

**“Outing the Corporations” Investigative Reporting Proposal**

**Application Deadline: July 1**

**Return to: erin@themediaconsortium.com**

*Application Length Limit: 4 pages*

Name: Steve Katz\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_Publisher\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_Mother Jones\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Will you be responsible for overseeing the program at your organization?

If no, please enter name and title here: Monika Bauerlein\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

If you have read and agree to the requirements to the program, please mark X here: \_\_X\_\_\_\_

1. Why is your organization interested in reporting on the topic of corporate influence on our democracy?   
*350 words or less*

*Mother Jones* was established to hold the great, unelected power-wielders to account. Today that means becoming a go-to source for reporting, data, and debate on the unfettered corporate and ideological-driven money that, thanks to Citizens United, is flooding our political system and threatening the foundation of our democracy. A much clearer narrative is needed about what the problem is, who’s causing it, and how it can be resolved. And right now, most reporting on campaign finance—from mainstream news organization, transparency groups, or progressive outlets—doesn’t provide that. It’s boring, wonky, and repetitive; it fails to dramatize the actual problem in a way that connects with regular people.

This is where *Mother Jones* comes in: we aim to deliverjournalism that shows how broken the system has become, that’s compelling, addictive, shareable and motivating, and, last not least, that reflects and illuminates the debate over how to fix the problem.

2. Has your organization reported on this topic in the past?  
Yes \_\_X\_\_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

If so, please share headlines and links to past reporting over past year

Here’s a very incomplete sample of Mother Jones reporting on this topic:

[Fighting Outside Money With Outside Money](https://motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2011/06/fighting-fire-fire)

Andy Kroll Let the **dark** **money** wars begin. So begins the 2012 presidential campaigns outside spending money war . Priorities USA Action, ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - Jun 29, 2011

[Rove's Shadowy Crossroads GPS Plans $20 Million Ad Assault on Obama](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/06/karl-rove-crossroads-obama-20-million)

on the presidential, House, and Senate races intended to counter the right wings flow of **dark** **money**. After watching ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - Jun 27, 2011

[Citizens United: The Shareholders Strike Back](https://motherjones.com/politics/2011/05/citizens-united-home-depot-elections)

Andy Kroll Forget Congress. Its investors who are battling against corporate **dark** **money**. The battle against the effects of the Supreme Courts game-changing Citizens United decision , ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - Jun 1, 2011

[Crossroads GPS's New Target: Health Care Waivers](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/05/crossroads-gps-attack-health-care-waivers)

Grassroots Policy Strategies—the **dark** **money** sister group to Karl Roves American Crossroads—has released ...

[Suzy Khimm](https://motherjones.com/authors/suzy-khimm) - May 19, 2011

[Inside the Democrats' Outside Money Machine](https://motherjones.com/politics/2011/05/democrats-obama-dark-money-2012)

**dark-money** juggernaut? On a recent ... **dark-money** machine . In her view, she wasnt seduced, but forced to fight to fire with fire. Or, as she put ... they do.) In essence, theyve adopted the model of American Crossroads and its **dark-money** arm, Crossroads ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - May 19, 2011

[The Hypocrisy of Darrell Issa](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/05/hypocrisy-darell-issa)

in politics, probably involves money. The union-backed group Chamber Watch has tallied up how much **dark** **money** ... Evidence suggests that a large part of this **dark** **money** comes from companies that feed at the public trough. Board members of just one of those **dark** **money** groups, the US Chamber of Commerce, earned a collective ...

[Josh Harkinson](https://motherjones.com/authors/josh-harkinson) - May 12, 2011

[Issa Stacks the Deck Against Obama's Dark Money Directive](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/05/issa-obama-executive-order-wertheimer)

Andy Kroll Congress top GOP watchdog shuts out a leading campaign finance reformer from a crucial hearing. ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - May 12, 2011

[Haley Barbour's Child-Welfare Debacle](https://motherjones.com/politics/2011/04/haley-barbours-child-welfare-debacle)

Claims Barbours New Hire: **Dark** **Money** and Voter ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - Apr 6, 2011

[Rove's Crossroads GPS: 0 for 3 on Facts](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/03/rove-crossroads-gps-kuttner-corn-moulitsas-wikicountability)

David Corn The **dark-money** outfit botches its phony attempt to be a transparency champion. Crossroads GPS, the Karl Rove-connected **dark-money** outfit that works to elect Republicans, is not too strong ...

