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. 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. 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. You may receive a small grant in return for participating in the project. Grant amounts will range from $1000 to $5000, depending on your outlet’s level of participation. TMC will publish a formula for this in the coming month.

**What does TMC / the indy media sector get out of this project?**

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 $25K to manage the project over a 18-24 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

US Military Interventions

Education: Teachers Unions

Education: School Choice

Fracking

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.

**Why do researchers need access to my Google Analytics?**

With this information, the researchers will be able learn the precise mechanisms by which stories turn into mentions, which lead to pageviews on TMC web sites, which turn into discussions, which may lead to action. This would be much more informative than jumping from what appears on your web site all the way to the social media conversation. The researchers will only distribute aggregated information and not reveal information to others about your web site, but if you are interested, the researchers may be able to provide you with individualized feedback.

**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

**I’m nervous about allowing anyone accesss to my Analytics. How do I know this information will be kept anonymous and private?**

We have created a legal contract that you and Gary’s team will sign to keep your data private. This project will only work with your cooperation, so we are very eager to ensure you are comfortable with the privacy protections. Gary’s team has considerable experience with protecting confidential data.

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

How to add a user to your Google Analytics account

1. Log into the account as an administrator.

2. Click the “Admin” tab in the upper right corner of any page (right next to “Help”).

3. Select your account (there may be only one; if not, choose the one that is the TMC member site) by clicking on its name.

4. Click the “Users” tab.

5. Click “+ New User”.

6. Fill in the following information for the new user:

• Email address: tmcmediaproject@gmail.com

• Role: User (not Administrator)

• Notify this user by email: yes (check box)

• Select profiles and click “Add” to give access (again, choose the TMC member site if

there are more than one).

• Finally, click “Add User”.