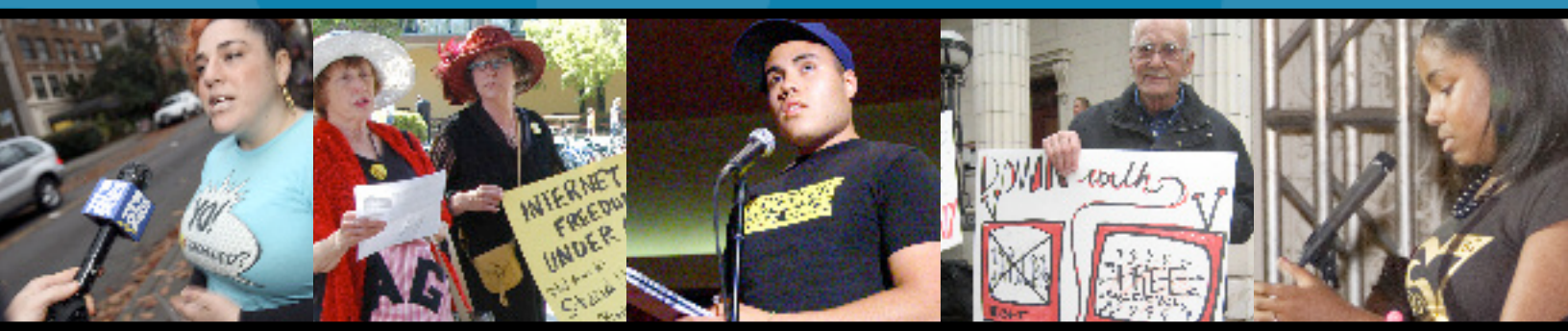
WHOSE MEDIA? OUR MEDIA!



STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS TO REFORM, RECLAIM AND REVOLUTIONIZE THE MEDIA

A publication of the SPIN Project
Edited by Isobel White

The SPIN Project is proud to bring you *Whose Media? Our Media!*, a toolkit designed to help media activists develop and successfully execute their own communications campaigns from the ground up.

USING THE MEDIA TO REFORM THE MEDIA

MEDIA ACTIVISM is broadening and strengthening a mosaic of voices in many ways—from campaigns to limit media consolidation to efforts to preserve net neutrality, from struggles to promote community radio to advances in wireless access and other means of ensuring that independent voices are heard. Common to the many facets of media reform is an understanding of the unparalleled power of media to influence public opinion through the stories it tells about our communities.

At the SPIN Project, we believe that one key to reforming the media is shaping these stories. By employing the tools of public relations—strategic communications planning, framing, messaging and creative campaign tactics—we can use the media to reform the media, spreading the word about the need for a better media system and the means to get there.

The Message About the Media

In these pages, you'll find best practices and inspiring case studies of media activists who have used strategic communications to impact coverage, win new supporters and forge alliances with activists in other movements. You'll find tips for:

- framing media reform issues to appeal to deeply held public values.
- creating messages that make your target audience sit up and notice.
- harnessing new media to change the way we collaborate and activate.

Media justice and media reform issues, while profoundly resonant for activists, can still be hard for the average media consumer to understand. That's why this toolkit is intended to give advocates, grassroots organizers, policy specialists, community leaders and their allies the tools they need to help shape public opinion in favor of a democratic media system.

It's an exciting time for media activism. Millions of Americans are making their voices heard against media consolidation and in favor of net neutrality and expanded low power FM radio. Yet the struggle continues to wrest the media from monolithic megacompanies that suppress divergent and diverse voices. *Whose Media? Our Media!* is the SPIN Project's contribution to this vibrant and growing movement.

Navigating this Toolkit

The toolkit is organized into five parts.

- Section One introduces strategic communications planning and provides a detailed sample communications plan.
- Section Two focuses on framing, messaging and storytelling for media reform and media justice, including framing how-to's, tailoring messages for your audience and tips for creating a compelling campaign narrative.
- Section Three offers a host of creative ways to broadcast your message, providing the basics and more on press releases, pitching, working with reporters and crafting a persuasive argument in an opinion editorial (Op Ed).
- Section Four explores the ever-changing world of Web 2.0, offering insights into tools that can help organizers work smarter, activate their base and reach whole new communities of potential supporters.
- Section Five delves into the possibilities and realities of collaborations between researchers and activists, and the growing importance of ethnic media. The section ends with an exploration of funding issues within media reform/media justice.

About the SPIN Project

The SPIN Project, a program of the Communications Leadership Institute, engages nonprofit communications specialists who work with grassroots groups and progressive organizations across the nation to build their communications capacity. SPIN helps organizations increase their effectiveness in influencing debate, shaping public opinion and garnering positive media attention. The SPIN Project honors the multiracial, multicultural, diverse constituencies of the groups we train.

The SPIN Project works with a broad range of organizing, advocacy and policy organizations, all of which work to strengthen democracy and public participation. Our clients typically focus on issues concerning civil rights, human rights, social justice and the environment. We work towards a stronger democracy in which people enhance and actively participate in the public discourse.

To best meet the needs of our clients, we offer:

- Communications Audits
- Communications Strategy Development
- Skills Building and Leadership Development
- Communications Coaching
- Organizational Communications Infrastructure
- Campaign Support
- Peer Networking
- Customized Communications Conferences
- Publications

We invite you to visit our Web site at www.spinproject.org and contact us if you would like to discuss our services.

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SECTION ONE

PREPARING FOR CHANGE

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

THE KEY TO ANY SUCCESSFUL communications effort is strategic planning, and for groups working toward media reform and media justice, that's even more true. With so many powerful corporate interests overshadowing the finite resources of media activists, it's crucial to consider how messages for change can reach the right audiences. Developing a strategic communications plan is the first step to making that happen.

The following pages lay out the SPIN Project's strategic communications planning process. Then you'll get a close look at how one dynamic campaign carried out its own carefully constructed communications plan.

The bottom line: No matter what your media reform goal, this section will help you think it through and plan it out.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING: STEP BY STEP

Creating a long-term plan allows you to be proactive, instead of merely reactive.

THE PURPOSE of a strategic communications plan is to integrate all the organization's programs, public education and advocacy efforts. By planning a long-term strategy for your efforts, you will be positioned to be proactive, rather than just reacting to the existing environment. The strategic plan will help you deploy resources more effectively by highlighting synergies and shared opportunities in your various programs and work areas.

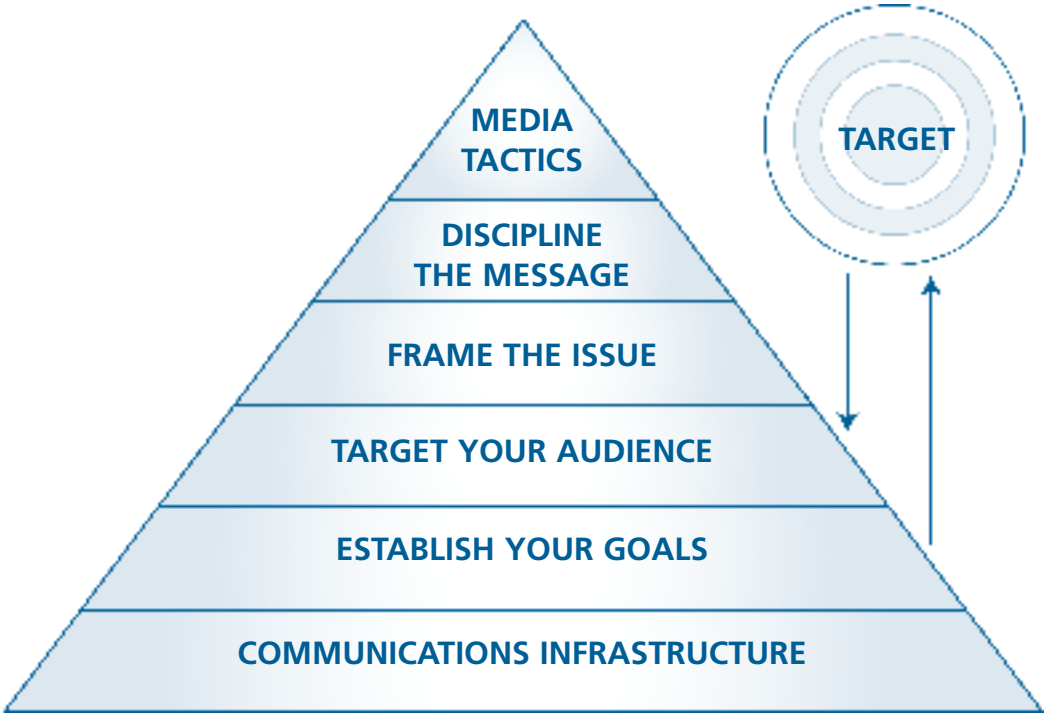
The creation and adoption of a strategic communications plan represents a significant step for any organization. It means a cultural shift toward communications and a clear recognition that all the organization's efforts have a communications element. Public education, grassroots organizing, research, public advocacy, direct service and even fundraising are all, at their core, communications tasks that are vital to the health and success of a nonprofit organization.

At the SPIN Project, we firmly believe that a strategic communications plan has the power to transform an organization: both in terms of your credibility and status in your community, and in terms of the way you work together as a team to achieve your mission and vision.

The communications plan pyramid on the next page outlines six questions you should answer before you even begin to implement your media tactics. Many of the steps outlined here will be discussed in greater detail in other sections of this toolkit.

- What are the key strengths and weaknesses of your organization's communications infrastructure?
- What are your goals?
- Who is your target?
- Who is your audience?
- What is your frame?
- What is your message?

THE STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS PYRAMID



WHEN IT COMES TO communications, the natural tendency for many organizations is to jump right to tactics. The FCC announces public hearings about new media ownership rules, the Copyright Royalty Board announces a decision that could destroy internet radio—quick, what do you do? That's right, issue a news release and schedule a press conference. But what should the release say? Who is it aimed at? Who can make the decision you want made, and who can influence them? Who do you invite to the press conference? And why should they bother to show up?

These are the questions that a strategic communications plan can help you answer. And while it does require putting in some effort on the front end, in the long run a plan will help you act more quickly, and more effectively, when news you need to respond to hits the wires.

Communications tactics—whether earned or paid media, self-published media such as your Web site or blog, or even your annual report or brochure—rest at the very top of what the SPIN Project refers to as the Strategic Communications Pyramid. It's a simple concept, really: In order to succeed at the tactics of communications, you need to build a solid strategic base. Before you can decide what your message is, you need to know who your audience is. To decide on your audience, you need to understand who has the power to make (or stop) the changes you're taking a stand on. Before you can even decide what it is you're trying to accomplish, you need to have a firm grasp of what resources are available to help you achieve your goals. Building your plan from the ground up will ensure that your limited resources are used in the most thoughtful way possible.

On the following pages are the steps to create your own strategic communications plan.

In order to succeed at the tactics of communications, you need to build a solid strategic base.

ASSESS PAST COMMUNICATIONS: LESSONS LEARNED

What has worked? Describe your top three communications wins and three worst blunders from the last two years.

LAY THE FOUNDATIONS OF WINNING COMMUNICATIONS

Communications Infrastructure

What is your communications capacity?

- How much staff time are you willing to devote to communications? If you feel you cannot afford communications staff, are there communications funding opportunities on the horizon?
- Who will do the work, and are they comfortable with and knowledgeable about communications?
- What is your program budget? If you do advocacy, are you willing to commit 30% of that to communications?
- How powerful is your brand? Is it well known?

Goals

What are your program, campaign or organizational goals?

- Why are you launching communications efforts in the first place? What, specifically, do you want to win? For the purposes of communications planning, you should define your goals in terms of *outcomes* (e.g., Secure support of House Bill 1234), and not *outputs* (e.g., Send Action Alert emails to 3,000 members). Outputs are the tactics that will help you reach the outcomes, which are your true goals.
- What is your positive vision for the future?

Target

Who can give you what you want (e.g., Chairperson X of Y Committee)?

- Can you directly influence this individual's decision making?
- If not, who can? Who do you need on your side to get what you want (e.g., voters in District Z)?

Your Audience

Who can persuade the decision maker to do what you want (e.g., voters in District Z)? Know your audience through research:

- Focus groups
- Surveys
- Door-knocking/canvassing
- Talking to strangers in the supermarket, on airplanes, etc.

For more on audience targeting, see page 22.

Frame the Issue

Describe the issue in a way that resonates with the values and needs of your audience, and is also interesting to journalists or "newsworthy."

- What is this issue really about?
- Who is affected?
- Who are the players?
- What hooks does this frame contain?
- What pictures and images communicate this frame?

For more on framing, see Section Two, page 15.

Craft and Discipline Your Message

The SPIN Project recommends adopting a messaging strategy that addresses three key points: the Problem, the Solution and the Action. Each part should be brief, ideally no longer than 35 words.

For more on messaging, see page 22.

Problem

Introduce your frame. Describe how your issue affects your audience and its broader impacts.

Solution

Speak broadly about the change you wish to see. Speak to people's hearts with values-rich language and images.

Action

Call on your audience to do something specific.

- Make sure key people in your organization buy into this message.
- Craft your message to be appealing to journalists and convincing to your target audience while being authentic to who you are.
- Brainstorm soundbites that express much or all of your message in seven to 12 seconds.
- Put yourself in your audience's shoes. Create a message that has meaning to them.

Select and Train Spokespeople

- Who are the best messengers to reach your target audience?
- Have spokespeople practice delivering message on camera. Review and critique the tape. Adjust the message if needed at this stage; something that works on paper may fail when you actually say it.
- Remember that the most powerful person in the organization is not always the best person to put on camera. Choose someone with an effective speaking style and a look that appeals to your audience.

For more on spokesperson skills, see page 38.

© Dirk van der Duim

Outside Chicago FCC hearing.

IMPLEMENT

NOW THAT YOU KNOW what you want to say and why, it's time to figure out how you're going to broadcast your message. Each option has advantages and disadvantages. Below are some of the key avenues available to organizations like yours. Which avenues you choose to pursue should be informed by the resources you have available for the task and the audiences you want to reach.

Carefully consider your audience when choosing ways to deliver your message.

Earned Media

While it can be difficult to gain news coverage of media reform and media justice issues from the big corporations whose interests are most directly affected, coverage of your campaign in the news media (earned media) can still be a cost-effective way to reach your target audiences. Remember that the most effective placements aren't always in the outlets you read most often, or the ones with the largest audiences. If you are targeting Senate staffers on a particular bill, for example, a short piece in *The Hill* will be more effective than a cover story in your local free weekly. Whereas if you're ramping up a campaign against a particular media corporation in your town, a story in the local weekly or local ethnic press could be an ideal way to engage your target audience.

Start by making a list of the top 20 outlets that would have the most impact for your strategy, ordered according to importance to your campaign. For each outlet, list the journalist(s) there with whom you want to cultivate a relationship, and the type of piece in which you'd like your organization featured. Are you looking for an Op Ed or a feature story in a magazine? Would an appearance by your Executive Director on a radio talk show be most effective, or is your target audience more likely to watch television news?

Now plan how to attract your targeted media outlets to cover your story and carry your message. Plan—along a realistic timeline—events, products, story releases and other tactics to get your message to your target audience. Recall the successes you considered earlier in the planning process, but don't let your past successes and failures restrain your imagination or strategic sense.

What will you pitch to the chosen outlets/reporters? What's the news you're providing? What are the hooks that make your news interesting to journalists? The journalists themselves aren't your target audience, of course, but you do need to tell a story that they think their readers will find interesting.

For more on developing hooks, see page 21.

Paid Media

Advertising (paid media) can be a highly effective strategic communications option for a given campaign. Unlike earned media, where your message is filtered through the biases and agendas of the outlet doing the reporting, you have total control of the content—you paid for it, after all. That, of course, is also the drawback. Any message needs to be heard or seen by your intended audience many times for it to sink in, and advertising messages are no different. If your audience is large, this can get quickly get very expensive.

Still, even if you aren't working with a large budget, don't automatically reject the idea of using advertisements. A targeted ad buy seen by the right people (an elected official's staff or constituents), at the right time (just before an important vote, for example) can have an impact just as great, or greater, as a news article about the issue. Advertising can also be a good option when you're working on a tight deadline and don't have time to pitch reporters on the importance of your story. If a public hearing has been scheduled for the next week, an advertisement allows you to get in front of your audience in the quickest, most direct way possible, with the exact message you want them to see.

Self-Published Media

Self-published media such as your Web site, blog or newsletter combine the ability to control the message of paid media with the (relatively) low cost of earned media. The trade-off is that the target audiences you need to reach on a given campaign aren't always reachable via self-published media. For reaching your base to alert them about a new campaign, an email blast can work well, though you do need to be careful not to use this option so frequently that your emails become so much white noise to your supporters.

Reaching audiences who aren't already committed to media reform can be more difficult, though not impossible. Save the Internet (www.savetheinternet.com), for example, produced a viral YouTube video in support of net neutrality that has been viewed more than 500,000 times. Not all of those viewers were committed to media reform, of course, but all of them were Internet-users, which provided the coalition with a hook to reach new supporters. A blog about your issue can also help position your organization as a source for information about it. As with all communications efforts, you should use self-published media when you believe it's the best way to reach the audiences you need to reach, given the resources available for the job.

For more on online strategies, see Section Four, on page 45.

TRACK AND EVALUATE

Track Coverage

Create a system to capture your media hits.

- Search index Web sites, such as Google News and Technorati, for mentions of your organization and issue. Google Alerts can be a great way to monitor coverage of your organization and issue without breaking the bank. LexisNexis is a more comprehensive option for those organizations that can afford it.
- Consider hiring a print news clipping service.
- Contact an audio/video clipping service prior to major TV and radio hits to ensure capture of those hits.
- Enlist staff or community volunteers to collect print hits and record TV and radio appearances and features.
- Note which journalists covered your story. If you liked the coverage, thank them tactfully for a well-balanced story. Continue to cultivate your relationship with them.

For more on working with reporters, see page 30.

Evaluate Your Efforts

After each effort, assess what was successful and what could be improved. Review the coverage that your organization received, assess the impact of email blasts and research how your advertising was received by its intended audience. Remember, each of your tactics should be measured by how much closer it brought you to achieving your goals. It might help to wait a week or more after the event to begin an assessment, as it's helpful to develop some perspective.

Celebrate

Don't forget to celebrate the victories you achieve, and your role in achieving them. People support media reform/media justice, and your organization, because they want to see change in our media landscape. Taking the time to post links to positive coverage on your Web site, or to blog about your win, honors the support you've received, and helps to energize your allies for the next fight.

Resources

Strategic Communications Plan Generator.
The SPIN Project provides an online tool for creating your own strategic communications plans at www.spinproject.org/plangenerator. You can save your work and return to it later, and even submit your plan to a SPIN Project Strategist for review, all free of charge.

The Smart Chart.
The SPIN Project's parent organization, Communications Leadership Institute (www.smartcommunications.org), created the Smart Chart to help nonprofit organizations make smart choices and develop high-impact communications strategies. An online version is available at www.smartchart.org.

Honest evaluation and assessment will tell you how well your tactics helped you to achieve your goals.

SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

❶ *Reclaim the Media first examined the infrastructure available for their efforts around the Seattle hearing. While they are an all-volunteer organization, their Web site is a well-respected, professional-looking clearinghouse for information on media reform—which could help them get the word out about this campaign. They also knew that their partner organizations in the media reform/media justice movement and their donors would recognize the importance of the hearing and be willing to help out. One of the first things RTM did was reach out to their partner organizations for help. By doing so, they secured additional volunteers and interns to help with press and community outreach, as well as workshop leaders to explain the issues and train spokespeople. They also sought, and received, funding to hire a part-time staff person and pay for advertising in the local weeklies.*

❷ *The primary goal of Reclaim the Media's efforts was, of course, to stop the FCC's attempt to promote media consolidation and corporate ownership. A secondary goal was to use the lack of notice about the hearing to expand the number of individuals and communities who see media reform as critical to their belief in and work for social justice.*

❸ *While all of Reclaim the Media's messaging was directed at the FCC commissioners, they were well aware that the Commission had likely already arrived at their decision to overturn the current cross-ownership rules—and no amount of public opposition would change that. Their organizing and communications efforts were therefore really directed at the elected officials, at both the local and state levels, from whom they would need support to pass legislation restoring, and even strengthening, the previous rules. All of RTM's decisions about target audiences, messaging and tactics were based on this understanding of who they needed to convince in order to achieve their ultimate goal.*

❹ *For this campaign, Reclaim the Media decided to focus on turning out communities beyond the sectors of their base who would be easiest to mobilize (white, college-educated progressives already interested in issues of media reform). RTM would concentrate on broadening the range of voices opposing the changes at the hearing. Focusing a large proportion of their efforts on these historically marginalized communities would serve several purposes: First, it would demonstrate to legislators and other elected officials that the issues of media reform and media justice were increasingly important to a broad range of their constituents. Second, it would bolster their framing and messaging by highlighting how these communities were disproportionately affected by media consolidation. Finally, it would help RTM build connections and trust with these communities that would be valuable on future campaigns.*

Reclaim the Media's Fight Against Media Deregulation

IN THE FALL OF 2007, the Federal Communications Commission was preparing to restructure its media ownership rules. At the behest of corporate lobbyists for some of the largest media conglomerates, Commission leadership was planning a ruling that would loosen the restrictions on cross-ownership of print and television outlets in 20 major media markets, thus concentrating control of media messages in fewer hands, and reducing diversity of voices and viewpoints in the media.

When the activists at Reclaim the Media (www.reclaimthemedia.org) heard that the Commission was planning to hold its final public hearing on the proposed rule change in Seattle, their home base, they knew what they had to do. Although official notice of the hearing wouldn't be issued until just seven days before it took place, Reclaim the Media (RTM) decided they would start planning their efforts immediately after getting word of it, about a month before the eventual hearing date.

What followed was a carefully structured plan that integrated Reclaim the Media's organizing, advocacy and communications efforts to mobilize a constituency focused on promoting independent voices and protecting diversity in media. Here's the communications plan they created to help them achieve their goals.

❶ Infrastructure

- All-volunteer staff
- Strong Web site
- FCC Campaign likely to attract volunteers and campaign-specific funding
- Partner organizations' volunteers/interns mean extra hands for press/community outreach, workshops

❷ Goals

- Protect current rules against media cross-ownership.
- Highlight late notice of hearing to generate broad opposition to the FCC's current direction and priorities.

❸ Target

- FCC Commissioners
- Elected officials (Congress, State Officials)

❹ Target Audience

- Move beyond "the usual suspects," i.e. the typical audience. Ensure that communities that have historically been marginalized are included:
- Rural
- African-American
- Latino
- Immigrant Populations
- Native Americans

❺ Frames

- Big Media puts profits before their responsibility to the public—this silences diverse voices and limits access to information.
- The FCC's process isn't fair: The big corporations have had their say, now the people need to have theirs.
- We need to tell the FCC that Big Media is already big enough.