[David Corn](https://motherjones.com/authors/david-corn) - Mar 23, 2011

[Karl Rove's Audacious Transparency Hypocrisy](https://motherjones.com/politics/2011/03/karl-rove-crossroads-gps-david-corn)

The Bush officials **dark-money** group, Crossroads GPS, gets into the transparency game. Seriously?! The conservative **dark-money** group gets into the transparency game. Seriously?! Karl Roves **dark-money** political operation has uncovered a major piece of what its calling ...

[David Corn](https://motherjones.com/authors/david-corn) - Mar 23, 2011

[Barbour's New Hire: Dark Money and Voter Suppression](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/03/haley-barbour-new-hire-jim-dyke)

Tim Murphy In the first presidential race post- Citizens United , what will candidates do to catch the wave of corporate cash? Here ...

[Tim Murphy](https://motherjones.com/authors/tim-murphy) - Mar 9, 2011

[Quote of the Day: American Crossroads Edition](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/03/american-crossroads-gps-quote-day)

$97 million to $40 million. For more, check out our reporting on the rise of **dark** **money** groups. ...

[Tim Murphy](https://motherjones.com/authors/tim-murphy) - Mar 9, 2011

[Dems Eye Legal Attack on Shadow Spending Groups](https://motherjones.com/politics/2011/01/democrats-target-outside-spending-crossroads-gps)

Andy Kroll Lawmakers and interest groups are crafting a strategy to challenge the tax status of **dark** **money** outfits like ... Lawmakers are crafting a plan to challenge the tax status of **dark** **money** outfits like Karl Roves Crossroads ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - Jan 28, 2011

[Will Secret Spending Divide Democrats?](https://motherjones.com/politics/2010/11/obama-outside-spending-2012-election)

Andy Kroll They denounced shadowy outside groups and **dark** **money** during the midterms. Now, as they plan for a nasty 2012, all options are on the table. ...

[Andy Kroll](https://motherjones.com/authors/andy-kroll) - Nov 15, 2010

[Following the Outside Money](https://motherjones.com/mojo/2010/11/following-outside-money-2010)

doors from undisclosed donors.  So, have the **dark** **money** groups and super PACs gotten ...

[Dave Gilson](https://motherjones.com/authors/dave-gilson) - Nov 2, 2010

[And 2010's Biggest Winner Is…](https://motherjones.com/politics/2010/11/2010-midterms-campaign-finance-secret-spending)

David Corn **Dark** **money**, shadowy groups, and secret millionaires. ... of that coming from **dark-money** groups that dont disclose donors. And its not just a Republican phenomenon. ...

[David Corn](https://motherjones.com/authors/david-corn) - Nov 2, 2010

3. Please provide a brief outline of a) the likely topic(s) that your media organization(s) would focus on and why. Let us know what scoop you hope to uncover, scandal you hope to lay bare, or top-secret information you want to blow up.

We propose a series of high-impact data visualizations built off of reported pieces published at MotherJones.com, focusing on hidden corporate money in politics. Our intention is to do with campaign finance what we did with income inequality—translate reporting that can sometimes be dull and unappealing into revelatory, visually driven, shareable graphics that will travel far beyond the MoJo audience. Among the kinds of things we will likely be able to show are:

* Which corporate influencers spend the most money in politics, both aggregate and broken down (e.g. Federal/state/lobbying/open vs. secret/etc.)
* Ways other than money in which corporate influencers gain power to shape policies
* Who benefits from this spending (literally, what is it spent on)
* How corporate influencers hide their tracks
* Case studies of specific influencers (e.g. Walmart)
* Capsule profiles of specific individuals wielding/deploying influence

Primary editorial responsibility for this project will be assigned to Senior Editor Dave Gilson in San Francisco and News Editor Dan Schulman in Washington DC. Gilson, along with Art Director Carolyn Perot was responsible for the series of [inequality charts](http://motherjones.com/politics/2011/02/income-inequality-in-america-chart-graph) published in the March/April 2011 issue of *Mother Jones*, and is leading the effort to expand our use of data visualization in storytelling. When the inequality charts were published online, they quickly went viral (boosted by major play at Yahoo News) and jumped to the offline space thanks to a Stephen Colbert episode.

