For many years, our deep prison beat had us watching the issue of affordable phone communications in prison.  Support from the MPREP project allowed us to closely follow and report on a breakthrough year in terms of federal policy, and will inform our future coverage.—*Andrew Stelzer, Making Contact

Especially powerful this year was the ability for reporters to meet with policy experts in person. We brought Michael Copps to our annual conference in Baltimore in February to give a plenary address on media reform, and we are bringing 5 reporters to Oakland to meet with CMJ activists at the FCC town hall in January 2014. Reporters were especially impressed by their trip to NCMR.

The impact of these in-person events was three fold:

* Travel to NCMR brought new reporters to the media policy beat
* Immersion in media policy for a 2-3 day period exposed reporters to new story ideas.
* Face-to-face meetings with policy experts helped reporters develop their own sources and stories.

*"Attending the Free Press Conference in Denver was a great opportunity to learn about a wide range of media policy issues. From the history of indigenous media, to internet access in rural communities, the conference helped me identify issues, sources, and stories for Making Contact."* --George Lavender

These in-person events also enabled us to increase and deepen relationships between news and media policy organizations. MPREP has developed such a positive reputation among policy advocates that when we contact media reform groups we have not worked with previously, such as the Utility Reform Network, they already know about us and are happy to participate in our calls. The Media Consortium was the first place CMJ and Free Press turned to in order to bring reporters to FCC chair Wheeler’s first town hall. We are increasingly perceived as the best resource for media policy reporting.

In 2013, we expanded our network of policy experts, continuing to work with the Center for Media Justice, Color of Change, EFF, Free Press, National Hispanic Media Coalition, Native Public Media, New America Foundation, Prometheus, Public Citizen, Public Knowledge and the Center for Rural Strategies, and developing new relationships with Benton, the media reform group within Common Cause, the Institute for Local Self-Reliance, the National Consumer Law Center, and the Utility Reform Network.

Partnering with these activists led us to realize that our working plan for 2013 was headed in the wrong direction. We had proposed tying media policy work to other policy areas such as campaign cash, criminal justice and environmental justice. We found, however, that the media policy advocates were not that interested in spending their time on these connections. We realized by March that we just didn’t have the leverage to bring media policy and other progressive policy activists to the table—that that is work better suited, perhaps, to a foundation, think tank, or the activists themselves. Instead, we focused on understanding the policy concerns of our partners, and bringing those to our members.

**One Story**

An unexpected but welcome effect of the MPREP project has been our ability to facilitate networking among the media policy experts themselves. Each of our online briefings has brought together experts from at least two different organizations.

Our largest call—and the one that was most heavily covered by our outlets—was on the Verizon v FCC case challenging net neutrality. Over 23 individuals joined that call, and our reporters produced 5 feature stories plus a number of radio briefs.

Originally, we had set up the call with CMJ, NHMC, and Color of Change, aiming to focus the call on how net neutrality relates to access for communities of color. Once they heard about the call, however, Free Press and PK asked us to allow their experts to join. We agreed, but insisted the policy folks all talk to each other first.

The conversation the Media Consortium hosted with representatives of these five organizations was perhaps as or more important than the briefing itself. The act of participating jointly in the briefing required each of these organizations to understand the priorities of the other, and to shape their messaging so that they would complement each other’s positions. That background work may not have been visible to the public, but helped strengthen the coalition to support net neutrality.

**Conclusion**

The Media Consortium has come to serve a critical role in the media policy landscape by bringing together reporters and policy makers to educate the public about media policy. At a time when the way Americans access the media is changing radically, this educational effort is more important than ever. We thank the Media Democracy Fund for its continued support for our project.

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