



Live From Main Street: Celebrating the Impact and Opportunities Generated by Media Collaboration

Forums like Live From Main Street [are] a great way to encourage we, the people, to [make] our voices heard, and [LFMS] should continue regardless of who gets to spend his/her days in the oval office.
-Jeff Weinberger, LFMS Audience Member

We loved it! It's refreshing to hear intelligent, successful women talk about issues relevant to my world. I thought the panelists and audience were amazing.
-Kay Schultz, LFMS Audience Member

I give it a thumbs up! It was refreshing and had a very good feel about it. I enjoyed the panelists, how it was presented [and] would love to see more events with this theme.
-Rhonda Hue, LFMS Audience Member

INTRODUCTION

This report analyzes the impact of Live From Main Street, a collaborative multimedia project organized by The Media Consortium and its member organizations. The data presented within was distilled from audience surveys, interviews with staff and partner organizations, and metrics analysis (i.e. reprinted content, audience estimates for radio, web traffic, video views). Please see appendix for lists of articles, data and tracking information generated by this project.

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HISTORY

In 2006, representatives from Mother Jones, The Nation and Air America identified the potential for The Media Consortium, a network of 50 leading independent media organizations, to meet a deep need for journalism that engaged the American public by linking national issues and policies to everyday life. The 2008 election season was identified as a prime opportunity for independent media to work together to impact the political dialogue.

The resulting collaboration became Live From Main Street (LFMS) and was launched as a flagship project of The Media Consortium in 2008. LFMS became a grassroots-focused town hall tour of America, hosted GRITtv's Laura Flanders, and facilitated by an unprecedented alliance of independent media makers and regional, grassroots activist organizations. From its conception, LFMS offered a powerful opportunity to break the elite-focused, horse-race mold of mainstream election coverage and bring the conversation back to where it belonged: with the people and issues our candidates were meant to represent.

PROJECT GOALS

Early on, the Media Consortium's staff and advisers developed a set of innovative goals for the project:

- Strengthen progressive media infrastructure through multi-platform partnerships.
- Enhance progressive media through the open-source distribution of free, high-quality content.
- Change the tenor and scope of election coverage
- Highlight grassroots initiatives and victories by amplifying local voices to a national scale.

These goals would be implemented via a series of a monthly town halls, taking place over five months. Each program was designed to inform and inspire local and national audiences, strengthen the reach of independent media, and breathe new life into the political process.

LFMS was also envisioned as a multi-platform project. Each town hall would be broadcast on multiple television and radio networks, streamed all over the web, written about in dozens of print and online outlets, and disseminated on wires reaching thousands of independent and ethnic media outlets.

In terms of content, each town hall was designed to pull diverse cross-section of communities together. Producers were to work with local activist organizations, leading thinkers and independent media to capture the on-the-ground happenings. LFMS honed in on a critical, under-reported issues by visiting the regions most impacted by issues of civil liberties, the housing crisis, national security, voting rights, and political accountability. After months of planning, fundraising and development, LFMS launched in June 2008 with the below program schedule and staff.

Program Schedule:

June: Minneapolis, MN

Getting Heard This Election Season: What Stands Between the Public and a True Story?

What does it take to get heard in the era of big media and diminished civil liberties? Join us as we talk with journalists, national leaders and Minneapolis locals and explore how everyday people are confronting these challenges and working to get the truth out far and wide.

Inspired by the work of everyday activists, Live From Main Street's premiere town hall will take place in downtown Minneapolis at the close of the National Conference for Media Reform. We'll talk to reporters speaking from personal experience to find out what stories get told in the age of corporate media, and which get cut out of fear and favor. We'll explore how independent media is flourishing in the face of growing challenges. LFMS will also look at Federal Government censorship and the PATRIOT Act. What do these restrictions mean for the press and dissenters trying to speak out? And, how are these issues playing out locally around plans for this Fall's Republican National Convention in Minneapolis and Saint Paul?

Featuring:

Malkia Cyril, Director of The Center for Media Justice

Amy Goodman, Host of *Democracy Now!*

Marlina Gonzalez, Program Director of the Unconvention and Intermedia Arts

Joel Kramer, Founder of *The Minneapolis Post*

John Nichols, Washington Correspondent for *The Nation*

Colleen Rowley, FBI Whistle Blower and 2006 Congressional Candidate

Paul Schmelzer, Managing Editor of *Minnesota Monitor*

July 12: Miami, FL

Magic City, Hard Times: How is Miami Facing the Economic Crisis and Working Toward a Sustainable Future?

With its diverse population, disparate levels of wealth and innovative Green Commission, Miami is often cited as a “window to the city” of the future. Known as the Magic City, Miami has a unique international flavor while sharing a focus on the foreclosure crisis, lost jobs and the environment with Gulf Coast neighbors like Atlanta and New Orleans. Live From Main Street’s Miami town hall will explore the work of Miami’s young leaders. How are they facing hard times and working to build a stronger sustainable city for generations to come? What is and isn’t working for the economy’s unrewarded stakeholders? And how are the most innovative ideas becoming action? In partnership with the Miami Workers Center.

