Media Empowerment

A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING MEDIA POWER
AND ORGANIZING FOR MEDIA JUSTICE
IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Organizing Manual

Media Empowerment Manual

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MEDIA EMPOWERMENT ORGANIZING MANUAL • AN INTRODUCTION

The United States is a vast country, made up of people from all around the world. Immigrants to this country bring with them varied histories, desires and dreams for the future. Those who have been here for many centuries, too — Native Americans, the descendants of Africans and Europeans — have experienced this country in different ways, and have different visions and values. There are many ways for us to communicate these ideas. In times past, it was through storytelling, through community events and conversations. Most of us still have these conversations about values and ideals, in the different communities to which we belong.

But today, we have to compete with another powerful force: our media system. We all watch TV, listen to the radio or read the paper. The different media all claim at some level to speak for us, to tell us who we are and what we aspire to, and how to deal with what's important and relevant in our lives. They also have a big impact on what and who politicians think they should be focusing their energies and money on. In our increasingly complex and information-driven society, the media have a very powerful voice.

Most of us are excluded from taking part in this one-way conversation. How often have you seen programs or read articles that addressed you and your community? How often have you had to sit through depressing stereotypes of women, people of color, working people, of immigrants or youth? How much of the time is someone selling you something? Have you ever made a program, shown it on TV, talked about it in your community? Have you ever noticed in the media the United States that you see on your streets, that you know exists beyond your neighborhood? Have you ever seen a program that you thought might help people struggling for social justice? Where are all the people like us in our media? What happened to their voices?

This situation isn't inevitable. In some countries, media can play a very different role. They can help communities to stay in touch with each other locally, nationally and even across borders. They can give voice to people that traditionally have been excluded from power and policy debates. As recently as a few decades ago, media looked quite different. There were a greater variety of programs and viewpoints, not to mention fewer commercials. Even today, on public access TV and low-power radio stations and through countless organizations working on community media, you can see yourself reflected, you can hear music from the community and honest debates about issues that matter.

What is your vision for the role media should play in your community? What could you do in your neighborhood if you had access to the media? If you could speak and be heard by media corporations, what would you tell them? What would you watch, produce and distribute? What kinds of rules would you put in place to make sure that media served the people, *all* the people?

These are big questions, and the task of transforming the media is a difficult and long-term struggle. But there are many things you can do to make a meaningful impact in your community and country. In this manual, you will find information about some of the many media justice organizing, policy and education drives going on around the United States. The guide is divided into four chapters. **Chapter 1** provides information on how the media operates today, who owns it, the rules that govern it and the organizations working to change it. **Chapter 2** deals with the more concrete aspects of community organizing: how to recruit people, how to organize your group, run meetings, etc. In **Chapter 3,** there is a guide to researching your media, and in **Chapter 4,** there are several resources guides on actions you can take.

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MEDIA EMPOWERMENT

A. The public airwaves

In the town of Opelousas, La., KOCZ-LP radio broadcasts 24 hours a day to the surrounding area. You can hear all sorts of local music on the station, as well as religious and current affairs programming with major politicians around the state. A Sunday night show spotlights the "movers and shakers" of the area. KOCZ was set up by the Southern Development Foundation (SDF), an organization that works for school reform, community supported agriculture and neighborhood economic development. The SDF is the first civil rights organization ever to own its own radio station. John Freeman, the station's executive director, says, "We pride ourselves on being part of this democratic project."

Contact information:

KOCZ 103.7 FM
Southern Development Foundation
Opelousas, LA
337 942 2312

Based in Boulder, Colo., Free Speech TV (FSTV) is a cable TV network that reaches more than 10 percent of the national cable market. FSTV gets its programming from around the country, from community organizations, from independent producers and first time filmmakers. Every week on FSTV you can watch programs made by community activists working on environmental racism issues, immigrant laborers fighting for decent working conditions and youth campaigning for fair criminal justice policies. The programming is as diverse as the United States itself.

Contact information:

FSTV
P.O. Box 6060
Boulder, CO 80306
303 442 8445 ext. 0
www.fstv.org

The airwaves over which KOCZ, Free Speech TV and all other stations broadcast are public property. In exchange for free use of these airwaves, the stations must show the government that they serve the "public interest." KOCZ's programming is all local in origin, and the station is run by and for the community that it serves. Free Speech has a national outlook, but its programs come up through communities around the United States, and deal with important issues affecting diverse people, the nation as a whole and even the world. Both these stations entertain as well as educate, and energize the communities they serve. They are part of a large and growing number of organizations

broadcasting on public access cable stations and low-power FM radio frequencies around the country. And they exist alongside community-based newspapers, websites and journals.

Can we say the same of the TV and radio companies that most of us watch or listen to in our homes or at work? Do they serve us? They also get to broadcast on the airwaves for free, and they also are bound by the same public interest obligations. Unlike Free Speech and KOCZ, though, they make billions of dollars in profit every year from this privilege, most of which comes from advertising. And profits from media advertising are growing significantly: from $73 billion in 1993 to $122 billion in 2001[1]. Though it might seem like they own the airwaves, NBC, ABC, CBS, FOX and company do not. We do. They broadcast on temporary, renewable licenses.

What do we get in return? For one, we get lots of commercials. The networks in particular, now make it their business to sell us (the audience) to advertisers.

B. Advertising

TV, radio and the print media are vehicles for advertising. This affects the style and content of news, entertainment and other programming. To sell products, advertisers don't want programs that question injustice or highlight stories of people improving things in their communities. Rather, they want emotional, superficial fluff: images that make us feel inadequate, news that is negative and scary. This "primes" the audience to be more receptive to the uplifting, fulfilling messages of commercials.

We could switch off the TV, or stop reading the paper, but the same corporations that own much of our media also own a lot of our public spaces. Clear Channel, by far the largest radio company in the United States, owns many of the billboards that decorate our buildings and streets, as well as concert venues and television stations. Together with its clients the large corporations, Clear Channel targets specific audiences with its campaigns. Outdoor advertising is far more visible in poor communities: One survey done in a New Jersey Latino community found 145 billboards and store ads for liquor and beer, compared with seven in a nearby white neighborhood[2].

What else do we get?

Advertising consumes approximately:

60 percent of newspaper space

52 percent of magazine pages

18 percent of radio time

17 percent of network television prime time

Source: Michael Jacobson and Laurie Ann Mazur, 1995, *Marketing Madness: A Survival Guide for a Consumer Society,* Boulder: Westview Press, in *We the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Fighting for Media Democracy,* New York: The New Press, p. 40.

Commercialized schools: Channel One

Advertising is a staple of American life. Children, in particular, are the most valuable market for advertisers. If a corporation can get a child hooked at an early age, it has "got them" for life. This is from media scholar Robert McChesney: "By age 7, the average American child is watching 1,400 hours of TV and 20,000 TV commercials per year. By age 12, that child's preferences are stored in massive databanks by marketers of consumer goods. In the 1990s, commercial television for children may well have been the most rapidly growing and lucrative sector of the U.S. industry, with 1998 ad revenues pegged at approximately $1 billion. Each of the four largest U.S. media giants has a full-time children's cable TV channel to capture the 39 million viewers in the 2-to-11 age group."

Source: Robert McChesney, "Oligopoly: The Big Media Game has fewer and fewer players," in *The Progressive,* 1999, **www.progressive.org/mcc1199.htm.**

In the past few decades, budget cuts and growing student populations have forced many schools to accept exclusive marketing contracts with companies like Coca Cola or IBM. Since the 1990s, this trend has gone further. Every day, around 8 million children in 12,000 schools watch the "Channel One" news program. The PRIMEDIA group, which owns Channel One, targets budget-strapped city schools, loaning them TVs, videos and other audio-visual equipment. In exchange, schools must play the 12-minute Channel One news and current affairs program to their students every day. At least two of those 12 minutes are made up of commercials. There are PSAs, but also commercials for movies, junk food, music, cosmetics and websites. The rest is news and sponsored sections, like the "Cingular Question of the Day" and the "Gatorade Play of the Week."

In 1994, Joel Babbit, then president of Channel One, said, "The advertiser gets a group of kids who cannot go to the bathroom, who cannot change the station, who cannot listen to their mother yell in the background, who cannot be playing Nintendo, who cannot have their headsets on." Channel One's advertising spots are very expen-

sive. In 1997, advertisers paid about $200,000 per 30-second spot. This is much more than the cost of most commercials on network TV, as the advertisers are willing to pay a high price for a guaranteed, or "captive," young audience.

Source: Abby Graham-Pardus, "Critics Slam Channel One's Commercials," in the *Tribune Review,* Sunday Aug. 10, 2003.

However, Channel One's profits have plunged in recent years, because many campaigns around the country have managed to get the show out of schools, or even to have the program banned in a whole school district (as in New York, San Francisco, Seattle and Nashville, among other places). In the early 1990s in California, a group of high school students calling itself the Center for Commercial-Free Public Education/ "UNPLUG" successfully organized with others to get Channel One out of its showcase school in San Jose California.

Today, the campaign continues. For recent successes against the company, see the recently formed National Campaign Against Channel One (NCACO) website **www.geocities.com/iceman_km/.**

C. Cable and broadband

Cable

In exchange for our cable subscriptions and the billions of dollars the networks make in advertising, are we getting more choice, better programming? If you have cable in your home, you can choose from hundreds of channels. Cable prices have risen steeply since the government bowed to the companies' pressure and stopped regulating them in the late 1990s. They have gone up at least 40 percent, more than two-and-a-half times the rate of inflation[3], despite the corporations' promise that deregulation would lower prices.

In exchange for the use of local facilities like the roads, cable companies are legally bound to provide the community with some form of public service. In the past this meant public access TV stations, which the community can use in whatever (non-commercial) way it chooses. During the 1970s, some local governments made deals while negotiating cable franchises to get free access to technical equipment and channels for government and public use. In the 1970s and 1980s, laws were enacted that required cable companies to provide channels and technical equipment (free) for public, educational and government use (PEG). There are many cable access channels around the United States today, providing a wide range of programming. For a resource guide on how to get cable access in your community if you don't have it, see sections 4C and 4D of this manual. If you do have a cable access station in your area, look at section 4B for information on how you can use the station in your campaign.

Today, with cable companies' expansion into internet service with broadband, many people are redefining the meaning of public service for them, and including internet and other services in the definition. The future of cable access, as well as newer technologies like broadband, is unclear. Cities, community organizations, corporations and the government are involved in trying to shape the future of these technologies.

A Parents' Bill of Rights

Commercial Alert, the advocacy group that has drafted the Parents' Bill of Rights, introduces it with these words:

"Our nation's largest corporations resort to extreme measures to influence our children. They invade places that were previously off-limits, like schools, to target children with ads. The ads cause children to nag and whine for products, sowing strife and stress in our homes … Tell Congress to stop corporations from pitting children against their own parents and jeopardizing children's health, safety and education."

On Commercial Alert's website, you can find extensive information about commercialism in schools and in other areas. The education section of the site has links to articles on activism around Channel One, to research and different campaigns.

Contact info:

Commercial Alert
4110 SE Hawthorne Blvd. #123
Portland, OR 97214-5426
503 235 8012
info@commercialalert.org
www.commercialalert.org

Other Resources on kids and advertising/TV are:

www.adbusters.org
www.tvturnoff.org
www.obligation.org
www.childrennow.org

In the summer of 2003, the nation's largest cable company, Comcast, sued the city of San Jose for seeking to extend some of these technological benefits to the city and community. Comcast is not alone in alleging that its "first amendment" rights are being violated in cases like these. Corporations around the United States, increasingly close to government regulators, are arguing for a special status that elevates their rights above those of the public. At the same time, local governments and the public are fighting at the local and national levels to ensure that everyone benefits from the new technologies. (See section 4D on how to influence decisions on cable policy at a local level.)

Examples of public access programming

- A 10-year-old child in New York City trained at a public access center and now produces shows with his mother on violence prevention.
- A media arts center in Palatine, Ill., serving people with developmental disabilities has trained them to produce a cable access show.
- Public Access media centers in Burlington, Vt., and Cambridge, Mass., are among the many providing free computer and internet training for residents.
- In Salem, Ore., a group of prison inmates worked with at-risk youth to produce a series called Reaching out from Within to help teens think about the consequences of their actions. The series was also distributed to public access channels in other cities.
- In Lowell, Mass., Cambodian immigrants have used public access to develop programming for their community in Khmer language. Programs include international news, religious shows, educational information for youth, public service announcements and event notices. Some programs also serve as a way for the Cambodian community to teach the wider community about Cambodian culture.

These examples are from the Philadelphia Community Access Coalition (PCAC) website. PCAC is a grassroots coalition of individuals and organizations working together through outreach, organizing and advocacy for the establishment of public access cable media in Philadelphia.

Contact info:

Philadelphia Community Access Coalition
P.O. Box 42612
Philadelphia, PA 19101
(215) 563-1090
Fax: (215) 563-4951
www.phillyaccess.org

Broadband

"Broadband is high-speed, interactive, always-on, two-way communications provided by cable modems, telephone lines, satellites, fixed and terrestrial wireless, and fiber optics to the home. Broadband is not just faster internet, a better version of the 56 Kbps dial-up services that are utilized by the majority of internet users. Such a definition is far too narrow. Broadband is more appropriately defined as a connection platform, a gateway to information and services. It can be accessed from a home computer, a wireless handheld device and soon even accessed by household appliances. In fact, broadband is whatever the user wants it to be."

Source: *A Broadband World: The Promise of Advanced Services,* Published by the Alliance for Public Technology and the Benton Foundation, February 2003. To read the full report: Alliance for Public Technology (APT) website: **www.apt.org/publica/broadband-world.html.**

Here are some examples of current uses of broadband technology, taken from the APT report:

- Worker training
- College online
- Prison telemedicine
- Real time sign language
- Rural community development

What is Broadband universal service?

"Broadband universal service refers to the effort to ensure that all citizens are served by emerging broadband technologies. Broadband universal service is a policy initiative mandated by the 1996 Telecommunications Act and managed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to promote the expansion of telecommunications services to all citizens. (The FCC is the government body that regulates media. For more information, see page 16.) Specifically, the goals of Universal Service are to:

- promote the availability of quality services at just, reasonable, and affordable rates;

- increase access to advanced telecommunications services throughout the nation; and
- advance the availability of such services to all consumers, including those in low income, rural, insular, and high cost areas at rates that are reasonably comparable to those charged in urban areas.

In addition, the 1996 Act states that all providers of telecommunications services should contribute to the federal Universal Service Fund in some equitable and nondiscriminatory manner; there should be specific, predictable, and sufficient Federal and State mechanisms to preserve and advance universal service; all schools, classrooms, health care providers, and libraries should, generally, have access to advanced telecommunications services; and finally, that the Federal-State Joint Board and the FCC should determine those other principles that, consistent with the 1996 Act, are necessary to protect the public interest."