❺ For their basic frame, Reclaim the Media decided to focus on a traditional argument about "the people vs. the powerful." Because they knew from past experience that the FCC would seek to limit dissent by providing little notice of the hearing's date, they combined this frame with arguments about the unfairness of the process itself. This combination of frames would resonate with their target audiences, helping to explain the importance of this issue in terms that people could connect with their own experience.

❻ Message

Problem

We have access to more TV channels, radio stations and Internet choices then ever before—but that doesn't mean we have a greater variety of entertainment, news and information. That's because much of what we see, hear and read is under the control of a handful of large companies—who care more about boosting stock values, reaping advertising dollars and schmoozing government officials than about serving the interests of the public.

Highly concentrated media works against the public interest—replacing local with national voices, catering to the largest or wealthiest demographic groups at the expense of others, placing commercialization above community-building, supplanting a concern for good journalism with a concern for profit-making and pushing music and arts programming that all looks and sounds the same.

Solution

The federal rules limiting concentration of media outlets are an integral part of our First Amendment freedoms, guaranteeing our rights to free speech, to hear others' free speech and to have a free and independent press that's capable of holding powerful institutions accountable to the public interest. In recent years, these rules have been under attack by corporations like Clear Channel, Tribune and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., for whom bigger is always better. They get to use the public airwaves for free, but they don't want to be held accountable to local communities or public service values.

In order for our democracy to work for everyone, we need a media system with democratic values. That means access to a wide range of voices and opinions, programming that encourages civic participation, quality journalism that's protected from manipulation by commercial interests and support for emerging arts and music.

Action

The upcoming media ownership hearing is our opportunity to tell the FCC that the public interest matters more than corporate greed. Attend the hearing and one of Reclaim the Media's prep workshops. Plan to speak your mind—together we can make a difference and hold big media accountable!

❻ Reclaim the Media's basic message (from the posting on their Web site announcing the hearing) focused on the importance of a diverse media to a healthy democracy. It clearly stated the problem with the current media landscape: A small number of companies controlling most of what we see and hear in the media, and how that hurts everyone. It explained how the federal rules are supposed to function, as well as how they are being undermined, and offered a positive vision for what is needed ("A media system with democratic values"). Finally, it made clear what action the reader could take to support this positive vision.

❼ *Because the heart of the campaign was to be a public hearing on the proposed rule changes, Reclaim the Media knew that spokesperson outreach, identification and training would be a huge component of their communications efforts. Hiring a part-time staffer, and with staff on loan from their partners at the Media and Democracy Coalition and the Prometheus Radio Project, they organized a series of workshops across the Northwest. These workshops would be a combination of public education about the issues involved in media reform and training on how to be an effective spokesperson around the issue. Working from a basic set of talking points developed in collaboration with Free Press, and informed by the Ten-Point Platform for Media Justice that was developed by the Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-Net), workshop leaders would focus on helping participants express how media consolidation had affected them personally.*

❽ *They knew they would be working on a short timeline, so Reclaim the Media prioritized outlets where they could get the word out quickly: Seattle's two daily newspapers were thus a key focus. In addition to a series of news releases leading up to the hearing and summarizing its outcome, Reclaim the Media planned individual outreach to the* Post-Intelligencer *and the* Times *reporters who had covered the issue before, as well as reporters on those papers' business and TV beats. Because the* Seattle Times *has a history of interest in the media ownership issue, Reclaim the Media knew that the challenge with the dailies wouldn't be simply to get coverage of the hearing, but to make sure their frame was included in the stories that were published. For this reason, they focused on intensive, individualized outreach to reporters to position themselves as a trusted source on issues of media reform.*

❾ *Reclaim the Media knew that Seattle's two weekly papers would be likely to cover the story, but that coverage by idiosyncratic columnists at the weeklies could be somewhat unpredictable. Because many of the group's target audiences were readers of the weeklies, the group decided to take out advertisements to communicate with them directly. This was a calculated risk, as they needed to buy the ads before they had a firm date for the hearing, but the chance was too good to pass up. And it paid off—if they had waited for final confirmation from the FCC, they would have missed the window for placing ads in that week's issues. Another tactic employed was individualized outreach to individual columnists and local bloggers. This kind of personal outreach meant they could tailor their pitch to each columnist's particular concerns. Reclaim the Media got favorable coverage of their efforts from a conservative blogger using this tactic, something that would have been much harder with a less-tailored effort.*

❿ *Knowing that they could build on previous community organizing work, Reclaim the Media specifically targeted the blogs and listservs of their partner organizations. This started with outreach by phone to directors of organizations across the Northwest. Would allies be willing to share their lists? To co-sign an email? To post an item to their blog about the hearing or about Reclaim the Media's workshop series? The organization prioritized groups with strong connections to their target audiences, and in particular to audiences they knew they would have trouble reaching through other means, such as immigrant and Native American communities. They also made a real effort to make sure that the messages they included in emails weren't just generic, but spoke to the audiences they were contacting. One tactic was to collaborate with their partner organizations on drafting the emails that would be sent to each organization's list.*

❼ Spokespeople

- Hold training workshops across the state (issue education/personal storytelling).
- Provide basic talking points, promote personal stories (e.g., how concentrated media power affects young hip-hop artists, media workers, immigrants, etc.).

❽ Tactics

Daily Newspapers:
Seattle Times, Seattle Post-Intelligencer

- Four press releases: Announcement, Hearing Description, Quote Collection, Hearing Outcome
- Outreach to businesses, TV reporters
- Individual outreach to reporters to establish trust

❾ Weekly Newspapers:
Seattle Weekly, The Stranger

- Advertisements
- Columnist/blogger outreach

❿ **Allies/Partner Organizations:**

- Blogs
- Listservs
- Email lists

⓫ **Self-Publishing:**

- Web site
- Blog
- Newswire (Google News)
- Connections with Community Media

⓬ **Television:**

- Ready with a quote for the cameras at the hearing
- Bill Moyers

⓭ Track Coverage and Evaluation

- Google Alerts
- Track hits and post to blog
- Target audiences reached?
- Networks expanded?

Celebrate

In the end, over 1,100 people came to the hearing to speak out against media consolidation. Yet the FCC leadership completely ignored the public outcry, of which the Seattle hearing formed a prominent part. In fact, Chairman Kevin J. Martin contemptuously announced his decision to deregulate the rules just days after leaving Seattle.

Despite this, or perhaps in part because of this, the experience of the hearing was very empowering for many of the people who attended, who saw their personal concerns echoed and sustained by such a large and mixed constituency. This was especially true for attendees who had come a long way, hailed from smaller communities or were not used to speaking out against oppressive power.

Most importantly, Reclaim the Media and other hearing organizers were able to make use of that jolt of energy to continue expanding the coalition that they know will be needed to encourage Congress to overturn the FCC's decision. They continue working to help groups of potential activists develop their own critiques of media issues, forging partnerships and coalitions that will be invaluable in the months and years ahead.

© Jonathan Lawson / Reclaim the Media

The packed FCC hearing in Seattle.

⓫ *One of the key outlets for Reclaim the Media's efforts would be their own Web site, and in particular their blog, which included posts on interesting media reform items across the Web. Even more important, Reclaim the Media had submitted their Web site to Google News and were accepted as a source. This meant that everything the group published would be indexed by Google News—their blog posts would show up in search results alongside articles from the* New York Times *and CNN.com. Reclaim the Media also drew on their extensive network of allies at community radio stations and other community media across the region to get the word out.*

⓬ *Reclaim the Media knew that television coverage of their message would be difficult, but that local stations were likely to turn out for the hearing itself. Executive Director Jonathan Lawson, fresh from his experience at the SPIN Academy, developed a soundbite ahead of time to make sure he'd be able to get his key points across when the camera was on him. His preparation paid off: After a local station interviewed him, his soundbite was the exact portion of the longer interview he'd given that they chose to air. The group also pitched Bill Moyers on covering the hearing, knowing that he was one of the few national television journalists who had shown a real interest in the issue. While Moyers' team didn't cover the leadup to the hearing, they did turn to Northwest videographers for footage of the Seattle hearing for a major piece they did after the event. (That video can be found at http://www.alternet.org/blogs/video/68295/.)*

⓭ *To understand where they had succeeded in getting the word out, Reclaim the Media used Google Alerts to track the names of their organization, their key staff members and some of their partner organizations. They also used Google Alerts on terms like "media justice" and "diversity" to understand how their preferred frames were being amplified or undermined in reporting about the issue. They tracked all of the organization's hits, and posted them to their Web site's newswire. They also evaluated the effectiveness of reaching out to their target audiences. One of their key realizations was that the organization would need more lead time for future campaigns to reach out to many ethnic media outlets (which often publish bi-monthly or are less likely to have prior interest in issues of media policy). Finally, they looked carefully at which individuals and organizations they had brought into their networks, and considered how to integrate those new allies into future campaigns.*

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SECTION TWO

SHAPING THE STORY

USING FRAMING, MESSAGING AND STORYTELLING TO TELL *YOUR* TRUTH

BEFORE DEVELOPING YOUR TACTICS, you have to determine the tale you will tell. One story can be told in many different ways—your challenge is to figure out how to craft communication so that it taps into shared values; links problems and solutions; educates the media, policy makers and the public; and wins allies and champions. In sum, you need to know how to frame and you need to know how to message.

Framing is the art and science of organizing information in a way that connects to what people already think, aligns with what they already know and helps them see new ideas in a context that acknowledges and builds on their values. Messaging is connecting those shared values to the change you want to see in the world. And storytelling? That's crafting a narrative that can amplify voices and uproot power dynamics, creating a common tale that resonates with your audience.

This section guides you through it all.

HOW THE FRAME MAKES THE ISSUE

By Loren Siegel

MEDIA ACTIVISTS understand the media's power to influence the way people think about the issues that affect their lives. The mass media plays a huge role in shaping how people think about social issues. It is a mediator of meaning—telling us what to think about and how to think about it. Sociologist William Gamson of the Media Research and Action Project at Boston College has written, "Media is an arena of contest in its own right, and part of a larger strategy of social change."

Using the media to move an issue from relative obscurity to broad public understanding and action requires a well thought-out communications strategy. Marshalling public support for any given reform will depend on how successful we are at defining the problem in the first place: At its most fundamental level, what's really at stake? Why does it matter? Who are the heroes, who are the villains and what are the solutions?

Framing's basic truth is this: The person who defines the issue and sets the terms of the debate is halfway to winning.

Framing is the process of using strategic communications to shape a narrative that the public adopts as its own.

Framing Basics

Journalist and scholar Walter Lippman (who coined the term "cold war") referred to frames as "the pictures in our heads." When we hear the word "rat," for example, we have an immediate negative association that can't be dislodged easily, which is why rat is such an enduring metaphor for the lowest of the low—backstabber, betrayer, sneak, snitch.

The Frameworks Institute, a leader in working with nonprofit organizations to communicate more effectively with the public, describes frames as "mental shortcuts to make sense of the world." As we go through our day, we have to process mountains of incoming information quickly, so we rely on cues within that new information to signal how to connect it with what we already know, think and believe. We unconsciously "file" incoming information into a frame—good or bad, liberal or conservative, safe or dangerous, important or unimportant. That frame then exerts a lot of influence over how we think and feel about a given issue.

Framing for Social Change

Effective framing is critical to mounting a winning campaign. Framing allows you to establish the "meaning" of an issue and puts your opposition on the defensive. By crafting language based on how people think about issues, advocates can garner support from broad and diverse constituencies. This will lead to the kind of media coverage that can push your issue to the forefront of the public discourse and set the public policy agenda.

Social scientists and linguists have created a hierarchy of frames that are relevant to public policy issues, with the higher-level frames acting as a kind of template or container that the lower-level frames fit into. Frameworks Institute's Levels of Understanding lays it out this way:

LEVEL ONE FRAMES: Big ideas, like freedom, justice, community, success, prevention, responsibility.

LEVEL TWO FRAMES: Issue-types, like environment, child care (or media reform).

LEVEL THREE FRAMES: Specific issues, like rainforests, earned income tax credits (or net neutrality).

By developing messages that trigger Level One frames, advocates can use their access to the media to influence how millions of people think about an issue. By skipping directly to Level Two, we will end up speaking to a much smaller audience—mostly those who are already concerned about our topic. And if we go right to Level Three, we may be preaching only to the choir of policy wonks, activists and others already engaged in battle.

Why? Because values trump facts: We can pour on fact after fact in an effort to persuade the public to support net neutrality, but if the dominant frame through which the public sees this issue is that "it's bad for business," even our most compelling facts will fail to convince many people. To return to an earlier example, if you heard that *in fact*, rats are actually quite clean and are very attached to their young, would that make you like rats?

We don't think so…

©iStock Jacob T. Meltzer

FRAME WITH YOUR VALUES IN MIND

If frames are the structural underpinnings of your communications machine, values are its fuel. Understanding the values embedded in what we believe, what we stand for and what kind of society we want to live in is an essential part of developing your frame. Your frame's values point audiences toward the actions your propose.

Here is a sample of commonly held values in the US:

- Accountability
- Civic participation
- Compassion
- Courage
- Creativity
- Democracy
- Dignity
- Discipline
- Diversity
- Equal opportunity
- Faith
- Family
- Freedom
- Generosity
- Health
- Happiness
- Honesty
- Hope
- Independence
- Justice
- Making a better life
- Personal responsibility
- Self-interest
- Self-expression
- Self-reliance
- Tradition
- Work

—The SPIN Project

Values are more important than facts. A frame that conveys compelling values will trump even the most convincing counterargument.

Understanding Public Opinion

DOING SOME PRELIMINARY public opinion research will help you identify winning frames and messages. You can check out the extensive polling resources on the Web to get a sense of how the public feels about the media and media reform. For example, the Gallup Poll has been asking the following question since 1972:

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media—such as newspapers, TV and radio—when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly?

	GREAT DEAL	FAIR AMOUNT	NOT VERY MUCH	NONE AT ALL
2007	9 %	38 %	35 %	17 %
1997	10 %	43 %	31 %	15 %
1976	18 %	54 %	22 %	4 %

Evidently, confidence in the news media has diminished, not grown, over the past 30 years. Americans have a love-hate relationship with the news media. When asked how much confidence they have in a list of major institutions, televisions news and newspapers are ranked below public schools and the medical system.

Media reform advocates can tap into the public's disappointment in the media to make their case that the mass media needs to be reformed if it is to fulfill its responsibilities in our democracy: to keep the government honest, to give diverse voices a platform and to accurately and fully report the issues of the day so that an informed public can exercise its basic democratic rights.

The Conservative Frame

IT'S ALSO HELPFUL to identify how the opposition is attempting to frame the issue you're working on. You can usually figure this out by looking at your opponents' messages in public statements, like press releases and quotes in the media.

The Web site of the conservative think tank the American Enterprise Institute, for example, has a special section on "Telecommunications and Information Technology." A review of the content pretty quickly reveals how conservatives are talking to their audiences about media reform:

- Regulation is bad for business.
- Regulation impedes technological innovation.
- Net neutrality is "bad economics."

The Heritage Foundation, another conservative think tank, dismisses the issue of media concentration as "a myth.":

- There's more diversity in the media than ever.
- Regulation endangers choice.
- Existing regulations are obsolete and should be abolished.

Boiled down to its essence, the conservative frame is that media reform is Big Government—a frame that conservatives have used quite effectively for years to win public support for cutting social programs and limiting government oversight—and is therefore Bad for America.

BASIC FRAMING REMINDERS

Framing is about clarifying and promoting values. Proactive framing means offering a positive vision for your campaign: Be *for* something, not just against something.

Do not reinforce your opposition's frames. Repeating their frames reinforces their definition of the issue, thus supporting their point of view.

Activists sometimes create "myths and facts" information sheets in an attempt to dispel the opposition's claims head-on. But here's the problem: Conservatives often rely on deeply held stereotypes to make their points, and restating these stereotypes only gives them new life. Think back to the rat example—would a fact sheet that started out "Myth: rats are dirty" help our cause?

—The SPIN Project

Framing Media Reform

BILL MOYERS, one of the country's leading thinkers and communicators on the issue of media democracy, says that "There is no more important struggle for American democracy than ensuring a diverse, independent and free media." "Democracy," "diversity," "independence" and "freedom" are Level One frames that we can use to contest the conservative frame. This is a good place to start. By framing media reform as a question of **preserving democracy and freedom**, we begin from a position of strength that is positive rather than reactive. It's a frame that's big and broad enough to embrace all of the media reform movement's specific policy concerns.

This CORNERSTONE OF DEMOCRACY frame taps into the public's support for the values embedded in the First Amendment and the belief that our democratic society cannot flourish without a free and unbiased media and a well-informed citizenry. It is true that the public has many criticisms of the media today. But at the same time, most Americans understand the importance of the media's role in creating transparency and holding those in power responsible for their actions.

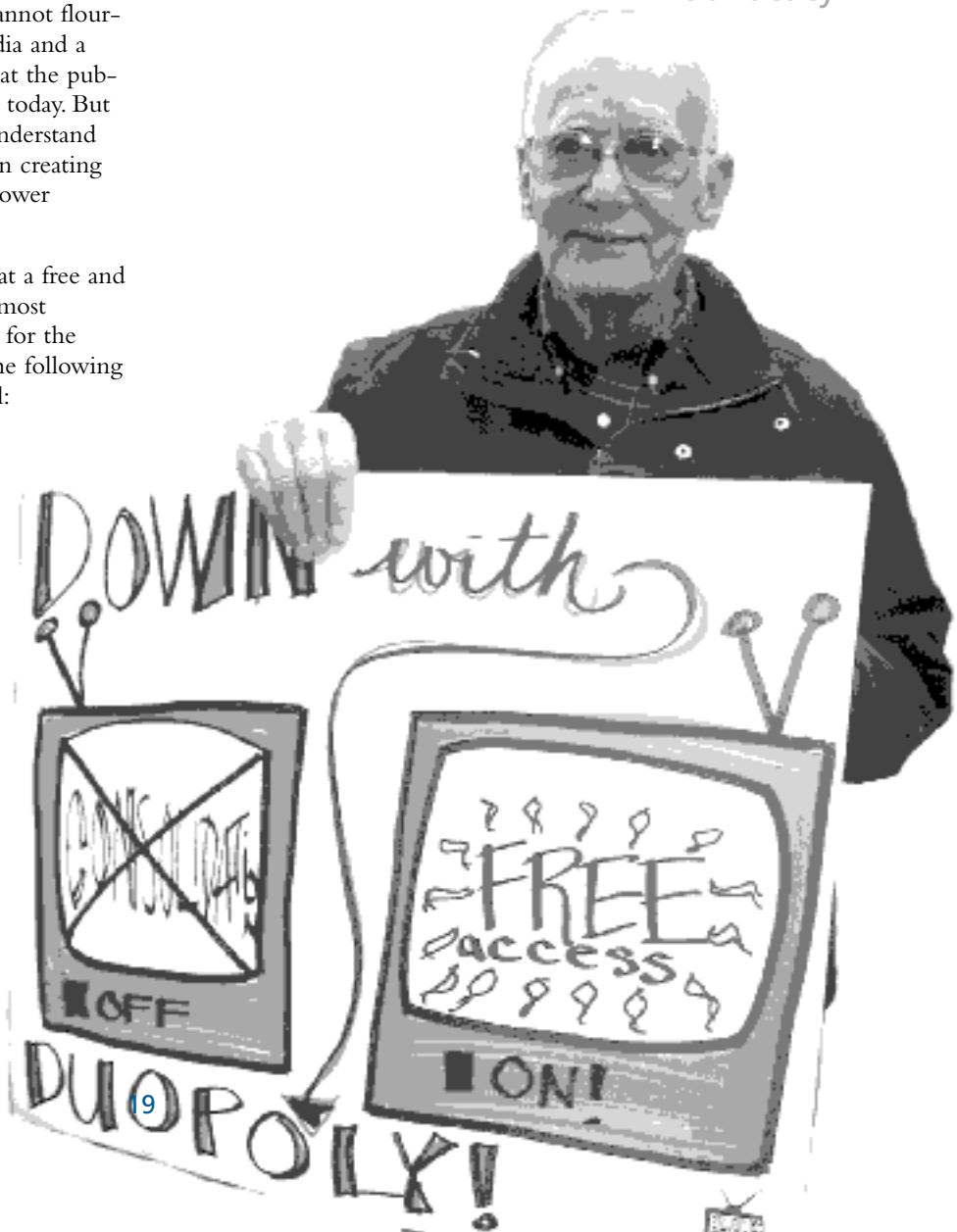
Some recent polling results show that a free and independent media is important to most Americans. A Pew Research Center for the People and the Press survey asked the following question in its 2006 nationwide poll:

Q. Which is more important to you—that the government be able to censor news stories it feels threaten national security OR that the news media be able to report stories they feel are in the national interest?

Government able to censor	34%
News media able to report	56%

Although a substantial minority chose government censorship, the public is much more supportive of a free news media today than it was in 1991 when this question was first asked. At that time the responses were reversed, with 58% in favor of government censorship and only 32% in favor of a free media.

Tap into the public's support for core values such as democracy, freedom and transparency to create a proactive frame for media advocacy.



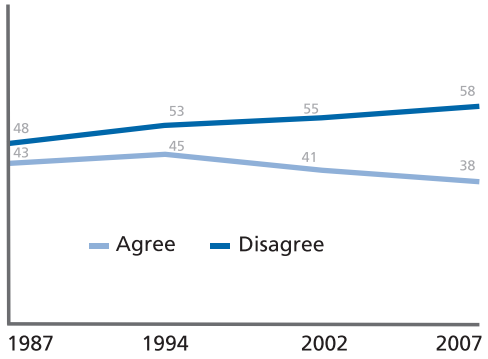
Outside the Seattle FCC hearing.

© Jonathan Lawson / Reclaim the Media

Other Frames to Consider

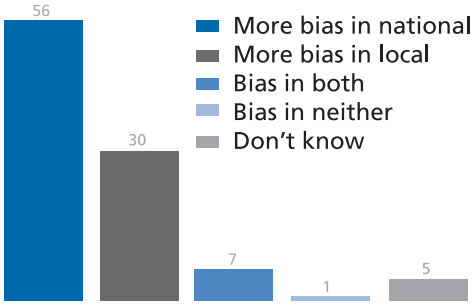
CORPORATE POWER VERSUS CONSUMER RIGHTS: This frame taps into the public's belief that major corporations in this country already have too much power and its general post-Enron disillusionment with big business. The depth of this disillusionment was revealed in recent polls. According to the Pew Research Center's report "Trends in Political Values and Core Attitudes: 1987-2007," the idea that corporations make too much profit is now more widely shared—and more strongly expressed—than a few years ago. While 65% agree that corporations make too much profit, 30% *strongly* agree. This is the highest percentage expressing complete agreement with this statement in 20 years. The chart below shows a growing cynicism about corporate America:

Q. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: Business corporations generally strike a fair balance between profits and the public interest.