Featuring:

Carolina Delgado, Jobs with Justice Membership Director

Barbara Jordan, Miami-Dade County Commissioner

Gihan Perera, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Miami Workers Center

Denise Perry, Director of the Power U Center for Social Change

Max Rameau, Founder and Author of *Take Back The Land*

Sonia Succar, Emerging Green Builders of South Florida

Darrin Woods, Countrywide Mortgage Sales Manager

August 24: Denver, CO

So You Say You Want Change? Exploring the Conflicts and Opportunities Ahead

Tens of thousands of volunteers, delegates from the Democratic Party and the presumptive presidential nominee will be hitting Denver for the DNC championing “change.”

But do they all agree on the best kind of changes for this country? With the help of local and national leaders and activists, Live From Main Street Denver is taking a closer look at what this buzzword means and what real, sustainable change would look like. Is a new, more progressive era on the horizon? And what impact will this new era have on education, security, the environment, immigration reform and other issues critical to the day-to-day lives of everyday Americans?

Featuring:

Representative Donna Edwards (D-MD), the first African American Congresswoman from Maryland who harnessed the power of the netroots to win a special election this June by 80%

Polly Baca, Former Colorado State Senator and President and CEO of the Latin American Research and Service Agency (LARASA)

Andre Banks, Deputy Director of the online citizens' lobby Color of Change

David Barsamian, Founder and Director of Colorado's Alternative Radio

Lee Camp, Laughing Liberally comedian

Lt. Col. Jay Fawcett, retired Air Force officer and Founder of Colorado's Western Strategies Center

Jim Hightower, bestselling author and radio commentator

Van Jones, Founder and President, Green For All

David Sirota, bestselling author of *The Uprising: The Unauthorized Tour of the Populist Revolt Scaring Wall Street and Washington*

Faye Wattleton, President and Co-Founder Center for the Advancement of Women

September 29-October 3: Columbus, OH

Will Your Vote Count? Voting Rights, Voter Engagement

Voter turnout in the 2008 primaries is at an all time high with young people registering to vote in unprecedented numbers. After two presidential elections with widespread voter disenfranchisement and many, including Ohio election officials, reporting that Ohio's voting system remains flawed--will every vote will get counted this year?

Live From Main Street's Columbus town hall is a weeklong virtual town hall series that kicks-off on September 29. Each day, Live From Main Street's virtual town hall will feature Ohio citizens and news to a national audience through televised, print and online stories. Content will include live chats, short investigative documentaries, one-on-one interviews and more.

Featuring:

Docia Buffington, Lead organizer for the Youth Voter Collective

Bob Fittrakis, Author of *How the GOP Stole Americas 2004 Election & Is Rigging 2008*

Stephen Hightower, The League of Young Voters

Donita Judge, Member of Advancement Project's Power and Democracy team and lead attorney covering Ohio

Bo Lipari, Executive Director of New Yorkers for Verified Voting

Frances Fox Piven, Renowned Professor and Author of *Why Americans Still Don't Vote*

Dr. Divine Pryor, Executive Director of the Center for NuLeadership on Urban Solutions

Steven Rosenfeld, Senior Fellow at AlterNet and the Author of *Count My Vote: A Citizen's Guide to Voting*

Deanna Zandt, Media Technologist and consultant to the *Hightower Lowdown*

October 26: Seattle, WA

Beyond Hockey Moms and Palin Politics: Women on Real National Security

Though National Security is a buzzword on the 2008 campaign trail, there has been virtually no discussion of what it means for everyday Americans to feel secure. Join us, less than two weeks before the election, as we move beyond lipstick and hockey pucks to investigate what real national security looks like. Hosted by Laura Flanders (GritTV), Live From Main Street Seattle will convene an all-women panel to examine how issues of national security impact our daily lives and ask the tough questions about how we can build a better future. Does the solution lie in our military or social policies? What are women doing to ensure security in their communities and in the world at large? And how does the militarization of our budget affect security in other areas of our lives?

We will bring together the voices of women who have served in the military, foreign policy experts and more to explore how national security policy might change if a broader cross-section of society was at the decision-making table.

Featuring:

Martha Burk, Author and Money Editor at *Ms. Magazine*

Rep. Maralyn Chase, Washington's 32nd District and The Washington State Director for the Women Legislator's Lobby

Rosalinda Guillen, Co-founder of and Executive Director for Community to Community Development

Carol Kessler, Director of Center for Global Security for Pacific Northwest National Lab and Co-chair of Women in International Security

Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, Executive Director of Mom's Rising

Erin Solaro, Author of *Women in the Line of Fire: What you should know about Women in the Military*

Commissioner Gael Tarleton, Commissioner at the Port of Seattle

Sarah Van Gelder, Executive Editor at *YES! Magazine*

LFMS Staff

Live From Main Street was managed by four part to full-time contractors. They were supported by Media Consortium staff members who provided management, fundraising and publicity support.