This information is from the Telecommunity website. Telecommunity is an alliance of local governments and their associations, whose agenda is "based on principles of federalism and local community control. It defines the telecommunications policy issues that affect local governments and their citizens." For more information, see **www.telecommunityalliance.org/**

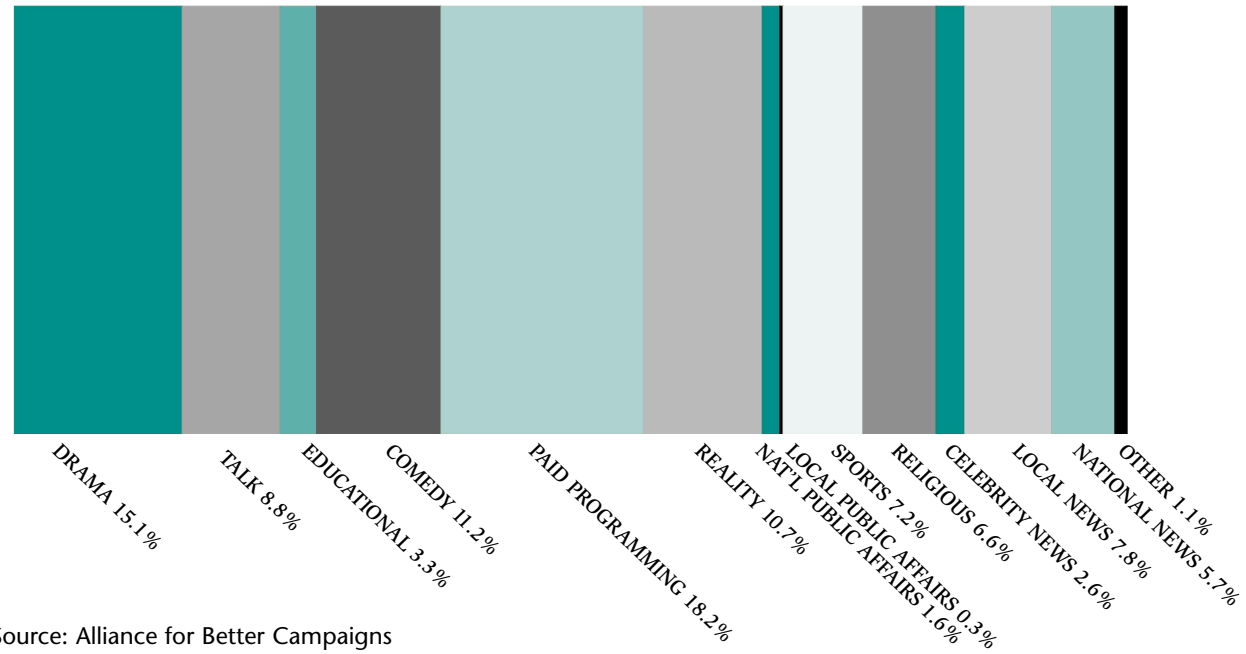
D. What's on

Advertising's influence on TV goes beyond shaping the tone of programs to make us receptive to the commercials. They influence content in another way. Advertisers need programs that appeal to those persons with the most money to buy the advertisers' products. In the past, this meant that TV catered almost exclusively to rich white people. Today, wealthy members of minority communities are increasingly included. Most U.S. residents, though, minority or not, are not wealthy. How does this relationship between advertising, television and society translate into what we see on TV? Below are just a couple of examples.

People of Color

People of color make up some 30 percent of the U.S. population, and a majority of the world as a whole. And yet they get "less than 11 percent of prime-time [network TV] and three percent of children's program casts, and, unlike in life, are mostly middle-class. Latino/Hispanic people, nearly 10 percent of the United States population, get about 1 percent of prime-time and 0.5 percent of children's program casts."[4] When people of color get represented on TV, in what roles do they get cast? In what roles on the news, in commercials, on talk shows?

AN EXAMPLE OF TELEVISION PROGRAMMING IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



Source: Alliance for Better Campaigns

Children and television

Distribution of Child Characters By Ethnicity and Source

	White	African-American	Hispanic/Latino	Asian-American
Commercial Broadcast	80.1%	13.7%	2.1%	4.1%
Cable	76%	13.1%	3.3%	2.2%
Public Broadcast Service	35%	27.5%	20%	13.8%

Source: Children Now, *The Reflection on the Screen: Television's Image of Children.*

Working People

What about poor and low-income people? "Despite the highest poverty rate in the developed world, poor people are virtually invisible in the U.S. media."[5] On the news, poor and low-income people get a mere 0.2 percent of coverage.[6] And what about employment issues? What kinds of coverage do working conditions and corporate fraud get? What about the rights of immigrant workers? Whose views are represented on these issues? In 2002, a year when more than 2 million jobs were lost in the United States, corporate executives appeared as sources on network news about 35 times more than union representatives.[7]

Women and television

"An examination of the top-rated entertainment series among the top 100 programs of the 1998-1999 prime-time season found women's employment at a standstill. Women comprised 31 percent of producers, 24 percent of executive producers, 21 percent of writers, 16 percent of editors, 15 percent of creators, and 3 percent of directors. There wasn't a single female director of photography working on any of the programs considered in the 1998-1999 season.

"On screen, the story is much the same. Women accounted for only 38 percent of all characters in the 1998-1999 season.

"Viewers are more likely to see a female alien or angel in prime-time TV than they were a female Asian or Latina character. Seventy-eight percent of the females were white, 16 percent were African American, 3 percent were otherworldly (aliens, witches, etc.), 2 percent were Asian, 1 percent were Hispanic and 3 percent were Native American.

"Thirty-one percent of the male characters — but only 20 percent of the female characters — held powerful jobs, (e.g., doctor, lawyer, business owner). While 15 percent of the female characters performed traditional female jobs, only 1 percent of the male characters enacted similar duties. Once again, [the] study found a relationship between the number of women working behind the scenes and women's presence on screen. The results of this study add to a growing body of evidence that gender diversity behind the scenes translates into greater gender equity on screen. With women accounting for only 21.5 percent of all behind-the-scenes workers on programs considered, gender diversity remains far from a foregone conclusion."

Source: Reel News, Nov./Dec. 1999. For more information contact: Dr. Lauzen, School of Communication, SDSU, San Diego, CA 92182.

Medicare and Money

What about coverage of the November 2003 overhaul of the Medicare system? Did the media investigate the links between the political contributions of the pharmaceutical and insurance industries and the way members of Congress voted? In the last election cycle, the pharmaceutical industries gave $21.7 million to the Republicans and $7.6 million to the Democrats. The insurance sector gave $25.9 million to the Republicans and $11.7 million to the Democrats. After the Medicare bill had passed, many media outlets did mention that the HMO and pharmaceutical industries were the winners, but they missed the big story when they didn't talk about political contributions.

Source: "Networks don't follow the money in Medicare," FAIR, Dec. 2, 2003.

As the summary of FAIR's report on "Powerful Sources" states, "It serves the country poorly when … broadcast news functions more as a venue for the claims and opinions of the powerful than as a democratic forum for public discussion and debate (June 2002)."

What does this mean for our ability to deal with the problems of poverty, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination? What role do the media play in the continued existence of these forms of oppression? What responsibility do they have to society, given that they get to use public airwaves for free (and make large profits from this)? What role could media play in tackling these issues? The images we see on TV and in commercials both shape our culture and are shaped by it. Stereotypes in the media only make sense to us because we recognize them in our daily lives: they exist in our culture. This does not mean that media simply reflect society. Clearly, they do not. "Although the majority of welfare recipients are rural white women, both in absolute terms and also as a proportion of the population, white people continue to believe that the majority of welfare recipients are

inner-city black women." (**Free Press: www.medicare-form.net/concerns/concern.php?id = racism**). These kinds of beliefs shape the way people vote, the kinds of policies that get enacted, and the whole "discourse" around what really is, and how things could and should be. For a useful guide on how to get issues that matter to your community covered well and fairly in the media, see the guide to "Getting better coverage of your issues," section 4A of this manual.

There are many interconnected factors that influence the content of broadcasting, from the structures of inequality in society and in media ownership to the relationships between government and media corporations—and the regulations that come out of them. When the government began regulating media in the early half of the 20th century, it placed certain restrictions on what could be broadcast. These obscenity laws dealt mainly with protecting "decency" on the airwaves. But in addition to these laws were others designed to regulate content and, to a degree, promote democratic discourse. One of these was the "Fairness Doctrine" in communication law (from 1959), which required broadcast stations to cover important and controversial issues and to be fair in their coverage. It was abandoned in the late 1980s. Another required reserving a minimum amount of time on TV for public service programming. Over the last 20 years, powerful corporate forces have dismantled these and other policies on media content.

Youth visions

"Despite dramatic decreases in juvenile crime, leading to the lowest rate of juvenile crime and victimization in 25 years, 80 percent of respondents to a Los Angeles Poll said the media's coverage of violent crime had increased their personal fear of being a victim. From 1990 to 1998, the national crime rate dropped by 20 percent, but news coverage of crime increased by 83 percent."

Source: Figures quoted in: "Is KMEL the People's Station? A Community Assessment of 106.1 KMEL," Youth Media Council, fall 2002.

September 11, 2001

September 11 was a horrific day. Many new government policies were put into place after that day, with far-reaching consequences for people in the United States and around the world. One of these was the USA Patriot Act, which changed the way government can collect information about people and the way it deals with those it defines as "dangerous." Another was the biggest reorganization of government in half a century: the creation of the vast Department of Homeland Security; another, the massive expansion of the defense budget at the expense of social services, health and education. Finally, the wars we are fighting also are consequences of the way government dealt with September 11, as is the organized movement against the current war.

These changes are extremely important. They affect our security in every sense of the word, from our economic health and the safety of our civil rights and liberties to how the United States is seen by the rest of the world. And yet, many people living in the United States did not feel safe before September 11, not in terms of civil and economic rights. How much media coverage did these issues and policy changes get? Beyond playing and replaying images of the collapsing towers, how much did media tell us about why this might have happened? Did it warn residents of New York City about the health and environmental impacts of the disaster?

The media portrayed the world of before September 11 as radically different from the world afterwards. The United States of before became a place of unquestioned social and racial harmony and the United States of after, one in which insecurity was suddenly introduced, and war and terrorists became the utmost priority of government and media. How were Arab Americans portrayed? Hollywood and the media have histoically cast Arabs and Arab Americans as terrorists. Since September 11, this has only gotten worse. The Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) 2002 report on hate crimes and discrimination documented huge jumps in the amount of racist commentary in the press, as well as a rising rate of hate crimes and discrimination targeted at Arab Americans, as well as Sikhs, who resemble Hollywood's stereotype of the Arab "terrorist."

For more information:

Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
4201 Connecticut Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20008, Tel: 202 244-2990; **www.adc.org**

"The People's Radio," 106.1 KMEL broadcasts to over 600,000 people in the Bay Area and is the main radio for youth and people of color. In 1999, Clear Channel Communications bought the station, and the programming began to change, moving it away from its label as the "People's Radio." "Young folks are listening to KMEL, not the news," said Nicole Lee, organizer for Let's Get Free (a collective of Bay are artists). "We need the station to include the voices of our youth leaders, not blame them, and be willing to look at the public policies that are the root causes of the problems in our communities."

In 2002, a coalition of youth organizers, artists, and media activists produced a community assessment of KMEL. The report's main findings were that "KMEL content routinely excludes the voices of youth organizers and local artists, neglects discussion of policy debates affecting youth and people of color, focuses disproportionately on crime and violence and has no clear avenues for listeners to hold the station accountable." The report included a series of recommendations to make the station more accountable and more accessible to the people it serves and to build strong relationships between the station and its primary audience, youth of color in the Bay area. The Community Coalition for Media Accountability (CCMA) publicized its report and recommendations in a pressure campaign to make the station change.

Source: "Is KMEL the People's Station? A Community Assessment of 106.1 KMEL."

In 2003, the station did begin to give ground, adding new local music programs and re-instating a popular show. In June 2003, reports Aliza Dichter, "Something rather extraordinary happened: KMEL partnered with Let's Get Free to offer live coverage of "360° of Violence," a community forum featuring young people talking about policy and community solutions to street violence. Here, live on Clear Channel radio, young radicals were speaking out against racism, the criminal "injustice" system and the oppressive, abusive dangers of concentrated corporate media. The campaign did not bring down the powerful corporation, nor did it shift government policy, but the listeners of KMEL had begun to win their station back."

Source: Media Development Journal, January 2004

Aliza Dichter is the Director of Programs for CIMA: Center for International Media Action, a nonprofit organization providing tools and services to help media advocacy groups connect, collaborate and increase their collective impact.

Contact info:

Center for International Media Action
1276 Bergen Street, #4 Brooklyn, NY 11213
646 249 3027/518 678 9540
cima@mediaactioncenter.org
www.mediaactioncenter.org

For more information about the Community Coalition for Media Accountability:

Youth Media Council
1611 Telegraph, Suite 510
Oakland, CA 94612
510 444 0460 ext. 312
campaigns@youthmediacouncil.org
www.youthmediacouncil.org

Section 3 of this manual contains information on different kinds of research strategies you can use to produce your own report on your media.

E. Ownership matters

Ownership matters because it has an impact on the kind of people who get access to the media, the kinds of programs that get made, and the power that media corporations have over all areas of government policy. Today, fewer companies own more of the market share than ever before. Because of this, it is increasingly difficult for those who are not part of this media-owning elite (which is mostly white, wealthy and male) to start their own companies, get access to the airwaves and influence media policy. Section 3A lists resources you can use to determine who owns the media in your community.

"Diversity" is an important term in media regulation, even for democracy itself. It's a term that is used by all sides in the debate on how to regulate the media. Media executives use it to claim they are better serving the public: more (in number) channels mean greater diversity. On the other side, many advocacy groups use the term to say that there isn't enough diversity: more channels do not mean more diversity when the channels are showing the same thing and are owned by a handful of companies, whose owners are all from the same kind of background. The Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Michael Powell (Secretary of State Colin Powell's son), also uses the term, saying, "The communications sector needs to tap the strength and vibrancy that flows from the diversity of the American people."[8] Despite this statement from the chief of broadcast regulation, only 3 percent of all U.S. broadcast stations, radio and television, are owned by minorities.

Minority representation and ownership

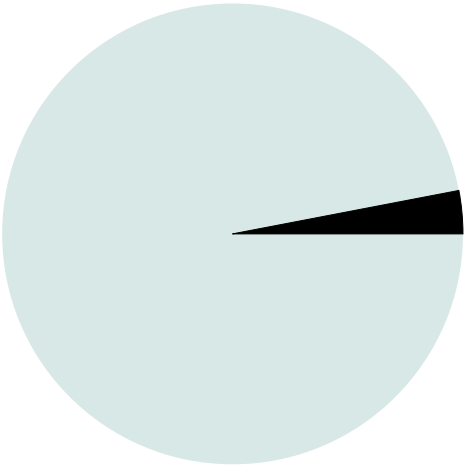
Today, the situation is difficult, both in terms of ownership and in terms of employment in the media. The president of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists, Juan Gonzalez, said in a November 2003 speech:

"For the past two years, the percentage of minorities in television and radio news has been declining, not increasing. For Hispanics it's gone down from 10 percent two years ago to 6 percent this year. It's gone down in radio even faster. Radio news is disappearing, but it is especially disappearing when it comes to minorities. Two years ago, 5 percent of the reporters in radio news were Hispanic. The next year, it went down to 2.5 percent. And this current year it's down to 1 percent. There are virtually no Latinos doing news on radio. There are hardly any radio news reporters but the disappearance is even greater among Latinos. Newspapers, meanwhile, have been creeping along with, but it's still only 4 percent, while our population is close to 14 percent right now.

"Television ownership. The number of television stations owned by minorities has gone down in the past three years, from 33 to 20. That's largely because when the FCC adopted duopoly rules, that a station could own two stations in one town, a lot of the minority-owned stations were bought up by larger chains. So you have an enormous drop in the number of minority-owned stations."