LOCAL NEWS MATTERS: This frame taps into the public's strong desire for, and belief in, local news coverage. According to research commissioned by the Media and Democracy Coalition, "thorough coverage of local news" ranks second among the characteristics Americans associate with quality news (behind only "availability of thorough, accurate information"). And as the chart below shows, twice as many people think there is more bias in national news coverage than in local news coverage. The consolidation of media ownership in the hands of fewer and fewer large multinational corporations undermines the public's preference for local ownership and local content.

Bias in national and local news coverage



DIVERSITY MATTERS: This frame taps into the widespread belief that diversity is one of America's greatest assets. Terms like "a nation of immigrants," "melting pot" and "American mosaic" celebrate our diversity. Universities and colleges strive for diversity and the public is largely supportive of those efforts. For communities of color and other under-represented groups, media diversity is a civil right issue. Discrimination prevented people of color from obtaining licenses in the early days of radio and television, and in spite of progress, unequal access to the media is still a fact of life in America.

Loren Siegel is a consultant specializing in communications and strategic planning for social justice organizations. From 1991–2001 she served as Director of Public Education for the American Civil Liberties Union and built an integrated communications program for the organization and its state affiliates.

TO FRAME, CONSIDER THESE QUESTIONS

WHILE IT'S TRUE that framing is an art that can take years to master, no organization can afford to ignore it, and anyone can begin to create a solid frame right now. The exercise below is much more useful when more than one brain is involved, so work with a colleague or friend. For fresh ideas, discuss the questions with people unfamiliar with your issue. Later, you can edit these ideas down to a sharp strategic frame.

Warmup. What is your issue really about, in personal terms to you? In policy terms? In terms of local history? In terms of your political environment? In broad national or international historical terms? In personal terms to your target audience?

Who is affected? Framing for widest reach and drama allows you to show the broad impact of media issues on many people, not just on selected parts of a community.

What values will your frame use to engage target audiences? *For a list of commonly held values, see page 17.*

Who are the players? Most frames will have a good vs. bad aspect to them: hero vs. villain, the Force vs. the Dark Side. People are accustomed to choosing sides on issues. This is your chance to cast these roles as you see fit.

What's the story? What happened? Summarize the story that sets up your frame by describing five critical episodes in two sentences each.

What pictures/images communicate the frame? Images and symbols can be critical to conveying the story that you want to tell. Find images that convey the values behind media reform and media justice.

Powerful data. What data support your frame? Put your data in terms of "human" or "social" math. For instance, say, "from Dubuque to Denver, at any given moment one in four viewers is watching the same canned news being delivered all over the country," not, "Big Bad Media Conglomerate XYZ owns 25% of all local news outlets."

What media hooks does this frame contain? Media hooks attract a reporter's attention and make sense of an issue in their language. Possible hooks include:

- Current national event.
- Trends. Three examples can constitute a "trend."
- Anniversaries of events related to media reform, such as FCC or Supreme Court rulings, legislation, major milestones in news or entertainment programming.
- Controversy.
- New finding that runs counter to conventional wisdom.
- Name recognition. If you have a recognized name associated with your event or endorsing your work.
- Local hook to a national event.
- Human interest. Personal stories of individuals or community leaders with fascinating stories.
- Unlikely bedfellows. Are people or groups who are usually opposed to an issue joining together on something?

Know Your Enemy
Your ideal frame probably differs in many ways from how your campaign or issue is currently framed in your target audience's mind. What elements of the current frame do you want to dissolve, and which will you reinforce? Consider the dominant frame in your target audience's mind, as well as your opponent's frame (these can be the same or different).

The Big Picture
How will the frame affect your work and the work of your allies beyond your immediate campaign? Briefly describe how the frame brings you towards your long-term goals in the next five years and 20 years.

—The SPIN Project

MAKING MESSAGES THAT MATTER

By Loren Siegel

MESSAGE DEVELOPMENT is how you fill the canvas within your frame. An effective message is more than the marshalling of facts and arguments. The job of the message is to link an idea (e.g., a policy you are supporting or opposing) to a familiar and widely held belief (the frame), so that your audience will hear it, understand it, get it and be moved to action. There are a few basic guidelines to remember as you work on developing your messages.

Guideline One: Know Your Audience

Different frames and messages will resonate with different audiences. If you are appearing on a local TV news program, you might want to tap into the Local News Matters frame with a message that emphasizes the impact that media consolidation has on the delivery of local news to the community. If you are writing commentary for a blog dedicated to racial justice, you may want to use the Diversity Matters frame and focus on how net neutrality is the best way to ensure that all voices and opinions have a say.

Guideline Two: Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

It's not only okay to use the same messages over and over again—it's in your issue's interest to do so. Repeating your key messages is the only way to get them into the public consciousness. The message pipeline carries messages through a cycle, from advocates to allies, who repeat the same message to influencers, who repeat it in the media and in community outreach. With enough of this "echo effect," your messages and your frames come to define the public's perception of an issue.

AUDIENCE AWARENESS

Media activists can test the effectiveness of messages through polls, focus groups, interviews and research. These can gauge the mood and attitudes of intended audiences. They are supports—not substitutes—for the focused advocacy, policy and communications work that is needed to win campaigns.

Polling gauges public perception of an issue over time or in a moment.

Surveys ask in-depth questions and seek to get a deeper understanding of a particular issue.

Focus groups assemble people for discussion and feedback on a particular issue.

Research is the most important way to understand attitudes and types of media messages permeating the media landscape. The Pew Research Center [www.pewresearch.org] offers information on trends, attitudes and issues in American society, particularly related to how we consume the media.

Other public opinion resources on the Web:

Gallup Poll: www.gallup.com

New American Media: news.newamericamedia.org/news/

Public Agenda: www.publicagenda.org

The Roper Center: www.roper-center.ucon.edu

Polling Report: www.pollingreport.com

—The SPIN Project

Guideline Three: Don't Reinforce Your Opponent's Message

This rule was the theme of *Don't Think of an Elephant!*—the popular book by linguist George Lakoff. The example he used was a speech given by Richard Nixon when he was under pressure to resign during the Watergate scandal. He stood before the nation on TV and said, "I am not a crook." And from then on, everybody thought of him as a crook. If the opposition's message is that, "the Internet Freedom Preservation Act is bad economics that will make the US less competitive in the global economy," we should not respond with the message, "the Internet Freedom Preservation Act is not bad economics and it will not make the US less competitive in the global economy." Our message has to invoke a different frame that leads the audience on an entirely different path to the solution we believe in.

Guideline Four: Stay on Message

This rule is especially important in the context of media outreach. Getting your message into the media is the most efficient and cost-effective way to communicate with potentially millions of people. It's crucial to use your access to the media in a strategic way. And it's more important to get your message across than to answer the precise question posed by the reporter. Even when asked about a specific policy detail, you should always include your core message in your answer. If a reporter asks you to comment on a bad FCC rule, remember to connect your answer to your core message:

Question: How do you plan to challenge the FCC's media ownership rule?

Answer: *The FCC's media ownership rule undermines the free, vibrant and diverse media so important to our democratic way of life.* Right now we are considering our options for challenging this anti-democratic rule.

Guideline Five: Problem/Solution/Action

The SPIN Project recommends a three-part format for message development—the Problem, the Solution and the Action. This format helps you develop short, pithy "talking points," that move to the essence of an issue, rather than jargon-filled lectures that only your closest allies understand.

Problem

This section of the message should frame the issue clearly, broadly and in a compelling way so that the need for media reform is felt and understood by everyone, especially those not familiar with the issue. This section defines the issue, who is affected, who is causing the problem and who is responsible for correcting it.

Solution:

This part of the message should convey your values. What do you stand for? What is your vision for solving the problem? The solution helps you convey viable alternatives for success. It offers a positive vision, not just a response to the opposition. You want to convey a sense of hope and possibility in your message so that your audience will believe that change is achievable and within reach.

Action:

Your call to action provides leadership to your audience and gives them a sense of what they can do to solve the problem and help achieve the solution. Actions should be tailored to specific audiences, based on the best way to influence your target.

Consistency is the key to effective messaging. Stay on message, stay proactive and say it over and over again.

EFFECTIVE MESSAGES

BELOW ARE THREE EXAMPLES of real-life media reform messages that effectively define the Problem, frame the Solution using core values and point towards Actions to solve the stated problem.

Example One: Craig Aaron, Communications Director of Free Press

Issue: Net neutrality

Target audience: Public radio listeners

Frames: Corporate power versus consumer rights; Cornerstone of Democracy

Problem

We've got the phone and cable companies dominating 96% of the residential market. Now these big phone and cable companies are trying to become gatekeepers on the Internet too. That poses a threat to the free and open Internet as we know it.

Solution

Every major consumer group in the country has come out for "net neutrality," which means genuine competition for our broadband dollar. That's how consumers are going to benefit: more choices, faster speeds, lower prices and more access.

Action

The US Senate's Dorgan/Snowe Bill creates clear, enforceable net neutrality regulations. Support the Dorgan/Snowe Bill and keep the Internet the open, level playing field it's always been.

Example Two: Preamble to the Media and Democracy Coalition's Bill of Media Rights

Issue: Media consolidation

Target audience: The engaged public

Frame: Cornerstone of Democracy

Problem

A free and vibrant media, full of diverse and competing voices, is the lifeblood of America's democracy and culture, as well as an engine of growth for its economy. Yet in recent years, massive and unprecedented corporate consolidation has dangerously contracted the number of voices in our nation's media.

Solution

According to the Supreme Court, the First Amendment protects the public's right to "an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will prevail," and "suitable access to social, political, esthetic, moral and other ideas and experiences." The rights of viewers and listeners are more important than the economic interests of media conglomerates.

Action

We ask you to join the broad coalition of consumer, public interest, media reform, organized labor and other groups representing millions of Americans in proposing the Bill of Media Rights.

Example Three: Malkia Cyril, Director, the Center for Media Justice (formerly the Youth Media Council)

Issues: Media consolidation, bias, responsiveness to the community

Target audience: Media democracy activists

Frames: Corporate power/consumer rights; local news matters; diversity matters

Problem

In the Bay Area, like other areas around the country, Clear Channel owns more radio stations than it's supposed to. It owns both the right wing radio station and the hip-hop station. It's reorganized Community Affairs so that one director is responsible for both of those stations. This shift has meant fewer progressive voices on the air, fewer young people on the air, fewer local artists able to get on the air.

Solution

We've been working with community members, organizers and artists to do three things. One is to increase the air time that local artists get on the hip-hop radio station. Two is to hold the right wing radio station accountable for balance and for bias. And three is to push Clear Channel to reorganize Community Affairs to be more representative and responsive to the community.

Action

We are going to go back into our communities with a renewed vigor for change and for media accountability locally. To find out more about what we are doing, go to our Web site at www.youthmediacouncil.org.

IT'S TIME TO CHANGE THE STORY!

By Patrick Reinsborough

AT THE HEART OF THE STRUGGLE for media justice and media reform is the recognition that we live in a world shaped by stories. These stories take many different forms: from the daily anecdotes we share with friends and loved ones to pre-packaged corporate "news" stories, from a favorite novel or movie to the deepest personal narratives we carry around to remind us who we are and where we come from.

Unfortunately we live in a world where the stories that are beamed at us through the mass media rarely reflect our lives. The media has increasingly become an occupied territory—a corporate-controlled "culture industry" that sells us trivia and titillation while promoting racist, sexist and homophobic stereotypes and uncritically parroting the perspectives (and lies) of power holders.

A *narrative analysis of power* recognizes that all power relations have a narrative component. Stories are embedded with power—the power to explain and justify the status quo, as well as the power to make change imaginable. Which stories define the cultural norms? Who is portrayed as the main character, and whose story is erased or distorted? Who gets to tell their own story and who has stories told about them? These questions are the narrative components of the relationships of power and privilege, the unequal access to resources, and denials of self-determination that define much of our current economic and political system.

Story-Based Strategy

Movements and campaigns that are pushing for sweeping changes in current policies must, first and foremost, win in the realm of ideas. One of the most effective ways to change attitudes and provide new information is by telling a good story.

Ironically, so many of us that can tell a great story over the dinner table forget the basics when it comes to telling our broader campaign story. We make the mistake of focusing only on what the public doesn't know ("If they only knew the facts…"). There is much important work to be done to educate the public about the deeply flawed policies governing media ownership. What people *don't* know is a big problem. However, applying a narrative analysis of power means we need to flip this approach and also examine what people *do* know. What are the existing stories and assumptions of the people we are trying to reach?

An effective way to combine an understanding of narrative power with traditional movement-building skills is to create a *story-based strategy*. By placing a story at the center of a campaign, organizers can articulate the change they want to make with a common narrative that ties together messaging, media, advocacy and organizing strategy.

Storytelling for Social Change

Whether we're analyzing our opponent's story or calculating how to most effectively tell our own story, there are some simple elements to keep in mind.

The Conflict: A good story has to define the conflict and frame what is at stake. What is the problem we are addressing? How is it currently framed? What is emphasized and what is avoided? How can we change the framing?

The Characters: Who are the characters in our story? This can be a profound organizing question: Who are "we?" Are we amplifying the voices of the most impacted people? Who are the other characters in the story? Choose your messengers carefully, since the messenger is often as important as the message.

Show, Don't Tell: What is the imagery of this story—what pictures linger in our minds? What about songs? Poems? Metaphors? "Show, don't tell" also means avoid a preachy or self-righteous tone.

Foreshadowing: There's an old advertising industry saying, "People can only go somewhere that they have already been to in their minds." This rings true for social change work too. Our stories must forecast the future we desire. What is our vision of resolution to the conflict? What is our solution to the problem?

Sharing our stories makes us strong, and creating a common story about the possibility of change makes us even stronger.

Assumptions: What are the assumptions underlying the status quo story? On the other side, what assumptions and core values does our base share that will strengthen our sense of community as we work towards our common vision? Assumptions are the glue that holds a story together, but they are also the vulnerable parts of a flawed or deceptive narrative. When we spotlight these assumptions, we can challenge and transform them.

Memes: When Stories Spread

Identifying these elements of your narrative can help a campaign craft a common story. The next question is how does the story spread and inspire more imagination? A useful tool for organizers is the idea of a *meme*. A *meme* (rhymes with dream) is like a gene of culture that self-replicates like a virus of the mind.

Examples of memes are ideas or slogans ("Low Power to the People" or "Stop Big Media"), rituals (shaking hands) and symbols (the Nike swoosh or the peace sign) that spread virally from person to person, generation to generation. When we reproduce the meme—by using the phrase, discussing the idea or replicating the ritual or symbol—we spread the story. Social movements have always created memes as containers for larger stories that can change the dominant culture: No Taxation Without Representation; the raised fist; Think Globally, Act Locally; Si Se Puede!

Memes are not magic wands, but when combined with broader organizing and advocacy strategies, they can make social change efforts much more effective. An effective meme becomes a touchstone, offering a catchy symbol, image or ritual that spreads the campaign narrative. In order to win campaigns, we also need to pay attention to what memes our opponents are using and challenge them in ways that reframe the debate.

Winning the Battle of the Story

We know how many voices are left out of our current good ol' boys network of just-us corporate media. Whether it's the voices of poor people, communities of color and other marginalized communities or any type of dissenting perspectives, the consequences of this silencing are very real.

In communities across the country, inspiring campaigns of resistance and transformation are standing up to powerful corporations and bought-and-paid-for-politicians. The Battle of the Story is being waged daily to determine whether our collective mediascape will be a sterile corporate monoculture or a vibrant ecosystem of diverse voices and perspectives.

In the words of Indian novelist and activist Arundhati Roy, "Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our own stories." As the media justice/media reform movement continues to grow and deepen its alliance with other connected movements, we are reclaiming this most fundamental power to tell our own stories. Let's make sure we tell them well.

Patrick Reinsborough is the co-founder of smartMeme, a strategy and training organization that combines grassroots movement building with strategies to change the stories that shape the dominant culture. Patrick works as a trainer, strategist and movement consultant supporting grassroots social change organizations working for peace, justice, democracy and ecological sanity. He lives in San Francisco and runs smartMeme's West Coast office.

CASE STUDY

TAKING BACK THE AIRWAVES STORY BY STORY

By Hannah Sassaman

ONE WOULD THINK that the battle to build low-power, 100-watt community radio stations on the FM dials of America's communities would be the red-headed stepchild of the media movement. Analog transmitters and antennas on church steeples? One young person's voice on the dial—the equivalent of a light bulb surrounded by the megawatt stadium floodlights of Clear Channel and Viacom? You're kidding, right?

In terms of legislative priorities, one would think that passing a bill to expand community radio in New Orleans and New York and Nashville is about on par with a Congressional resolution to name a day after a long-dead baseball player—a fine enough thing to do, but if our lawmakers don't get to it, it's because they had more important things on their plate.

But the truth is that community radio has emerged as one of the biggest battles of the media movement. This is in no small part due to the efforts of community radio activists from around the country who took their stories to Capitol Hill and the FCC—putting them out as the most potent currency available to win over Commissioners and Congressmembers in the fight to expand our voices on our own airwaves.

Here at the Prometheus Radio Project, where we live and breathe the answer to the question, "how do I start a radio station," we learned early on that facts and figures would play a supporting role in our struggle to put radio stations into the hands of regular people. When America's biggest broadcasters convinced Congress that community radio stations would cause technical interference to big stations in big cities, the FCC rebutted them with an independent, Congressionally mandated $2.2 million study. The study's results: There is plenty of room for low-power FM community radio in most cities, and all smaller communities nationwide. That study is our biggest fact-based weapon—especially since it was designed by America's biggest broadcasters and is fully supported by all five members of the FCC.

But it isn't enough. It isn't nearly enough. All the National Association of Broadcasters needs to do is tell Congressmembers that they have a twinge of doubt that there's room for both community radio and their top-40, news-free, localism-poor stations, and Congressmembers will fight to keep community radio out of their districts.

That is—unless they hear their constituents tell stories of how a local radio station can save lives, expand religious and community voices or address the social and economic struggles of their region.

Some stories are powerful enough to transcend congressional districts, and to cross the aisle. In 2005, as Hurricane Katrina was barreling towards the community of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, Brice Phillips and the volunteers of WQRZ-LP faced a challenge. This low-power FM radio station was about to be hit by over 100-mile-an-hour winds and the loss of the entire county's power grid. Bay St. Louis, and other Gulf towns in range of the station, were going to learn what the center of a Category Five hurricane felt like.

Brice and his partner, Christine, worked around the clock to provide generator support for their station and to connect with the Emergency Operations Center. Most impressively, they climbed their 130-foot tower to move the station's antenna to more stable ground. Theirs was the only station in the entire county that stayed on the air during and after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Since the hurricane, Brice has been an incredible partner in the fight to expand low-power FM radio. Through national exposure on MSNBC and PBS, his story has been seen in millions of American households. And his voice helped inspire bipartisan Congressmembers to introduce the Local Community Radio Act, which would bring community radio to thousands more American cities and towns.

Not every community radio story is as dramatic as WQRZ's, but every story can be powerfully told as a battle for a community's soul. And hundreds of low-power FM radio stations have told their stories in front of our nation's lawmakers to great effect. Take WLEZ-LP in Jackson, Mississippi. After this station connected the state's Arts Commission, the Chamber of Commerce and dozens of coastal groups to their Senate offices, Senator Trent Lott voted to expand low-power FM, and Senator Thad Cochran co-sponsored the bill that would bring it to other coastal communities.

In this Congress, or the next, we are poised to break the blockade keeping thousands of these stations off the FM dial. For more information, see www.prometheusradio.org or www.freepress.net/lpfm. And remember—your story might be the key to bringing a low-power station to your community soon!

Hannah Sassaman was an organizer at the Prometheus Radio Project for six years. She now does political communications with the Service Employees International Union. She looks forward to working long term to build radio stations with amazing community groups as an ally for many years to come.

© Sarah Smith / Media Mobilizing Project

SECTION THREE

MOVING YOUR MESSAGE

TOOLS AND TACTICS FOR BEING HEARD

HOW DO YOU BROADCAST the compelling frames and messages you've created? How do you use the media to reform the media?

The following pages offer tips for maximizing the chances that a journalist will tell the story you want told. You'll learn about finding the right reporter for the job, writing releases that get read and pitching like a pro.

Beyond the nuts and bolts, this section also contains inspiring stories of how media reform and media justice organizations have used creative communications tactics to get the word out. The final chapter in this section points you towards a particularly effective way to deliver your message—the Op Ed.

Even in this era of increasing media consolidation, there are still plenty of reporters and editors looking to tell the story of community media and how big media impacts our nation. Help them tell it right.

WORKING THE NEWSROOM

By Laura Weide
Adapted from *SPIN Works!*

YOUR PRESS RELEASE may be brilliant, but if it doesn't get into the right hands, it won't become news. Make sure to target the best journalists to cover your story by doing your research ahead of time.

Large news departments have different people who cover discrete beats. Smaller news organizations will have less-defined beats, but may have particular journalists who specialize in multiple areas. Journalists like it when you know their beat and can reference related articles they have written, so it always helps to do your homework first.

Pitching Media to Media

Don't assume you'll face hostility when approaching journalists about media issues. Remember, thanks to consolidation, journalists are seeing their colleagues laid off left and right, and many entered the field to serve the public. In these pages, you'll find tips and best practices from veterans of the media critique. You'll learn how to:

- get your foot in the door.
- spotlight evidence reporters can use.
- provide a compelling story that hooks reporters in and keeps them interested.

When pitching a story to a media outlet, your targets will be reporters and their immediate editors. These are the venues and individuals you will want to reach:

Newspaper: Reporters, News Editor, Business Editor, Technology Editor, Features Editor.

TV: The Planning Editor decides major stories and investigative pieces. If you are pitching a same-day story, call the Assignment Editor. Call specific reporters on your beat.

Wire Services: Editors of all stripes keep an eye on the newswires for interesting and newsworthy stories. Getting listed on a national or regional wire helps legitimize your event and reaches editors and freelancers who are not on your list. The Datebook Editor decides what events will be listed on the wire. Some wire services, like the AP, also cover their own news stories. The Datebook Editor does not make these assignments, so you will need to contact the Assignment Editor or ask if there is a writer or editor more matched to your story. Regional wire services, like the Bay City News Service, only post stories with a regional hook.