Laura Flanders, Host

Tracy Fleischman, Managing Producer

Yoruba Richen, Content Producer

Becki Scholl, Production Assistant

The Media Consortium: Supervision and Support

Tracy Van Slyke, Program Director

Erin Polgreen, Program Associate

SUCSESSES

Live From Main Street built dynamic national and local partnerships, was made available to a large audience, and broke new ground by harnessing new technologies and strategies for reporting and collaborating. **LFMS accomplished many of our goals, and ultimately reached over 9 million people via this five part town hall series and accompanying content.** The tremendous reach of this project fulfilled our central mission of putting the voices of every day people, local leaders front and center during this election season. We took issues underrepresented by corporate media mainstream by connecting the local impact of national trends and letting a diversity of voices tell their own stories. LFMS staff and crew worked with the people and locations ignored by mainstream media by working with up-and-coming experts and leaders on key national, political and social issues.

Collaboration:

LFMS brought members of The Media Consortium together. New partnerships were formed, demonstrating our collective ability to work together on future projects, big and small. MC Members, including Free Speech TV, Link TV, the National Radio Project, Public News Service, OneWorld, AlterNet, the American News Project and Brave New Films, Mother Jones, NAMAC, The Nation, The UpTake and Yes! Magazine participated on multiple levels, and by doing so, expanded the scope of this project, reaching new audiences and utilizing different mediums. For instance, radio reports distributed by Public News Service "were aired on a minimum of 810 radio stations and heard by an estimated 3,161,190 listeners," according to Lark Corbeil, Founder/Managing Editor of Public News Service.

LFMS and Media Consortium staff worked to engage Media Consortium members and allies months before the program launched. Media Consortium members played a critical role in developing and identifying themes and locations for town halls. Staff called, emailed and communicated with the group and individual organizations on a regular basis, sending 1-2 updates a week on developments, opportunities for collaboration around editorial content, self-promotion at town halls, publicity for the events themselves, and ideas for engaging audiences. LFMS staff worked hard to create an inclusive and informative environment for collaboration and relationship-building.

LFMS's live shows provided a wealth of content, from video and audio segments to blog posts and reported articles. Content was coordinated to explore the central issue of each live program, offering several nuanced and in-depth views of complex issues. By multi-platforming the content, LFMS was able to engage a wider scope of Media Consortium members and outside partners, as each organization was able to adapt content according to their editorial mandate. Members were also able to take advantage of these collaborations to bring their viewers something new and different.

"It was really important to host the video content—this broke up our regular text,"

-Jeffrey Allen, Managing Editor for OneWorld.

"[The UpTake saw a] rise in viewership from carrying show live, [and] networking with media allies."

-Noah Kumin, Senior Political Correspondent for The UpTake

"This was a perfect match for how we wanted to cover the election. We just don't have enough people on the ground to get that coverage."

-Geraldine Cabill, Communications and Social Media Director for The Real News

Editorial collaborations were also key to building the impact of LFMS. On Monday July 7, the LFMS team kicked off "Housing Crisis Investigation Week," a multimedia initiative designed to amplify coverage and conversation around this issue. This investigation week was in coordination with the Miami town hall, "Magic City, Hard Times: How is Miami Facing the Economic Crisis and Working Toward a Sustainable Future?" Media Consortium members created a flood of high-quality, independent media exposure to the housing crisis.

Content highlights include:

- In "Housing Crisis Hits 2 Million U.S. Children," OneWorld's Caitlin Johnson documents the impact of the housing crisis on our nation's most vulnerable citizens.
- Retired Wall Streeter and *Mother Jones* writer Nomi Prins explains how congress went wrong in "Why the Economy Went South."
- Over at The Nation, Peter Rothberg blogged about H.R. 2061, the Predatory Mortgage Lending Practices Reduction Act.
- GRITtv honed in on the crisis with several special guests and experts in the housing field.
- LFMS Miami participants Gihan Perera, Co-founder and Executive Director of the Miami Workers Center and Max Rameau, Founder and Author of Take Back The Land released open-source blogs about housing in Miami, which were picked up by MC members and allies like Huffington Post.
- Adele Stan, former managing editor of The Media Consortium's syndicated reporting project, examined how Miami--known as the subprime disaster's "ground zero"--became a window for larger national issues and was republished in outlets like Alternet and *In These Times*.

For each investigation week, open-source content generated by The Media Consortium's staff and reporters connected what was happening on the ground to national trends. These articles were published not only by Media Consortium members, but were picked up by larger blogs, including Huffington Post and FireDogLake. By increasing the distribution of this content, LFMS created an effective echo-chamber that increased public awareness of several issues critical to the 2008 election's outcome.