Source: Keynote Speech to the NAHJ Midwest Regional Conference, Detroit, Mich., Nov. 22, 2003. The National Association of Hispanic Journalists, **www.nahj.org.** Speech is available at **www.esperanzacenter.org/accionfccNAHJkeynote.htm.**

MINORITY OWNERSHIP OF MEDIA



■ Minority owned 3% ■ Other 97%

Number of stations owned by Minorities
(over 50% majority ownership)

Unequal opportunity

"A few years ago, Congress eliminated the Commission's most successful program for promoting minority ownership. Referred to as 'tax certificates,' this program permitted non-minority companies to defer capital gains taxes if they sold their media properties to a minority. A new movement is afoot to pass legislation to reinstate an improved tax certificate program."

From the Media Access Project website. The Media Access Project (MAP) is a public interest law firm which promotes the public's First Amendment

"African Americans faced a much more hostile establishment (white) press in the days of Jim Crow, local newspapers that often incited mob violence against Blacks and, on occasion, announced lynchings in advance. In the 1950s, Blacks employed informal and church networks and the Black press (where it existed) to create mass movements—facts on the ground that could not be ignored. The Montgomery Bus Boycott and, later, mass marches and jail-ins in Birmingham drew the attention of the northern-based corporate media. More interested in recording the show than supporting the protestors, the media nevertheless served to fire up the spirit of Black America and hasten the demise of Jim Crow.

"As the 1960s unfolded, mass incendiary activity presented the media and nation with additional facts —burning cities are not easily ignored. The corporate press grudgingly integrated their staffs. Although Black newspapers went into steep decline, Black radio sprouted news departments that encouraged local organizers to tackle the tasks of a post-Civil Rights world.

"Thirty years later, media consolidation has had the same strangulating effects on Black radio as in the general media. Radio One, the largest Black-owned chain, recently entered into a marketing agreement with a subsidiary of Clear Channel, the 1,200-station beast. Both chains abhor the very concept of local news."

Editorial, Black Commentator, Jan. 29, 2004, Issue 75. **www.blackcommentator.com.**

right to hear and be heard on the electronic media of today and tomorrow. MAP works in the courts, with the FCC and in coalitions with public interest groups.

Contact info:

Media Access Project
1625 K Street, NW Suite 1118
Washington, DC 20006
202 232 4300
info@mediaaccess.org
www.mediaaccess.org

Speaking on the National Association of Broadcasters' opposition to reinstating Equal Employment Opportunity laws, the Rev. Robert Chase, executive director of the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc., said, "We want to encourage broadcasters to stop fighting antidiscrimination laws, and start fighting discrimination. Deploy your vast resources and skills to expose the lawless ones in your midst… And we want to applaud the FCC in its determined effort to reinstate Equal Employment Opportunity rules in race-neutral recruiting. As our society moves relentlessly toward a day — some estimate little more than 40 years away — when people of color will constitute the majority of our population, this is a small but essential step toward ensuring all citizens, irrespective of race or gender, a voice over the airwaves — a public trust held on behalf of us all."

> Testimony before the FCC, June 24, 2002, of the Rev. Robert Chase, Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc. (OC, Inc.)

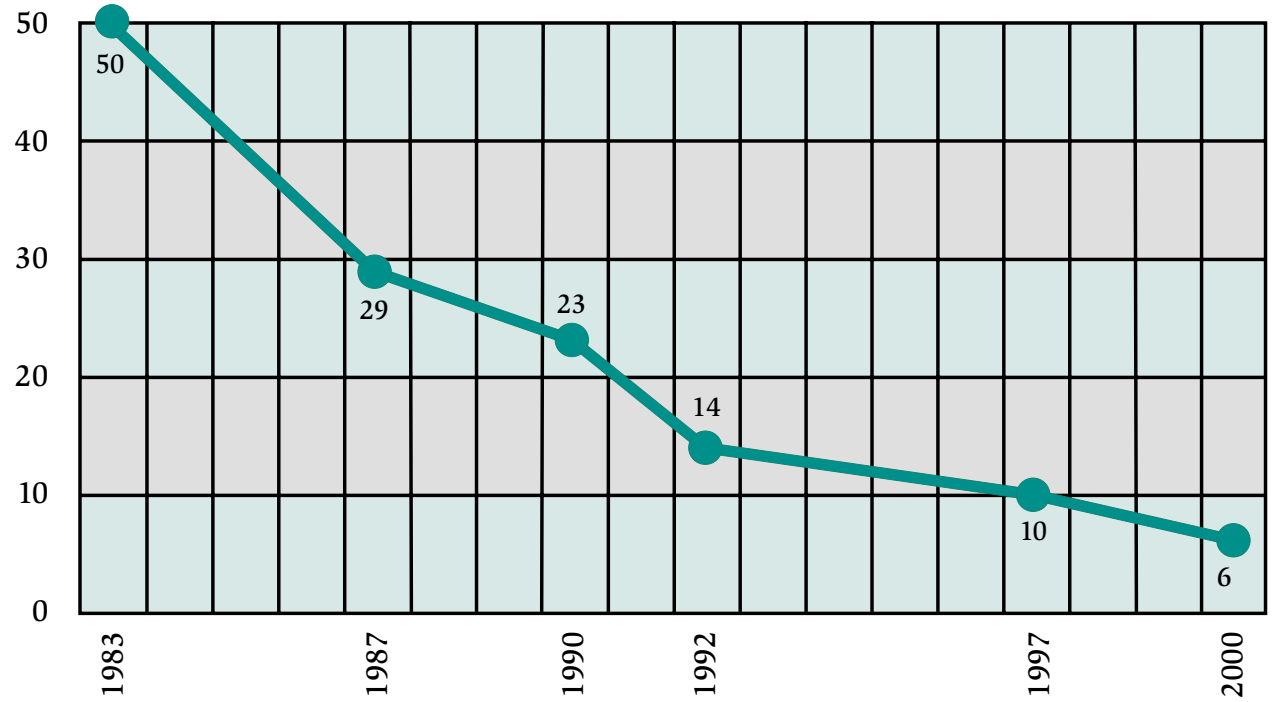
The Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc. (OC, Inc.)'s pioneering work in integrating southern television stations led to the landmark ruling affirming the standing of listeners and viewers to participate in broadcast licensing proceedings. OC, Inc. has participated in dozens of FCC proceedings over the past four decades as an advocate for persons of color and women in the mass media and in telecommunications.

For more information: www.ucc.org/ocinc

Information on the Equal Employment Opportunity case can be found in section 4 E (2) of this manual, which contains more on this case.

NUMBER OF CORPORATIONS THAT CONTROL MOST U.S. MEDIA

Newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, books, records, movies, videos, wire services and photo agencies



NOTE: Table based on Ben Bagdikian's The Media Monopoly, 2000, p. X. Controlling "nearly all" U.S. media here means controlling at least 90 percent of U.S. media. Source: Media Reform Information Center, **www.corporations.org/media/#monopoly**

Who does own the media then?

Today, the media is owned by a small and shrinking number of large, multinational corporations. We can count the six major owners of media in the world: Viacom, Vivendi Universal, Disney, AOL/Time Warner, News Corp. and Bertelsmann. There will be fewer tomorrow: not only are the "big 6" busy buying up the remaining independents, but they also have a tendency to "merge" with each other into even larger bodies, as AOL and Time Warner did a few years ago. Even when they are not merged, "competing" corporations have "equity joint ventures," which means that they are not really separate entities because they own shares in each other's companies. There also is "vertical integration" today: companies that own TV stations now also own magazines, production companies, movie theatres, radio stations, video distributors, cable providers, recording studios and more.

These giant corporations don't only deal in media. The group "Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting" (FAIR) has produced a list of "interlocking directorates" revealing the non-media interests of the major media companies. So, for example, members of Disney/ABC's board also sit on Boeing, Edison and many other companies' boards. General Electric owns NBC. GE is an important defense contractor for the government.

For more information:

www.fair.org/media-woes/interlocking-directorates.html

Global dimensions

These policies threaten cultural diversity around the globe and the rights of different civilizations to represent themselves to each other and to the world. The following statement sums up what is at stake (which goes beyond culture) and what an information society could mean for people around the world:

"At the heart of our vision of information and communications societies is the human being. The dignity and rights of all peoples and each person must be promoted, respected, protected and affirmed. Redressing the inexcusable gulf between levels of development and between opulence and extreme poverty must therefore be our prime concern. We are committed to building information and communication societies that are people-centered, inclusive and equitable. Societies in which everyone can freely create, access, utilize, share and disseminate information and knowledge, so that individuals, communities and peoples are empowered to improve their quality of life and to achieve their full potential."

Exporting culture

Our number one export to the world today is "entertainment": movies, videos, music, television programs and books. Programs made for the audience at home are made with an eye to export: less dialogue, more action and quick easy laughs make it easier to sell the programs to non-English speaking countries. Because of this, U.S. international trade negotiators treat these "cultural" goods like other commodities (food or fuel for example) on the world market. In trade talks, the government puts pressure on countries (mostly non-Western) to "open" their media and culture markets to U.S. exports. This effectively means other countries giving up control over their cultural policy. The United States is currently negotiating such agreements with 20 countries.

Source: Coalition Currents, Vol. 1, No. 5, December 2003

"Civil Society" (non-governmental and non-business) Declaration, "Shaping Information Societies for Human Needs" to the December 2003 UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

The full declaration is available at **www.itu.int/wsis/docs/geneva/civil-society-declaration.pdf**

This declaration comes out of a broad coalition of groups around the world that are opposed to treating culture like a product in international trade. These groups are united in a desire to harness media and communications technologies for the good of ordinary citizens, exploiting media's full potential to raise living standards and enhance understanding and peace between cultures. They are particularly active in the "Third World," where the impact of international trade policies on culture — but also in agriculture and other basic goods — is acutely felt. For more information about these issues, you can go to the World Social Forum website, **www.wsfindia.org.** These forums, of which there have been three so far, bring together ordinary people and activists from around the world to discuss a broad range of issues impacting people and their communities.

For more information, see:

The Coalition for Cultural Diversity's newsletter "Coalition Currents" available at:
www.screenquota.org/epage/upload/2003.12%205th%20issue.htm

The International Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS) Campaign: www.crisinfo.org/live/index.php

F. Who is responsible for policy?

Media corporations

With vast budgets and sophisticated lobbying machines, their lawyers and representatives can buy closed-door meetings with members of the FCC and Congress, who actually make the policy decisions. The National Association of Broadcasters (the NAB) is a powerful lobbying force in Washington. As large donors to political campaigns and with the potential to damage political careers with unflattering coverage in the media, media corporations are a force to be reckoned with.

The U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate

These also play an important role. They draft and pass legislation, like the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which paved the way for Clear Channel Communications to build its empire of 1,200 radio stations. When Congress passes such a law, it overrides any regulations the FCC has in place, such as limits on the number of radio stations one company can own. The party in power appoints three of the five FCC Commissioners, as well as its Chairman.

The FCC

When Congress first provided for the licensing of radio stations in 1927, individuals were to be granted licenses providing they serve both the public interest and the licensee's interests.[9] The FCC's main role was to give out portions of the "spectrum," or the airwaves, to the different (radio) corporations who wanted to broadcast. It also would maintain order, policing pirate broadcasters and preventing the "legitimate" ones from broadcasting on each other's frequencies. The FCC had to consider the public interest when it reviewed laws because of the special nature of broadcasting that is vital to the functioning of democracy and our ability to act in the world. However, in decisions of the 1950s and 1960s, the FCC supported discriminatory practices by radio and TV stations.

This began to change with the Civil Rights movement because the FCC put in place laws designed to guarantee fair coverage of important issues and promote minority ownership. Since the 1980s, there has been another broad shift in the FCC's decisions, which increasingly have tended to promote "corporate welfare," or the financial interests of large corporations, over the public interest. Nonetheless, there always are differences in emphasis and opinion among FCC Commissioners and staff, which public interest groups and advocates use to continue to press for change. For a detailed summary by the FCC of its role, see **www.fcc.gov/Bureaus/Mass_Media/Factsheets/pubbroad.pdf.**

Public interest groups

In 1966, an important court case paved the way for increasing public involvement in communications policy. Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ, Inc. v. Federal Communications Commission found the audience — the public — could have "standing" to help determine whether or not a television station should have its license renewed.[10] This case has been used by coalitions of community, church and advocacy organizations and their lawyers to fight, among other things, for better access for all to the media, for children's programming and for public access TV. All the gains that have been made in media regulation have been the result of these struggles.

Media justice

Makani Themba-Nixon and Nan Rubin write in *Speaking for Ourselves:* "The lobbyists and scholars leading the current efforts at media reform are focusing on a whole different set of concerns — resistance to corporate media consolidation, the battle to preserve localism against content that is commercial and sensationalistic — which are a far cry from the issues of racism and unfair treatment that launched the earlier movement."

The Nation, Nov. 17, 2003.

The Media Justice Network

From "A Declaration of Media Independence"
Nov. 11, 2003

"Media justice speaks to the need to go beyond creating greater access to the same rotten corporate media structure. We are interested in more than paternalistic conceptualizations of 'access,' more than paper rights, more than taking up space in a crowded boxcar along the corporate information highway. Media Justice takes into account history, culture, privilege and power. We seek new relationships to media and a new vision and reality for its ownership, control, access and structure. We understand that this will require new policies, systems and structures that will treat our airwaves and our communities as more than markets for exploitation … We need a unique space so that our communities can move forward the visions and strategies for this work that are grounded in their own reality, which we believe will lead our society towards a truly free and democratic media."

Signed by:

Art McGee, Afrofuturism Collective
Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Third World Majority
Makani Themba-Nixon, The Praxis Project
Malkia Cyril, Youth Media Council
Jeff Perlstein, Media Alliance

Full declaration at:
www.media-alliance.org/mediajustice.html
info@mediajustice.org

Despite the important victories that citizen's groups have won in the policy arena over the past few decades, there still has been a general reversal of many of the rules that prevented a few media companies from owning the majority of the different media that now exist. Similarly, there has been an erosion of the few laws that required media corporations to be equal opportunity employers, as well as to promote or invest in minority ownership of media.

The policy landscape in 2003

In June 2003, the FCC voted 3-2 (the two were Democrats) to allow another round of media deregulation. The proposed laws would essentially get rid of the few regulations that are left in the area of communications, allowing corporations to own TV stations that reach 45 percent of the U.S. population (over the previous 35 percent). In large TV markets, bans on owning both TV and radio stations — or TV and newspapers — would be lifted. When the proposals were finally made public (shortly before the vote), a coalition of groups on the right and left organized a national campaign to raise public awareness of the changes. As a result, two million people contacted the FCC asking them to vote no on further deregulation. Despite this unprecedented public outcry, the FCC voted yes to deregulation. But in the summer of 2003, the laws that were to have been implemented in September 2003 were "stayed," or suspended, by a federal judge in Philadelphia. In July 2003, Congress voted overwhelmingly (400 to 21) to keep the 35 percent cap. The Senate went even further in September voting to call off all of the new regulations. In late 2003, a compromise was reached which set the cap at 38 percent, though what the final outcome will be is not yet clear.

For more information, see section 4E in this guide.

G. What can we do?

At the same time as this erosion of rules, there have been the recent triumphs by media advocates in delaying, if not stopping, further erosion of media ownership rules. As the other examples above show, there have been, and continue to be, many successful community based actions around media access and content, as well as the ongoing creation of alternative media.