Radio: News Directors usually assign stories to individual reporters. Radio talk show producers make decisions about topics and guests.

Web sites: All major news outlets have online versions of their papers, many with additional content and their own set of editors. As you build your contacts, you can find out what angles these online editors might be particularly interested in. For example, if there is a big breaking national story, you might offer first-person testimonials from a local angle that integrates into the larger story.

Blogs: Bloggers are a world unto themselves—a world it's increasingly important to inhabit or at least visit. Sift the blogosphere to find bloggers who are influential and write about your issue.

For more on researching and pitching bloggers, see page 53.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH REPORTERS

By Laura Weide
Adapted from *SPIN Works!*

CULTIVATING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS with reporters is critical for the success of your communications plan. While the "who you know" rule has always been a boost for activists seeking media attention, media consolidation—with fewer reporters having to sort through more events to decide what to cover—makes personal relationships even more critical. You can see the effect of relationships already when you watch the news for a month and notice many of the same people and groups repeatedly referenced.

So how do you develop these relationships? Here are some media pointers to live by.

- **Pick up the phone.** Your press release can languish in an inbox unless you follow-up with short phone calls. We can't over-emphasize the importance of direct communication with media to get on their radar and have a reporter assigned to your story. Make calls in the morning, before the deadline crunch.
- **Be a resource.** Journalists will see you as a go-to source if you consistently offer accurate, up-to-date information, meet deadlines, deliver good soundbites and offer interesting angles. Provide other contacts to reporters, even from the other side, if requested.
- **Be accessible.** Journalists will move on to other sources if they are not able to reach you with one email and a phone call. Give reporters a direct line and put your cell phone number on your press release. Make yourself available at all times.
- **Know your facts.** If you do not know the answer to a reporter's question, do not make up something. You can spin your response with a talking point, but if what they want is a specific fact or statistic, point them to someone who knows it.
- **Respect deadlines.** Find out about reporters' deadlines: They live by them and they are inflexible. If you have not called back by 3 or 4 pm at a print newspaper, the reporter will get nervous. By 4:30, you will be out of the story. For TV news, get back to a reporter at least a couple of hours before airtime.
- **Appear more reasonable than your opponents.** Whoever appears more reasonable is ahead of the game. A typical frame you want to avoid is that of the "livid protestor" or "extremist." Avoid getting boxed in by staking your ground in positive terms. Channel and convert your rage into a message that moves people to awareness and action.

For tips on building your media list and developing a media outreach timeline, visit www.spinproject.org/whosemedia.

Laura Weide is the co-founder of Spark Action, a communications consulting firm that specializes in shaping media in support of progressive agendas. She has facilitated hundreds of high-visibility print, electronic, radio and broadcast news stories on issue areas ranging from reproductive rights and sexuality to education reform. She teaches media-activism workshops and provides technical assistance to organizations looking to improve their media work.

SPIN Works!: A Media Guidebook for Communicating Values and Shaping Opinion *is available at www.spinproject.org.*

CASE STUDY

COURTING COVERAGE

The Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) is a Philadelphia-based organization that uses media and technology to connect diverse groups working for social and economic justice. MMP provides communications support for organizing campaigns and trains people to make their own media through classes in everything from video production to investigative journalism. MMP also works with its network organizations to advocate for media policy that benefits low-income communities—all with the goal of building a sustainable movement for change.

MMP received a burst of media coverage shortly after it became an independent organization in 2007, including articles in the New York Times, Philadelphia Inquirer *and the* Philadelphia City Paper. *Here, MMP Co-Founder Todd Wolfson, an independent journalist and activist, describes how the organization worked with reporters every step of the way to shape the stories being told.*

—Isobel White

Media = Support

We know, for better and for worse, that the mass media confers legitimacy. We understand it's a game, but we wanted that legitimacy conferred on us because we thought it would help give us the institutional support we need to grow.

The Pitch that Fits

The pitch for the *New York Times* was very different than for the *City Paper*, because of who was going to read it and the length of the piece. For the *Times*, we knew the reporter wouldn't have much space for his story. It couldn't be very nuanced, but we still wanted it to be exciting. We focused our pitch on the community journalism aspects of our work. For the *City Paper*, an alternative weekly, we knew we'd have more space, and could lead the reporter towards a social justice organizing story that would help us with relationship-building among other progressive groups at the local level.

New York Times First Contact

Initially, the *New York Times* story was kind of a lucky break, because the reporter contacted us in the summer of 2007, after we got a grant from the Knight Foundation. He was interested, but the story also presented some challenges because he didn't want to come down to Philly. And he wanted to write about our video production classes, but our first round of classes was in Spanish and he doesn't speak Spanish.

Building the Relationship

From then on, it was the squeaky wheel syndrome. I kept him on the hook so that anytime we did anything I sent him a press release. When we got the *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, I sent him the link. I made sure he heard from us once a month. Sometimes he didn't reply, but I just kept trying.

Tailoring the Pitch

About six months later, when we did our first round of classes in English, I sent him an email saying, "this would be a great time to come down, because you'd be able to engage with the class." From there, he said "pick a weekend."

Right Story for the Job

What was more work was staying on top of the reporter. I must have talked to him for four or five hours. A story about community journalism and how low-income community members need to be digitally included is not really how we ultimately think of our work, but we knew it played best in the scope of possible narratives we could get.

Philadelphia City Paper Repeated Re-framing

The reporter writes about social justice organizing and had been wanting to write about new media. He contacted me in early 2007 to do a story about me in my role as an independent journalist. That really wasn't the story we wanted told, so we pushed back against that frame.

Then he wanted to tell a story about MMP as a single organization, but we really wanted him to see us as a network, and to look at the whole scope of what our network organizations are doing. And he wanted to tell a story in which the main measure of our effectiveness would be whether an organization we work with, like the taxi drivers' union, is getting their message into the mass media. Whereas we're trying to argue that new media can build a shared movement across fragmented struggles. We believe that what's exciting is how the taxi drivers are becoming part of a movement together with students and new immigrants and other marginalized groups.

Not Just One Hero

The media tends to want to tell the story of a heroic individual fighting against the odds; that story is fine, if it's all you can get, but it doesn't really portray what MMP is all about—which is that a network of organizations can work to support each other and build a movement for wide-scale change. That's a tougher story to tell but it is ultimately a lot more meaningful, particularly for a progressive audience. That's why we pushed that story with the *City Paper*. We knew we had enough space and we knew it's read by progressive people, so we wanted to make sure the story at least partially focused on what our work is really all about.

Disciplining the Message

We gave the *City Paper* reporter a list of about 30 people to contact. We made sure everyone who was going to speak understood our frames. We really pushed the leaders of our network organizations that we wanted the story to be about them. So in the first half of the article, he does person-

alize the story—but in the back half of the article he does the work we really wanted him to do.

Still a Challenge

Even with all the attention from mainstream press that MMP has gotten, we still want to improve the framing of our work and organizational structure. Under the pressure to "find the story," reporters who write about MMP have tended to focus on one character or personality, despite our insistence on highlighting the diversity of the network. This paints an inaccurate representation of MMP's structure and leadership—in terms of race, gender, sexuality—a misrepresentation that has both internal and external consequences.

End Results

We've gotten a lot of reaction to the *Times* article from foundations. And the *City Paper* article has netted us a bunch of new volunteers. In the end, both stories did their job.

MAKING NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT: THE PRESS RELEASE

By Laura Weide
Adapted from *SPIN Works!*

© Sarah Smith / Media Mobilizing Project

ALL COMMUNICATIONS with the media must convey your core messages. The news release—a short standard document that communicates the importance of your event along with the basic who, what, where, when and why—is the basic method of communicating with reporters and editors.

Reporters sort through hundreds of releases a day, so write yours well, make it interesting and don't forget to include all the salient information. Press releases are not a time to get funky with creative formatting; stick with the standard format on the next page to be sure that yours gets read.

Start by defining your frame and writing down the three most important points you would want covered in a news story. Create a list of angles that make your story timely. Use this outline when writing your press release and pitches.

Your release should read like a news article, complete with quotes and statements of fact. Use an unbiased, third-person voice. If you think that the phrase "organizers say" waters down your point, write a direct quote.

Are you doing the reporter's job for them by essentially writing the article? That's one way to look at it—but the payoff is that if your release is very good, sometimes reporters will use significant portions of it and you will have written your own news.

Press Release vs. Press Alert

Think of a press release as the news item that you get to pen about your issue or event. It has a strong lead, a snappy headline and a lead paragraph that summarizes your pitch.

A press alert is a shorter piece covering the five W's: Who, What, When, Where, Why. It serves as a reminder on the day of the event.

Some organizations create a post-event release that is sent out immediately after an important event, providing quotes from key speakers and detailing any decisions made or the number of people in attendance, if substantial. Post-event releases are sometimes picked up by reporters who could not attend the event.

❶ *Organizational logo: This should appear at the top of all releases. Organizational letterhead is often appropriate for this purpose. You can also list Web address.*

❷ *Provide name and phone number. Ideally include cell and email address too. If you have more than one contact, include them all in a readable format.*

❸ *Use the distribution date of the release, even if it's not the date of your event.*

❹ *An attention-grabbing headline is key to being noticed by busy reporters and editors. Summarize your news in a one- to two-line headline that captures the larger frame of the news, communicates a sense of drama and pulls reporters into the story. You can also include a one- to two-line subheading with crucial details.*

❺ *Consider bullet-pointing What, Where and When under the headline. Make it easy for reporters to find vital information. If you're publicizing an event and the location isn't well-known, provide cross streets or other markers.*

❻ *Dateline: Use the location of the action, whether or not it's where you're located.*

❼ *Lead paragraph: This is the most important paragraph in the body. It grabs attention and frames the issue for maximum media impact. Provide your most relevant details here. Do not try to explain everything, but do imagine yourself answering a reporter's questions of what, where and why now. Ask yourself what is most newsworthy about the story you're trying to tell. You can provide more key details in the second paragraph.*

❽ *Lead quote: Within the first two to three paragraphs, there should be a compelling quote that further frames the issue and clarifies why it's important. Choose a spokesperson whose perspective is particularly central to the story.*

❾ *These links are particularly prominent because the story is about the report. If you're simply providing further info, put links at the bottom of the release.*

❿ *Body of release: Organize the remainder of your release in descending order of importance, known as the "inverted pyramid." Lay your base in the first two paragraphs and elaborate below.*

SAMPLE PRESS RELEASE

Edited Version

❶

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: ❷

Jen Howard, Free Press, (202) 265-1490, ext. 22

June 5, 2007 ❸

Pushed *Off the Dial*:

Media Consolidation Diminishes Diversity on the Radio ❹

FCC Commissioners and Civil Rights Leaders React to New Study on the Shameful State of Radio Ownership by Women and People of Color ❺

❻ WASHINGTON — Reacting to a new Free Press study on radio ownership released today, national women's rights and civil rights leaders joined two Federal Communications Commissioners in condemning the FCC for its failure to address the low number of female and minority media owners. ❼

❽ "We found that women and people of color control just one-eighth of the country's full-power radio stations, despite comprising two-thirds of the population," said S. Derek Turner, Research Director of Free Press and author of *Off the Dial: How Media Consolidation Diminishes Diversity on the Radio*. "These results are stark and a cause for alarm. The FCC should be aware of the consequences before enacting any policies that could further media concentration."

The full report can be downloaded at
http://www.freepress.net/docs/off_the_dial.pdf or
http://www.stopbigmedia.com/files/off_the_dial.pdf ❾

As the FCC considers eliminating longstanding media ownership limits, *Off the Dial* exposes how these changes could hasten the disappearance of the few female- and minority-controlled stations on the radio. On a national teleconference today, FCC Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps blasted the agency's pro-consolidation policies for pushing out female and minority owners. ❿

"This study presents fresh and challenging evidence about the lack of female and minority ownership in the radio industry," Commissioner Copps said. "My fervent hope is that we can harness the shame of our failures and recommit ourselves to creating a media that reflects the diversity of the American people." 11

"Women and people of color have been left off the dial because the FCC has pursued policies that are far off the mark, " said Commissioner Adelstein. "It is our legal and moral obligation to promote diversity in the public airwaves. But as this landmark report shows, misguided policies have concentrated radio station ownership in a few hands and denied two-thirds of the American people an opportunity to serve the needs of their communities. The Commission needs to thoroughly study this report and develop a comprehensive strategy to remedy this injustice. "

Off the Dial found that the average local radio market has 16 white male-owned radio stations—but just one female-owned station and two minority-owned stations. Women own just 6% of all full-power radio stations, even though they comprise 51% of the population. People of color own just 7.7% of stations but make up 33% of the population. 12

"'All day, all night, all white,' clearly does not represent the diversity of American culture," said Rev. Jesse Jackson, founder of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition. "When people of color own just 7.7% of radio stations, but make up 33% of the population, we see how poor public policy decisions continue to lock more of the 'Rainbow' out of opportunities."

"Commercial radio may be one of the most unfriendly environments for women and people of color, " said Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women. "Media consolidation has created an almost unbreakable glass ceiling at the top. The FCC must take action to promote more diverse ownership and end the white male stranglehold on the airwaves. "

Off the Dial shows that media consolidation is a barrier to ownership diversity. Female and minority owners are more likely to be local radio station owners and more likely to own a single station. Off the Dial also found that female and minority owners were more likely to have a female president or CEO and employ women as General Managers. 13

Read *Off the Dial: How Media Consolidation Diminishes Diversity on the Radio* at http://www.freepress.net/docs/off_the_dial.pdf or http://www.stopbigmedia.com/files/off_the_dial.pdf.

To read the earlier study on TV station ownership, *Out of the Picture*, go to http://www.stopbigmedia.com/files/out_of_the_picture.pdf.

14

Free Press (www.freepress.net) is a national, nonpartisan organization working to reform the media and involve the public in media policymaking. Through education, organizing and advocacy, we promote diverse and independent media ownership, strong public media and universal, affordable access to communications. 15

This release can be found online at http://www.freepress.net/press/release.php?id=242. 16

11 Quotes: Usually between one and three soundbites. If possible, write quotes for your spokespeople and ask for permission to attribute the quote to them. Quotes should be short and sharp. Take your core message and elaborate on it (as in a quote from an organizational representative) or personalize it (as in a quote from a community member personally affected).

12 Facts: Continue the inverted pyramid, layering in the most important facts to make your case. Save extra information for the press packet. Remember that any expression of opinion needs to be attributed.

13 Readability: Your reader needs to comprehend the information as quickly as possible. Use short sentences. Don't use jargon; translate all terms into language that reporters and your target audience will understand.

14 End with the symbol ### centered at the bottom of your release. If the release is more than one page, write "the name of your event or release issue, p. 2" at the top of the next page, and write "more" at the page breaks.

15 Boilerplate: At the end of your release, briefly describe your organization and direct reporters to your Web site for more information.

16 You can also restate contact information and any additional materials you may have for the media under the ### symbol. For instance, if you have a podcast or other related resources, present them here.

WIND UP YOUR PITCHING ARM

By Laura Weide
Adapted from *SPIN Works!*

A PITCH is the act of convincing specific journalists that your story is more newsworthy than the hundreds of others on their desk. You can send a personalized pitch letter in advance, but to make sure your pitch has landed, you must pick up the phone.

What Is a Good Pitch?

A good pitch includes the frames and messages you've developed to state the larger problem, your organization's solution and the specific action you are calling for. Your success at pitching depends on how well you convince the reporter that your story is timely and should be told *now*, not filed away for some unspecified future coverage.

The trick with pitching is that you have only a few sentences to capture the journalist's attention. Sound human, relaxed and genuine about the reason for the call. Write yourself a pitch script and practice it a few times before you call your top targets, but be sure you don't sound like you are reading from a script. You can also call a few of your less-important targets to warm up your pitch.

Hook your media contact like a fish on a line with dramatic human interest, controversy or a local angle to a national story. Tie your story into major events, holidays, or anniversaries. Be prepared to offer multiple hooks. A reporter may have recently written on a related topic, but one of your angles may sound fresh.

For more on developing hooks, see page 21.

Tips

- Keep it brief.
- If you get voicemail, leave a short message with your pitch and contact information. Assume you'll have to call again the next day, or several hours later if the story is pressing. Feel free to call other journalists at the same outlet in the meantime. After two to three unreturned calls, don't call back on the same story.
- If the reporter you call is not interested or on another assignment, ask who you can speak to instead.
- The Ask: At the end of your conversation, don't forget to actually ask if they're interested in your story and/or if they will be attending your event.
- Target reporters who have written on similar issues and show you know their work. "Hi, I'm calling from _____, and that terrific piece you wrote last month on ___ made me think you would be interested in what is happening next week…."

Pitch Letters

A pitch letter is the personalized letter you will write to your top media contacts. Tailor each letter to the particular outlet. For instance, if you're pitching to a radio editor, mention the various shows that you think your spokespeople are appropriate for, and what questions the show can address by featuring them. Explain briefly how this information/interview will be appreciated by their audience. If you're pitching to a magazine, shape your pitch according to the magazine format. Suggest where your story would best fit in their publication. Do they have a page on emerging organizations? Moving stories of personal triumph? Or are you pitching to a writer known for hard-hitting investigative pieces? Help editors and reporters by presenting your story in a way that fits the format of their outlet.

Be sure to make your follow up call within one to two days after you send your pitch letter.

For tips on sending your release and a sample pitch script from MoveOn.org Civic Action, visit www.spinproject.org/whosemedia.

CASE STUDY

GOOD FACTS MAKE GREAT NEWS

By Beth McConnell

One way to garner media attention is to provide timely, well-researched information not available elsewhere. Whether it's a report, a poll or participatory research, new data can serve as a hook into a larger story. In the fall of 2007, the Media and Democracy Coalition released the results of a poll showing wide opposition to media consolidation. Below, MDC Executive Director Beth McConnell explains the group's approach and the remarkable results. —ed

As the FCC sought public comment on weakening media ownership rules, the Media and Democracy Coalition released a public opinion poll showing that opposition to media consolidation stretches across ethnic, generational and gender differences. The poll also showed that diverse individuals oppose lifting the newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership ban, a rule that was a prime target of elimination by FCC Chairman Martin and big media companies.

The poll was conceived of and conducted in the summer of 2007. Knowing the FCC would soon hold a public hearing in Washington D.C., we ensured the research could be completed and released to coincide with that hearing, held on October 31, 2007.

By releasing the results the same day of the hearing, we gave reporters data they could use when writing about the hearing, and a tool to help them describe the strong public response to Martin's plans. Results of the poll were mentioned in dozens of news outlets across the country, including the *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post*.

We also ensured the results of the poll were made available to FCC Commissioners Jonathan Adelstein and Michael Copps, key allies in the fight to stop media consolidation. In his opening statement at the Washington, D.C. hearing, Commissioner Adelstein referenced the poll results as an example of what he'd seen at dozens of similar public hearings over the years—pleas from thousands of diverse individuals and organizations urging the FCC not to weaken media ownership rules. Commissioners Adelstein and Copps referenced the poll results again at a public hearing just two weeks later in Seattle, as evidence that the estimated 1,100 individuals there to testify in person were just a sample of the millions of Americans concerned about these issues.

The poll was also designed to help the Coalition reach out to a diversity of communities regarding media ownership. We ensured that a statistically significant number of Latinos and African Americans were included in the survey, and shared the results with civil rights organizations in need of messages to help make these issues relevant to their constituents. We also ensured that the respondents shared mixed political views, as well as varied income categories.

We also posed additional questions to survey respondents to test specific messages among different communities, and designed the survey to segment this "message testing" from the public opinion research. This allowed us to create two distinct uses for the research: one internal, to help us refine our message, and another external, to help generate press and visibility.

The Coalition continues to use the results of the research as it reaches out to new organizations and seeks allies of varied political affiliations—and now works to overturn the FCC's eventual decision to weaken media ownership rules.

Beth McConnell is the Executive Director of the Media and Democracy Coalition. The Coalition is a collaboration of more than two dozen local and national organizations united to advance the public's voice in debates over media and telecommunications policies.

SPOKESFOLKS: SPEAKING OUT EFFECTIVELY FOR YOUR GROUP

Adapted from *SPIN Works*!

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Soundbites are short, snappy and quotable phrasings of your message. Imagine a 10-second quote in a news broadcast—that's your soundbite. You can elaborate on a soundbite to educate reporters, but be sure to prepare your soundbites in advance and use them when the tape is rolling.

SOMETIMES THE MESSENGER is just as important as the message. That's why it's critical to learn how to be a more effective spokesperson yourself, and to develop these skills among people in your community. The best spokespeople are those who command media attention; present a poised, confident and persuasive image; and stay on message—no matter what is happening around them.

Reporters, rushing against deadlines, often don't have time to call a dozen people looking for quotes. They tend to go with the designated spokesperson. Choose at least one official representative of your organization (Executive Director or board member) who is well-spoken, trusted to say the right things and has a command of the issues. Reporters may call this person at any time for a quote or background information.

Community members can also speak to the issues from a more personal, textured perspective. Diversify your list of spokespeople, so the same one or two people are not always being quoted. Use your position as a media activist to ensure that those rarely represented in the media are, in fact, out front representing your organization.

Whether you designate organizational leaders, community spokespeople or both, here are a few basic tips everyone should follow:

- Build confidence and poise through practicing your soundbites in advance. Write up obvious questions, and hone a one to three sentence response.
- Don't try to explain everything in your soundbite. Remember, if you are being interviewed for print, unless it is for a feature story, your quote will be one to three sentences long. For TV, long answers will be edited out.
- Don't be thrown off by a reporter's questions. If it is a prescheduled interview, do your homework and prepare for the reporter's style. With even the most rabid hosts, you can bring the question back to your main points: "John, the question most people care about is how we are going to ensure a diversity of viewpoints…." Stick to your main points and you'll rise above the fray.
- Don't repeat interviewer questions. You have only a short time to speak, and you don't want to be quoted saying what you don't think.
- Cut the "ummms" out. We often use empty filler words as we think about the next thing to say. Make a point to practice speaking without saying "you know," "like," "umm," etc.

For tips on staging media events and more on spokesperson skills—including a flyer developed by Free Press to help people prepare for FCC testimony—visit www.spinproject.org/whosemedia.

© Dirk van der Duim

Alexandra Pates (left) and Stacy Erenberg speak out at the Chicago FCC hearing.

CASE STUDY

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

THE RIGHT SPOKESPERSON can go a long way toward reframing an issue. At the 2007 FCC hearings in Chicago, one consistent theme was the impact of media consolidation on the media's portrayal of people of color and other marginalized groups—and the benefits that would incur from a more diverse ownership structure, where more voices could be heard.