Prior to its Denver town hall, LFMS collaborated with FireDogLake on Sunday, August 17 to produce a live chat with Laura Flanders and town hall guest Andre Banks of Color of Change. Dozens of FDL community members asked Banks and Flanders what change really meant--and how we could accomplish it. The Live Chat raised awareness of the Denver town hall, but also engaged another audience in our discussion about what change really meant.

Local partnerships were also integral to the success of LFMS. The Miami Workers Center proved to be a critical ally for Miami's town hall, making it possible for us to reach a community that isn't usually a part of independent media. "We were told over and over that [Miami] was not a place where progressives are," says Producer Yoruba Richen.

But thanks to the outreach and support of the Miami Workers Center, over 200 people from across the Miami-Dade area attended. Local organizers and allies said this was an amazing turnout for Miami. The audience was

diverse, primarily made up of Blacks, Latinos and young people. Many local politicians, including a former city manager, a former state rep. of the district running for office again, a representative from the Florida DNC, and a mayoral candidate participated in the event. During the Q&A session, practically half the audience left their seats to line up to ask questions, share their own stories and press for change. These were the people hit hardest by the foreclosure crisis--giving them a platform is part of what made the Miami LFMS such an impactful event. "We heard over and over again how important it was that national media was paying attention to the issues of this community and how more communities across Miami and the country needs this kind of journalism," said Tracy Van Slyke, program director for The Media Consortium.

Local partnerships brought definition and depth to each town hall. During the opening of the Big Tent in Denver, LFMS Host Laura Flanders described a "Feeling that we'd gone from the margins to the center of the conversation. To me it was huge that we put a collaborative independent media event together and the heart and start of the convention."

Content with Impact

When considering the central question and topic of each town hall, LFMS staff and producers chose issues that were on the cusp of national notoriety, had a pressing and important local angle and was a critical issue during the election year. Some issues, like Civil Liberties in the lead-up to the Republican National Convention, became white-hot as the election drew closer. We were proud to have guided the tone and scope of coverage around these topics: "Minneapolis came the closest to being most successful as far as offering solutions," says LFMS host Laura Flanders. "Minneapolis put it's finger on what was going to happen during the RNC months before it happened." During the RNC, many independent journalists were illegally arrested as agitators and protesters, including representatives from Media Consortium members Democracy Now! and The Uptake.

Each town hall was both a creative challenge and a new opportunity, as LFMS producers adapted to new logistical circumstances and cultures in each city. While each town hall had similar elements, including panels and conversations with local experts, activists and media makers, LFMS staff worked hard to capture the identity of each community they worked with. We integrated local video and short documentaries with slam poetry and in-depth Q&A sessions to make sure each town hall presented a composite snapshot of that community.

LFMS staff also worked diligently to ensure that a diversity of voices and perspectives were present for each town hall, recruiting across the spectrum of ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and occupation to give the fullest perspective. Staff also thought strategically about how each town hall would be distributed. While most events were live-streamed, we also provided short video clips of each show's highlights. No matter the show was formatted, it was always available for Media Consortium members to post on their own sites.

"It was beneficial to have raw content and free reign to select what would work best for us," says Lisa Rudman, Executive Director of the National Radio Project.

Yes! Magazine "created a landing page on the Yes! Magazine website where several content items were featured, then linked to that page in two newsletters (which reached 25,000 viewers)," says Susan Gleason. "[Yes!] also featured [LFMS] extensively in a third voter email (12 Ways to Vote), including links to LFMS Ohio. It was good content for us to make use of."

Location:

In Minneapolis and Denver, LFMS built audience and impact by working in tandem with other events, such as the National Conference for Media Reform, or the Democratic National Convention. Over 500 people attended Denver's town hall making it one of the best-attended events at the DNC's Big Tent. Over 400 people attended Minneapolis LFMS, making it the second-best attended LFMS. These events had the largest turnout of any LFMS town halls. Producers were also able to recruit bigger names for panel participation when LFMS coincided

with another event.

Harnessing New Technologies:

By the time the Columbus event arrived, resources (mainly time and money) were limited. But rather than cut a town hall that was vital to the election conversation, LFMS staff decided to host a week-long virtual town hall that focused on in-the-field efforts of Ohio-based organizations to prevent voter fraud and vote manipulation. Every day, a short segment was released to MC members, featuring voting experts and grassroots activists on-the-ground in Ohio, fighting for a fair electoral process. Content from this town hall was featured on GRITtv, where audience members could chat about their concerns via the webstream, on OneWorld.net as a part of their election coverage, and with partner organizations like the Center for Social Media and the Huffington Post.