Patricia Hill Collins, a black feminist scholar, writes that knowledge is a key part both of how we are oppressed and how we liberate ourselves. Knowledge shapes the way we understand ourselves and others. It shapes our understandings of the way our societies work and the real, concrete problems, and potential solutions, that face us. This section of the manual has described some of the kinds of stories, information and images our media produce for us and about us. It has highlighted people's struggles against the destructive images of people of color and of youth. And it has talked about the increasing commercialization not only of the media, but also of our schools and public spaces.

We use the knowledge we get from media to decide what is possible in our lives, to inform our actions, to shape our priorities. But much of corporate media today works against us: it fragments our communities, it doesn't reflect our living realities and it doesn't give us hope. If we are actively engaged in struggles for social justice, the corporate media present us with formidable challenges in getting our message out, in helping people think about the problems and join us in acting on them. As Makani Themba-Nixon and Nan Rubin state, "Because media's role in spreading capitalist values and neoliberal ideology was having a mortal impact on so many social and economic justice movements, the conclusion was that media could no longer be a sidebar — it had to become one of the main issues" (The Nation, Nov. 17, 2003).

Taking media on as a central issue in social justice campaigns is a way not only to address the problems with our current media system, but also to ensure the survival and strength of our struggles for justice. We can create and support alternative media, we can challenge our local media and we can take the policy fight to the local and national levels. All these strategies are possible, and with some research into what your community wants and needs, and what the media is providing, you can decide which one is best for you.

The next three sections of this manual provide more details on organizing, research and a set of resources to use in your campaigns. Sections 3 and 4, in particular, provide detailed guides on different types of research and action you can undertake.

1. Cited in Mark Cooper, 2003, *Media Ownership and Democracy in the Digital Information Age,* Creative Commons, Stanford, p. 132.

2. EXTRA! Report, reprinted in *We the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Fighting for Media Democracy*, The New Press, New York, p. 90.

3. Mark Cooper, 2003, *Media Ownership and Democracy in the Digital Information Age,* Creative Commons, Stanford, p. 143.

4. Cultural Indicators research, reprinted in *We the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Fighting for Media Democracy*, The New Press, New York, p. 110.

5. The Free Press, "How the Media Affect us: Poverty", **www.mediareform.net/concern.php?id=poverty**

6. Cultural Indicators research, reprinted in *We the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Fighting for Media Democracy*, The New Press, New York, p. 110.

7. "Who's On the News? Study shows network news sources skew white, male and elite," *Extra!,* FAIR, June 2002.

8. FCC Public Notice, Chairman Powell announces intention to form a federal advisory committee to assist the Federal Communications Commission in addressing diversity issues. May 19, 2003.

9. Erik Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty,* Oxford Univ. Press, NY 1975, p. 59 and Documents of American Broadcasting, Frank J. Kahn, Ed., Prentice-Hall, NJ. 1984, p. 40.

10. *Documents of American Broadcasting,* Frank J. Kahn, Ed., Prentice-Hall, NJ, 1984, p. 233.

NOTES

Chapter 2
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Media Empowerment

A. Getting started

You need to focus on your issues before you start to bring more people in to work with you on the campaign. It may be very clear to the community what issues need to be addressed, or it might take some time to focus in on a couple of issues. This section provides a quick guide for organizing, with an emphasis on democratic decision making and structures. These sections will be more or less relevant, depending on your experience and the stage that your organization or campaign is at.

Defining the community

How will you define the "community" or "communities" for the purposes of your work? Will you work with existing, organized groups or will the project build new communities in the process (or both)? Talk to all sorts of people about the project: young and old, men and women, those with and without experience in community organizing. For example, when you are in the initial research stages of the project, the internet is a very valuable resource for looking at what media are available and who owns them. Ask older high school or college students in the area to help you with this research. With a little training and guidance, they could work with you on this. Depending on who lives in the neighborhoods you'll be working with, try to bring people in from all the different communities you want to represent.

Recruiting people

Face-to-face contact is the most effective way of reaching out to people and getting them interested in the project. Go and see people where they are, at home or at work. Make sure you call them first to set up appointments. Be respectful of people's time and space, but also tell them why you think the project is important and why you need them to get involved. There are some organizing/interview questions at the end of this manual (section 4A) that you can refer to and adapt to different situations.

Prepare yourselves for talking to others about the project: Why do you think it's so important for the community to deal with media? Why does the work need to be done now? How will you all benefit from it? What have other organizations and communities achieved? Where will it fit into community organizations or existing organizing efforts? What kinds of coalitions will be built during this work?

If you are involved in an existing social justice campaign and want to bring a media focus to your work, bring up the subject at one of your meetings. Tell people you are starting a campaign and want the organization to lead the effort. Ask them what they think, how to fit their ideas into your work as a group, who in other groups you should talk to. Also discuss the issues that are important in other community organizations at the moment, and think of ways you can work together to strengthen each other's goals. If you are starting this campaign outside any existing organizations, set up meetings with people in other community groups, talk about the project at community events, make flyers and use them to have conversations with people in public places. In both cases, you need to get people to an initial meeting. Create a "buzz" around the campaign, get people curious and excited about it. Choose a place and time, and ask people to come and bring others who are interested.

The actual work of the campaign is a good organizing tool. It's always easier to get people involved by asking them to do a specific task, starting with smaller tasks and then, as they feel more involved, asking them to do more. Some people will want to get very involved when you first approach them, but for those who are a little more hesitant, this gradual approach is a good way to go. Whatever course of action you decide to take, you will likely need more people to carry out the work than are active in the group. This is one way you can get more people from the community involved.

Another good way of spreading the word about the group or campaign is to have campaign members volunteer as guest speakers for panels and other meetings in the neighborhood and beyond. Write letters to the editor, call in to talk shows. To recruit more people when the campaign is up and running, publish a newsletter and/or produce a program for the public access cable station in your community. Publicity about the topic will educate people and help create interest in the community about the project.

Different skills

There are different types of people who will be particularly useful to your work. It would help if you can get them involved from the beginning. Be honest about why you are approaching them: tell them that the campaign really needs them for their specific skills — a little flattery can go a long way.

- **Networkers** are those persons in your community who can reach out to other groups. They could be elected officials, leaders of organizations within the community, such as church groups, community centers or other voluntary agencies. These networkers would not necessarily work with you day to day, but they can put your group in touch with others who could give you support. Keep them informed about your progress because they can help you with future contacts.
- **Mobilizers** are those who are or have been community activists or advocates, people working for change. Community activists understand the community: what organizing strategies work; which existing community organizations could be helpful; whether or not the local newspapers are open to special columns, and so on.
- **Resource persons** are small business people with products or services that could be helpful throughout the project, or those who work in large organizations that have the needed resources. They could have access to photocopiers or internet server space, or be able to create web sites. When you have events, they can also provide food and drinks, or even just advertise your events in their organization.
- **Media activists,** scholars and journalists. In just about every city in the United States, there are people working on media justice issues: whether it's educating youth to use the media more critically, making films about issues that are ignored, or fighting campaigns for more democratic access to media. Find out which people are working on these issues in your community and get in touch with them. Similarly, **teachers** and **college professors** working on these issues could help you in your research and in spreading information about the campaign. Finally, it would also be very useful for you to develop relationships with sympathetic people in the **local media,** both "mainstream" and alternative. They can help you publicize the campaign and your events. They also will be useful when you are researching the media in your community.

  If you can get people with special skills involved from the start, all the better. However, what you really need to get started is a group of people who are excited about the project, and willing and able to commit time to making it a success.

The first meeting

At the first meeting, begin by introducing yourselves and saying why you came, what your interest in the project is and what you'd like to achieve with the group. Spend quite a lot of time during the first meeting talk-

ing about the issues, about what you all feel the problems are and the different courses of action you can take. Make it personal: you want people to express what in particular in their lives and work made them interested in media. You'll also be building trust among members of the group if you are able to share your feelings and experiences.

Here are some questions that might help get people talking:

- Why did you get interested in media?
- Was there a particular issue that made you want to act?
- Was it a conversation with a friend, relative or co-worker?
- Was it a news program or the absence of coverage on something you think is important in your community?
- Do you have difficulty finding media in your mother tongue?
- What are the issues you are working on?
- How could including media in your work help you?
- Have you heard about some of the other projects that are dealing with justice and media? What are they?

Make sure that while this conversation is going on, someone is recording people's comments. You may all agree very quickly on the most important issues in the community, and on a course of action. If you don't though, whoever is facilitating should help the group choose a few specific issues to focus on, and some possible courses of action. At this stage, sketch out a mission statement for the group (see next section). At the end of the discussion, you will want to have a rough agenda for your project or campaign — outlining the different steps you need to take, the resources and people/organizations you'll want to work with. Each attendee should come up with a list of people they know who might be interested in the project, and contact them before the next meeting. Divide up the work: make sure everyone chooses a task to work on until the next time.

Mission statement

A strong mission statement will help you clarify your goals and vision, and explain them to others. Use the mission statement to energize people around the problem, and get them optimistic about the possibilities for change. The mission statement doesn't need to be very long, a few sentences is fine. It should be broad enough to appeal to a wide audience, but also clear enough to focus people's attention on your issue. Coming up with a statement that you're all comfortable with may take some time, but it will be worth it as you'll use it often.

Mission statements

Chicago Access Network

CAN TV gives every Chicagoan a voice on cable television by providing video training, facilities, equipment and channel time for Chicago residents and nonprofit groups and by providing coverage of events relevant to the local community. Cable channels CAN TV19, 21, 27, 36 and 42 reach more than a million viewers in the city of Chicago.

Contact info:

Chicago Access Network
322 South Green Street
Chicago, IL 60607
312-738-1400
popovicb@cantv.org
www.cantv.org

National Asian American Telecommunications Association

NAATA's mission is to present stories that convey the richness and diversity of the Asian Pacific American experience to the broadest audience possible. We do this by funding, producing, distributing, and exhibiting films, video and new media.

Contact info:

NAATA
145 9th Street, Suite 350
San Francisco, CA 94103
415-863-0814
naata@naatanet.org
www.naatanet.org

These mission statements come from the Center for International Media Action's Media Policy Action Directory, which lists contact information for organizations opposed to media concentration. You can download the Directory on the web (**www.mediaactioncenter.org/projects.html**), or write to CIMA for a copy. The e-mail address is survey@mediaactioncenter.org.

Choosing a name

Once you've talked about your goals as a group, and have come up with a mission statement, pick a name for the project or campaign. Some examples are Marie Winn's book title "Plug in Drug," which captures what she argues about the effects of television. SPIN

(Strategic Progressive Information Network) provides media activist training to progressive groups around the country. Enjoy coming up with a name that is relevant to your community, which people can identify with and rally around.

B. Organizing your group

Early in the process, decide what kind of organizational structure to follow in the group. It's important for this to be clear so that everyone involved knows how decisions are being made, who is responsible for what work and whom to ask about a particular issue. In general, you want to make all members feel comfortable and empowered to speak and act in the group. The group should become large, but appear small; large enough to have an impact, but small enough so that people will feel part of a community and know that their work is appreciated. It should be effective as well as flexible and open to change.

Decision making

How will decisions be made in the group? By consensus, with the whole group discussing an issue till everyone agrees? Will you bring decisions for a vote instead? Or will decisions be made by a smaller group, a board for example? If decisions are made by a smaller group, how will those decisions made be communicated to the whole group? Finally, what about the more important versus the less important decisions? Will you have different decision-making structures for different types of issues? These are important questions you should discuss early on, while being flexible about the process.

Board or steering committee

Decide whether to have a board or steering committee The board could be comprised of the people who started the organization, who are most invested in it, and who would be able and willing to represent it in the wider community. A board can be responsible for the overall direction of the group, and for organizing its work. Whatever its role, it's important that board members are in frequent communication with each other, and that they are representative of the communities you want to work with.

Working groups

You don't necessarily need a lot of people to run an organization or a campaign, but you do need to make sure that all those involved feel that they have a say, and can act effectively in the group. You also want to divide up the work as much as possible, as there will be a lot to get done. Different people have different skills, and a good way of involving everyone in the group is to have them do work they are comfortable with and enjoy. Working groups can function semi-independently of the main group, setting their own agendas and meeting separately, in addition to the all-group meetings. There has to be good communication among groups; you can devote part of the main meetings to discussing what's been going on in the working groups, and what each group needs from the others. Some examples of committees that may be useful are: research, outreach, organizing and events.

Advisory board

Having an advisory board is a good way to get people involved who may not have much time, but who care about the project. Members of the advisory board might come from different sectors of the communities you're working in, and from different professional backgrounds. They can be persons with specific expertise that is not otherwise represented in the group. Call on them when you need advice about a particular issue.

C. Running meetings and keeping people energized

There are many ways to judge the success of a meeting. Your goals in meetings will likely vary as your work evolves. Sometimes you may want a meeting to provide an open forum for members to connect, to talk about their feelings about the group's work, to evaluate the work and come up with new directions. At other times, you may have an event to organize and a lot of small tasks to get accomplished during the meeting. The shape of meeting also will vary with the kind of organizational structure you choose. Either way, here are a few suggestions for shaping meetings:

- **Introductions:** When new people are attending a meeting, make sure you all introduce yourselves at the beginning. Explain why you are working on the project, what particular role you play in the group and so on.
- **Agenda:** Having a clear agenda is an essential component of successful meetings. It can be more or less open depending on your needs, but should at least outline the issues you'll be discussing. The agenda alerts everyone to the topics for discussion, and also helps

the facilitator keep the group moving with the schedule.

- **Facilitator:** You should have one or more facilitators during each meeting. To keep everyone actively involved, you can have someone different do it each time. The facilitator should ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak, that all issues on the agenda are addressed, that the group is moving forward, and that you keep to your time frame.
- **Work to do for next meeting:** At the end of each meeting, well before people start getting ready to leave, you should state the broad goal for the next meeting, and each person should choose a task to work on before then.

Keeping people energized

One of the most common problems you will face during your campaign is that of getting the work done and keeping people excited about the project. Some people may drop out of the group, others may not come regularly to meetings or not do what they said they would. To a degree, this is inevitable. If you feel someone doesn't seem as keen as they were when they started, talk to them. Ask them why and find out if it's something you can work on. Ask them why they got involved in the first place. Let them know that you, as a community, need them working on the project, and remind them of the things that you, as a group, have already achieved. Some people will find they really don't have time to be fully involved in the project, even though they would like to be — you could ask them to do small, manageable tasks when they come up.

Similarly, if group members clash — with different views on how to get things done or what to focus on — you need to find a way to keep things moving. Keep the focus on the bigger issue (what brought you together) and the need to compromise.

First steps

Any form of organizing around media involves a few essential steps. These include finding out what media you have in your community, finding out what people in the community would want out of their media (which involves organizing them), and seeking out resources to help you in your work. The next section deals with these issues in more detail.

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Chapter 3
Investigating Your Media

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Investigate your media 29

The steps described below concentrate mainly on broadcast media, though much of the information can be applied to other media as well.

A) Identifying the media available in your community
B) Identifying the needs of your community
C) Inspecting public files

Much of this may seem fairly obvious. However, if you decide to use your findings to convince policy makers, you are more restricted in the kind of information you present to them. The knowledge you produce to mobilize your community will therefore look quite different from information you use to push for change at the programming or policy levels.