This focus on diversity in ownership came about thanks to the efforts of groups like Females United for Action (FUFA) and many others. FUFA is a Chicago-based organization of young women and girls dedicated to transformation through popular education and direct action organizing. FUFA stepped into the media justice realm in 2006, when its youth leaders launched a campaign to stop a local radio station from advertising via a billboard series that essentially equated the backsides of a row of women in skin-tight shorts to radio "pegaditas," or "hits"—a play on words that the youth did not appreciate. Realizing the problem was much larger than one media outlet, FUFA leaders went on to develop a survey of youth opinions on the media, a photo exhibit and a series of "Media Justice 101" trainings—all with the goal of building a base of young people who know how to critique the media and aim to change it.

So when the FCC came to town for hearings on media consolidation, it was natural that FUFA board member Alexandra (Allie) Pates would testify. But when this 14-year-old African-American girl stood up, many others in the room were surprised. Allie spoke in stark terms about the way the mass media portrays people like her, and how it doesn't fit with the reality of her own life. "I have goals and a plan to achieve them," she said. "I want to be a lawyer. But because of the media, you would just assume stereotypes about me and not want to hear what I have to say. I think if you changed the news, and made it so that there were more people of color or more women owning more media, there would be more diversity on TV."

After her testimony, members of the press literally followed Allie out of the room. She was featured on the TV news and mentioned in many news stories. Message delivered.

—Isobel White

THE ART OF THE OP ED

By Jeff Gillenkirk

OP EDS can be an integral part of your campaign to sway public opinion and change the frame and perception of your issue. Media policy advocates face a special challenge in publishing their work in the corporate press, however, as it predictably will be resistant to criticism and calls for change. There are ways to make this work, above and beyond the basics of effective Op Ed writing and placement. But first, some basics!

Why an Op Ed?

The Op Ed page of daily newspapers is an accessible space to showcase your organization and summarize your message. This page is read by major decision-makers—businesspeople, politicians and their staffs, CEOs, heads of NGOs and scholars, as well as involved citizens who are potential advocates of your cause.

An effective Op Ed can be parlayed into appearances on radio and television talk shows, and in some cases attract the attention of book agents, television producers and policy makers. Your successful Op Ed can inject you and your organization into the middle of a local, regional or even national debate—or better yet, start one. It is a timely and durable document that you can reproduce for funders, direct mail campaigns, public officials and other decision makers. And by appearing in a mainstream publication rather than just on your own Web site or blog, you have a better chance of spreading your Op Ed across the Internet.

You won't be preaching to the choir in an Op Ed piece. Use your most convincing arguments, present solutions and combine passion with respect.

The Keys to an Effective Op Ed

The basic principles of putting your message into play on the Op Ed pages of a newspaper or magazine can be summarized in three steps.

1. Good Writing. Being right is not enough. Your Op Ed has to be clear, concise and compelling in order to connect with people who don't yet see your issue from your perspective, or to motivate people who do. People read newspapers quickly. You need to grab readers at the outset with an engaging opening paragraph that helps them understand the impact of your issue on their lives.

Avoid jargon and acronyms. Write in the active voice with strong verbs, colorful images, interesting anecdotes and personal stories that illustrate the issue in human terms. Structure your Op Ed so that it leads to a solution: Problem-Discussion-Solution (i.e., "call to action") is the classic structure.

Be cognizant of your audience and the fact that most people will not know your issue. For the most part, you are talking to regular folks, not your familiar base of loyal supporters. Passion and controversy are welcome, but write in a reasonable and respectful tone.

2. Good Timing. Issues often appear and disappear in daily newspapers in a matter of days. That means that you and your organization must be able to produce an Op Ed within days—not weeks. Use hooks that tie your Op Ed to news of the time—an ongoing debate over your issue, a Congressional investigation, FCC announcement, upcoming milestone (death or birth of a community news outlet in your city), anniversary (major disaster in which news coverage was lacking) or major new study. These hooks will help you insert your issue into the news cycle.

The Op Ed pages are a newspaper's most influential section. They generate the most mail, and they consider what to do about the news—rather than just reporting it.

Shamelessly exploit anything happening in the news, even popular culture. (I once tied *American Idol* to Hunger Awareness Day, as Simon Cowell had just toured a Los Angeles food bank and admitted he didn't know that so many people were hungry in America.) Once you decide on a hook, write the Op Ed and get sign-off within a two- to three-day time frame, even faster if possible. For news-sensitive issues, the longer you take, the less likely an editor is to run your Op Ed.

3. Good Contacts. Chances are you are one degree of separation from an editor at your local paper. Tap your social network to find out. Use your in-house resources, leverage your staff, allies, Board of Advisors and Board of Directors to identify any contacts with editors. Use a celebrity signer to break in to a paper—an actor, athlete, author or national political figure who supports your issue (local elected officials may not be of help, as politicians seeking publicity are in no short supply). Find the names of editors on the paper's Op Ed page or Web site.

Do a pre-submittal pitch: Where possible, have the "author" of the Op Ed (i.e., whoever is to be the signer, even if you wrote it, such as your E.D., Board Member or celebrity) call the Op Ed page editor directly to quickly describe the column idea and the news hook. Editors like to speak "equal to equal" and are more likely to be receptive if they get queried by an executive director than a communications person.

If you don't get a response to your query, go ahead and craft the Op Ed. Submit it according to the guidelines published on the paper's Op Ed page or Web site. Follow up with a call to the Op Ed editor or his/her assistant 24 to 36 hours after submission, inquiring whether they received the submission and briefly reiterate why the article is timely, compelling and important. Again, have the "author" make the call when possible. If you don't get a response to your submission or your query within two to three days, assume that it's dead and submit elsewhere.

The Challenge for Media Advocates. Placing an Op Ed calling for the reform of mainstream corporate media presents special challenges. Journalists and editors know who signs their paychecks, and in most cases today that is someone working for a major conglomerate such as Hearst, Gannett, Disney or Fox. Think strategically: Would you publish an article in your organization's newsletter critical of your way of doing business? You may want to seek other outlets for your argument—independent weekly newspapers in your area; journalism reviews like *CJR*; semi-national newspapers like *Christian Science Monitor*; or progressive publications like *The Nation*, *In These Times*, *Mother Jones* or *The Progressive*.

It's not impossible, however, to crack the Op Ed pages of corporate publications. Many journalists and editors still pride themselves in being independent of corporate influence and practitioners of a craft devoted to finding the truth.

One way to get published is to offer constructive criticism. Think about pointing out measures they can take to conform to FCC regulations or ways they can improve coverage, including reaching other communities, expanding readership and boosting civic pride. Keep your criticism respectful and constructive ("we're all in this because we value the media's role in society"). Cultivate a relationship with the Op Ed editor and pitch your criticism as an important argument about the future of journalism. Offer to take one side of a "pro-and-con" argument about a key issue of consolidation, coverage or community. Appeal to their pride of profession by referencing guidelines published by professional journalism societies and asking that their newspaper live up to them.

Finally, try to find an issue that sheds negative light on a competing conglomerate. Some aspect of media consolidation that benefits Fox may be one that Disney or Hearst is willing to oppose. Take your openings where you can!

You only have a two to three day window before current news becomes old news, so remember to follow your Op Ed submission with a pitch call.

A former speechwriter for New York Governor Mario Cuomo, Jeff Gillenkirk has composed and/or placed Op Eds in the Los Angeles Times, New York Times *and* Washington Post*, among other outlets. He lives in San Francisco and provides strategic media consulting to nonprofit organizations through his firm, Your Message Media.*

This bold initiative for a digital public works project ran in the Forum section of the San Francisco Chronicle *on April 11, 2008. Helen De Michiel honed her Op Ed skills through SPIN's Op Ed writing and pitching seminars.*

—Jeff Gillenkirk

IT'S TIME FOR A DIGITAL NEW DEAL

by Helen De Michiel

❶ *Strong lead: Like all good writing, your Op Ed needs to grab the reader's attention immediately. This Op Ed capitalizes on strong interest in the historic 2008 presidential primary campaigns and the rising number of young participants.*

❶ WHEN MORE than three million voters under age 30 turned out for recent caucuses and primaries, they staked a claim as a major force shaping this historic presidential election. Leaving college with an average $20,000 debt in a recession economy, and entering a job market with fewer opportunities to earn a decent living, energized young Americans are yearning to help solve America's current calamities, address the mounting issues of income disparity and contribute to the health and well being of their communities.

❷ *Frame your issue quickly: De Michiel uses powerful, declarative language to effectively frame her issue, linking the aspirations of a passionate new generation to a nation in need.*

❷ While enhanced national public service is part of the remaining candidates' campaign platforms, this is a singular moment in which to demand a much larger and bolder vision to propel all Americans, across generations, fully into the 21st century. It's time for a Digital New Deal.

❸ *State the problem: The author uses precise, dramatic examples to illustrate the problems she is setting out to resolve via an upgraded digital infrastructure and expansion of our democratic commons.*

❸ Even though we inhabit a technologically saturated environment, America is falling behind in its capacity as a technological world leader. With only 53% broadband penetration, America now ranks 24th among industrialized nations—well below countries as diverse as China, Iceland and Canada. South Korea leads the world in broadband penetration, with 90% of households. This deficiency seriously affects our competitiveness in the global new economy and compromises our ability to keep pace with cyber-terrorism and other Internet hijinks.

Our next president can help reconstruct America's fragmented and relatively weak public communications infrastructure by using the most effective tool our youth wield—the power and depth of their digital fluency.

❹ *Discuss the issue in engaging terms: De Michiel provides an inspiring portrayal of the new millennial generation, using accessible, upbeat language. Rather than giving a list of policy points, she illustrates the benefits of her proposal by showing its impact on real people.*

❹ This eager, highly knowledgeable, connected and multitasking first generation of digital natives—"millennials" coming of age now who have used computers and the Internet since childhood—can be put to work in a WPA-inspired Digital New Deal to build out a networked national public commons that bolsters our international competitiveness.

Free of commercial data-mining and ultra-marketing of social networks like MySpace and Facebook, this new online public sphere would evolve into a robust multitude of open channels and spaces where people could safely share ideas, experiment with innovative design and debate issues and policies. The talents and organizing skills of the millennial generation, whose numbers now exceed their boomer parents, can be harnessed to connect citizens across online communities, and amplify America's independent media voices and visions globally. As a benefit, these Digital New Dealmakers will earn a living wage, be able to retire college debt and develop a lifelong commitment to the public good.

❺ What will this work look like? Youth-driven teams will design tools, social networks and online environments that bolster and stimulate community-building and citizen participation. They would work with IT specialists to democratize the next generation of broadband access. And they can creatively partner with nonprofits, public schools and communities to build technological and networking capacity that will help us address challenges such as climate change, lack of healthcare and economic hardship.

❺ Stay on message: Every point in your Op Ed should circle back to the main message. To strengthen her case for a Digital New Deal, De Michiel continues to use concrete language, free of industry jargon, to paint a portrait of the kinds of solutions she's proposing.

The Digital New Deal will also foster a much-needed intergenerational knowledge exchange. Professional development goes both ways—young people showing their elders how to take advantage of Web 2.0, while public sector leaders and educators pass on the experience and wisdom they have gained working as organization builders. The expertise and enthusiasm of millennials and boomers are complementary, and can transform America's public communications sphere if we make this knowledge exchange a priority.

❻ When Franklin D. Roosevelt put millions of Americans to work designing, building and repairing our country's roads, parks, buildings and schools, they were beautifully constructed for generations to use and enjoy. The construction of a widely accessible broadband digital network now ranks as equally important with that of President Roosevelt's public works infrastructure expansion in the last century.

❻ Marshal support: De Michiel links her vision of a Digital New Deal to the founder of the original New Deal, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and builds the case for meeting today's formidable economic challenges with a public works program tailor-made to meet contemporary needs.

Like other moments in American history when far-reaching public works initiatives were implemented, there will be cynicism and disdain along with relentless fear mongering to bring down this "activist" government program. But the benefits of a Digital New Deal are vast and cannot be underestimated.

❼ Creative potential will be unleashed through new media and social networking pathways in ways we have never experienced, influencing where we live and how we work. Young people will be able to acquire entrepreneurial and leadership skills needed for a 21st-century workforce, and the public sector will be recharged and better prepared to handle problems of our time.

❼ Win-win solutions: It strengthens your appeal to propose a solution that impacts more than your own cause or subculture. Here the benefits of the Digital New Deal are shown to help today's young people and society in general. Who can argue with a helpful vision like that?

As the economy falters and technological innovation slows, the Digital New Deal can translate into trillions of dollars for a US economy wired for the online demands of the 21st century. It will create new skill sets and jobs for people who are now struggling, and bring new participants into the information economy. Without a large-scale public sector agenda, private enterprise will simply not provide this on their own.

❽ Imagine after the 2008 election, a swarm of arts and culture leaders, public interest and policy advocates, energetic young software developers, philanthropists, media reformers and forward-thinking politicians banding together in a broad coalition to construct this Digital New Deal. How this investment in our future would be implemented—including public and private partnerships—is a debate well worth having.

❽ Call to action: The classic Op Ed structure of Problem-Discussion-Solution is successfully concluded as De Michiel makes an impassioned call for a broad coalition of reformers to help solve the many problems of our time.

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Helen De Michiel is the National Co-Director of the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC), based in San Francisco.

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SECTION FOUR

PLUGGING PEOPLE IN

NEW MEDIA TACTICS TO ENHANCE COLLABORATION AND PARTICIPATION

NO LONGER AN ADD-ON, online strategies can be front and center in your campaign. By harnessing the power of Web 2.0—the range of interactive tools that enable participation on the Internet—you can work smarter, collaborate more easily with allies and reach new supporters. And with Web 2.0 tools, you can create your own media, broadcasting the message you want your audience to receive.

On the following pages, you'll find a primer on new media tools, with information on how media activists can use everything from blogs to YouTube, podcasts to wikis. You'll also find case studies of groundbreaking Web-based campaigns.

Lastly, because it's an unfortunate truth that with new opportunities for expression come new threats to that expression, this section also highlights campaigns to ensure that the tremendous organizing potential of the Internet is protected and its benefits shared broadly.

THE TOOLS THEY USE: ONLINE AND OFFLINE COLLABORATION FOR MEDIA ACTIVISTS

By Dharma Dailey

THE EASIER it is to collaborate, the more collaboration will happen, right? Here we'll look at how one all-volunteer group used a variety of online and offline collaborative tools to pull together a very successful event. Then we'll look at some collaborative tools that are being used by another activist group that has a small staff and lots of volunteers.

Northeast Citizens for Responsible Media (ReMedia, for short) is an all-volunteer group active on media reform in the Hudson Valley of New York. When ReMedia got the news that the FCC was coming to town, they had only three short weeks to alert the community, find an event space, get local officials and experts lined up to testify and create a press campaign for pre- and post-event press coverage. Because ReMedia is all volunteer, they were constrained by having no money and no staff.

Cross the digital divide: Nothing beats a face-to-face meeting for planning, building trust and ironing out differences of opinion.

It Started with a Meeting. Right after the FCC called to say it had selected a date to come to the Hudson Valley, ReMedia members held a meeting. About eight people attended and set out to create an overall plan of action. The meeting was a long one, but it set the project up for success. Important strategic questions were talked through: What key groups must be represented at this hearing? What are the best ways to ensure that they are represented? What's different about media ownership here than other places, and how can we demonstrate that?

After coming to consensus on the big picture questions, people were ready to think about how the work should be broken down over the following weeks. Working groups included Press Outreach; Event Space; Outreach to Underrepresented/Marginalized Groups; Outreach to Local Officials and Pooh-bahs; and Outreach to Local Media Experts, such as professors. The meeting included working out a pre-event and post-event press strategy.

Yes, meetings are still an activist's best friend. There are a plethora of online tools that can help you manage information and stay on top of tasks, but nothing works better than a meeting for strategic planning, evaluation or ironing out differences of opinion. Meeting face to face builds trust, and it also translates into a stronger feeling of connection when working together online. Rob Purdie, a longtime environmental activist and professional project manager, notes that just prior to and just after a meeting there is a burst of energy and activity. That's just what you need to kick off your project, as well as move it from one phase to another.

First Email Blast, First Press Outreach and Personalized Emails. The night of the meeting, the Press Outreach group drafted an announcement to blast to the ReMedia email list. This announcement doubled as a press release. Everyone in the group was encouraged to forward the email and tailor the message to each of their selected outreach groups.

The trick to using email for outreach is to always put the most important information first, starting with the subject line. A subject line like "Hudson Valley FCC Hearing Nov. 7th" lets people know that the message is time sensitive.

Follow Up with Phone Calls. ReMedia already had a history of good turnout for their events, but they wanted to make sure that the FCC hearing truly reflected the concerns of a wide spectrum of local residents. That meant using methods that would help quickly establish relationships with groups that they had never connected with before. The best way to do this quickly was to pick up the phone.

ReMedia used follow-up phone calls after the initial email announcement to connect with community leaders. Volunteers with relationships at local media outlets forwarded the email, and then made follow-up calls to ensure coverage of the event.

Expand the Circle of Allies Digitally with Conference Calls, Video Chat and Plain Old Chat. ReMedia wanted to get advice from other groups that had held FCC hearings, so they arranged conference calls with a few allies out of the area.

© Jonathan Lawson/Reclaim the Media

Youth plug in: Oregon Learning Lab for Information Education (OLLIE) van.

When it isn't possible to get all of your collaborators in the same room, many activists turn to conference calls and video chat. Conference calls can be arranged through conference call services or through Internet-based programs like Skype, which works on any computer for text, video or audio chats.

Video chat can also help expand opportunities for collaboration. For example, a youth media project can arrange to have their youth talk directly to peers working in other communities.

Video chat has an advantage over conference calls because seeing someone adds more depth to the communication experience. Also, people are less tempted to "multitask" (which is just another way of saying "not paying attention").

A simple text chat program is another tool than can keep remote collaboration running smoothly. I work with a group that represents Internet users in Internet governance forums. We have had a single text chat going for over six months using Skype. With just one tool, our group has been able to effectively share information in this informal "back channel" among folks spread out from Hawaii to Moldova.

With a text chat, you can involve as many people as you like, and save chats that are useful. Skype tells you when anyone has added a comment. You can have the same chat active on multiple computers. You can also use Skype to send files or make phone calls to land lines. Other popular chat services include AOL Instant Messenger and Yahoo Messenger. On my Mac, I use a free open source program called Adium to access these other services.

Collaborating on Documents and Messaging. ReMedia had a lot of written material to pull together in a hurry, including email announcements, text for the Web site, messages for particular audiences and press outreach materials. The press kit had all the usual organizational information about ReMedia, but also contained issue briefs that gave substantive information about how media consolidation affects the Hudson Valley, including professional research and expert testimony. The work on these documents was divvied up among a number of volunteers. Some sympathetic local reporters were even recruited to help create the press kit. Collaboration involved a lot of back and forth in email and telephone calls.

When using email for outreach, put the most important information first, and always follow up with a phone call.

Keep in mind that pre-event press helps create the excitement and interest that your project needs to be successful. Post-event press can document that success to future allies, collaborators and funders. By recruiting people with media skills to be part of the project, ReMedia had more credibility to get coverage from media outlets.

Your Web 2.0 tools will only work if people use them. Pick a few, experiment, and make sure to train folks on how they work.

The way that ReMedia collaborated on creating the necessary documents worked, and that's what counts. But there are other ways to facilitate this kind of collaboration. Online services that let you edit and store a document in one place that is accessible to all collaborators have several advantages over passing things back and forth in email. You don't have to worry if your text editing program is compatible with your collaborator's. You always know that you are looking at the latest version. It's easy to see what changes have been made by different collaborators. And all documents are always available to everyone with an Internet connection—no chasing down someone to get that precious document at the last minute.

Easy-to-use online project management services like Basecamp (BasecampHQ.com) let you and your collaborators write and edit together on "writeboards." Google Docs is another popular way to collaborate, though many activists are uncomfortable with Google's privacy policies. Services like Basecamp also let you have online calendars, project milestones, to-do lists and document storage. Basecamp will even send people "to-do" reminders. You can set up most of these services so that you receive an email or an RSS announcement when changes are made by your collaborators.

To make chats, teleconferences and email more effective, Marc LaPorte, a coordinator for an all-volunteer open source project, suggests that someone in your group take responsibility to copy and paste any decisions that are made and questions that may come up again into an online archive such as a wiki. Wiki, which means "fast" in Hawaiian, is an online tool that lets people quickly and collaboratively document information. LaPorte also recommends pointing people to a link instead of answering each question directly. "Here is the Web address (URL) that has all the information about the event...." is more helpful than re-posting or re-typing all the info.

Use RSS, Google Alerts, Tags and Bookmarks to Track Information that Affects Your Project. ReMedia carefully scanned all local news outlets, from the time of their first email blast to the days after the FCC hearing, to monitor the coverage of the event. This involved maintaining a comprehensive list of local media outlets. Blogs were less popular at the time (2004), but if the event were today, ReMedia would also be looking at Hudson Valley blogs and blogs about media consolidation.

To make it easier to keep on top of relevant coverage, there are a few stand-out tools that your group should consider. First, you can set up a Google Alert that will email you anytime your group gets mentioned in the mainstream press. You can use blog search engines, such as Technorati, to identify bloggers who may be covering your project, or may want to. You can use RSS feeds to keep on top of important sources of information—such as the Web sites of key allies and stake-holders. And, finally, you can use a tag service such as Del.ici.ous to help you bookmark important information sources for later use, as well as to share that info with your collaborators.

For more on these tools, see "Ramping It Up Online," p.50.

Results. The hard work paid off, with 350–400 Hudson Valley residents coming out to voice their opinions at the FCC hearing. "It made it so much more valid to hear the sentiments coming out of the citizenry," says Joanne Lukacher, a ReMedia volunteer. The event received print, radio and television coverage from both major and smaller outlets in the area. Several small local outlets specifically came because of ReMedia's pre-event outreach, and, says Lukacher, "I thought the local papers covered our event better than the larger outlets."

It Ends with a Meeting. About a week after the FCC hearing, ReMedia got together to celebrate their hard work and also to evaluate the event's impact. It was a good time for writing thank-you letters to people and groups who showed support. Several conversations were started at the hearing about possible new collaborations, and during the initial evaluation meeting, ReMedia found that there were too many threads to follow. All of this needed to be

sorted out by the group in a next-step strategy meeting. So they scheduled a facilitated day-long meeting about a month after the hearing to help them sort out opportunities.

A week after the end of a project or campaign is about the right amount of time to set up an initial in-person evaluation meeting. Just as it's important to meet in person for strategy, it's also important to do evaluations in person. This kind of review will often lead you back to the beginning—a new round of strategic planning.