The virtual town hall helped preserve resources, but it also encouraged collaboration. LFMS Columbus accompanying investigation week really leveraged the efforts of many Media Consortium members, according to Laura Flanders. "I think it worked in terms of setting and agenda for other media. I think we managed to pull off one of our goals as far as pulling people together. I think we were really on the right topic at the right moment."

"Ohio was more economical and efficient. There was more aggregating and collecting and presenting different outlets' works. [There were] different ways to have different voices heard—each way has different cost-benefits."

-Lisa Rudman

CHALLENGES

LFMS was a first-time project that generated an unprecedented amount of content and collaboration amongst Media Consortium members and outside organizations. But, as a first time project, there were new and unexpected challenges and lessons learned. Though LFMS was an overall success, staff also encountered challenges related to timing, collaboration, and promotions. The below outline offers a summary of challenges faced, and recommendations for avoiding future difficulties with future projects of a similar manner.

Timing:

Although there were 4-5 weeks between each show, LFMS staff only had 2-3 weeks to confirm guests since publicity materials had to go out at least two weeks before each show. "Having more time to plan would have been good, nailing down big name speakers at the beginning, having details more laid out in advance, and finding strong local partners," Tracy Fleischman, LFMS Managing Producer.

This short turnaround also proved difficult in regards to facilitating collaboration and organizing investigation weeks: participating and partner organizations struggled to fit LFMS programming into their regular editorial schedules. "The timeline was very pressed and [impacted our] ability of the potential to fulfill the vision," Susan Gleason, Media and Outreach Manager, YES! Magazine, LFMS partner.

In the beginning, LFMS staff wanted to have a team on location one week prior to an event to connect with local groups and engage the community. Due to time constraints, LFMS staff was only able accomplish this in Minneapolis. A successful show depends on networking. According to Lisa Rudman, town hall panels "may have been stronger if we worked more with local organizers." And Producer Yoruba Richen felt that "more time in between might allow for bigger guests."

If I had the project to do over, one thing I would strongly consider doing would be to hold one less event and use some of that extra money to sponsor MC members' participation in the project through a mini-grant program. For example, giving a reporter a few thousand dollars to investigate a related story or come to the event to cover how a local organization participated and advanced their mission there.

-Tracy Fleischman

Booking diversified panels proved difficult on a short turnaround. One viewer of LFMS Seattle wrote, “I’d love to see a more diverse array of voices represented, such as racial minorities, and women from various socioeconomic classes.” Diversity was a big focus for LFMS staff, and we were very happy with the overall results. However, a few panels were not as diverse due to time constraints in booking and meshing with the focus of each town hall. Given more time, LFMS staff could have recruited from a wider base.

Budget constraints prevented big name guests. So, while booking time was a constraint, travel budgets also impacted the guest we could get in a given location.

Collaboration:

Collaboration is key to a project like LFMS. It brings partners together, broadens the coverage of a topic and reaches a larger audience. Both sides should benefit from the collaboration by utilizing resources that would not otherwise be available. Since LFMS was a first time venture, many Media Consortium members and partners were fuzzy on what the sector-wide implications were for this project.

Unfortunately, collaboration is not necessarily an altruistic enterprise. Some members were not engaged with LFMS since the “What’s in it for me?” factor was not clear. When asked if LFMS benefited YES! Magazine, Susan Gleason responded, “To some degree yes, but as far as the promotion of YES!, I thought that this could have been stronger.”

Lisa Rudman said that the central question for the National Radio Project was “When the dust settles, do these people feel more involved with independent media?” Now that the program has been test-driven, and we’ve proven that there is potential for audience development and engagement, members are much more interested in participating.

“I think you need a certain minimum level of buy-ins and promotion from MC members to get a wide range of viewership-- that we need enough groups to promise involvement and also do “xy and z” to promote it. It felt like we got pushed to be involved, but that we didn’t have concrete commitments ahead of time. I wonder if it wouldn’t be interesting to have Laura four times a year dedicate a show to the economy, to travel to different spots in the country.

-Jeffrey Allen

In an interview with *The American Prospect*, a Media Consortium member who did not participate in LFMS, Richard Boriskin, Business Manager, pointed out that they were excited about LFMS, but that funding and participation would come easier if content was applicable to projects already being planned by *The American Prospect*.

This all comes back to the “What’s in it for me?” factor. In planning a large-scale collaboration, it’s important to look at what partners have planned for the year, and then generate a show that plugs in easily to compliment their current work. Boriskin went on to say that, “if we plan this out far enough, we could probably obtain something from our organizations and funders to provide funding.” “Out far enough” would mean at least a “five to six month period” ahead of time.

Though LFMS staff took a great deal of time to interact with members and develop ideas for programming, participation was often limited due to time constraints, a long-term PR strategy that had a positive outcome for members, and syncing content with a collectively developed editorial strategy. LFMS staff did a great deal of legwork with members to craft content, but perhaps didn’t focus closely enough on editorial overlap and creating easy entry points for new collaborators.