A. Identifying media available in your community

Depending on the needs of your campaign, there are different types of research that you can do. You can use a targeted survey of how media cover (or don't cover) a particular set of issues that are important to your community; to push, for example, for the creation of a public access station that would serve your needs. Your work might be focused on the activities of a particular outlet; for example, a radio station, and the problems with its programming. Or your campaign might be trying to prevent one media company from buying another, in which case, research on the lack of diverse media ownership in the community would be useful. In your work, use what community media you already have in your area, both to get your message out and as examples you can hold up to local government, to corporate media and to your community. Below are resources for conducting some of the different types of research. Adapt them to the specific needs of your campaign.

What media are available?

To fully understand how diverse or uniform your local media are, identify all the media outlets that anyone in your community can find, on the newsstands, on the airwaves, on the cable system, on the internet, and on cell phones. You will have several decisions to make about collecting the information. Will you only count those media that have production facilities within your geographic area? For example would you count USA Today as one print medium available to your community? It's available on the newsstands, but where is it produced and is there much news about your community, or is there even any local advertising in it? For radio, you'll want to count all the AM and FM stations that can be heard by the community; for television, all the UHF and

VHF stations that can be received; and for cable television, all the stations available through the different providers. The television listings in TV Guide or a local newspaper should have all the stations listed. Be sure to include the public access channels available on cable television. Consider studying the internet: what websites are targeted towards your community, and carry local information, news and events?

Ownership of media

Are any of the media locally owned, or owned by large conglomerates? How many of the media in your community are owned by the same owner? This is a fast-growing trend nationally, and has a big impact on what we get to see on our local media. How does it work in your community? There are many resources available, especially on the internet. Here are some web sites dealing with ownership:

The Media Reform Information Center is a great place to start. They have many articles, links to other organizations working on media and a lot of research on ownership. Their website is **www.corporations.org/media/#monopoly.**

The Center for Public Integrity has a searchable database to learn who owns the media in each area, and how "concentrated" the market is in your community; i.e., how few or many different owners there are. The website is **www.openairwaves.org/telecom/analysis/default.aspx.**

The Columbia Journalism Review also keeps track of media ownership and lists all the major media owners and their properties, as well as providing timelines for some of the main corporations and other articles on media ownership. **www.cjr.org/tools/owners/index.asp.**

Resources you can find online

The internet is a great way to go about this research process.

Newspapers: To find local newspapers online you can go to the News Voyager site at **www.newspaperlinks.com/voyager.cfm.**

Radio: For radio stations available go to Radio Locator at **www.radio-locator.com** and enter your zip code. From this site, you also can find out which stations stream their broadcasts online, and who owns each of them.

TV: For TV stations, go to TVRadioWorld at **www.tvradioworld.com/search/station_finder.asp** and look under their "Locate Radio and TV stations on the web by location" (the fourth type of search in the list). Once you get a list of the stations in your area, you can follow links to other information, including the station's website, whether they broadcast online, and the FCC's page on the station (which contains some technical frequency information, as well as a list of the owners of the station).

Content of media

In producing a "content analysis" of what's on your media, you can either look at one or more outlets' programming in general, or research how a specific issue or set of issues is covered in one or more outlets (See box on next page).

If you are looking at what kind of programming is on a particular station, identify and categorize content by selecting a sample over a one-week period, and reading, listening or viewing it with a few others. Depending on the kind of media you are looking at, videotape a sample of newscasts, collect newspapers or download material from websites, and analyze the content and presentation of programming. The categories could include the following: local vs. non-local; for children vs. for adults; educational/informative vs. entertaining; original vs. reruns; violent vs. non-violent; class of talent; gender of talent; race of talent; sexual orientation of talent; language of programming and; percentage of programming that is advertising. You will undoubtedly come up with more categories.

Grade the News has a useful list of categories you could use, as well as a "scorecard" for study results: **www.stanford.edu/group/gradethenews/pages/scoring.htm.**

'Our Democracy, Our Airwaves'

The "Our Democracy, Our Airwaves" campaign is a coalition of more than 60 national organizations working for better coverage of election campaigns on TV networks in the Chicago area. In 2003, they published the results of their survey of newscasts of five Chicago broadcasters, looking at how much money stations brought in through political advertising and how much time they devoted to covering candidates and issues in their newscasts. They found that the stations make millions of dollars from political advertising, but fail to broadcast enough coverage of candidates and, especially, issues before an election. This weakens public debate of issues and makes it difficult for voters to

Questions on content

Here are some useful questions excerpted from **Impress the Press** that you will want to ask if you're looking at coverage of a specific issue:

1. How much coverage does your issue get? Count the number of times a story on your issue appears in the media outlet you're studying.
2. Who are the sources used in the story? List their names and their positions.
3. Where did the story come from? For instance, was it from a wire service or a staff reporter?
4. Is the coverage factual or based on speculation or opinion?
5. Are negative terms used to described sources that might be considered alternative to the "official" sources? For instance, are environmental groups labeled as "radical" while government officials are labeled "official"?
6. How long are the stories that cover your issue?
7. Does the coverage reflect actual circumstances? For example, does a story on unemployment talk about businesses that move out of the country to take advantage of lower wages and fewer regulations?
8. Are the root causes of the problem explained?
9. Are there places where your issue is being covered better? If so, who are the sources and how are both sides represented?

Source: from Impress the Press, 1997, Media Alliance Latin America/Caribbean Basin Committee Handbook **www.media-alliance.org/voices/mexico/background.html.** Contact Rich Yurman at Media Alliance for more on this.

The Media Alliance website also has other resources; for example, how to follow up on your research, get coverage for it and contact the media.

Contact info:

The Media Alliance
942 Market St., Suite 503
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 546-6334 or (415) 546-6491
info@media-alliance.org
www.media-alliance.org

make informed decisions. Chicago TV licenses are up for renewal in 2005. Therefore, the campaign has launched a "License Challenge Project" that will show the FCC how the stations are failing the public, arguing that their licenses to broadcast should be examined.

For the report: **www.bettercampaigns.org/reports/display.php/ReportID = 7**

Contact info:

Alliance for Better Campaigns
1990 M Street NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
202 659-1300
alliance@bettercampaigns.org
www.freeairtime.org

B. What does the community want?

This is the most important part of your campaign's work. It is a good way of bringing people together to work on media, and it's a good way to develop a vision of the kind of media you want in your community. There are two main ways of doing this: first, conducting a survey or interviews with a broad sample of people from the community (in and out of community organizations); and second, finding out what kinds of "news" there is in the

THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING SOUND BITE

Average length of sound bite from presidential candidates on network newscasts, in seconds
(Center for Media and Public Affairs)

community. What are the important social, economic and political issues people are facing? Both are important and useful. The second method can be done fairly easily: it's your community and you may already be working on a campaign around a particular issue. To make sure you don't ignore important issues, also ask other organizations what their priorities are, and talk to people involved in education, health and social services in the area. Find out what kinds of organizing are going on and talk to people about how you could work together.

The first method, systematically finding out what people actually want their media to do, is more work because it involves education. Many of us, when asked, could name problems with our media, the kind of coverage our communities get or don't get, and the negativity or sameness of the many channels. Yet we don't necessarily know what positive role the media could play in our lives because we haven't come into contact with strong, community media. Different communities in your area probably read local papers written for and by them. But when it comes to network TV in particular, there is likely no programming that people in the community are involved in making, and which really speaks to and for them. So you might want to think back to what got you interested in the issues, and use this as a basis for some of your research questions. You also will want to share examples of work other communities have done in this area and the impact it has had on the lives of people in those communities.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. To whom are you going to talk?

How will you decide with whom to speak? How will you define the community you work with? If there are different linguistic/ethnic/class communities in your area, will you speak with people from each of them, or concentrate on one community? How will you make

Finding out what people think

Questionnaires are not easy to design well. They have to be precise and are not meant to "lead" people to the answers you want. But once they are written, anyone with a little training can use them. They aren't time consuming, so you can do lot of them. Record answers on a sheet of paper with the questions on it. Once you have collected all the information, it's relatively easy to analyze, as answers are all in the same format. One of the disadvantages is that it's hard to use questionnaires to really educate or organize people. Another problem is that people have to choose answers from a pre-set list, so you can't get complex information about people's opinions. They are good, though, for collecting "factual" information, like how many hours a week someone watched TV, and so on. Finally, you can speak to a lot of people and produce easy-to-understand results (in percentages) with them. If policy makers comprise one of your target audiences, questionnaires will be useful, because many policy makers favor this method.

Structured and unstructured interviews involve asking people more open-ended questions than in questionnaires, and so they are more interactive. In a **structured interview,** the interviewer would go through a pre-set list of questions with the interviewee. They would need to be more skilled than a questionnaire giver to get people to speak freely and encourage and guide them when they are hesitating. You can record what people say, either on paper or via audio/videotape. These last two options are more expensive. An **unstructured interview** is an open conversation around a set of themes. The interviewer might ask an initial question and then just listen and ask further questions as they come up. These kinds of interviews are more difficult to do because you have to be very alert to pick up on things the person says or doesn't. The advantage of all interviews is that you can get more in-depth information, in a more "natural" form: speaking. Interviews also can be more personal, and a way to build relationships and to educate. The disadvantage of interviews is that they are usually more time-consuming, and take more work to systematically analyze. But you will get good "material," powerful statements by people about what they think is wrong with the media, and what they would like to see.

Group interviews or focus groups can have more or less structure, depending on your preference. Their main advantage is to get ideas as they normally would be articulated in conversations between people. The main disadvantage is that they can be difficult to manage. You need a good facilitator who can make sure everyone has a chance to speak freely and be heard. Recording them also can be difficult, as there may be several people speaking at the same time. But a good group interview can produce rich data and can, in itself, be a way of organizing people. You could, for example, tie it to a workshop.

sure the "sample" is inclusive and representative of the community as you define it?

2. What kind of research will you do?

You will already have gathered comments from people about what they think, from everyday interactions and observation. The next step is developing a systematic approach to getting information from a larger group of people. How will you do this?

You can use a combination of these methods at the same time or, for example, you could start with questionnaires and then, in a second phase, get more detailed answers on what you have learned through interviews. At least part of the time, you will be talking to people you know. Take advantage of your personal relationships in the community, and try to make the interviews or questionnaires as "natural" as you can. The research doesn't need to be formal. You can ask people what they think at other gatherings in the community, or you can meet with friends at someone's house to talk about these issues. This is a way to energize people in the community, to let them know they do have a say in their media.

3. What are you going to ask people?

In section 4G, there are some interview questions you can use as a guide. They are designed to help people verbalize what is wrong with their media, rather than having the interviewer tell them. This is the best way to get people really thinking about the issues, and also of getting them angry or "agitated" enough to do something about the problem. Often, we may know that something is wrong, but not necessarily have the language to express the problem, or know the way to challenge it.

C. Inspecting public files

The questions in section 4G are designed to help people do this. Because the questions are phrased in order to get people to verbalize their views, some questions also can be used in organizing/recruiting conversations.

In exchange for using the public airwaves for free, TV stations are legally bound to follow public interest guidelines. These include laws relating to their content (for example, they are required to show at least three hours of children's programming a week), and to their record-keeping (they must maintain a "public file" at the station that lists the programs they broadcast), letters from the public, and so on. Many people do not know that these files exist or that they are, as the name suggests, public. The media don't advertise the fact, and often try to make it hard for people to access these documents. Nonetheless, members of your community have a right to inspect these files at any time they choose and without prior notification to the station (see "The right to investigate your media" box on the next page.)

Your research about what the community wants will tell you what people think should be on TV and what is not being covered. Looking at the station's records will help you confirm your findings. Even more important, because stations are legally bound to serve the public, with your different types of research, you will be able to make a very strong case for change at the station. All station licenses in a state also come up for renewal every eight years, and so if the timing is right, you would be able to use your research to argue that the stations' license should not be renewed, because they are not serving the public interest. This is a long and complicated process (see an example in section 4D). Whether or not a license challenge is part of your action plan, paying an unexpected visit to a station is an effective way of letting them know that you know your rights and intend to enforce them. Section 4 of this guide gives information on different types of action you can pursue, using the knowledge you get from looking at the public files.

Below is information taken from the website of "Our Media Voice: Campaign for Accountability." This site is a great resource and contains ideas for different actions you might pursue, as well as articles on the media, a questionnaire and sample letters you can write to newspapers, members of the U.S. Congress, and so on. The group "Our Media Voice" is working on televised citizen feedback forums across the country, in which members of the public will be able to express their views, concerns and interests.

The right to investigate your media

Source: Our Media Voice

In 1998, the FCC re-affirmed the rights of ordinary citizens to inspect the public files of broadcasters. The Commission went even further. It stated that it relies on public scrutiny of media companies to "monitor their performance." You should take a copy of this statement with you when you visit media companies. If they are uncooperative, show it to them and ask to proceed with your inspection.

INVESTIGATE YOUR MEDIA

Source: Our Media Voice

Instructions for inspecting the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reports on public file at your local television station

You do not need an appointment to visit your local TV station to inspect the public files. Go to the station during normal business hours, usually between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. (Note: Find out the station's business hours ahead of time. Your inspection process could take a half-hour or more so go well before the end of business to ensure that you can complete your investigation.) You do not have to explain why you are there or whom you represent. Of course, you should act professionally. Bring a copy of the FCC public notice outlining your right to inspect the FCC public file.

We advise that you go with at least one other person. Have one person do the talking while the other notes the details of your visit. In this way, you can verify what took place with a witness. Note how the station's personnel treated you and what level of difficulty was involved in inspecting the FCC public file. Ask to see the FCC quarterly reports in the public files. You may need to ask for the station's public affairs director, who will know what files the station is required to give you access to.

Each station is required to file quarterly reports to the FCC in Washington D.C., on programming they broadcast, their response to community inquires, and their activities. As you inspect the files please note if the files are current, legible, and in proper order.

The FCC gives broadcasters guidelines describing what they must report. Here is a list of what to look for while inspecting the FCC quarterly report in the station's public file:

- Review the weekly time amounts for children's programming. Look at the list of shows and times and evaluate whether they are cartoons or legitimate educational programs. Do the advertisements in children's programming violate the hourly rules?
- Review the list of issues the broadcasters think reflect the public interest. How many broadcasts dealt with youth, diverse communities, women, seniors, etc.? Were these broadcasts news/crime reports or educational information or an event announcement?
- How many community-based public service announcements (PSAs) did the station run that quarter? What times did those PSAs run?
- If the quarterly report is during an election period, look for the list of political advertisements. Which candidates got the most time and how much did the ads cost?
- Review the station's record of complaints and praise — both letters and e-mails. Which broadcasts got the most attention from the public, either positive or negative? Did the station respond to the complaints?
- The stations also may list ways in which they have been of service to their community; for example, by televising or co-sponsoring charitable events. Note who they sent to the event and what areas the station is (and is not) supporting in the community.

If you find that the TV station did not properly accommodate your visit, or does not keep orderly records in the public file, or that they are not in compliance with broadcast requirements, we advise you send a letter to the FCC:

Federal Communications Commission

Enforcement Division, Mass Media Bureau
445 12 Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

In addition to a copy of the FCC letter, it also is a good idea to send a copy of the FCC letter and a copy of your notes from inspecting the FCC quarterly report from your local television station's public file to Our Media Voice (see address on previous page).