Contact Management Software and a Wiki Help a Small Staff and Volunteers Make Big Waves for Big Media. A few other tools worth mentioning are more helpful for bigger projects or ongoing group operations. Prometheus Radio Project was an early adopter of CRM software (Constituent Relationship Management software). With CRM software they are able to keep track of the interests and needs of thousands of media activists around the country: who wants a radio station, who has technical skills that they are willing to donate, allies, engineers, lawyers—you name it. This makes it very easy for Prometheus to turn people-power into a smooth-running campaign action engine. Currently, Prometheus uses an open source CRM called Sugar.

Another tool that helps Prometheus run projects, campaigns and day-to-day operations is their internal wiki, which includes everything from the phone numbers of nearby lunch places to complex technical and legal information for community radio applicants to to-do lists for upcoming events. Corey Mark of Prometheus explains the advantage of the wiki over traditional ways of storing documents. "The wiki combines narrative language with a place to quickly add or look up important information. If I am just looking at a directory of documents on a file server, I have to open each document to see what it is. With the wiki I can add language that describes what is here and why."

Final Thoughts. Keep in mind that any "tool" only works if people use it. That means that they have to have access to it and be comfortable with it. A new tool will usually require a bit of training in both "how this can help us accomplish our mission" and "how to use it."

Also consider that different people in your group may have different preferences for communicating. That has led some groups to use so many collaborative tools that group members can't keep track. Be selective. Pick a few that you think will work best for your group. And remember—the important thing is not what tools you use but that you kick Big Media butt!

For More Information:

For up to date information and unbiased reviews of software and Web 2.0 services that are useful to nonprofits, check out www.IdealWare.org.

For a case study on People's Production House efforts to overcome digital segregation, visit www.spinproject.org/whosemedia.

Dharma Dailey is the Director of Research for the Ethos Group, a consulting firm focusing on the social impact of information and communications technologies. She is a longtime advocate for community media—especially community radio. She lives in the Catskill Mountains of New York state.

RAMPING IT UP ONLINE: A GUIDE TO WEB 2.0 FOR MEDIA REFORM ACTIVISTS

By Rebecca Farmer

Whole communities are ready and waiting for alternative news sources. You just need to find them and get the word out. In this chapter we'll show you how to spread your message using YouTube, podcasts, social networking, social bookmarking, RSS feeds, blogs, photo sharing, email blasts and your good old Web site.

ONE OF THE REALITIES for media reform activists is that getting publicity for your organizations and campaigns has an added layer of obstacles. When you're challenging news media or the entertainment world, it's more difficult to garner a place in their coverage. At the same time, the fact that more and more people get their news online—via the blogosphere or traditional news media Web sites like nytimes.com—has changed the media landscape and offers multiple entry points for activists looking to get the word out.

The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press reports that roughly a quarter of people in the US get their news online, and that Internet news audiences are more likely to be critical of mainstream news. What this means for media reform activists is that whole communities are ready and waiting for alternative forms of news and analysis—these audiences won't need to be convinced of the importance of your work so much as they'll need innovative ways to plug in.

Where the 2008 US presidential race is concerned, according to the Pew Research Center, close to half (42%) of people aged 18–29 learned about the campaign online—more than any other news source. This is more than double the number of young people who got campaign news online during the 2004 election.

The rise in Internet news audiences is rapidly changing the industry and has increasingly created opportunities for democratizing the media. By the same token, as the handful of big companies that own our major media outlets gain power, the need for independent news sources expands. These trends make it all the more crucial to ensure that the Internet remains free and open to everyone.

Why Web 2.0?

New media, as a term, can also be thought of as digital or online communications. You've probably heard about Web 2.0, which refers to the range of online applications, Web sites and tools—including blogs, podcasts, wikis and social networking sites—that promote interactivity, collaboration and user-generated content.

Web 2.0 applications are perfectly matched for activism because they encourage participation. And part of the beauty of new media tools is that many of them are completely free or low-cost, making them accessible for organizations at any budget.

As with all communications efforts, an effective new media strategy should build from your campaign or broader organizational goals, and be in tune with your capacity. Consider your target audiences and which Web 2.0 tools will best reach them. Web 2.0 is a constantly evolving field, so don't be afraid to experiment to figure out which tools will best work for your purposes.

HIGHLIGHTS OF NEW MEDIA TOOLS

YouTube and Online Videos

Chances are that someone has sent you a link to an online video of a baby panda sneezing or otters holding hands. This is how many of us became familiar with YouTube, a Web site where you can upload, watch and share short video clips. YouTube rose to new popularity in 2007 as a tool for activist organizations when it launched a nonprofit program (www.youtube.com/nonprofits). The program allows 501c3 organizations to create a customized page showcasing their videos, and provides other enhanced features.

Creating short videos and posting them online is a way to tell your organization's story and reveal the human interest angle behind a complex issue. Online videos can deliver a narrative, creative story, featuring interviews with leaders and activists or highlighting key moments from rallies. Online video aficionados recommend that a video posted on YouTube be no longer than five minutes—but the punchier the better.

In the communications world, we refer to the videos that catch on and spread quickly via email and online posts as "going viral" (a take-off on viral marketing), and this is definitely one of the benefits of delivering your messages in a multimedia format that is easily shared.

Keep in mind that you don't need professional, high-budget tech assistance to create online videos. Both Mac and PC computers come equipped with basic video editing software. Once you've got a video, uploading is easy and instantaneous. After it's uploaded, you're provided with the HTML code to embed the video on any Web site, social networking page or blog.

www.youtube.com

www.youtube.com/nonprofits

youtube.com/savetheinternet

Listen Up: Podcasting

The answer to the first question many people ask about podcasting is "No, you don't have to have an iPod." Podcasts are a series of audio files hosted online. The "pod" bit comes in because many people download favorite podcasts to an MP3 player for convenient listening. Podcasts are also available for listening online and can be easily distributed through iTunes and sites like PodcastAlley.com and Podcast.net.

Sometimes a story is best narrated by a compelling storyteller, rather than written. This is one way podcasting can supplement your other communications tactics. Groups can also provide a newscast-style analysis around campaigns and issues, or feature interviews with key leaders and members.

Audio recording equipment and editing software can be purchased relatively inexpensively. Gcast (www.gcast.com), is a free podcasting tool used by musicians, comedians and nonprofit groups to promote their work. Promoting a podcast through Gcast is similar to embedding a YouTube video on your site. With Gcast, you can either upload an audio file that you've recorded and edited, or you can record a message or conversation via phone which will post directly to your podcast stream.

For more on podcasting:

Gcast.com

Podcastalley.com

Techsoup.org (for resources on the more technical parts of creating a podcast)

Use a short online video to tell a story, create human interest or showcase work your organization has done.

USING THE INTERNET TO SAVE THE INTERNET

The SavetheInternet.com Coalition has been wildly successful in keeping the Web free and open for everyone. Nearly two million people and thousands of organizations and businesses are united on the principle of Net Neutrality—the idea that the Web is an equal ground for people to access the information of their choosing.

Net neutrality has been a core principle since the beginning of the Web, but cable and phone companies, like Comcast, AT&T, Verizon and Time Warner, are trying to capitalize on the information flow. These business giants are working political channels to position themselves as gatekeepers who could decide, as Internet providers, which sites to speed up, which to slow down and which might not load at all.

SavetheInternet.com has rallied supporters using a number of Web 2.0 tools—using the Internet to save the Internet. With a vast email network, regular updates and action alerts, blog posts, a YouTube channel and a social networking site presence, the coalition has generated over two million petitions, emails and phone calls to Congress and the FCC.

SavetheInternet.com Coalition's bloggers post several times per week with updates on the status of legislative and regulatory battles, as well as on the latest infuriating moves by Comcast and other companies. As a core part of the coalition's effort, snippets from the blog are featured prominently on the homepage. Its YouTube videos, also highlighted on the homepage, pack hip, punchy and engaging messages into an informative few minutes.

Victories for the coalition and, ultimately, net neutrality have stacked up quickly and include Web protections in the AT&T/Bell South merger, stopping the flawed 2006 Telecommunications Act and getting the FCC to launch an investigation into Comcast's blocking of Web traffic.

Check out:
www.SavetheInternet.com
www.YouTube.com/SavetheInternet
www.SavetheInternet.com/blog

—Rebecca Farmer

In 2007, Maine became the first state in the nation to pass a legislative resolution in support of net neutrality. Common Cause Maine teamed with the Maine Civil Liberties Union to create a coalition of supportive organizations that worked to pass this resolution.

The bill that was passed instructs the state to investigate whether or not a state can mandate net neutrality rules, and emphasizes that net neutrality is critically important for the proper functioning of our democracy and for Maine's local economy.

For more information, visit www.maineinternetfreedom.com.

—Jon Bartholomew, Media Reform Campaign Coordinator for Common Cause

Make Friends: Social Networking Sites

Two of the most well-known social networking sites are Facebook and MySpace. The key emphasis of these Web sites is networking online. Users set up personal profiles as a way to connect with friends and other users with similar interests.

Most social networking sites also enable an organization to set up its own profile to share information, keep in touch with current online members and recruit new folks. Overall, they're a great way to capture and cultivate new audiences for your organization. A key thing to remember, though, is to convert these new online relationships into action.

Facebook's Causes application was developed specifically for nonprofits. Groups in the media reform and media watchdog worlds that use Facebook include Free Press, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and Media Matters for America. The Facebook Causes application allows you to send alerts, action items and fundraising requests to users who have joined your cause page as members. It also allows users to donate directly through Facebook.

A relative newcomer to social networking sites is MyBLOC.net (BLOC stands for Building Leadership, Organizing Communities), which was created for social justice organizations and activists, particularly those working with young people and communities of color. Other sites created for networking around social change include Care2.org and Change.org.

As for-profit social networking sites grow, it's likely that media justice groups will need to serve as watchdogs around ownership and accessibility. In 2005, MySpace was purchased by the News Corporation conglomerate, and Facebook was the target of a MoveOn.org petition in 2007 over privacy issues.

Social networking sites:

- Facebook.com
- MySpace.com
- MyBloc.net
- Change.org
- Care2.org
- Tribe.net
- Gather.com
- MeetUp.com

Save It: Social Bookmarking Sites

You've probably used your Web browser's bookmark function to keep track of key sites you visit often. But what happens when you want to share a bunch of sites with a colleague or to find them again on another computer? With a service like Del.ici.ous you can access your bookmarks from any computer and share them publicly if you choose. A media justice activist could create a sort of public primer on organizations in the field, categorized by tags for policy groups, community-based groups and issue-related blogs, for instance.

Social bookmarking expanded for news sites and blogs with applications like Digg, Reddit and Newsvine, which allow users to submit and vote for a story or blog post. The more clicks, or "diggs," the higher it's ranked and the more other users are able to see it. The activist-oriented site Care2.org also has a news-ranking function.

Bookmark it:

- Del.ici.ous.com
- Diigo.com
- StumbleUpon.com
- Furl.com
- Digg.com
- Reddit.com
- Newsvine.com

Share It, Read It: RSS feeds

RSS stands for "real simple syndication," and it's a way of tracking information and distributing important updates. With an RSS reader, instead of checking each blog or Web site you're interested in to see if there is new content, you can see all the updates in one place. Adding an RSS feed on your own Web site or blog lets your audience track updates to your information as well.

Resources for RSS feeds and readers:

- Google.com/reader
- Bloglines.com
- NewsGator.com
- MyYahoo.com
- Addthis.com

Navigate the Blogosphere

Blogs—short for Web logs—have changed the media landscape immeasurably. While blogs were originally a way for individuals to self-publish thoughts, perspectives, news and pop culture analysis with frequent updates, today most mainstream news organizations also have their own blogs—often written by seasoned reporters. Blogs have gained increasing respect in the news world, as they break their own news, provide analyses and report on topics that are otherwise ignored by the mainstream media.

For groups looking to launch a blog, the technology is simple, but capacity and commitment are factors to consider. Successful nonprofit blogs feature several posts per week. If you can't manage that much, another option is to post with regularity, such as every Wednesday. Consider sharing blog responsibilities by offering posting rights to different staff, board members and key activists. The bonus of having several bloggers is that your blog will feature diverse voices and perspectives, though one staff person might want to oversee blogging activities.

Blog posts can be as short as 150 words, with an ideal maximum length around 600 words. If writing short and sweet is a challenge, remember that you can always link to additional background information instead of including everything in one post. Once you have a blog, don't forget to promote it.

Whether your group has its own blog or not, pitching stories to bloggers is a great way to spread your messages without going through the filter of corporate-owned media. Pitching bloggers is similar to pitching traditional media in certain ways—build relationships and trust, make sure you know what they're interested in, don't waste their time and give them a good story. A notable difference is that bloggers don't need to be unbiased in the same way that mainstream press is supposed to be. This means that you're often better off sending along a personal note with a brief introduction instead of copying and pasting a press release.

In order to pitch blogs, you've got to read blogs. Find out who is blogging on your issues by using a blog search tool like Google (blogsearch.google.com) or Technorati (www.technorati.com). When you find a blog you like, click through the blog roll—links to other blogs—to find more like-minded bloggers to pitch and network with.

Blogging tools:

Blogger.com

WordPress.com

Typepad.com

Blog searches:

Google blog search: blogs.google.com

Technorati blog search: technorati.com

Media reform blogs:

SavetheInternet.com/blog

PRWatch.org/blog

Women In Media and News: wimnonline.org/WIMNsVoicesBlog/

Center for Media Justice: cmj.centerformediajustice.org/blogs

Other progressive blogs:

Dailykos.org

Huffingtonpost.com

Feministing.com

Pandagon.blogsome.com

Atrios.blogspot.com

See It: Online Photo Sharing

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then spread those words! Sharing photos of your organization, members, signage and events is a great way to connect with people in a visual medium. Flickr is a free tool for posting and sharing your photos online. The site offers a number of ways to integrate your photostream into your Web site, blog or Facebook page. Media justice activists have posted pictures from Media Action Grassroots Network trainings, FCC hearings and protests, Texas Media Empowerment Project meetings and images of event fliers, for instance.

Flickr.com

Send It: Email Blasts

In the world of online organizing, don't forget the power of a good email blast. Often a standard e-alert list is a way to publicize your foray into social networking sites, blogging, podcasting and YouTube.

A blog puts you in charge of the message: You can use your own language, prove your case and keep your audience coming back for more.

© Sharat G. Lin

If you already have an email list, consider the ways you might cross-purpose information into other Web 2.0 tools. Do you have a take action item that you could post on Facebook? Are you emailing pictures from a event that you could also post on Flickr? Are you announcing a new campaign that you could talk about in a podcast?

There are several options if you're looking to upgrade your email blast system, with a wide range of price and features:

- Democracy in Action
- Emma
- Kintera
- Get Active
- Groundspring
- Constant Contact
- Jangomail
- Campaign Monitor

Back Home: Your Web Site

With all the new media options, don't forget the value of your organization's Web site. Having an online presence in a variety of ways will drive more traffic to your site, so you'll want to make sure that the site is frequently updated and easy to navigate. Be sure to prominently feature a general "about us" page, ways to subscribe to your email list, Web 2.0 tools that you're using, recent issue or organizational news and a press room where reporters and bloggers can easily access both press releases and links to coverage you've received.

Don't miss these all-around stellar resources for nonprofit organizations on Web 2.0 and other tech topics:

- NetSquared.org
- TechSoup.org
- Nonprofit Technology Network: Nten.org
- New Organizing Institute: www.neworganizing.com

Rebecca Farmer has worked in communications at social justice and feminist nonprofits for nine years. After stints at the SPIN Project, Breast Cancer Action and the National Organization for Women, she's currently an independent consultant in San Francisco. And yes, she's on Facebook.

CASE STUDY

CLEARING THE AIR

By Casey Rae-Hunter

New media tools are a stellar supplement to any campaign, and if your target audience is particularly tech-savvy, new media tools can be a centerpiece of your efforts. A campaign by the Future of Music Coalition (FMC), a Washington, D.C.-based group dedicated to preserving musicians' rights in a consolidated media environment, shows the power of the well-planned blog campaign to draw attention to corporate wrongs—and force the corporation to right them. —ed.

IN APRIL 2007, the FCC reached a settlement with Clear Channel and other broadcasters to end an investigation into payola allegations at some radio stations. Payola, the practice of offering bribes for airplay consideration without disclosing such exchanges on-air, is a detriment both to musicians and to listeners who assume the songs they hear have been chosen on artistic merit. In the settlement, Clear Channel, and the three other large broadcasters, agreed to pay a $12.5 million fine. They also agreed to air 4,200 hours of local and independent music, and abide by "Rules of Engagement" aimed at ending the widespread practice of payola.

To fulfill its airplay mandate, Clear Channel solicited independent artists to submit their music for consideration. This could have been a good thing for indie acts, but the fine print proved otherwise. As a term of submitting music via an online submission form, Clear Channel required artists to check a licensing agreement that, among other things, explicitly waived their rights to royalties for the online broadcast of their music.

In June 2007, FMC launched a campaign to expose Clear Channel's attempt to take away artists' rights in exchange for airplay consideration. Our main means of drawing attention to Clear Channel's wrongdoing: the FMC blog. We created a weeklong blog series called "The Best of Clear Channel," outlining the problem and linking Clear Channel's actions back to the payola settlement.

In addition, FMC and Media Access Project filed a formal complaint with the FCC requesting clarification of Clear Channel's practices.

While the campaign was partially set up to educate artists about the dangers of waiving their royalties, its core goal was to embarrass Clear Channel by exposing its practices and linking this new behavior with some of the company's prior negatives, including payola and media consolidation. The audience for the series was not only musicians, but also the media and Clear Channel itself.

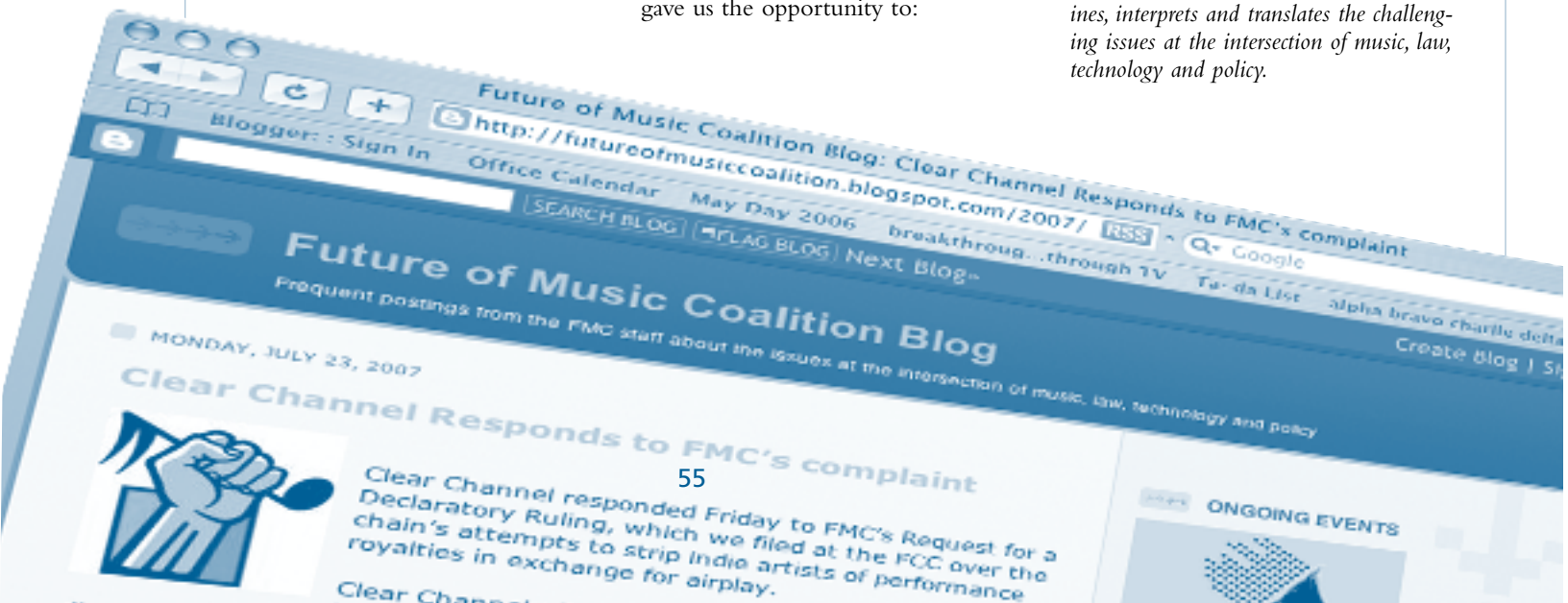
We chose a blog campaign as our main communications tactic because it gave us the opportunity to:

- post scheduled, regular updates that would encourage our audience to come back for more.
- roll out complex information in plain language.
- link to evidence on Clear Channel's own Web sites.
- define the weeklong series as a "campaign," with news hooks and an end point.
- create a compelling finale through our FCC filing.

The campaign also gave us the opportunity to build support for FMC and educate our audience about the wider problem of media consolidation. We asked musicians and their supporters to sign up for our newsletter and to support low-power and non-commercial radio and net neutrality initiatives.

Pressure from other music organizations and FMC's work succeeded. Clear Channel agreed within two weeks to modify its contract language to remove this waiver. The campaign netted considerable press coverage for FMC, and helped artists understand the risks of doing business in a consolidated media environment.

Casey Rae-Hunter is Communications Director for the Future of Music Coalition, a national nonprofit education, research and advocacy organization that identifies, examines, interprets and translates the challenging issues at the intersection of music, law, technology and policy.



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SECTION FIVE

BROADENING YOUR REACH

CRITICAL CONSTITUENCIES TO CONSIDER

IN ANY MOVEMENT, the sum of individual efforts is greater than the parts. How successful we'll be has everything to do with how we reach out to and engage potential constituencies. For media reform—a movement that touches on so many related social and political issues—forging new alliances is critical if we are to continue building support for a democratic media system.

This section explores the synergies that occur when researchers and media activists collaborate. And it delves into the growing importance of ethnic media as a way to reach large segments of the population.

The last chapter of this toolkit could also be the first, because it addresses that most critical of constituencies—funders. Here, a grant maker and a leader of a key organization in the media reform movement offer their thoughts on the challenges and successes of funding for media activism.

REACHING OUT TO ETHNIC MEDIA

By Sandip Roy

A GLANCE AROUND while riding the bus or subway during rush hour in cities like New York and San Francisco gives one a taste of the boom in ethnic media. Elderly Chinese ladies, shopping bags stuffed with leafy greens, sit reading the *Sing Tao Daily*. A Latina might be reading the Spanish language *El Diario/La Prensa*. *India Abroad*. *Nguoi Viet*. *Arab American News*.

Ethnic media reaches 51 million adults—almost one in four adult Americans.