For any collaboration to succeed, the following elements must be in play:

- A core group of members must give up front and clear commitments. LFMS received those

commitments from Link TV, National Radio Project and Free Speech TV. But due to multiple circumstances regarding time and member resources, it was very difficult for LFMS staff to secure long-term commitments from other organizations.

- A clear promotions strategy that articulates issues of branding and partner representation.

Many potential partners were also strapped in both an editorial and capacity sense due to the election year. Many members were overwhelmed with their own management and unable to dedicate time and resources to this project. In a non-election year and with more additional lede time, this model could flourish.

Originally [the National Radio Project] thought we could have provided more bandwidth in suggesting grassroots groups and voices. Made an editorial decision to work more "downstream" time, more local help. Maybe the project design was larger than personnel and budget could provide

--Lisa Rudman

LFMS was a new project and a relatively new concept for many Media Consortium members. And as a new concept, it was hard to visualize the big picture benefits for many. As Jeffrey Allen of OneWorld pointed out, "I know we would definitely be more likely to play a more pro-active role in it [LFMS], now that we know what it is."

It is important to note, however, that in the face of collaborative challenges, LFMS managed to break new ground and provide a replicable, concrete example of the pure potential in cross-platform collaboration. Now that we have a model for what collaboration can look like--and what the benefits are, there is a very real opportunity to develop new models of high-impact journalistic and multi-media collaboration.

Content:

Though LFMS staff worked to include a diversity of voices and ideas in each event, there may have been too much noise to develop concrete take-aways for audience members. One Seattle audience member wrote "I felt that the sheer number of panelists made it hard to get anything more than sound-bite answers from them. I would have liked to see more of a discussion, where they could bounce ideas off of one-another." LFMS staff, partners and other audience members agreed with this sentiment:

I don't think we were wrong on the topic areas, I think we picked the right topics, I just think the panels were too fragmented. I would have like to have seen more general panels—longer with people chewing over a topic.

-Laura Flanders

The topics we focused on for each event were so timely that we were compelled to cover a lot of ground in each show—we wanted to get as much of the story out as possible and featured several speakers at each event. This is a formula I'd play around with in the future. I'd like to see if we could get at the same issues in more intimate free flowing conversations.

-Tracy Fleischman

"We picked topics, but not questions," Flanders also said. "[We] need more video roll-in and solutions." Tracy Fleischman agreed and recommended re-tooling panel structure to feature a more "free-flowing conversation."

Live tapings of some events also restricted the diversity of transitions and content. Some commitments from local groups and Media Consortium members also fell through, which impacted the overall variety of content for each program. Throughout it all, however, LFMS staff was always flexible and proactive in their response to challenging situations.

For future events, we have the following recommendations:

- Consider one or two smaller panels with more in-depth and solution-oriented discussions.

- Increase the attendance and representation of Media Consortium members by bringing in reporters and editors.
- Break news or unique findings as a part of the Town Hall. By using our journalism chops to their fullest potential, we can really make the event worth attending.

Publicity and Marketing:

As LFMS was a new venture, staff created a public relations strategy with messages, frames and action items for the overall series and each event from scratch. The process began once the program schedule was solidified. LFMS staff adjusted and advanced many PR strategies based on resources, time and lessons from previous events. The LFMS publicity strategy was based on:

- Reaching out to Media Consortium members to help publicize the events and issues to their audiences.
- Social networking outreach through Facebook and Twitter.
- Funneling content through existing networks of blogs and listservs to publicize events.
- Press releases for local press in each city.
- Event calendar listings in local newspapers and websites.
- Post-event promotion via articles and video clips to create viral buzz.

PR contractors spent a great deal of time supporting LFMS producers and working with local organizations to help with outreach and turnout. Contractors were also focused on getting local media coverage, and in places like Miami, there was some great press. But as journalists know, getting the attention of an overworked regional press means that the event must be headline worthy. To get a reporter to show up, you have to be breaking news, presenting on a controversial issue that is part of the community's current debates, or have extremely high-profile local leaders. While recognizing these important issues, the LFMS team also wanted to remain true to the overall goals of the program, which didn't always overlap with our PR strategy.

Amongst MC members, lead time was a critical issue. PR and promotion was sometimes a struggle for organizations that run at least a month or two ahead in regards to editorial promotions and planning. Partner Susan Gleason agrees that Yes! "Needed more time to get emails out."