Here are excerpts from the FCC's public notice:

Public Notice
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C.
Sept. 28, 1998
DA 98–1895

Availability of locally maintained records for inspection by members of the public

In light of our recent modifications to the main studio and public inspection file rules … we take this opportunity to reissue the statement the FCC made in 1971 regarding the availability of locally maintained records for inspection by members of the public … The availability of these materials is important given that, in recent years, the FCC has increasingly come to rely on the involvement and scrutiny by members of the public to monitor broadcast licensee performance … Thus a station may not require that a member of the public make an appointment in advance or return at another time to inspect the public file, or that members of the public examine the public file only at times most convenient to the licensee or its staff. We also remind all licensees, permittees and applications that while they may require personal identification (names and addresses) of members of the public visiting the station, public files records are to be provided to them on request and without requiring that they identify their organization.

Contact info:

Our Media Voice
P.O. Box 1333
Tiburon, CA 94920
Fax: 415 435-9598
info@ourmediavoice.com
www.ourmediavoice.org

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Doing your research will have many results. One of these is factual. You will have at your disposal solid facts that you can use to promote the project, pressure local government and the media, bring new groups in, get funding for your project, and so on. You can use the information you get to conduct interviews with members of the media in your area. You can ask them to explain the injustices that you found in your research and push them to make some improvements (see section 4A). Some of your interviews could be held before you visit the stations to look at their records, and others once you have looked at your research. Both will be useful.

In addition to producing facts, the research also will mobilize members of the community. Through their work on media, community members will feel empowered to create their own media and challenge existing media to serve their needs. At the policy level, the results of community-based research into media have been used by coalitions of organizations and public interest lawyers to argue for change in regulations. The chairman of the Federal Communications Commission has recently formed a task force that is conducting public hearings around the country over the next year to hear how local communities can be better served by their media (Source: FCC Chairman Powell launches a "Localism in Broadcasting" initiative, Aug. 20, 2003. **www.fcc.gov**). What does this mean? Does a transmitter located in the community mean the licensee is serving the community, even though all the programming is meant for anybody and is being distributed throughout the nation? With your research, you will be able to decide what this means in your community.

Your group can take many different types of action based on the research you have done about your community's needs. The kind of action that is most appropriate depends on what people in your community will be most excited about, what is feasible and what has the most impact. This section of the manual contains useful resources on different courses of action you can take. The strategies and actions covered below are:

- Getting better coverage of your issues
- Getting a show on television
- Getting media access in your community
- Interacting with local government: Influencing local cable franchise agreements
- Interacting with the FCC
- Planning tools
- Organizing/interview questions

A. Getting better coverage of your issues

Developing a media campaign

Below is an excerpt from the "Impress the Press" handbook.

> *Impress the Press,* 1997, Media Alliance Latin America/Caribbean Basin Committee Handbook. **www.media-alliance.org/voices/mexico/background.html.** Contact Rich Yurman at Media Alliance for more on this.

Contact info:

Media Alliance
942 Market St., Suite 503
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 546-6334 or (415) 546-6491
www.media-alliance.org
info@media-alliance.org

Meeting with the media

Once you've compiled a comprehensive study with facts and figures, you're ready to make a strong case.

- Get the names of editors at the media outlet you've studied and write a letter asking them for a meeting. Explain to them that you represent a group concerned with the coverage of your particular issue and that you would like to discuss the findings of your study with the appropriate editor, producer, or news director. Follow up with a phone call about a week later, and be persistent if necessary. Often, someone will get back to you and set up a meeting, which may include members from your group, a few people from the media organization, and perhaps representatives you bring in from the community who can speak on the issue and make your case stronger. The community representatives also can serve as ongoing sources for reporters. It is best to bring no more than four or five people to the meeting.
- Prior to the meeting, prepare an agenda or identify points for discussion. Be sure that everyone is familiar with the study, and develop a format for presenting the information. For instance, decide who will make opening remarks, who will ask which questions, who will present your ideas about improving coverage, who will give closing remarks, and so on.
- It also is important to be psychologically prepared. Some editors and news directors will be friendly and at least claim that they welcome comments and suggestions. Others, who are not used to being held accountable, may get defensive and question your study or put the blame on tight budgets. Don't be intimidated! Insist on being treated with courtesy and respect. Avoid making accusations, and never lose your temper …
- Requests that coverage feature expert sources and people who are affected by policy decisions rather than just the views of policy makers and other spokespeople. Request space for public service announcements and inquire about expressing your views on the opinion/editorial page or in an on-air commentary. You may not get all that you ask for, but rest assured that the pressure will be felt and may result in some improvements.
- Conclude your meeting with a specific request for better coverage, based on what you found in the study. Offer yourselves or the community representatives as sources, and provide a list of additional contacts. Recap any commitments the media representatives may have made and thank them for their time. Let them know that you'll continue to monitor the coverage. This is just the beginning. Get what you can and go back for more.

Short-term follow up

"The reward of a thing well done is to have done it."
Ralph Waldo Emerson

About a week after your meeting, send a letter to everyone who attended the meeting that summarizes the points and agreements made. As you continue to monitor media coverage, look for material that may be a positive response to your concerns, and express appreciation for improvements by thanking the media representatives who are responsible for them. They need to know that you are constantly monitoring the coverage. If they don't, you may lose your ability to influence them.

Long-term follow up

There are several ways to continue to press for better coverage, depending on what kind of response you get. If you've met with the media to express your concerns, and you haven't noticed any changes in the coverage:

Organize letters to the editor campaigns

Get people interested in your issue to write letters asking for more coverage of the issue. The letters might also respond to inaccuracies or biases that came through in any coverage that appears, reflecting the concerns expressed in the meeting. Try to include any important information that's been left out of a story.

Organize an informational media picket

The media feel the heat of an embarrassing situation. Take your protest to the streets around the media organization's building and hand out informational flyers that explain your case. Urge the public to write letters to the editor and boycott that particular media outlet until it covers the issues adequately and fairly. The organization will feel the threat, not only of public embarrassment, but also of reduced profits.

Editorial note: You should try to work with the media corporations as far as this is possible. If you are confrontational with them from the start, you are less likely to have their cooperation in getting the changes you want implemented. A picket line or a full-scale boycott are your "secret weapons," and you should use them sparingly and when they will be most effective (ie, not at the beginning of your campaign, but rather when you have failed through other means and have a lot of public support).

Write op-ed pieces

Writers or journalists who are familiar with your issue and willing to align themselves with your cause can write op-ed pieces for newspapers. They also can be used as sources of information for the media. These days, the media rely heavily on outside journalists for commentary and analysis. If the media uses mainstream journalists from the Washington Post or the Wall Street Journal, for instance, it's only fair that they balance the coverage by using sources from the alternative press.

Editorial note: Contact American Forum to get help having op-eds on your issues published. They are a national organization (most active in the South) that provides "professionally prepared and easily used materials to print, broadcast and new media outlets seeking commentary from a state point of view … the Forum gives prominent and authoritative proponents of progressive measures an audience in their own communities as well as greater access to the latest communications technology."

Media monitoring project checklist

1. **Choose one or more local media outlets to study.**
2. **Define a period of time** in which to conduct the study (four to six weeks is good).
3. **Determine the questions** that you will be asking as you conduct the study.
4. **Tally the results and form your conclusion.** Now you're ready to meet with media representatives.
5. **Decide who's going to the meeting and what they will say.** Determine who from your group will be going to the meeting. Get people from outside your group to attend the meeting as well. Include community leaders who can speak on the issue and act as sources. Make sure they're informed of the study and provided with a copy of your facts, figures, and conclusions. Decide who will discuss the study and who will answer questions about the issue.
6. **Prepare materials for the meeting.** Prepare your meeting as if you were giving a report. The media representatives will want something that's clear and concise. Make enough copies of the study to hand out to everyone at the meeting. Determine the points you want to cover at the meeting.
7. **At the meeting.** Lay out the results of your study, referring to specific facts, figures, and examples. Stay calm, and be ready to defend your position. Be sure to make all your points. Get the names of the reporters who are responsible for covering your issue if they are not at the meeting. Find out who to contact with story ideas and information. End the meeting with a recap of the points you made and determine the way in which the media representatives intend to respond to request for better coverage.
8. **After the meeting.** Send a letter to everyone who attended the meeting thanking them for their time and recapping the points and decisions that were made. If you notice an improvement in coverage, write a note of thanks. Let them know that you are still watching. Be a source of information by continually providing press releases and contacts to the reporters who cover your issue. If you don't see any changes, write letters to the editor, publish your study, conduct an informational picket, get ready to do a another study, and set up another meeting.

Contact for National Office

1071 National Press Bldg.
Washington, DC 20045
202-638-1431
Fax: 202-638-1434
forum@mediaforum.org

Provide ongoing documentation

Prove yourself a credible and up-to-date source of information by sending out press releases on new developments to media outlets. Call them immediately with breaking news and describe its impact. If the information hasn't been confirmed, encourage them to follow up, or provide them with sources who can give them answers.

Publish your study

Try to get local alternative publications or a competing media outlet to publish your study. This may further embarrass the organization you're attempting to influence. Avoid exaggerating or being accusatory. Just state the facts and figures and hope that you'll be respected for a solid study and a reasonable analysis.

Conclusions

Don't give up. After a year, begin the process again and note improvements, lapses in coverage, and other developments.

Think change

Think of the media as a tool for change. You can impress the press and impact decisions on what gets covered. If we don't make an effort, we will continue to live with misinformation, and media organizations will think they are doing fine job. Since the objective of a media monitoring project is to promote free and accurate coverage, we should be able to achieve our goals simply by holding the media accountable to the basic tenets of journalism.

Writing letters and op-eds

The following information is taken from FAIR's Media Activist Kit, available online at **www.fair.org/activism/activismkit.html**

Contact info:

FAIR
112 W. 27th Street
New York, NY 10001
212-633-6700
Fax: 212-727-7668
fair@fair.org
www.fair.org

How to write a letter to the editor

Letters that are intended for publication usually should be drafted carefully. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Make one point (or at most two) in your letter or fax. State the point clearly, ideally in the first sentence.
- Make your letter timely. If you are not addressing a specific article, editorial or letter that recently appeared in the paper you are writing to, then try to tie the issue you want to write about to a recent event.
- Familiarize yourself with the coverage and editorial position of the paper to which you are writing. Counter or support specific statements, address relevant facts that are ignored, but do avoid blanket attacks on the media in general or the newspaper in particular.
- Check the letter specifications of the newspaper to which you are writing. Length and format requirements vary from paper to paper. (Generally, roughly two short paragraphs are ideal.) You also must include your name, signature, address and phone number.
- Look at the letters that appear in your paper. Is a certain type of letter usually printed?
- Support your facts. If the topic you address is controversial, consider sending documentation along with your letter. But don't overload the editors with too much info.
- Keep your letter brief. Type it whenever possible.
- Find others to write letters when possible. This will show that other individuals in the community are concerned about the issue. If your letter doesn't get published, perhaps someone else's on the same topic will.
- Monitor the paper for your letter. If your letter has not appeared within a week or two, follow up with a call to the editorial department of the newspaper.
- Write to different sections of the paper when appropriate. Sometimes the issue you want to address is relevant to the lifestyle, book review or other section of the paper.
- An increasing number of broadcast news programs (60 Minutes, All Things Considered, etc.) also solicit and broadcast "letters to the editor." Don't forget these outlets.
- Sign your letters as an individual or representative of a community group, not as a member of FAIR.
- Send FAIR a copy of your letters (published and unpublished). Address them to the attention of the activist co-coordinator.

How to write an op-ed

Op-eds are longer than letters to the editor, and there is more competition for space. You may want to call the paper for length requirements (usually 600-800 words).

- Try to write on a controversial issue being covered at that time. If you can use a professional title that suggests authority, do so. If you work for an organization, get permission to sign the op-ed as a representative of that organization.
- Feel free to send it to papers far from where you live, but avoid sending it to two newspapers in the same "market." (For example, sending to the San Francisco Examiner and the Seattle Times is OK, but not to the Examiner and the San Francisco Chronicle.) "National" newspapers like The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Christian Science Monitor and USA Today generally do not accept op-eds that also are being offered to other papers. But you can easily submit the same piece to five or 10 local dailies in different regions — greatly increasing your chances of being published.
- Assure the op-ed editor in your cover letter that the piece has not been submitted to any other paper in their market. If, on the other hand, you sent it to only one paper, let that paper know you are offering them an exclusive.
- In writing op-eds, avoid excessive rhetoric. State the subject under controversy clearly. You are trying to persuade a middle-of-the-road readership. If you rely on facts not commonly found in mainstream media, cite your sources, hopefully as "respectable" as possible.
- Try to think of a catchy title. If you don't, the paper will be more likely to run its own — which may not emphasize your central message. (Even if you do write your own headline, don't be surprised if it appears under a different one.)
- Be prepared to shorten and re-submit your article as a letter to the editor in case it does not get accepted as an op-ed.

Creating your own public service announcements (PSAs)

Here are a couple of examples of 2002 PSAs from the Seattle-based Reclaim the Media coalition. Write your own and send them out to local radio stations. They will be most effective if they are focused on local issues and current stories and events. They also are a good way to announce events that you have organized.

Come to Seattle this September for a week of events celebrating community media. Many of the nation's most prominent media voices will be there, including Democracy Now host Amy Goodman, Alternative Radio's David Barsamian, as well as nationally known media watchdog organizations, community broadcasters from across the Northwest, bands, film screenings, street theater and more! Events culminate with an all-day teach-in and D-I-Y media fair at Town Hall on Friday, Sept 13, and, in Seattle's Freeway Park, a weekend-long program of music, media and protests against the most powerful corporate media lobbying organization, the National Association of Broadcasters. The full schedule runs from Sept. 10th through the 15th; see www.reclaimthemedia.org for details.

In recent years, campaign spending has spiraled out of control, making the nation's capitol a virtual millionaire's club. Even though it seems nobody disputes that we'd all be better off with limits on campaign spending, one group has dedicated itself wholeheartedly to beating down any and all campaign finance reform proposals. But it's not the politicians who are so threatened by spending limits — it's the big media companies who stand to lose millions if such limits are passed into law. Represented by their lobbying mouthpiece, the National Association of Broadcasters, big media owners have invested millions in their fight against campaign finance reform — small change compared to the hundreds of millions they rake in during each election season — even though most Americans agree that out-of-control campaign spending is harmful to our democracy. This September, the NAB will meet in Seattle, but they won't be alone — critics of corporate power will gather from across the country for the shadow conference Reclaim the Media: five days of discussion, education, protest, music and celebrating community media. The action takes place Sept. 10-15. Find details and a complete schedule on the web, at www.reclaimthemedia.org.

From Reclaim the Media:
www.reclaimthemedia.org

B. Getting a show on television

Here is more information from FAIR's Media Activist Toolkit on how to get your own shows, or programs that deal with the issues that you are working on, broadcast on television.

How to get a video on cable access

Airing a program on your local cable public access channel is one of the easiest ways to promote alternative programming in your community. Whether you air a video by a nonprofit organization or produce your own show, the unique aspect of the cable access medium is that you control the program content.

Why use cable access?

Public access stations make airtime available to the public for free. By having your local station air a program, you educate your community, build support for your cause and help spur people to action.

People watch cable

According to surveys, about 60 percent of the average community is reachable by cable. A survey by the National Clearinghouse for Community Cable Viewership found that 50 percent of cable subscribers had watched a program on a community access channel in the previous two weeks. And cable access viewers are more politically active: One survey found that 80 percent of access viewers had voted in a recent election, and were more likely to be involved in community issues and to volunteer time or money to causes they care about.