But it's not just the big cities. As demographics change across the country, with the foreign-born population swelling in states not normally regarded as immigration entry points, ethnic media is growing and spreading as well. Whether it's media reform, immigration policy or teacher recruitment, any strategy that ignores ethnic communities, and the ethnic media that reaches them, is touching a shrinking segment of the population.

First, some numbers:

- By the fall of 2019, the majority of young adults turning 18 and eligible to vote in California will be Latino.
- Between 1990 and 2000, the foreign-born population grew by 200% or more in North Carolina, Georgia and Nevada. The foreign-born population grew by between 100% and 199% in 16 US states.
- *La Opinión*, the largest Spanish-language daily newspaper in the country, ranked number one in net daily paid circulation growth among the 200 largest newspapers in America for the six-month period ending September 2007, according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation.

But how can one reach these new Americans? A first-ever national poll conducted by New America Media, in 2005, found that 29 million ethnic adults (or 13% of the adult population in the US) are primary consumers of ethnic media, meaning they rely on ethnic media, whether print or broadcast, for their daily news. But even that is only part of the picture.

Many ethnic media outlets, such as those serving South Asians and Filipinos, provide not daily but weekly and biweekly news. So their readers might access them regularly but would not be included in the 29 million who prefer ethnic media for their daily news. There are 22 million ethnic Americans who access weekly and biweekly ethnic news sources on a regular basis. This means that ethnic media reaches 51 million adults—almost one in four adult Americans.

The mainstream media often subsumes these millions of Americans under the umbrella of people of color—as if they follow a standard script when it comes to their positions on issues. The reality is that histories of immigration; legacies of war; and relations between American political parties and homeland governments can all complicate the stance various ethnic communities—and the media that serve them—take on key issues of the day.

For example, when it came to the war in Iraq, another New America Media poll in 2003 found 85% of Vietnamese and 75% of Filipinos strongly supported the war, while only 40% of Chinese supported it.

Organizations trying to reach these communities via the portals of ethnic media would do well to remember that the message must be tailored to the needs of the community, to make it relevant to the community.

But it's not just the message that needs to be tailored. The medium matters as well. There are striking differences between ethnic communities when it comes to how they get their news.

- Eighty-seven percent of all Hispanic adults access Spanish-language television, radio or newspapers on a regular basis. Broadcast is definitely king, with 78% getting their news from television. Access to the Internet is low compared to most other groups. Only about 5% of Hispanics read *USA Today*, the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* frequently.
- A substantial majority of African-American adults, especially those over 40, listen to ethnic radio stations on a regular basis.
- More than half of all Chinese and Vietnamese adults read an ethnic newspaper on a regular basis.
- Television is the preferred medium for Arab Americans.

- One-fifth of all Native Americans read tribal newspapers more often than their mainstream counterparts.

This might seem like a Tower of Babel for anyone trying to navigate this diverse media landscape. But one thing is clear: Ethnic media see themselves as advocates and watchdogs for their community, much more so than most mainstream English-language press. Their main currency is the sense of trust they enjoy with their readers. And that trust is developed out of years of standing up for the community when its interests are felt to be in peril, from Chinese media standing behind nuclear scientist Wen Ho Lee to Spanish language media during the recent immigration rallies.

Take the latter example. Spanish newspaper *El Pregonero* told readers what to do in the case of a raid. *La Opinión* told readers how to locate relatives who have been detained by ICE. *El Diario/La Prensa* protested the Jersey Guys, local radio show hosts who called on their listeners to turn over suspected undocumented immigrants to authorities. The lesson? Approach ethnic media with a clear argument about how and why your issue impacts their community.

But despite the growth of ethnic media, the challenges these outlets face cannot be underestimated. The same poll that found 51 million adult Americans access ethnic media regularly also found that when it came to politics and government, a majority of all ethnic groups, other than Latino, thinks mainstream media covers the issues better. Why did Latinos respond differently? Possibly because they are able to access Univision and newspapers owned by Impremedia, whose publications reach 17 cities. Most other ethnic outlets are small and cannot afford to have reporters in Washington, D.C.—or even state capitols—covering particular beats in depth. This is an area crying out for capacity building. These small outlets could be potential allies in fighting for media reform, if their stake in it is clearly outlined.

Since much of ethnic media is owned privately or by corporations based in homelands, they often get left out of conversations about media ownership and independent media. But if the real objective of these conversations is to ensure a diversity of voices in the marketplace, it is vital to include ethnic media—not out of any notion of tokenism or political correctness, but because without the people whom this media reach, the conversation would remain incomplete.

Ethnic media sources often serve as community advocates. Tell them how and why your issue impacts their community.

TEN TIPS FOR ACCESSING ETHNIC MEDIA

1. Find the ethnic media news organizations in your area and develop relationships with them.
2. Communicate with them on an ongoing basis, not just when you have news to pitch.
3. Target your event, story or issue to specific ethnic media audiences. Ask yourself, "Why should this issue matter to the target audience?'
4. Ask ethnic media what they need from your organization. Partner with ethnic media practitioners in your work.
5. Create opportunities for ethnic media to access decision makers and experts.
6. Be high-touch, not high-tech. Don't just rely on email.
7. Provide translations wherever possible.
8. Customize your messages to a "news you can use" format—for example, include practical tips on how to participate in voter registration or how to maneuver government bureaucracy.
9. Provide ethnic media with a list of your own staff experts.
10. Don't make ethnic media your communications afterthought. Include them at your events.

Sandip Roy is an editor with New America Media (www.newamericamedia.org), a national consortium of ethnic media, and host of its radio show, Up Front, *on KALW 91.7 FM in San Francisco.*

CASE STUDY

YA SE PUDO: COMMUNITY RADIO MAKES CHANGE

By Josh Seidenfeld

OVER HALF OF THE PEOPLE in Woodburn, Oregon, are Latino. Of these, many are recent immigrants and are most comfortable communicating in Spanish or in indigenous languages such as Zapoteco, Triqui or Nahuatl. However, until August 2006, Woodburn had no non-English language radio station. For a period of time, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), a network of community organizing groups in the area, had paid a local AM radio station for an hour of programming each week—but as soon as that hour's political content angered local businesspeople, the program was revoked. The Latino farmworker community literally couldn't buy a voice.

Exasperated by this silencing, PCUN decided to create its own media. PCUN leaders knew that low-power FM (LPFM) stations are relatively inexpensive to build and operate and can reach audiences of thousands, and so they invited the Prometheus Radio Project into their community to help create a station. One weekend in August 2006, Prometheus staff and volunteers came together with the local community to build the studio and transmitter that were to become KPCN-LP, the first Woodburn station run by and for local farmworkers in Spanish and multiple indigenous languages.

After beginning transmission with a rousing countdown in Spanish, KPCN quickly became a core resource for Latinos in Woodburn, reaching an average of 500 to 1,000 listeners for most shows. In its first year, the station provided talk shows in several languages, community news and, of course, that critical lifeline for a community: music.

Erubiel Valladares Carranza, Technical Engineer at KPCN and Woodburn community leader, recalls a moment when he saw the station was making a difference: "We had a couple come to the station. They were native [indigenous language] speakers, so I called the programmer who speaks their language to translate. It turns out the programmer had talked about sexual harassment on his show, and that was the first time this couple had heard they could do anything about harassment. They came in to the station to ask how to deal with it, and we pointed them in the right direction."

Beyond providing this kind of critical information, KPCN also serves as an organizing tool for PCUN's community. In November 2007, the FCC hastily announced a hearing in Seattle to review proposed new media ownership rules. If passed, the new rules would allow media conglomerates to grow their monopolies and gain even more control over the airwaves. According to Jonathan Lawson of Reclaim the Media, such monopolization is "why independent Spanish-language, minority-owned or labor-owned stations are so rare across the country, even in areas like Woodburn, where the marginalized community is actually a large percentage of the population. The proposed FCC rule changes would predictably make this situation even worse."

> Search for "KPCN" on YouTube and you'll find documentarian Bill Birney's inspiring portrait of the weekend the station was built, *KPCN: Radio Movemiento*, as well as footage of the joyful countdown to transmission.

A strong network of community organizations around the Northwest acted quickly to mobilize over 1,100 people to the hearing to speak out in favor of diversity in media ownership and against corporate media control (see Reclaim the Media's sample communications plan, starting on page 10). As part of that network, PCUN used its new LPFM station to organize its base, and Valladares Carranza spoke before the Commission as an official community panelist. With the support of a cheering crowd, he told the Commission, "In a town where over 50% of this community is Latino, our radio station is the only media owned by Latinos. We need more low-power FM, and less corporate radio standing in our way."

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Erubiel Valladares Carranza at the Seattle FCC hearing.

In an emotional moment after his own testimony, Valladares Carranza translated for the Commission the words of community member Oscar Morales, who explained elegantly why he traveled to Seattle to support LPFM: "I am here because our community radio station has changed my life and those of many others."

Josh Seidenfeld is a freelance communications consultant, former SPIN staff member, activist and musician who specializes in media trainings for grassroots activists.

PROOF POSITIVE: HOW RESEARCHER/ACTIVIST COLLABORATIONS CAN BUILD YOUR CASE FOR CHANGE

By Seeta Peña Gangadharan

EVERY ACTIVIST KNOWS that part of building one's case for change depends on collecting compelling evidence. One option is to rely on individual anecdotes as proof of wrongdoing (or "rightdoing," as the case may be). However, evidence that takes a more systematic, concrete approach can also support an advocate's argument. To produce systematic evidence, activist groups can do research "in house," using such tools as content analysis, surveys and interviews, or seek partnerships and support from professional and/or academic researchers.

Timely, reliable and replicable research goes a long way to support advocates working to transform media policies and practices. In the most immediate sense, it provides an opportunity to demand policy change and alter the political landscape. In the most long-term view, research can furnish a movement with the essential knowledge it needs to develop momentum and make a lasting difference.

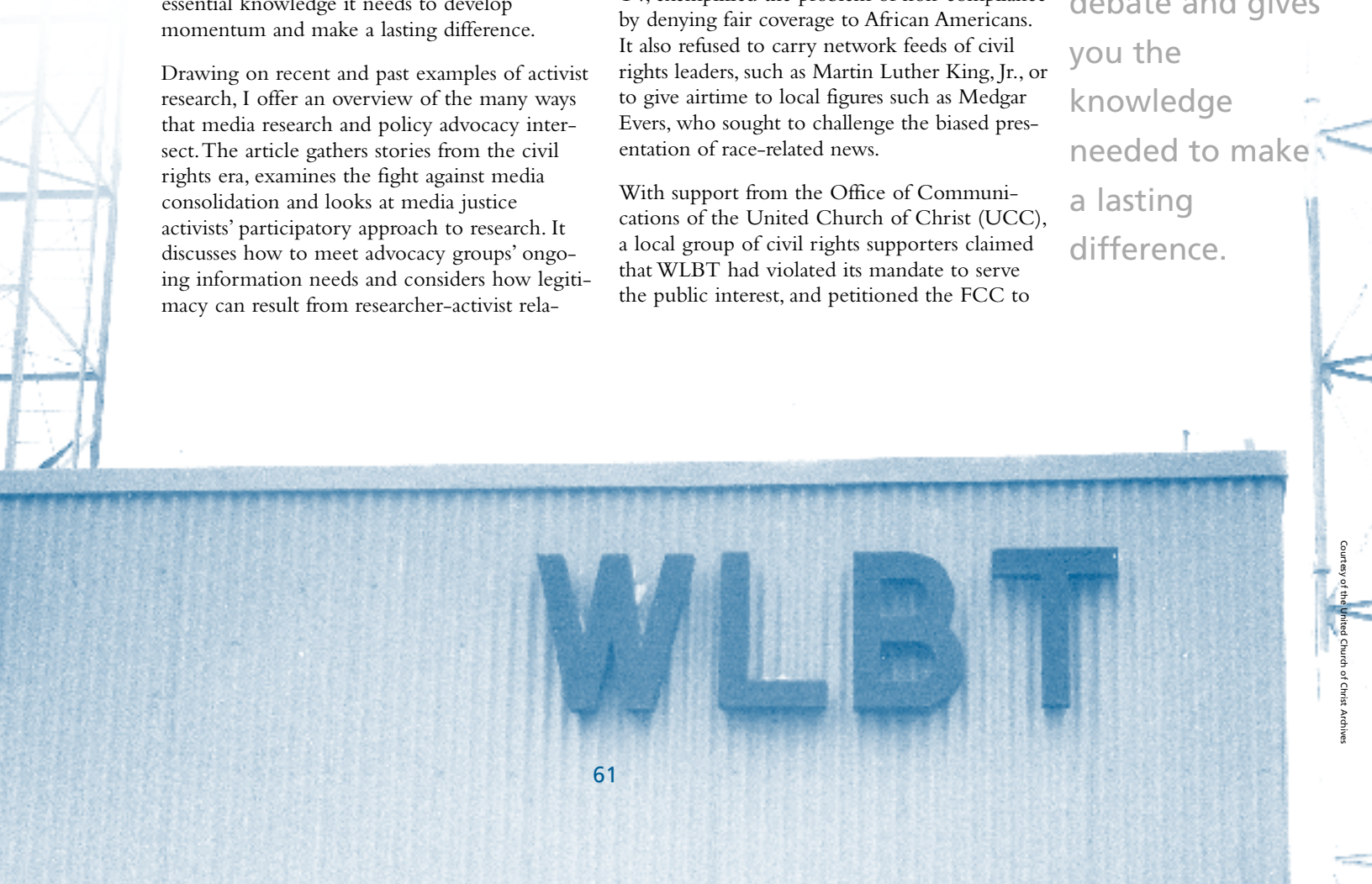
Drawing on recent and past examples of activist research, I offer an overview of the many ways that media research and policy advocacy intersect. The article gathers stories from the civil rights era, examines the fight against media consolidation and looks at media justice activists' participatory approach to research. It discusses how to meet advocacy groups' ongoing information needs and considers how legitimacy can result from researcher-activist relationships. Through these many cases, I hope to shed light on the positive effect of research on political decision-making, media coverage and public debate—and more broadly, on the struggle for media democracy and media justice.

Gathering evidence: How research helped win UCC vs. FCC, a landmark case expanding the right to public input.

No discussion of activist research would be complete without a nod to the work of early media reformers. Perhaps the most celebrated example of research that supports policy change is the landmark case UCC vs. FCC (1966). In the '50s and '60s, areas throughout the South continued to resist the Supreme Court's decree to desegregate. In the town of Jackson, Mississippi, one of the broadcast stations, WLBT-TV, exemplified the problem of non-compliance by denying fair coverage to African Americans. It also refused to carry network feeds of civil rights leaders, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., or to give airtime to local figures such as Medgar Evers, who sought to challenge the biased presentation of race-related news.

With support from the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ (UCC), a local group of civil rights supporters claimed that WLBT had violated its mandate to serve the public interest, and petitioned the FCC to

Activists can tap researchers for help when developing a campaign for change. Reliable research supports policy arguments, shifts public debate and gives you the knowledge needed to make a lasting difference.



Courtesy of the United Church of Christ Archives

deny the station the chance to renew its broadcast license. To demonstrate the station's failure to offer relevant, timely news to Jackson's predominantly black population, this team organized a "media monitoring" study. With a handful of college students and concerned residents—mostly white allies operating under covert conditions—the study noted topics covered in a typical week's programming and fastidiously documented specific instances of discrimination against African Americans, as well as the overall amount of coverage devoted to African Americans.

In the '60s, civil rights activists used "media monitoring" research to document media discrimination—and established the right of citizens to present evidence before the FCC.

Before this case, the FCC was not required to take input from citizens or advocacy groups when reviewing a station's application to renew its license. With UCC vs. FCC, all this changed. The United States Circuit Court of Appeals decided in UCC's favor, affirming the right of citizen standing—literally the right of citizens to "stand" before or present evidence before the FCC. As a result, throughout the '70s and '80s, citizen groups used standing to challenge broadcast license renewal proceedings. In the last 10 years, as media democracy and media justice efforts have stepped up, the UCC's pioneering work continues to inspire ordinary citizens and advocacy groups as they present their cases to the FCC.

Building your case through activist research: How the Future of Music Coalition gathered evidence against media consolidation.

Since UCC vs. FCC, the need to gather evidence in the fight to democratize media policies and practices has only increased. Practically a mantra at the FCC is the request for *proof* when advocates attempt to justify existing rules or introduce new ones. During its rulemaking on the media ownership issue in 2002–03, the Commission stepped up its demand for data.

Anticipating the Commission's call for evidence, Future of Music Coalition (FMC), a D.C.-based group which supports musicians facing a changing media landscape, produced two pieces of research that strengthened the case against further consolidation. First, partnering with Peter DiCola, then a doctoral student at the University of Michigan, the organization sought to demonstrate the impact of consolidation on programming. The study, entitled *Radio Deregulation: Has It Served Citizens and Musicians?* documented ownership patterns in the radio industry following the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and compared the playlists of corporate-owned stations to independent ones. Its most striking finding was the degree to which corporate stations limited programming diversity. The study drew the attention of policymakers, including Commissioner Michael Copps, who repeatedly cited information from the study to suggest what might happen more broadly, and in other media, if the Commission relaxed the ownership rules.

Second, FMC conducted a content analysis of comments submitted to the Commission, documenting the type of commenter and the commenter's position on the rules. Using the Commission's Electronic Comments Filing System, FMC combed through thousands of comments and found that individuals opposed to consolidation comprised the majority of commenters. This piece of evidence proved useful to FMC and other advocates keen to highlight citizens' concerns, and arguably, the study influenced Commissioner Copps to keep tabs on the overall sentiment of commenters. When the Commission finally voted to overturn many of the rules, Copps' dissenting statement reported figures on the overwhelming opposition to rolling back the rules.

Shifting media frames: How the Center for Media Justice/Youth Media Council documented media bias through participatory research.

Research can also impact media coverage that frames a debate. Research reports that systematically document bias in coverage can often influence an editorial staff to rethink their approach to making news on a particular topic.

The Center for Media Justice (formerly the Youth Media Council) recently conducted a months-long study of news coverage of gentrification and displacement in the San Francisco Bay Area. CMJ/YMC assembled a team of young people to analyze three major papers, all of them part of larger media conglomerates.

The research effort was built from the ground up, with CMJ/YMC staff creating a participatory research process fueled by their own desire to learn about their changing neighborhoods. The researchers began by hypothesizing how media

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Members of the CMJ/YMC participatory research team.

played a role in this transition. After the team's concerns were clearly laid out, CMJ/YMC then analyzed hundreds of news articles about the real estate market, housing and development. They measured what specific topics were covered; how reporters framed "problems" and "solutions" in each story; and whether reporters quoted a diverse range of spokespeople.

The report, *Displacing the Dream*, illustrates the extent to which mainstream papers fail to delve into the racial implications of housing and urban development plans. CMJ/YMC found that news reports most commonly covered the issue of subprime lending and stagnation in the housing market, while paying little attention to stories of displacement and gentrification. Stories that looked at the housing issue in low-income neighborhoods—often communities of color—referred to them as "problem areas" and wrote about corporate development as healthy solutions to these problems. CMJ/YMC also found that news reports rarely considered community spokespeople to be experts on the conditions of their communities. Edged out by government officials and corporate representatives, community voices merely accessorized stories with colorful descriptions rather than political prescriptions for the housing crisis. Overall, the topics of race and racism were nearly absent from Bay Area news coverage.

Displacing the Dream ends with a rich set of recommendations. For journalists, it lays out general principles to improve standards of coverage. For community organizers, it offers a thoughtful set of proposals for framing stories about displacement, gentrification and racial justice. It even includes a section on how to do participatory research involving members of the community and grassroots organizations.

CMJ/YMC has leveraged the report to garner media attention, including a letter-to-the-editor in the *San Francisco Chronicle* that responded to the paper's coverage of displacement of African-American populations. Anecdotally, CMJ/YMC has noted that recent news stories contain a more complex understanding of housing development issues. Although the full impact of CMJ/YMC's work is still to be told, the study exemplifies the power of media research to hold mainstream media accountable while fighting for social, economic and racial justice.

Research can frame a debate, document bias in coverage and hold editorial staff accountable.

Information needs for ongoing work: How Radical Reference helped the Prometheus Radio Project make the case for oversight of NBC and General Electric.

Activists don't always have the time to cultivate long and studied analyses of the problems they wish to change. But they regularly depend on facts and figures to help fortify policy arguments. When a Web search doesn't do the trick, activists can turn to researchers for assistance.

An innovative information service provider, Radical Reference is a nationwide volunteer collective of library workers that primarily serves independent journalists, activists and progressive organizations in their struggle for social justice and equality. In 2004, a group of librarians worked on the street, as well as online, to assist activists protesting at the Republican National Convention in New York City.

Since then, Radical Reference has focused its energies on cultivating its Web site, through which the group answers queries posted online. The Q&As found on the site help activists to locate free information, utilize public library resources and develop online research skills. One of the advantages of this online format has been the immense growth of the collective of information activists: More than 300 volunteers now participate in Radical Reference.

For media policy advocates, such a service can provide invaluable support. Recently, Prometheus Radio Project enlisted the help of Radical Reference to investigate General Electric and war profiteering. The goal of Prometheus' query was to update information in an 1994 article in *Extra!* magazine entitled, "Felons on the Air: Does GE's Ownership of NBC Violate the Law? NBC Brings Good Things to GE." Written by Sam Husseini, the article discussed GE's fraudulent behavior and the FCC's failure to uphold its oversight mandate when renewing NBC's broadcast licenses. Prometheus wanted to highlight the FCC's continued oversight duty and access to information to investigate the company's current track record, especially in relation to its military contracts involving the war in Iraq. Radical Reference responded within a few days with links to an online resource called Project On Government Oversight, which has audited companies like GE.

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TIPS FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCHER-ACTIVIST COLLABORATIONS

ACTIVISTS and academic researchers can seem like two totally different groups with disparate interests and ways of working. As the community media scholar Sergio Rodriguez once noted, researchers are guilty of working under conditions of severe jetlag. They observe and analyze the past. Advocacy groups, on the other hand, work in the present and actively seek to rework their surrounding social conditions. A big challenge of researcher-activist collaborations, then, is synchronizing time zones. Here's some advice when engaging in academic researcher-activist endeavors.

When collaborating with academics, activists may want to:

- Set a reasonable timetable to work.

  Academics often balance teaching and research responsibilities and plan several months or more ahead, making it difficult to adapt to the pressing needs of media policy advocacy. Activists should anticipate these differences in work life and get a sense of when strategic alliances can be most productive.

- Agree in advance how partners in the collaboration will be credited or acknowledged.

  Both academics and activists can translate their collaborative work for different audiences. As a practical matter, it's good to talk about who counts as an "author" or "co-author" in a project.