Gilson, Schulman, and Perot will be able to call on the reporting talents of several *Mother Jones* reporters who’ve covered the campaign finance/money and politics/Dark Money beat, including DC-based bureau chief David Corn, reporters Andy Kroll and Nick Bauman, and San Francisco-based reporter Josh Harkinson.

4. Please provide a sketch of how your organization(s) would produce the investigative piece(s), including

Reported content and data visualizations for this project will be published directly to MotherJones.com; we may decide the port this content over to print in a later issue of *Mother Jones* (as we’ve done in the past with other digital-first stories). We’ll be able to take advantage of the creative design talents of Art Director Carolyn Perot, as well as Creative Director Tim Luddy, for the data visualization products, and then work with our web/tech team to explore interactive possibilities for digital publication. Simultaneously with publication at MotherJones.com, our social media and communications staff will push the reporting and data visualization products out to our social media communities on Facebook and Twitter, as well as to social networking sites like Reddit, Stumbleupon, and Digg (taken together, these represent five of the top ten traffic sources for MotherJones.com).

5. Please provide a simple budget breakdown in a separate document clarifying what resources you will invest on reporting, production and impact. It’s OK to produce a 2-scenario budget (low-end and high-end). You may use the accompanying form or provide one of your own.

6. Please provide a quick snapshot of your audience:

Size: (i.e. print, online, viewers, listeners e-list, twitter followers, Facebook fans, etc…)  
Print:

200,000 paid subscribers

700,000 total readership (including “pass along”)

Online:

Web: averaging 2-2.5 million unique visitors/month, 5.5 – 6 million page views/month

Facebook: 53.764 friends

Twitter: 60,224 followers

Tumblr: 10,049

E-newsletters: 140,000

Geographic Distribution: (based on 2011 print reader survey)

New England      6.0%  
Middle Atlantic              13.4%

Midwest 18.1%  
Plains states 12.5%  
South Atlantic                      16.2%  
Mountain                                9.1%  
Pacific                                    24.4%  
No Answer                              0.3%

Demographics: Highly educated, generally liberal/progressive, overrepresentation of teachers and public sector employees, income distribution generally matches US income distribution, attentive to socially responsible/green lifestyles, tend to support political/advocacy organizations like ACLU, Planned Parenthood, etc.

What kinds of influentials in your audience would be receptive to this topic? (i.e. activists, policy makers, high number of retweeters, press contacts)

We’ve had good success reaching activists on this topic, as well as other media contacts. Mother Jones’ audience – both in print and online – includes a high proportion of “grasstops” leadership, i.e., people who are leaders/multipliers/organizers/influencers in their local communities or professional/social networks. In addition, particularly via Twitter and with personal relationships developed by editorial staff, we’ve been able to move our stories into other media outlets pretty effectively.

7. Please provide a brief overview of your Public Relations capabilities, including social networking strategies/opportunities, press and ally relationships/contacts and what you could do to promote your reporting.

Nowadays, we rely heavily on social media to help a *Mother Jones* story or personality get traction. In particular, Twitter is an efficient tool for reaching other media players – journalists, bloggers, advocates, and media commentators. Combine Twitter with the audiences we can reach via Facebook, social news sites like Reddit and Stumbleupon, aggregators like Huffington Post, Drudge, Alternet, and Real Clear Politics, and (thanks to improved search engine optimization) via Google, and you have the basics of how *Mother Jones* now uses the digital space to get its stories out to a wide audience.