To find your local access channels, call your cable company. Not all cable systems allow public access; in fact, as cable monopolies become entrenched, they are increasingly trying to replace access channels with more profitable programming.

You must be a resident of the station's service area to air a program. You can create your own programming or air a pre-produced video, many of which are available from alternative TV organizations. Paper Tiger Television, for instance, has an entire library of programs that activists can air on cable access. You can contact them at 212-420-9045, or write to 339 Lafayette St., NY, NY 10012. Free Speech TV provides weekly progressive programming for cable access channels. Call 303-442-5693, or write to them at P.O. Box 6060, Boulder, CO 80306.

To air a pre-produced video, simply call your local public access channel and ask for program submission forms and guidelines on programs from outside sources. Contact the program director, access coordinator or station manager. Explain why the program is important and how it is of interest to the community. Outline your plans for publicizing the telecast, because the people who manage access channels are probably interested in the possibility of increased viewership.

To show a video produced by a nonprofit organization, you need consent from the producers. Make sure you have this approval, as well as a copy of the tape, well before the program is scheduled to be aired. The station may want to re-telecast the program on affiliated stations, so ask for permission for this as well.

Check the technical requirements of the station. What format of videotape do they require (e.g., Beta SP? VHS)? Note deadlines and what type of messages are prohibited. For instance, most channels will not allow programs to include any kind of fundraising pitch or message that could be construed as a commercial. Usually a program can include the name, address and phone number of the organization which produced the video or of a local contact. Some organizations even offer free organizing kits, prizes or other such gimmicks to increase their response rate. Producers often can add such a message at the end or cut out a fundraising pitch if they need to.

Publicize the program

List the program in mainstream and alternative newspapers, local TV or cable guides, and the cable bulletin board. See if you can get on a local radio show to discuss the program or call in to a local talk show on a related issue. If you have access to a mailing list of people interested in the issue, send them a postcard describing the program, mentioning the air date and time and encouraging viewers to call the station after the show to voice their appreciation. Remember: Begin weeks before the actual airing of the program, because TV guides and media outlets have their own deadlines to deal with.

Build participation

Arranging for group viewings of the program in people's homes or a community hall can demonstrate community interest to the station, build support for your local group and spur people to action.

Monitor the telecast

Make sure there are no problems. Have the station number handy and call immediately if something goes wrong. Make sure someone is at the contact number the night the program airs to answer questions from viewers, cultivate their interest and recruit some of them to your cause.

Get viewers to respond positively as soon as the program is aired. TV stations like to know they have made a good decision.

If you are interested in producing your own program: Again, call the cable company and ask for their guidelines. Often public access channels will allow you to use their equipment or facilities to produce a program —though you may have to take a low-cost production class first.

Target your audience

Identify your target audience and keep them in mind when asking for a timeslot, naming and promoting your program. Build your viewership by involving the community in producing, airing or appearing as guests on the program. Develop a local angle or hook the program to a highly visible news event. If your program goes over well and you are part of a local group, you might want to explore the possibility of producing an ongoing series.

Many cable television systems have a community bulletin board or text channel that you can use to announce upcoming events, projects, organizational needs, etc. Simply call the access coordinator and ask for the form to post a message. Then mail or drop off the form. Ask how many times the message will run per hour — obviously, the more the better.

For a more complete guide to strategic uses of cable access, including case studies, how to produce your own program or weekly series, etc., see "Cable Access: Community Channels and Productions for Non-Profits," from the Benton Foundation, 1720 Rhode Island Ave. NW, 4th Floor, Washington, DC 20036, or call 202-857-7829.

Note: Cable companies receive franchises from local government. In return, they often have to provide access channels. Companies are fighting to revoke their access requirements. Let your legislators know you want them to ensure that cable companies continue to provide public access channels.

How to hold a video house party

A good way to educate your community while raising money for your local media activist group is to organize house parties or community showings of relevant programs. These can be either video screenings or group viewings of a program that people in the community have gotten aired on the cable access channel.

House parties can get more local people involved in getting public interest and progressive programming aired in your community, committed to participating in specific campaigns or activated on a particular issue.

Have everyone sign a sign-up sheet as they arrive. Serve refreshments, and let people chat. After the film, allow time for people to voice their reactions to the film and discuss what to do about the issues. Group discussions serve to move people to action as well as make the evening more interesting and fun.

Pass out pens, paper and envelopes. If you have watched a program airing on cable access or PBS, ask people to write the channels to voice their appreciation of the program. Depending on the issue, you might have them write their legislators, a television network or a specific program. Collect the letters and mail them yourself. Make a pitch for funding your group and pass the hat.

You have involved members of the community both in the process of supporting independent media as well as taking action on a specific media issue. Congratulations!

C. Getting media access in your community

The Alliance for Community Media is a national organization that "advances democratic ideals by ensuring that people have access to electronic media and by promoting effective communication through community uses of media." Below is their guide on how to get cable access television in your community. The next section (4D) goes over this process in more detail. It is not specific to cable access television, but could be applied to all the current and future technology needs of a community.

Contact info:

Alliance for Community Media
666 11th Street NW, Suite 740
Washington DC, 20001
(202) 393-2650
Fax: 202-393-2653
acm@alliancecm.org
www.alliancecm.org

Introduction to media access

Building communities through electronic media

Throughout the country, over a million people — just like you — are using electronic media to build a sense of community in their neighborhoods. They've learned how to run TV cameras, set lights, edit videotape, and

produce top-notch television programming for their community! And all for little or no cost.

The funding for media access comes from your town or county, which receives "franchise fees" from cable television operators and other commercial telecommunications businesses. The payments are compensation for the use of public property. As you know, the streets of your town are public property, managed by your local government. The poles on the side of the road and the conduits below the ground also are managed by your local government. These "rights-of-way" and "pole attachments" are leased to cable television and other telecommunications companies.

Only 10 percent to 15 percent of the communities in the country have media access. Every community with cable TV receives franchise fees — but not every local government uses those funds for providing public, educational, or governmental (PEG) access services. Unfortunately, no federal law requires local governments to fund media access for their citizens — even though public property is used for private gain. (For more information, see the Alliance information on Laws Affecting Community Media.)

Local governments can provide — or prevent — media access. The decision for providing your community with media access rests with your local government's contract with your local cable company. All cable companies pressure local governments to give the cable companies total control over the cable channels and programming. Local government officials and staff members often give in to the cable companies, especially if they have not conducted a community needs assessment.

Here are the steps for gaining media access in your town:

1. Research cable television franchise agreement, ordinances, and compliance. First, go to your town or city hall and get a copy of the cable television franchise agreement. The critical information to look for is whether (1) the original franchise agreement included PEG access; (2) the terms or conditions for establishing PEG access; and (3) the expiration date of the current franchise agreement. You'll also need to find out if your local government has passed any ordinances dealing with cable television or telecommunications since the agreement was signed. Finally, you should research any reports on how well the cable television operator has complied with the terms of the agreement.

2. Get to know the people responsible for overseeing the cable TV company. You'll need to find out who is responsible for negotiating and overseeing the franchise agreement in your town. Usually it's a staff attorney under the direction of a cable television or telecommunications commission. Find out how citizens get appointed to the commission — and when the next seat opens up. You may want to get yourself on the commission — or support another candidate who is an advocate for community media.

3. Build a coalition of community organizations. Local neighborhood groups, civic organizations, schools, cultural communities, religious groups, and other nonprofit organizations have the most to gain from community media — and can be powerful allies. Contact the Alliance national office for partners with chapters in your town.

4. Encourage your local government to devote funds to community media. Use your coalition to encourage your local government to devote some or all of the franchise fees to community media and to force the cable television operator to provide one or more channels.

D. Interacting with local government: Influencing local cable franchise agreements

Local governments are directly responsible for raising taxes from cable companies, allowing them to use public "rights-of-way" (roads) and real estate, and negotiating cable franchise agreements with them. It is through cable franchise agreements that public access television was first established, and this is the channel through which communities across the country are seeking to get access in their communities. The resource below describes in detail how to influence this process. For the other resources mentioned in this guide, and for other action ideas/resources, go the Children's Partnership website.

Contact info:

The Children's Partnership
1351 3rd Street Promenade
Suite 206
Santa Monica, CA
90401-1321
310-260-1220
Fax: 310-260-1921

—OR—

*2000 P Street, NW,
Suite 330
Washington, DC 20036-6904
202-429-0033
Fax: 202-429-0974
frontdoor@childrenspartnership.org
www.techpolicybank.org/whatsnew.html

How community leaders can address local technology needs through the city cable franchise renewal

Suggested Steps:

Research and Preparation

- **Find out when the current cable franchise agreement is set to expire.** The renewal process can last anywhere from one to three years. Call the agency within city government that regulates the cable industry. It may be listed under Public Utilities or Information Technology. Knowing when the agreement expires can help with preparing for renewal negotiations.
- **Determine whether the process is formal, informal, or a franchise transfer/sale.** The process determines the climate in which the renewal will occur. Both cable companies and the franchise authority prefer to enter into an informal process because it is a more flexible process. Usually, under the informal process, the cable operator and the franchising authority will negotiate the terms of the agreement. After agreeing upon the franchise's terms, they will be submitted to the public for comment and feedback. After public feedback, the franchising authority votes to approve the franchise. In a formal process, the franchising authority must conduct a community needs assessment, which allows the public to comment on what support a community requires. The formal and informal processes can be used simultaneously.

  Although a cable franchise transfer or sale is different than a franchise renewal, it is mentioned briefly because of its relevance in many communities as the cable industry has been going through mergers, consolidations, and buy-outs, such as between AT&T and Comcast. Before a transaction of this kind becomes final, a review of the cable franchise often takes place, usually around the issue of whether the new cable operator can fulfill its fiduciary responsibility. Sometimes, however, the entire cable franchise can be renegotiated.
- **Determine community technology needs.** Regardless of whether an official community needs assessment takes place, conducting a needs assessment specifically for community technology strengthens the negotiating position. Surveys or discussions with community-based organizations, or the community at large, can be used to determine what a community wants or needs. The needs assessment should include not only current needs, but also future needs, such as broadband capacity for distance learning or equipment for multimedia production.
- **Develop a "wish list" of items to request from the cable operator and city.** (See "What Policymakers And Advocates Can Ask For" [on the Children's Partnership website] for examples.) Based upon the community needs assessment, you should be able to formulate a list of what the community technology needs are. The list should include present and future needs, as a cable agreement can last as long as 15 years.
- **Review cable-related documents.** Although this research may prove technical and time-consuming, this information can provide leverage during negotiations. Related documents include audits and past performance reviews of the cable operator. To find out where to obtain these documents, contact the city agency that regulates the cable industry. A repeated pattern of delinquent or poor service can add fuel to the requests made to the cable operator. If this type of analysis is outside community expertise, consider partnering with other interested parties who are more knowledgeable about cable-related needs.
- **Find out who is the Local Franchising Authority (LFA).** The LFA is the entity within city or county government or established by cooperating governments that oversees the cable franchise renewal, negotiates the cable franchise on behalf of the local government and community, develops the cable franchise language, and many times, approves the cable franchise. Begin with a call to the local government office that regulates cable and find out which entity and staff person will oversee the renewal. Also find out which entity will eventually approve the franchise.
- **Learn about the politics behind cable access and the political landscape.** The cable franchise renewal, as with any public interest effort, is highly political. The politics of cable negotiations cannot be fully covered within this document. However, know that groups with disparate interests will be vying for a highly sought-after revenue stream. The more different factions compete against one another, the greater the likelihood that some groups will gain at the expense of others. In addition, more established groups have greater visibility and clout. Moreover, especially in these tight fiscal times, local governments also may try to keep a larger portion of the fees generated from the cable franchise for their own programs. Many coalitions and close-to-final franchise agreements have broken down because of

internal fighting that leads to individual groups striking deals that benefit one party over another. Consequently, a considerable effort must be devoted to maintaining relationships and coalitions.

In addition to being aware of the aforementioned groups and political issues, be cognizant of how cable companies view franchise fees and resources for public access. First, they cut into profits. Second, they are perceived as having little return on investment. Third, they are paid for by cable subscribers, burdening cable subscribers with higher cable rates and serving as a disincentive to subscribe to cable. Finally, they place cable at a competitive disadvantage with competitors, such as satellite and DirecTV, who are not required to pay fees and are also encroaching on cable's market share. Understanding these views will help you be more prepared when dealing with cable companies.

Relationship building

- **Identify the parties who will be affected by the renewal.** These include the cable operator, public access channel providers, government channel operators, media advocacy and alternative media organizations/groups, schools, higher education institutions, nonprofit organizations, hospitals, libraries, and the city. After identifying those parties, determine who are the strongest allies for community technology, as well as who will need to be educated, and who will be the opposition. The first two groups are the ones to spend the most time with to develop a coalition that will support and advocate for community technology.
- **Find an "inside" ally.** This person is someone who can advocate for community technology on the inside. This could be a member of the LFA, a cable representative, or a member of the city council. Because of this person's responsibilities and access to information, he or she can provide considerable help in determining how to influence the process and shape the franchise. Moreover, this person can ensure that the needs of community technology are "front and center" during the negotiations.
- **Meet with the media.** Local newspaper or television station can be very influential in spreading community technology issues to a larger audience and helping to shape public opinion. When initially meeting with the media, the goal is to establish a relationship, and not necessarily to get a story published. Find out who covers community technology. It is feasible to contact the media directly, or monitor which reporters consistently cover topics related to community technology. Host a meeting with the media at a local community technology program. Be helpful with any follow-up.

Educating policy makers and the public

- **Make recommendations to the local franchise authority.** Community technology is an emerging field and very few outside this community understand its role and value. It is therefore especially important to find opportunities to educate the public and decision makers. During a formal process, by federal law, the franchise authority must conduct a needs assessment of the community and conduct public hearings. Find out when these hearings will occur, attend the hearings, and educate members of the committee. Share the list of what the community needs with regard to technology. In addition, talk about the services community technology programs provide to the community.
- **Inform the media.** The media can help increase the public's awareness of community technology. The more people who know about community technology, the more decision makers who will be supportive.
- **Invite key people to visit high-quality community technology programs.** These include city council members, members of the franchise authority, and the mayor. For many people who are not familiar with computers, community technology is an abstract idea. Actually seeing a community technology program in operation and providing opportunities for visitors to speak with users will clarify the concept and underscore the importance of community technology.
- **Create and show political strength and unity.** It is important that all the stakeholders work together and buy into a shared agenda. Stakeholders must be educated about community technology; assist in the planning, creation, and design of the campaign; and be part of the action team that can show up at a moment's notice when a public hearing on the cable franchise is called. The more groups and individuals that are a part of the effort, that show up during public hearings, and that speak as one voice, the bigger the impact will be.

E. Interacting with the FCC

A petition to deny renewal of a license

Below is an excerpt from a Petition brought by Rocky Mountain Media Watch against a television station. Reprinted below is the introduction. The authors detail the problems with the TV station, discuss them using evidence from their studies of the station, and list remedies to the problems they identify. For full text of this and other petitions by Rocky Mountain Media Watch, visit **www.bigmedia. org/texts2.html.**

Petition to Deny the Re-licensing of KWGN-TV

Before the Secretary of the Federal Communications Commission

Television Branch
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20554
Feb. 17, 1998

In the Matter of Re-licensing of Denver, ColoradoTelevision station KWGN-TV
Petition to deny

Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a Colorado not-for-profit corporation, files this Petition to Deny the re-licensing of Denver, Colo., television station KWGN-TV, Channel 2 on Feb. 17, 1998.

