**#Who Counts: A Reporting Project on Immigrant Voter Rights**

On July 25, the Media Consortium launched Who Counts, a project centering immigrant voices on voting rights. The project was designed to harness the transformative power of journalism to tell stories by the people most directly impacted by the political debate on immigration. Our aim was to support reporters in answering these vital questions:

* Who counts as an American?
* Whose vote counts?
* Who is doing the counting?

The project consisted of three parts:

1) Telebriefings

These briefings in July and August provided background information and to educate reporters on current federal law and best-practice vocubulary.

2) Events in Chicago, New York and Durham, North Carolina

Our in-person events were designed to center immigrant experience by creating lasting networks joining community and national media with local activists.

3) Social Media campaign

The Media Consortium supported reporting for this project on Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr, where we aggregated the stories produced. See: whocounts.tumblr.com

**Who Counts Chicago**

A primary impetus for the national Who Counts project came as a direct result of the *On the Table* gathering in Pilsen convened by Ra Joy of CHANGE Illinoi. After this gathering, the Media Consortium connected with several community media organizations to assess how a collaborative effort could bring information to diverse immigrant communities. Too often, these disparate stakeholders didn’t have the opportunity to be in dialogue and learn from each other.

To that end, we held Who Counts Chicago on October 5, 2016 at the offices of In These Times, WhoCounts Chicago featured representatives from Change Illinois, Chicago Votes, Just Democracy Coalition, Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Common Cause, Northern Illinois University, Alliance for Filipinos for Immigrant Rights and Empowerment and the Coalition for a Better Chinese American Community in conversation with journalists from In These Times, The Chicago Reporter, WVON, Gozamos, Vocalo, Radio L’Union, Contexture Media and Public Narrative.

The lively discussion kicked off by our panel continued in a vigorous question and answer session. The intimate setting – and plentiful food and drink—encouraged attendees to stay, mingle, and continue that conversation.

**Impact**

This effort helped establish qualitative relationships between independent media with national reach, and local ethnic media, to produce narratives that have a comprehensive approach to informing immigrant voters about the 2016 election and beyond.

For instance, Monica Chen, a seasoned Chinese journalist, worked on a multi-lingual voter PSA with Columbia College students. At #WhoCounts Chicago she made connections that helped with Spanish-language translation and provided access to diverse translators from Muslim and Arab communities.

*Bringing together journalists and diverse community-based organizations is important in and of itself. A couple of comments from speakers have influenced how we are reporting two upcoming stories – one on new voter laws, the other on English-language programs in public schools.—*Susan Smith Richardson, The Chicago Reporter

The stories created by TMC outlets on immigrant voting rights have been captured on our #WhoCounts feed, <http://whocounts.tumblr.com/> with over 20 stories per month in September and October.

**Looking Ahead**

Questions about who counts as an American clearly have not ended with the 2016 election. In fact, it is likely that immigration reform will be a significant focus of the next administration. The Media Consortium plans to continue our WhoCounts project to enable immigrant groups to tell their stories to journalists.

What we learned from WhoCounts 2016 is that we have broader impact and reach when we create rich audio and video opportunities for immigrant storytelling. Journalists who could not attend our in-person or phone briefings did pick up the audio/video from those and used them in their reporting.

In Chicago, we’re hoping to obtain support to continue efforts to develop a strategic framework for collaborative storytelling that highlights local immigrant voices and stories in independent media. By implementing a practice that has worked in the past: provide local media outlets with mini-grants to do collaborative reporting on specific issues impacting immigrant families in the United States.