- Consider past activist-researcher collaborations.

  Although this history is often overshadowed, academics and activists have worked together on community radio projects, cable access, independent journalism, net activism, net neutrality, free speech online, intellectual property/creative commons and more! These past cases show both what's worked and what hasn't. They also build solidarity and give a long-term view of the movement.

- Work with academics to think proactively not just reactively.

  Academics have the time and reflective space to think about the future. Working with them can be fruitful in identifying key values and objectives and developing a long-term vision.

- Stay hooked into academic networks and publicize your research needs.

  Many academics are eager to work with activists and have "real world" impact. Unfortunately, some simply don't know how to form such relationships. Having a presence in places like the SSRC's Media Research Hub (http://mediaresearchub.ssrc.org) gives you a foot in the door to university culture and introduces you to interested researchers. Conferences concerned with social change, such as the annual conferences of OurMedia and Union for Democratic Communications, also welcome activists into the mix and are a good place to strike up partnerships with academics.

When collaborating with activists, academics may want to:

- Consider how activists can contribute to the research process.

  Whether in the process of creating a research agenda, gathering and analyzing data or disseminating results, activists can serve as valuable allies in the process of research. They are not specimens to be analyzed in a detached manner.

- Recognize and anticipate the rhythm of policy change and the political "year."

  The academic calendar year operates at a slightly slower pace than the calendar year for political advocates. Academics who anticipate the fast-paced rhythm of political advocacy will ultimately be more effective.

- Act as a consultant and provide back-up support.

  Many advocacy groups may want to initiate and design their own projects, but still need help at strategic points in the research process. You can provide valuable assistance without managing a full-fledged project.

- Stay hooked in to activist networks and publicize your research expertise.

  Many activists find the academic world to be an intimidating black box. Having a presence in activist forums makes it easier to initiate collaborations. Media Tank's "media activist" listserv, the National Conference on Media Reform, local community media meetings—these are just a few places where you can introduce yourself to activist culture. Make yourself known! There are lots of collaborations waiting to happen.

—Seeta Peña Gangadharan

Academic and professional researchers make great bedfellows. They are often well-connected in political circles and may be interested in supporting "alternative" points of view.

Since its interactions with Radical Reference, Prometheus has continued updating the critique of the FCC, NBC and GE. Its ultimate goal is to produce a persuasive case about wrongdoing in the regulatory arena. While Prometheus' work is ongoing, Radical Reference provided the necessary push to keep moving and manage the research process.

Beyond the research product: How work with university academics increased Media Tank's legitimacy with the FCC.

One common experience among groups who advocate for change in media policies but who operate outside of the Washington, D.C. network is a perceived lack of legitimacy. Activists don't always carry the same weight as inside-the-Beltway lawyers or lobbyists. Professional researchers and university-based academics, on the other hand, tend to garner a lot of respect and are often well-entrenched in political circles. Advocates who choose to work with these types of researchers may find benefits beyond the research product itself.

During the most recent fight over media ownership rules at the FCC, for example, more than a dozen unofficial hearings produced partnerships between academics and activists. Urged by Commissioner Copps—who had supported official hearings on media ownership, but had been rebuffed by Chairman Michael Powell all but once—academics turned into hosts for public forums. These meetings often took place within university auditoriums and carried the air of a serious, scholarly endeavor. Rather than limit invitations to industry representatives and experts on the subject matter, academics welcomed advocacy organizations to play a prominent role and join the dais during panel discussions. Advocates helped to promote these public forums, mobilizing crowds and pitching stories to journalists.

What resulted were inclusive debates where advocacy groups had a real voice and an opportunity to continue dialoguing with FCC officials. In Philadelphia, for example, academics played host to a town hall meeting on media ownership, while the media activist group Media Tank did most of the on-the-ground planning. Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania lent their names, a venue, a moderator and some speaker suggestions for the event. Media Tank contributed to programming but also focused on getting a crowd to the forum, aggressively reaching out to other citizen groups and media outlets and scheduling the event at night to increase attendance by working people.

In the end, the event resulted in considerable press attention and public involvement, as well as a timely connection with Commissioner Copps' office. Media Tank was later invited to a prominent press event on the eve of the Commission's vote on media ownership rules. Today, the group has become a familiar actor working to democratize media policies and practices in the local Philly area.

Knowledge for movement-building: How the Social Science Research Council supports researcher-activist "meet-ups."

From research that changes policy, influences media coverage or feeds into activists' ongoing work to research partnerships that lead to wider

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visibility for activists, gathering research is about creating knowledge. And with a healthy knowledge base, the movement for making media just and democratic can stay nimble, sustain growth and create change.

The Social Science Research Council's Necessary Knowledge for a Democratic Public Sphere (NKDPS) program provides a model of how researcher-activist collaborations can facilitate movement-building. NKDPS supports media and communications research that is informed by rigorous academic standards and a public interest sensibility. Apart from offering a clearinghouse for research with "real world" impact and for researcher-activist "meet ups," NKDPS manages grants for collaborative research projects.

A grant awarded to Media Alliance to study what is known as "digital inclusion" efforts of the municipal wireless initiative in the city of San Francisco speaks to NKDPS' twin goals. A 25-page report (written by this author) charted the local policymaking process, and scrutinized whether proposed policies enabled individuals to meaningfully engage with Wi-Fi capabilities. Written for an academic audience, the report has, so far, been accepted for presentation to a wide group of scholars at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association. Further down the line—as is often the case with academic timetables (see sidebar, page 65)—the goal is to circulate the report more widely, putting its findings in dialogue with the work of other scholars who evaluate the promise of digital technology.

The grant also provided for the production of a practitioners' guide based on the research findings. Entitled the Digital Inclusion Advocacy Toolkit, this resource included basic facts about wireless technologies, various policy plans and their potential and strategies for influencing policy change. The toolkit has been distributed to practitioners throughout California and showcased at events such as the Oakland Digital Inclusion Summit.

Conclusion

Movements require strong leaders, material resources, active supporters, political opportunities and more—not just knowledge. Nevertheless, research can bind disparate parts of a movement together, helping activists see where they've been and where they're headed, what's possible and why certain priorities should take precedence.

For this movement in particular, intersections between research and advocacy are crucial to building a strong foundation to further the cause of just and democratic media. As we saw with UCC vs. FCC, these intersections have expanded our rights and produced a legal legacy that supports activist work to this day.

In the 21st century, activist research is building evidence, stoking new perspectives in media reporting, supporting ongoing information-gathering and growing the legitimacy of advocacy groups. While not all our battles have been identified or won (or at least not yet!), the merging between activist-research collaborations move us steadily along.

For references to materials used in this chapter, visit www.spinproject.org/whosemedia.

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STRAIGHT FROM THE SOURCE: GARNERING FUNDS TO SUPPORT MEDIA ACTIVISM

On March 21, 2008, Helen Brunner, Director of the Media Democracy Fund, and Josh Silver, Co-Founder of Free Press, spoke about working with donors and foundations in the media justice and media reform field, and offered advice for grassroots activists working in their local communities.

The Media Democracy Fund is a foundation and donor collaborative in support of a just media environment and democratic media policy. Free Press engages public involvement in US media policy debates. Thaler Pekar, a communications consultant who has worked in the field, moderated the discussion. An edited transcript follows.

Thaler Pekar: Helen, tell me a little bit about the work you do at the Media Democracy Fund, and the projects you support.

Helen Brunner: The Albert A. List Foundation seeded MDF as part of its spend-out process. As the foundation became more engaged in media reform and media justice, the trustees understood how these issues affected every other issue they cared about.

As a result, they decided to establish a collaborative fund to serve as a resource for other foundations interested in the area but that may not have the knowledge base to invest on their own. The Foundation also saw the potential of a collaborative fund to raise awareness of this issue in the broader philanthropic community through donor education, outreach and organizing. The purpose of the Fund is to grow the pool of money available to support the field, whether through MDF or directly. MDF's own grantmaking is informed by field priorities and by the priorities of other funders.

Our recent grants have been focused on enlarging the base of constituencies engaged in this issue, including rural groups, Native-American groups, Civil Rights groups, youth and others, with a particular emphasis on protecting the Internet, digital inclusion and some work in radio.

Thaler: Thank you, Helen. Josh, can you tell me a little bit about Free Press and the work that you do?

Josh Silver: Sure. Free Press is a national non-partisan organization that's working to reform the policies that formed the US media. We are doing our work because there is an increasing understanding that the US media system, in its current state, is not working. There's a lack of critical journalism. There's a lack of diversity both in terms of gender and race and media ownership. There is a lack of quality independent local content and voices. And it is the result of a flawed media system, a media system that is concentrated in the hands of too few owners. And the result of policies that are made in Washington, and in state houses in the public's name, but without their informed consent.

So Free Press was formed to essentially create a seat at the table of the policy-making institutions like the Congress, the Federal Communications Commission and state legislatures where the media is shaped and governed—a seat at the table for the public. And we've done that by building a grassroots army of nearly half a million members. We've done it by creating a very strong and robust research and legal department.

We've created a strong lobbying and communications team. We've created a strong grassroots organizing team. And we have managed to really change the way media policy gets made, because now, when the largest companies try to do bad things, the public knows about it and they have an opportunity to strategically engage and push back.

Media is a large and inherently complicated field. It helps to think of it as really being three fronts, of which Free Press is fighting on one plank: media policy. The second being independent media, the creation of media content. Things like Democracy Now. Or Robert Greenwald's organization, or Free Speech TV or *Mother Jones* magazine. And then the third being media critique, accountability and literacy. So things like Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, Media Matters, the Media Education Foundation, Acme and other literacy and accountability organizations. So together, policy, independent media and accountability/literacy really comprise the whole of the movement for better media.

Helen: It has helped me in talking to donors and foundations to think about those three circles as a Venn diagram, where they're in a sense overlapping because there are a number of organizations where that work, in fact, does overlap.

Thaler: Those are both great descriptions. And I'm going to move our conversation towards funding for this field. Josh, can you talk a little bit about the direct correlation between funding and the growth of your organization?

Josh: I think that a lot of it is that Free Press has filled an important niche by being singularly focused on media policy. This role was not adequately filled before we came around. I think there are many reasons for our success, but the biggest is that there was a real need for our work.

When we stepped in, the list of issues was really quite long, from media consolidation to Internet policy, which has grown in importance exponentially every year, to non-commercial media to local media, things like low-power FM, spectrum allocation, and the like.

It has not been prohibitively difficult, frankly, to secure resources for this work, because we have capacity. We have such a skilled team that has done a very good job of both accomplishing tangible successful strategic work—this is what I think is very noteworthy—and making sure that funders know about it.

Effective communication with funders is one of the most important things one can do to be a successful fundraiser—and groups don't do it nearly enough in this or other issue areas. Communicating with funders about successes and challenges is critical.

Helen: It's important for people to understand the media field is not as well funded as it needs to be. We all need to work to engage more people to support this work. I do think, however, that we currently have an enormous opportunity to engage people—in the last 10 years, these issues have become increasingly relevant to people's lives. In the '90s, during the struggle over the Telecommunications Act, it was very hard for people to see how this was actually going to affect them. Since then, we've had a number of experiences in the body politic, and in the world at large, that have helped make this issue extremely relevant to people. Notably, the events of September 11th found people desperately searching for information and analysis to understand that cataclysmic event.

The number of hits on independent media sites went sky high after that. People also saw the run-up to the Iraq war and the incredible lack of responsible coverage and investigative journalism that has led us into a disastrous situation. We've seen terribly biased and inadequate coverage of elections. And studies show that there is an increase in people accessing and using independent media and international news sources, which also suggests that people realize there's a crisis in our information landscape. People are dissatisfied, and it's still hard for them to know what they don't know.

And now we have in our lives the advent of new technologies and gadgets like the iPhone. People are also getting ready for the DTV transition. There is growing awareness that we are living in a digital landscape and what that means.

Thaler: Helen, you're talking about consumers and individuals really growing in their knowledge of why this issue is important. And, Josh, you touched on this as well. Can you talk about whether that growth, an incredible expansion of knowledge, is commensurate in the funding community as well?

Helen: There is nowhere near enough funding in this area, but one thing that people need to remember when they raise money is that funders are people too. I mean any program officer, any donor, is living in the same world as the rest of us. It may sound simplistic, but there is often this mystique around donors or people who work in foundations. And I think they can be reached on the same level as everyone else.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Council on Foundations: www.cof.org

The Foundation Center: www.foundationcenter.org

Funding Exchange: www.fex.org

Grassroots Fundraising Journal: www.grassrootsfundraising.org

Josh: I agree we have to be careful. There's been an expansion, but I don't know if I'd call it incredible. It's been good. But, when I see Helen at events sometimes we lament that there aren't more resources to go around.

This can be a difficult issue for funders to pick up. Media is something that takes quite a few series of connections in your brain to relate to the issues that you care about most. Because a funder will rarely care the most about media. Foundations are banging their head against the wall losing on different fronts—be it environment, civil rights, human rights, economics, etc. Then they have that light bulb, "aha!" moment of, "Yeah, wait a minute. We're in sort of an Orwellian fog and people aren't getting the critical information, the critical journalism that they need to create an informed society."

Helen: Grant seekers also need to make the issue relevant to the issues that funders are working on. Whether you're talking to a civic engagement, environment or arts and culture funder, you need to make it relevant to the issues and constituency they care about.

Thaler: Josh, you mentioned your success with funders. You've been commended for reaching individual donors in a way that no other group has. Why do you think that is? Could you talk a little bit about this fundraising accomplishment?

Josh: Well, I think there are a lot of reasons. I think one, as I mentioned earlier, is that we benefit from strong organizational capacity and also that we work on the full breadth and scope of media issues. I think other organizations, even with the finest fundraisers and leadership, face a slight disadvantage because their target, their goal, is narrower. Be it geographic or be it issue based.

Number two, I think it's important to note that I came out of a fundraising background. I used to run political campaigns, and I ran fundraising departments for a big part of the Smithsonian Institution. So I have the training to do it. And a third part is that we have a communications team that is really good at framing these issues in ways that funders and donors understand. And finally, it's been prospecting. We learned how to find the donors that are out there that have a predisposition to funding these kinds of issues.

Thaler: Both of you talked about the impact of the broader political landscape on your work. How much of the work that you do gets to be proactive, as opposed to reactive? And how hard is it to fund projects that are reactive as opposed to proactive? Or is it easier?

Helen: Free Press, the foundations that are in the field and the donors that care about it, have been really working to build an infrastructure and support the infrastructure that the field itself has been building. We're now at a point where we can do some more proactive things and there are several campaigns in the pipeline that are about putting forth a vision for what our communications landscape really needs to be for the US to take a leadership role again in the communications arena, which we are not currently doing.

But I do think because the field has been so chronically under-funded, the issue landscape has been so volatile and the dynamic with industry has been "David and Goliath," that it has tended to be reactive. However, we're at a point now where there is an opportunity to be more visionary and proactive.

Josh: And I would say, on the proactive versus reactive front, I think there are pros and cons to each side in terms of what brings in money. I'm sure you know online fundraising, for example, or direct mail fundraising is often most successful when you're responding to a threat. And that continues to be the case. Donors, large and small, respond well to threats.

The same goes for net neutrality. Both large and small individual donors stepped up to stop the privatization of the Internet. On the other hand, I think we also see that the proactive visionary part is also appealing and obviously very important. We're seeing that in Public Broadcasting, we're seeing it in Internet. The Association for Public Television Stations recently introduced a proposal to double the revenue to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. That's big. That's the first time they've gotten off their heels in years. We're also looking at proactive legislation with a Democratic Congress to codify net neutrality laws, codify universal service changes.

Thaler: What is your sense of future funding for either national projects or community-based

projects? Do you see there being a completely different set of funders for those two realms of work? Do you see funding for one realm increasing, or one decreasing?

Helen: Well, I would like to see more donor organizing at the local level. I think that an organization the scale of Free Press is going to attract a certain level of donor that a small media activist group, or a social justice group that's taking on media justice, is not going to attract at a local level. But there may very well be people in the community, people in their constituency, who could support that group.

I also think that asking for money and getting people to contribute money is part of organizing. It's a way to get them engaged in the issue and it's part of expanding the base of people that care. I also understand it's hard work, and I agree with Josh's earlier point that there need to be more training opportunities for this field around fundraising. I also think it's important that people understand the importance of local support, that organizing efforts are rooted in the communities they benefit. People shouldn't assume they need, or could get, a grant from a large national foundation in order to do their work.

Josh: But don't you think, Helen, that there is a lot of untapped potential in local community foundations, or locally focused foundations that groups and activists don't always access?

Helen: Absolutely. Community foundations and local or regional private foundations with roots in a particular community are important resources to explore. Community foundations, in particular, often have capacity to meet with groups one-on-one to discuss a project or an organization, and are a great way for groups to get feedback.

Thaler: Could you give some advice on how one might go about finding a community foundation in your area?

Helen: The Council on Foundations' Web site has many great features, among them an interactive community foundation map. The Foundation Center is another great resource.

Thaler: And an example of a community fund would be Haymarket?

Helen: Yes. Member foundations of the Funding Exchange can be found across the country. They are listed at the Funding Exchange Web site. Many of these member foundations participate in the Media Justice Fund of the Funding Exchange, which is another terrific resource for media justice groups.

Thaler: Do you have any advice for the readers of this toolkit on where they might gain some fundraising expertise?

Helen: I think some of the work that Kim Klein has done with the *Grassroots Fundraising Journal* is quite valuable, and it's worth looking at that site. Their approach is great, and realistic about issues of scale and organizational capacity.

I'd also stress the importance of never making assumptions about whether or not someone can or cannot give money, and taking advantage of the resources mentioned earlier. It can also be a good idea to find a mentor, or take a basic workshop to practice and hone your skills. Most of this is common sense, but another piece to understand about fundraising is that it is fundamentally about relationships and relationship building. Shipping endless amounts of paper out over the transom isn't going to get you money. Ever.

Josh: But having strong relationships, and shipping paper that's concise and clear and linked right to that funder's interests, is effective.

Helen: Absolutely. It's like matchmaking. It's about really listening, doing your homework, understanding what that funder cares about. And then building a bridge to what it is that you're trying to accomplish.

Josh: While not changing what you do as an organization.

Helen: That's also key. Don't change your mission. Don't turn yourself into a pretzel for money. And be willing to say "no" to funders. Be willing to say, "No, I'm not going to do that because it doesn't fit with my mission. Just because you're waving $25,000 at me doesn't mean I need to commit to do something if it isn't a fit."

CONCLUSION AND RESOURCES

WE HOPE that this toolkit has provided you with some useful tools to begin planning and executing strategic communications campaigns to reform, reclaim and revolutionize the media. Creating a strong strategic communications plan, with clear goals, compelling, well-targeted messages and disciplined implementation, will help spread the word about the need for a better media system and the means to get there.

More about the SPIN Project

THE SPIN PROJECT, a program of the Communications Leadership Institute, builds the capacity of progressive, grassroots nonprofits working toward a fair, just, equitable society. We provide accessible and affordable strategic communications training, consulting and coaching. And we develop our clients' strategic communications skills, infrastructure and leadership. Our clients are organizations at the forefront of movements including racial, economic and environmental justice, immigrants' rights, reproductive rights, women's rights and human rights in the United States. The SPIN Project partners with these organizations to strengthen their ability to communicate in order to build the consciousness, people power and political will needed to put solutions in place.

For grassroots organizations, activists and coalitions across the nation, the SPIN Project offers communications audits, strategy development, communications coaching, campaign support, customized communications conferences and more. We invite you to contact us if you would like to discuss our services:

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About the Editor

ISOBEL WHITE is co-founder of Spark Action, a communications consulting firm that specializes in shaping media in support of progressive agendas. Her clients include social justice organizations such as the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Agape Foundation, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, Lenders for Community Development and the SPIN Project. She has facilitated hundreds of high-visibility print, electronic, radio and broadcast news stories on issue areas ranging from economic justice to education reform. Formerly a communications director with the Service Employees International Union, Isobel managed communications and media relations campaigns to fortify the organizing efforts of janitors, nursing home workers and other low-wage workers. She also previously worked with the Children's Defense Fund, where she employed legislative advocacy, strategic media relations and coalition-building to help preserve a critical children's health insurance program. Isobel's writing has appeared in the *East Bay Express, Equal Means, The Sun* and in various anthologies and curricula. She has also contributed to KQED radio's Perspectives series. She holds a B.A. in Public Policy from Brown University and an M.A. in Urban Planning from UCLA.

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—ed.

This Toolkit Continues Online

In addition to electronic versions of all the pieces in this toolkit, you can find additional pointers on moving your message at www.spinproject.org/whosemedia, including tips on staging media events and training spokespeople. You'll also find a case study by Josh Seidenfeld on the digital inclusion efforts of People's Production House. And you'll find a continuation of the Q&A with Helen Brunner and Josh Silver on funding for media activism.

Resources

All organizations mentioned in this toolkit are listed below.

- Action Coalition for Media Education: www.acmecoalition.org
- Center for Media Justice/Youth Media Council: www.centerformediajustice.org
- Common Cause: www.commoncause.org
- Communications Leadership Institute: www.communicationsleadership.org
- Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting: www.fair.org
- Females United for Action: www.womenandgirlscan.org
- Free Press: www.freepress.net
- Future of Music Coalition: www.futureofmusic.org
- Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation: www.glaad.org
- Media Action Grassroots Network: www.mediagrassroots.net
- Media Alliance: www.media-alliance.org
- Media and Democracy Coalition: www.media-democracy.com
- Media Education Foundation: www.mediaed.org
- Media Matters for America: www.mediamatters.org
- Media Mobilizing Project: www.mediamobilizing.org
- Media Research Hub: http://mediaresearchhub.ssrc.org/
- Media Tank: www.mediatank.org
- MoveOn.org Civic Action: www.civic.moveon.org
- National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture: www.namac.org
- Necessary Knowledge for a Democratic Public Sphere. Social Sciences Research Council: http://programs.ssrc.org/media/
- Northeast Citizens for Responsible Media: www.re-media.org
- Oakland Digital Inclusion Summit: www.digii.wordpress.com
- Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ: www.ucc.org/media-justice
- Our Media Network: www.ourmedianetwork.org
- People's Production House: www.peoplesproductionhouse.org
- Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN): www.pcun.org
- Prometheus Radio Project: www.prometheusradio.org
- Radical Reference: www.radicalreference.info
- Reclaim the Media: www.reclaimthemedia.org
- Save the Internet Coalition: www.savetheinternet.com
- The SPIN Project: www.spinproject.org
- Texas Media Empowerment Project: www.texasmep.org
- Union for Democratic Communications: www.democraticcommunications.org

For More Information

Please visit us and download this toolkit at www.spinproject.org/whosemedia.

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