KWGN-TV is broadcasting daily local news programs that are harming the citizens of Colorado. We ask the FCC, pursuant to its legal charge to regulate broadcasting "in the public interest," to protect us.

This Petition will document that local newscasts on KWGN-TV are severely unbalanced, with excessive coverage of violent topics and trivial events, and, consequently, inadequate news coverage of a wide range of stories and vital social issues. In addition, newscasts present stereotypical and unfavorable depictions of women and minorities. The amount of advertising is excessive. Like any unbalanced diet, TV news can have serious health effects.

We believe the FCC has a clear responsibility to act to protect citizens from this unhealthy diet of information. FCC action is not a question of censorship; no one wants the government to regulate news content or interfere with broadcasters' First Amendment guarantees. The issue is beyond bad journalism, although a crisis is currently occurring in journalistic ethics and values, and industry leaders, like Walter Cronkite, Robert McNeill, Ted Turner and Dan Rather, are speaking out against the forces of tabloid journalism. This is a public health issue we call "toxic television news."

The evidence for these assertions comes from a series of content analyses of local newscasts conducted between 1994 to 1997 by Rocky Mountain Media Watch, a Colorado nonprofit activist organization. Listed as Attachments to this Petition, these studies include three one-week-long content analyses, three one-day national studies, which include KWGN-TV, and three national surveys leading up to the November 1996 elections.

Submitted by:
Paul Klite, Executive Director
Rocky Mountain Media Watch
P.O. Box 18858
Denver, CO 80218
Feb. 17, 1998
www.bigmedia.org

License renewal and expiration dates

For information from the FCC on public participation in the license renewal process, see their fact sheet available at **www.fcc.gov/localism/renew_process_handout.pdf.**

See also the Free Press fact sheet on license renewal: **www.mediareform.net/townmeetings/LicenseRenewFACT.pdf.**

To find out the radio and television license expiration dates in your state, go to the FCC's new Broadcast License Renewal Filing and Expiration Dates web page at **www.fcc.gov/localism/renewals.html.**

Filing comments with the FCC

Here are two examples of comments to the FCC. The first (p. 42) is a series of informal comments to the FCC regarding media ownership guidelines. The second (box on p. 43) is a formal comment. In the second example, a coalition of more than 45 organizations, led by the Minority Media and Telecommunications Council (MMTC), filed comments to support and suggest improvements to proposed Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) regulations for the telecommunications industry. Such comments — both in support of and in opposition to proposed and existing laws — are frequent, and are an important way of introducing public concerns into policy making at the federal level. The actual format and procedure for filing formal comments with the FCC is a complicated process, and one that requires legal expertise.

The general public can, however, file informal comments with the FCC at any time, as two million people did in 2003 (see below). These can be sent by mail or e-mail, and do not have to fit into a specific format. The public also can attend the FCC hearings that are being held in 2004 (six hearings in total) and give personal testimonies at these. Or they can organize a hearing in their city and invite one of the more sympathetic FCC Commissioners to attend. For more information on the 2004 hearings, go to the Free Press website: **www.mediareform.net/townmeetings.**

Legal battles

The press release on page 45 describes the legal actions of the Prometheus Radio Project and its partners in fighting further media deregulation in late 2003. There are many different organizations working on the media policy front, most of which can be found on the internet. To start with, visit:

Prometheus Radio Project: www.prometheusradio.org. Documents Prometheus' legal and radio station building work.

Media Access Project (MAP): www.mediaaccess.org. MAP has worked on most of the public interest cases before the FCC. Its website has a lot of information onthe history of the FCC and legal battles over media regulation.

The Free Press: www.mediareform.net. Has a lot of news and information about the law and currents actions, as well as fact sheets and fliers you can print out.

F. Planning tools

Goals

- What are the goals of the proposed action/campaign? How feasible are they? How long do you think they will take to achieve?
- What message(s) do you want to get across?
- Who are the intended audiences? How many people do you want to reach?
- What changes (in attitudes, behaviors, etc.) do you hope to achieve with the action/campaign?

Informal public comments filed with the FCC before the June 2003 vote on further deregulation.

Seattle, Wash.
I am very disappointed in today's new rules that give big media the chance to become even bigger monopolies. The FCC has failed its duty in preserving the public interest. In promoting its supposed goals of fair competition, diversity and local voice in today's media market, I strongly believe that the FCC should have retained all of the current media ownership rules now in question. These rules serve the public interest by limiting the market power of the huge, dominant companies and players in the broadcast industry. I do not believe that the studies commissioned by the FCC accurately demonstrate, or even attempt to demonstrate, the negative effects that media deregulation and consolidation have had on the diversity of our media. While there may indeed be more sources of media than ever before, the spectrum of views presented has been severely limited. The right to conduct an informed debate and discussion of current events is part of the founding philosophy of our nation. Our forefathers believed that democracy was renewed in the marketplace of diverse ideas. Now the FCC will allow our media outlets to merge and consolidate further; thereby, our ability to have an open, informed discussion from a wide variety of viewpoints will be compromised. Many have urged the FCC to preserve the public interest by keeping the media ownership rules in question intact, but the public's urges have fallen on deft ears. These rule changes will have a serious impact on our democracy.

Carpinteria, Calif.
I do not agree with the deregulation of broadcast media. I do not appreciate finding out about something so important at the last minute, leaving absolutely no room for public debate. As a voting American, I can assure you that this little scheme of yours will impact my decision in the upcoming elections. Events like this are what prove to me that "democracy" is a joke in your eyes.

Warrenville, Ill.
Reconsider your well meaning but unfortunate decision to loosen media ownership guidelines. The unsupervised "free market" has proven itself to be unprincipled and unconcerned about the public good. Witness Enron and ... the list in the last few years is long. There must be checks and balances in all aspects of life. Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. For God's sake, do not do this to our democracy.

Below is an excerpt of the "press advisory" that MMTC released, summarizing their case.

Summary — MMTC et al. comments in support of FCC EEO regulations

These Comments are filed by the largest and broadest coalition of nonprofit organizations ever to participate in an FCC rulemaking proceeding ... We speak today with one voice to endorse most of the proposals in this Second Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.

We have invested the effort required to submit a comprehensive set of proposals because of the importance, breadth, and subtleties of the issue before us. EEO demands no less care and thoroughness of analysis than health care, airline safety, immigration, water, air and food quality — and telephone and cable rates. Our goal is to illustrate:

1. why we need strong EEO enforcement now more than ever
2. how EEO rules can be crafted and enforced fairly, and
3. how the Commission can ultimately put an end to discrimination in the electronic mass media, and thereby eliminate any further need for regulation in this area.

EEO compliance is essentially the only public service the Commission requests of radio stations, and one of very few public services required of television stations, cable systems and other mass media outlets. In exchange, they receive the free and protected use of the valuable radio frequency spectrum. That is why it is essential that the Commission create new EEO regulations which the industry will respect.

The new regulations must not be perceived as so innocuous that no one could ever be sanctioned for violating them. Nor should the regulations be so hair-splitting as to produce illogical or unjust results.

Equal opportunity should be sacrosanct in the law of broadcasting and cable. The full inclusion of minorities and women in the mass media has been essential to cross-cultural consciousness, to the diversity and strength of our national culture, and to the vitality of our democracy. This inclusiveness has largely been made possible by FCC equal employment opportunity regulation. By seeking to curtail the tradition of exclusionary word-of-mouth recruitment that is so common in close-knit industries like broadcasting and cable, the Commission's civil rights policies can ensure that the mass media industries are held to the highest standards of enlightened business in providing equal opportunity.

Over the past 30 years, many broadcasters and cable operators, as well as the NCTA, came to recognize that diversity invigorates and strengthens their industries. Many wonder why they ever doubted the value of the EEO rules. The enthusiasm of so many enlightened businesspeople enables us to contemplate the elimination of discrimination and its present effects, root and branch, from the broadcasting and cable industries. But until all vestiges of a two-class system of employment are eliminated from broadcasting and cable, strong and comprehensive EEO enforcement, without qualification or equivocation, is an absolute necessity. Providing equal employment opportunity, and taking aggressive steps to remedy the consequences of decades of unequal opportunity, should be considered an honor for all broadcasters and cable operators. It is nominal consideration for their free use of spectrum.

The new EEO regulations are a nondiscrimination-promoting and discrimination-avoidance program. They disallow the use of race and gender in hiring decisions while ensuring that all qualified persons, including minorities and women, can learn of job openings. They contain carefully crafted, race- and gender-neutral procedures which will prevent both intentional and unintentional discrimination …

The Commission's role in EEO enforcement is justified to prevent discrimination, remedy past discrimination, promote competition, and promote diversity of viewpoints within stations and among stations. The proposed rules would help ensure that all Americans have access to the instruments of mass communications — the most powerful force for democracy in the nation. In this way, the proposed rules can help ensure that the public has available the widest possible range of ideas and expression.

Prometheus lawsuit stays implementation of new ownership rules

Wave of consolidation held back by Federal Appeals Court

Sept. 4, 2003

Organizers at the Prometheus Radio Project met news of a stay on the Federal Communications Commissions push to deregulate media ownership with enthusiasm yesterday, Sept.3. These new FCC rule changes, changes that would dramatically alter the American media landscape, were blocked from being implemented by the Third Circuit Federal Court of Appeals, in Philadelphia. The Prometheus Radio Project brought the motion to stay the rules on behalf of their constituents, the many thousands of Americans fighting to build low power, independent radio stations. Prometheus also works in coalition with many consumer rights, media justice, and public access groups, all of whom have fought actively to repeal the new rules.

"These new rules, if implemented, would allow media corporations to consolidate control over more outlets than ever before, especially for lower income people who can't afford satellite cable and the internet," said Prometheus Technical Director Pete Tridish. "Americans are concerned about giant corporations having too much power over the media. If ever there was a special interest, it's the giant media corporations. They manage America's perceptions of their activities using the very airwaves they control. These are the wrong sorts of groups to give so much power over what Americans see and hear about their world. This decision to stay the rules will give Americans a chance to convince the powers that be that the consolidation that has already happened in radio should not happen in other media."

The Prometheus Radio Project is an activist organization that fights for more democratic ownership and regulation of media. Prometheus advocates for community organizations that want to start radio stations, and has helped build the first radio stations owned by civil rights and environmental organizations in the United States. Most recently, Prometheus helped the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to set up Radio Consciencia.

Resources

- What resources are you going to need to make the action/campaign successful?
- What materials will you need to produce (flyers, leaflets, invitations, etc.)?
- How much will it cost? Where will you get the money from?
- Which people will you need to be involved?

Logistics

- If it's an event, where is the best place to hold it? Can you secure use of the location?
- Which people will be in charge of the various aspects of the action/campaign? Who will coordinate?
- How will you communicate with each other about progress in the different areas?

Publicity

- How are you going to let your target audiences know about the action/campaign?
- What methods of distribution do you have available, and what others do you need to create?
- What about media? How will you get and sustain coverage of your action/campaign? In what outlets?

Time frame

- What is the time frame for the action/campaign? Will it be an ongoing process, a one-time event, or one you repeat several times?
- What is the time frame for the individual components of the action/campaign and how do they fit together?
- How are you going to ensure that you stay on schedule?

Follow Up

- How will you follow up on the event/campaign?
- How will you keep the momentum going to create lasting change in the community, at the TV station or the policy level?

G. Sample interview/ organizing questions

Use these questions as a starting point for making a guide that is really relevant in your area. When you talk with people, focus on issues that are current and important in the community. Illustrate your questions or points with examples that people will know. When you are organiz-

ing, try to get people to make the connection between problems in the community and lack of media attention, or where it's the case, media antagonism to dealing with these issues. On a more positive note, show the people you are speaking with how media can be used as positively to help solve local problems. Share with them examples of successful organizing efforts.

These questions deal mainly with television, though you can adapt them to other media.

TV viewing

How many TVs do you have in your house? How often do you watch TV? What about different family members: Do they have different viewing habits? How often are you actually watching and how often is it just on in the background? Are there times when you all watch TV together? Any particular shows? What are the shows you watch regularly? What are your favorite programs? What do you like about them? Are there any programs you don't like? Why don't you like them?

How many stations do you get? Do you have cable? Which provider? What about your friends? Do most of them have cable? How much do you pay for your subscription? What do you think about the price? Has it stayed the same or gone up (or down)?

What role would you say TV plays in your life? What do you use it for (e.g., relaxation, information, babysitting, etc.)?

Media available in the community

What are the different media you have access to where you live (papers, TV, cable, internet, etc.)? Which ones do you use and why? If you could change anything about them, what would you change?

What's on the local TV stations? What kinds of programs do they show (for example: soaps, news, talk shows, children's programs, commercials)? What languages are the broadcasts in? How many stations are there? Are there any public access stations? Do you watch them? What makes the stations different from each other in terms of programming? Do some seem aimed at particular audiences or markets? Are there things you particularly like or dislike about any of the programs or stations?

Questions on TV and the news

When you watch TV, who is speaking? What kinds of people? Have you ever been on TV, or seen someone you know on TV? In what context was it? Are the people on TV, in the local news for example, people you might meet in your neighborhood? Why are they not like your friends and co-workers and families? What values does TV represent or promote? Are these the values of people in your communities? What experiences and opinions do they show? Do these reflect the community?

What about local or national news? Do you watch it? Who are the anchors? What backgrounds would you say they come from? What are the subjects that the news usually deals with? How many commercial breaks are there? What do they sell during them? Who's in the commercials? What kind of lifestyle are they promoting?

When the news covers an issue or a person, what kind of tone does the coverage take? Does the tone change depending on the subject or the person? Do they ever seem to discredit or attack a person or a viewpoint? Which ideas or people? Who gets on the news? What race, gender and class are the "experts" who get interviewed for their opinions about issues? And who are the "ordinary" people who get interviewed? Who doesn't get on the news? What issues don't get coverage, or only rarely?

Questions about TV and the community

Who lives in our community? Is it a uniform place, or are there people from different parts of the world? What languages do you hear on the street in the neighborhood, in local businesses and schools? Are people from similar class backgrounds, or are there differences in terms of how much money people make, the types of schools their kids go to? What are the issues people are talking about in the community? What are the long-standing or recent problems that people are dealing with? What are some of the community's achievements in relation to these problems? What are some of the obstacles to improving things? What are people talking about on the local news? Do they deal with these issues? Do they highlight people's achievements in the community? Do they talk about the real obstacles to improving things?

What is the link between what you see on TV and the neighborhood, or even the country as a whole? What makes local TV local, apart from the weather, traffic and local crime coverage? Do you think TV in this area is different from programming in other places? In what way?

What the does the community want?

Do you ever read a local paper written by members of the community? (If yes) Why do you read it? What do you enjoy about it? Do you watch local public access programming? Have you ever made a program, shown it on TV, talked about it in the community? (If yes) What do you like about it? Did it have any effect in the community? (If no to these questions) Why not? What's stopping you? What would you do if you did have access to making programs or printing a community paper? Do you think people in the community would have interest in a community paper or program? What would be in it? Who would watch or read it? What would they want to see in the paper/on the TV? What impact do you think it would have on the community?

NOTES

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