A successful PR strategy for future events would detail specific goals in terms of audiences sizes, the type of audience we want to reach and what we want them to do with the information presented. Each town hall presented different PR challenges as staff and contractors had to dive into new media markets every 3-4 weeks—it was extremely difficult to create a new media database for each program. Recommendations for a future PR strategy are two-pronged:

- Focus on the local: work with local organizations and media to raise awareness pre-event by pushing for interviews, features and coverage of local and national guests in designated media markets as well as generating media coverage during and post-event. Hire local pr people who already know the area and have a local press database, but make sure that they work in concert with our national strategy. With enough lead time, it is also possible to use these events as news-making opportunities for local organizations by release reports, creating news, or other initiatives that encourage a media benefit for them.
- National Strategy: Have a national PR person work with Media Consortium members to frame and publicize the event as a part of a series that brands participating organizations and helps drive the national news cycle. It is key that any partner organization commits their own communications resources and time to the project as well. This person should have good knowledge of the political blogosphere, national radio and television programming.

Audience:

Reaching out to a more diverse audience and balancing the live LFMS with the online were the two biggest issues

when it came to audience responses. LFMS staff worked to make both the live show and final edited show just as interesting and engaging. However, sometimes catering to one audience takes away from another. Audience members also picked up on LFMS's struggles to diversify panels, but furthermore, it was difficult to always have a diverse audience. "The panel seemed far more diverse than the audience... and the panel didn't seem very diverse," one audience member commented.

While not perfect, LFMS staff felt overall they recruited and profiled a diversity of backgrounds and perspectives for the town hall series.

CONCLUSIONS

"I think we made a huge step. It almost felt normal, but it wasn't normal, it was the first time we've done that."

-Laura Flanders

"I think this was the beginning of a program that is really bringing in voices that you don't have on television, and to communities that don't necessarily have these conversations"

-Yoruba Richen

"The most successful moments in the series were when we truly gave a platform to people and stories not being served by the main stream media, and when Media Consortium partners worked together to build an echo chamber around progressive news content. I think these were the key strengths of Live from Main Street and where there is real potential to build upon."

-Tracy Fleischman

Despite any challenges, LFMS remains a groundbreaking project that showcases the pure potential of collaborative journalism. Now that the program has completed, we have a rough model of how to create a collaboration that works even better next time, creating a larger impact on the national dialogue. Projects like LFMS have the potential to make independent media organizations household names in America—and the sheer diversity of content, participating organizations and audience members proves that we've hit upon a winning formula, that once refined, will carry us through.

Our final recommendations if we Live From Main Street continued in the future includes:

- Further development of investigation weeks, but with greater promotions and branding strategy for content.
- Develop fundraising strategy around editorial collaborations that can benefit individual members.
- Replicate town halls on a quarterly, rather than monthly, schedule. Piggyback on other national events to procure audiences and panelists
- Create an on-the-ground presence before each town hall to make the final product more dynamic, diverse and interesting
- Develop a website geared more towards public participation.
- Increase the participation of Media Consortium members in on-screen panels and presentations to increase the visibility of their work.

"I think we started a model among our members about different ways to work together. We showed how we can create content that can be repurposed in multiple ways, but that members can also create their own original content to build the echo chamber."

-Tracy Van Slyke

APPENDIX

Tracking

Minneapolis:

9 PSA's ran on 8 different outlets including the Minnesota Coalition on Government information Blog, Utne, Metblogs, YouPeopleFor.org, Democracy Now, GRITtv, National Radio Project and the Represent Blog.

16 outlets livestreamed or ran clips of the show including GRITtv, Quantum Shift.tv, Brave New Films, Free Speech TV, Eyeteeth blog, Minnesota Independent, Public News Service, American Films, Odeo, Radio Time, Mother Jones blog, Utne blog, Insight News, KFAI Radio, Link TV, Archive.org, and Blip.tv.

17 articles were posted on 16 different outlets including Our Chart, the Main Street Project, Public News Service, Oneworld, WIMN's Voices, The Nation, GRITtv, Women's Media Center, Democrats.org, Tvoover.net, Huffington Post, Frost Bite blog, Build The Echo, Alternet, Carole Borges blog and the Center for Social Media.

Radio

- 27 stations affiliated with Public News Service ran clips of the show, reaching an audience of 42,507 people

Miami:

19 PSA's ran before the event on 17 different outlets

GRITtv livestreamed the show

Eight outlets, including The Nation, Mother Jones, KPFA, Link TV, Public News Service and the Miami Workers Center ran clips of the show.

16 outlets including The Nation, Mother Jones, OneWorld, Huffington Post, Public News Service, Afro-Netizen, Alternet, The Miami Herald, The Miami Workers Center and the Women's Media Center posted blogs or articles about the event.