On a day to day basis, editors in San Francisco and Washington DC circulate a “Top Story” email to editorial, web and outreach staff; the email includes suggested top Tweets for the following day. Early the next morning, first DC and then San Francisco post the stories and tweets (it can vary who does it on the east coast; ordinarily, social media fellow Anna Pulley – aka the voice of our @motherjones Twitter account and curator of our Facebook page – does it here in San Francisco). Once that happens, other staff are encouraged to “swarm” around the original tweet/post as a first step in helping a story to go viral.

Offline, most of *Mother Jones’* radio and television appearances happen as a result of personal connections. The clearest example is David Corn’s strong relationship with MSNBC, but other MoJo reporters – Kate Sheppard and Andy Kroll, for instance – as well as freelancers – Chris Mooney and Rick Perlstein most recently – also have built strong relationships over time with key media sources.

We back up this up with the work of our modest communications team. Right now, this communications team includes one-third of our Managing Editor, Liz Gettleman. While Liz is on maternity leave, copy editor Adam Weinstein has been filling in, along with some communications consulting services from Marlene Saritzky. We are focusing Marlene on “high value” outlets where we don’t have an existing relationship; her job is to identify and pitch these outlets (e.g., Anderson Cooper at CNN) to get one of our reporters or editors in front of their producers. All this is more than ably supported by our social media fellow, Anna Pulley who besides handling our Twitter and Facebook presence also helps Adam manage our Tumblr. Steve Katz also puts in about a third of his time to outreach and promotion.

Each issue of *Mother Jones* magazine is sent via first class to a roster of other journalists, media critics, and advocacy/policy folk who we think might have an interest in the specific stories in the issue. In addition, as each new story is posted online at MotherJones.com, Anna and Adam send email blasts to a list of relevant reporters and other media people from our Cision media database (a commercial database that is quite extensive and updated daily). Adam and Anna also do individual outreach to specific media outlets that we think might be interested in a *Mother Jones* story; historically we’ve had best results focusing on public and community radio, and on media commentary sites (e.g., Romenesko, CJR, Nieman). Clara, Monika, and other editorial staff reach out to their own lists of contacts for story promotion, too.

8. Do you have a reporter already on staff or a freelancer identified that covers this beat?

If so, please note their name

Our Washington DC bureau as a whole, especially David Corn, Nick Baumann, and Andy Kroll; and Josh Harkinson in our San Francisco office

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Mother-Jones-logo_red.gif |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| We The People/The Media Consortium |  |  |  |
| "Outing the Corporations"  Investigative Reporting Project |  |  |  |
| Submitted by Mother Jones |  |  |  |
| Estimated project budget  July 11 - November 2, 2011 |  |  |  |
| Prepared June 2011 |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| REVENUE | WtP/MC | TOTAL |  |
| Requested to We The People/Media Consortium | $7,500 | $7,500 |  |
| Other funding: |  |  |  |
| Puffin Foundation (portion of grant) |  | 25,000 |  |
| Other foundations |  | 5,000 |  |
| Individual donations/general fund support |  | 9,350 |  |
| TOTAL REVENUE | $7,500 | $46,850 |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| EXPENSES |  |  |  |
| Editors | 874 | $5,462 | Dave Gilson, Dan Schulman |
| Reporters | 1,600 | 10,000 | David Corn, Andy Kroll, Nick Baumann, Josh Harkinson |
| Creative/art | 1,083 | 6,769 | Tim Luddy, Carolyn Perot |
| Tech/web | 830 | 5,154 | Robert Wise, Celine Nadeau |
| Communications/outreach | 788 | 4,924 | Steve Katz, Liz Gettelman |
| Benefits/taxes @25% | 1,095 | 6,846 |  |
|  | - |  |  |
| Interns (factchecking/social media) | 102 | 635 | Asawin “Swin” Suebsaengl, Anna Pulley |
| Communications consultant | 80 | 500 | Marlene Saritzky |
|  | - |  |  |
| Overhead (rent, utilities, telephone, insurance, etc) | 1,049 | 6,554 |  |
|  | - |  |  |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | 7,500 | $46,843 |  |