



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

**Application Deadline: July 1**

**Return to: [erin@themediaconsortium.com](mailto:erin@themediaconsortium.com)**

*Application Length Limit: 4 pages*

**PROPOSAL FROM OAKLAND LOCAL AND NATIONAL RADIO PROJECT**

Name: Eric Arnold/Susan Mernit, Oakland Local, Lisa Rudman, National Radio Project

Title: (EA)Associate Editor / (SM) Executive Director, (LR) Executive Director

Organization: \_OaklandLocal/Making Contact (National Radio Project)

Will you be responsible for overseeing the program at your organization? Yes(EA)

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*

Corporate influence affects the ability of everyday citizens to live comfortably in a sustainable way and has tainted everything from the environment to the media landscape to health issues to foreign policy. The influence of corporate lobbyists affects politics not just at the national level, but also at the state and local level, ultimately resulting in less competition, and less informed choices in the voting booth. It undermines the very foundation of the democratic process, which promises fairness, justice, and equality for all. Oakland Local is all about nuanced, quality community reporting, examining issues in-depth and speaking truth to power.

There is a need for more public awareness around the influence of corporations, and corporate lobbyists, on the political process, since it is consumers who are most affected by the results of the corporate political agenda. From an independent media and hyper-local journalism perspective, we often see the impact of corporate politics in the base inequalities, which affirm the need for not only social justice, but also political justice and media justice.

Additionally, the prospect of collaborating and creating a body of reported work across multiple media platforms not only extends the scope and reach of the project, but bodes well for further collaborations in the future for OL and partners.

## 2. Has your organization reported on this topic in the past?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No—X—but we have done investigative reporting on related topics.

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

**Oakland Local:** Living in Debt series, <http://oaklandlocal.com/article/living-debt-can-oakland-make-recovery-series-index>

**Oakland Local:** Youth Sex Trafficking series: <http://oaklandlocal.com/article/youth-trafficking-series-index>

**Oakland Local:** Net Neutrality series, <http://oaklandlocal.com/tags/net-neutrality>

**The Media Consortium:** The Wavelength

<http://www.themediaconsortium.org/tag/the-wavelength/>

**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.**

### **BRIEF**

AT&T, COMCAST & PG& E are all active in local politics and policy in Oakland and the SF Bay area. These corporations have pumped tens of millions of dollars into misleading advertising, lobbying efforts and PR campaigns designed to skew public perception and promote their own agenda, which benefits them financially but isn't so great for consumers. With another election cycle gearing up, these three companies figure to once again play an active role in electoral politics and the legislative process.

We will look at Comcast and AT&T's influence on media/telecommunications policy; and PG&E's influence on environmental/energy policy; and the impact of their influence on the electorate and local communities.

Questions we want to answer:

- Who benefits from corporate influence?
- Who doesn't?
- What role do lobbyists play?
- Has corporate support of non-profits resulted in quid pro quo?
- To what extent have PG&E, Comcast & ATT been buying influence and doing back room deals to create policy in California and in the East Bay?
- Are legislators being fooled by rhetoric promising increased competition, job creation and lower prices?
- What's been the actual effect of corporate-supported legislation, which has passed?
- In cases where it hasn't passed, what made the difference?
- What current legislation or candidates are these corporations throwing their support behind?

Some of the cases we will reference include:

**PG&E:** Prop 21 (2000); Prop 16(2010); other bills TBD

**COMCAST/AT&T:** opposition to Net Neutrality; support of DIVCA (2006) and mergers with NBC (Comcast) and T-Mobile (AT&T).

Critical documents:

Public records, including campaign financing statements; letters from lobbyists; written legislation; media reports, etc.

The impact of this story could be:

Increased community engagement and an ongoing dialogue about the reality of corporate influence on electoral politics and local/state legislation.

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

The primary platform will be a series of related investigative stories on Oakland Local that will use text, images, video, audio and data visualization to tell the story, supplemented and enhanced by radio broadcast/podcast; some video is possible. OL's Eric Arnold will coordinate editorial coverage and head investigative research efforts, with support and fact-checking by OL interns; additional reporting will be done by OL/KPFA's Irene Flores and MC's Andrew Stelzer; OL's Susan Mernit will serve as Project Editor, coordinating editing and copy-editing tasks; possible videographers include Orianna Bolden and CB Smith-Dahl.

We will simultaneously produce audio/radio segments to run on The National Radio Project shows.

b) Production element(s): audio/visual: text, photographic stills, audio broadcast, video broadcast, audio podcast, timeline, data visualization.

c) Community Engagement tactics: broadcast on local/national radio (KPFA/NPR); promotion through OL social media network: Twitter/Facebook, internal online promotion; forum/panel discussion at East Side Arts Alliance, provoke and support discussion on FB and in comments.

**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.**

**BUDGET**

SCENARIO: \$7,500 from WTP/TMC

Output:

2 major story segments—one on COMCAST/ AT&T, one on PG&E—on Oakland Local, plus supporting web video, multimedia and data visualization and original documents(Scribd), with an accompanying radio show series on KPFA, Making

Contact/The National Radio Project and Youth Radio and podcasts on Urban Habitat/Radio RPE.

Project components:

Research (reporters and intern): 100 hours: (\$20/hour) \$2,000

FOIA and photocopying costs: \$1,000

Lexus/Nexus DB searches: \$600

Reporting: 150 hours (\$30/hour): \$4,500

Video/Video editing(\$100/hour) 20 hours: \$2000

Audio recording: N/A (included in reporting)

Audio editing: (\$35 hour) 20 hours, \$700

Web/text editing (\$45/hour, 20 hours): \$900

Copyediting: \$25/hour) 10 hours: \$250

Photos and permissions: \$1000

TOTAL: \$12,950

(additional support to be generated through Spot.Us)

**6. Please provide a quick snapshot of your audience:**

Unique visitors: 1.89 MM year; average 60-70K month (Google analytics)

Email newsletter: 2,000 subscribers

Facebook followers: 5,775 as of July 1; 4,200 active users (Facebook insights)

Twitter: Oakland Local (3,500 followers); Susan Mernit (4,500 followers); Amy

Gahran (6,500followers); Kwan Booth (3,000 followers)

Geographic Distribution:

Bay area, USA

Demographics: (based on May 2011 user survey and FB and Quantcast demographics)

Age: 46% are 18-35

Race: 35% people of color

Location: 46% Oakland flats (working class areas)

50% identify as progressive

Gender: 56% women, 34% men

15% identify as queer

What kinds of influentials in your audience would be receptive to this topic?

Many! We have deep reach into county and city government (run OL stories on their web site), local media, policy makers and nonprofits (45 nonprofit partners). OL stories are often referenced in press kits/websites, etc by Oakland and Bay area organizations.

**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.**

Oakland Local's senior team is extremely adept at social marketing and will use all our tools to promote this package. In addition to our social media reach, we distribute stories through Yahoo! News, New America Media, and the Investigative News Network, where we are a member. We can also promote through Knight Foundation channels and hyperlocal media associations such as Block by Block and Authentically Local, which Susan Mernit co-founded.

8. Do you have a reporter already on staff or a freelancer identified that covers this beat?  
If so, please note their name  
Eric Arnold and Jen Ward cover related areas, as do Barbara Grady and Irene Florez.