MC Members

- Women's Media Center: <http://www.womensmediacenter.com/ex/071608.html>
- The Progressive: <http://www.progressive.org/full/youtube>
- The Nation: <http://www.thenation.com/blogs/notion/336976>
- The National Radio Project: <http://www.radioproject.org/archive/2008/2908.html>
- Afro-Netizen: <http://www.afro-netizen.com/2008/07/magic-city-hard.html>
- Oneworld.net: <http://us.oneworld.net/article/miami-forum-addresses-neighborhood-desolation>
- Mother Jones: http://www.motherjones.com/mojoblog/archives/2008/07/8982_subprime_the_mi.html
- Brave New Films: <http://bravenewfilms.org/blog/44911-live-from-main-street-hits-miami-on-july-12th>
- Public Radio Exchange: <http://www.prx.org/pieces/27548>
- <http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/5628-1>

Blogs

- <http://www.bloggblackmiami.com/2008/07/live-from-main.html>
- <http://miami.indymedia.org/news/2008/06/11287.php>
- http://www.silobreaker.com/DocumentReader.aspx?Item=5_875076614
- <http://miamiherald.typepad.com/gaysouthflorida/2008/07/laura-flanders.html>
- <http://blackndade.blogspot.com/2008/07/live-from-main-street-tour-stops-in.html>
- <http://takebacktheland.blogspot.com/2008/07/live-from-main-street-town-hall-meeting.html>
- http://news.yahoo.com/s/thenation/20080703/cm_thenation/4334331

- <http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/5628-1>
- <http://www.publicnewsservice.org/index.php?/content/article/5628-1>
- http://www.motherjones.com/mojoblog/archives/2008/07/8982_subprime_the_mi.html

Radio

- 754 stations affiliated with Public News Service ran clips of the show, reaching an audience of 3,027,710 people
- 30 and 60 second PSAs played on NPR affiliate, WLRN, week prior to LFMS
- PSA on 99 JAMZ, Community Voices
- WKIS, Scott Simon plugged LFMS week prior
- WDHR
- 99 JAMZ interview with Laura and Yoruba
- WKIS interview with Yoruba/Laura

Newspaper/Magazine

- http://www.miamiherald.com/news/miami_dade/northeast/story/596768.html
- http://www.miamiherald.com/news/miami_dade/story/603069.html
- Florida Sun Sentinel (awaiting response from editor re: clipping)
- Miami Times (awaiting response from editor re: clipping)
- In Focus Magazine (awaiting response from Tony Lesesne, if they didn't get someone out to the event we'll ask them to post)

TV

- NBC/6
- CBS/4

Denver:

24 PSA's ran on 18 different outlets including Daily Kos, Port City Underground, Square State, David Sirota's blog, Denver Post, Politico, Texas Observer, The Nation, Sam Seder Show blog, the Colorado Statesman, Yes! Magazine online, The Big Tent, KALW Crosscurrents, and Link TV.

15 outlets livestreamed or ran clips of the show including OneWorld, Air America, the Center for the Advancement of Women, Ustream, PRX, Racewire, the Nation, The Uptake, National Radio Project, Alternative Radio, Brave new Films and GRITtv.

29 articles and blogs were posted on 21 different outlets including GRITtv, Colorado Independent, Democracy for America, Huffington Post, Alternet, Hightower Lowdown, Green For All, In These Times, The Nation, Advancement of Women, Sierra Club, Progressive Book Club and OneWorld.

Columbus:

12 outlets picked up clips or livestreamed the shows including Racewire, Radio Project, Yes! Magazine, GRITtv, Brave New Films, Alternet, OneWorld, In These Times, KFCF and Link TV.

16 articles or blogs were posted on 15 different outlets including the American Forum, Center for Social Media, Common Dreams, The Real News, In These Times, OneWorld, EGP News, Public News Service, Vermont Commons, GRITtv, Black Blog Watch, and the Huffington Post.

Radio

- 29 stations affiliated with Public News Service ran clips of the show, reaching an audience of 90,973 people

Seattle:

9 PSAs ran on 9 different outlets including, WomenandCuba.org, Bitch Magazine's blog, Blogher, Seattle Dirt, Seattle Pi, Twitter, King 5, FireDogLake, and 1090AM Seattle.

5 outlets livestreamed or ran clips of the show including Audioport, KPFA Radio, Link TV, National Radio Project and Odeo.

15 articles or blogs were posted (or reposted) on 15 different outlets including, Real Women Voices blog, American Forum, Kanabec County Times, SC Prog Blog, The Town Talk, OneWorld, Rationl Review, Secret Black Hat blog, Suzie-Q blog, The Capital Times, Nasir Khan blog, Yes! Magazine, GRITtv, Citizen Times and Altnet.

Interviewed for this report:

Laura Flanders, Host, Live From Main Street; Tracy Flieschman, Managing Producer, Live From Main Street; Yoruba Richen, Content Producer, Live From Main Street; Jeffrey Allen, Managing Editor, OneWorld.net; Richard Boriskin, Business Manager, The American Prospect; Geraldine Cahill, Communications and Social Media Director, The Real News; Eric Galatas, Program Director, Free Speech TV; Susan Gleason, Media and Outreach Manager, YES! Magazine; Heather Hurford, Link TV; Noah Kunin, Senior Political Correspondent, The UpTake; Carolyn Petri, Editorial Assistant, The American Prospect; Lisa Rudman, Executive Director, National Radio Project.