Metrics Lab FAQ

**What is this project all about?**

Can we get quantitative proof that editorial collaborations make more impact than stand-alone stories do? That’s the question the metrics project asks.

**What does my outlet get out of this project?**

1. Direction. You will find out the answer to our central question. That will help guide you in determining whether to spend your resources on collaborations.
2. Data. You will get access to Big Data-style analytics on the spread of your outlets’ content. How far do your stories really reach, beyond click-thrus and shares? You will find out.
3. Money? Many foundations, Silicon-valley major donors, and others, are reluctant to fund media because they can’t measure the results. The aim of this project is to demonstrate first that we can produce measurable, quantitative assessments of impact, and second, the hope is that these assessments will show our pieces, singly and collaboratively, do have sizable impact.

**Is TMC getting any money from this project?**

Yes, TMC is getting $45K to manage the project over a 24 month period.

**Ok, let’s dig into the project itself. What do you mean by editorial collaborations?**

For the purposes of this lab, collaboration simply means co-publishing and co-promotion—that is, a willingness for outlets already working on similar stories to time their publication and to cross promote.

**What do you mean by impact—in quantitative terms**?

We mean that news stories will not only reach more people (i.e get more clicks), but will get more people talking about them (shares, mentions, as well as detailed discussion about individual topics with particular views) and taking action on the issues they raise (linking to petitions, activist sites, etc) .

**How will you measure quantitative impact?**

We have use of servers at Crimson Hexagon that literally record every tweet and other social media post sent publicly. Our researchers have developed algorithms that can accurately ascertain the topic and sentiment in the social media conversation about any subject. This technology goes way behind keyword counts. The researchers will compare the prevalence of discussion about different views about each topic with the content of stories published.

**What topics will be measured?**

TMC has worked with the researchers to focus in on a few topics that we believe are likely to appear in TMC member publications with regularity over the next year:

Abortion

Reproductive Health

Immigration

Health Care Reform

Education: Teachers Unions

Education: School Choice

Fracking

Climate Change

Within each of these topics, researchers have defined a set of categories representing what people are saying to support the left, right, and center in various ways. For example, on abortion, categories include pro-choice, pro-life, partial birth, mother’s health, women’s rights, etc. These categories are tied by the algorithm to the topic.

**Who is doing the research?**

The research is being directed by Gary King, a [Harvard professor](http://gking.harvard.edu/) who specializes in quantitative social science and who spoke at the TMC meeting in 2012. Working with him are two graduate students, Ariel White and Benjamin Schneer. Gary et al are being paid by donors to do this work. A company that commercialized some of the technology Gary developed, Crimson Hexagon, is donating time on its servers.

**This is Big Data. Will my readers’ privacy be protected?**

Yes. Researchers will only report on aggregated information in a way that helps the entire group. They will not reveal any personal or website-specific data associated with these metrics

**OK, I’m ready to participate. How do I do that?**

Contact Manolia Charlotin, manolia.charlotin@gmail.com