

MEDIADEMOCRACYFUND

MEDIA AS A PUBLIC SERVICE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

PROTECTING VIEWPOINTS MEANS PROTECTING DEMOCRACY

Defending journalism for the public good

Esperanza Peace and Justice Center in San Antonio, TX, produces an annual International Woman's Day march. In 2009, the city instituted a \$5,000 fee to cover police and cleanup fees for marches, placing a substantial financial burden on organizations that wish to demonstrate for their causes. The San Antonio Free Speech Coalition (SAFSC) is suing to reverse the ordinance, but local media coverage regarding informing the public about this barrier to First Amendment rights remains scant.

According to Graciela Sanchez, director of the Esperanza Center, The *San Antonio Express-News* interviewed the group's attorney on the case, but the story went unreported without explanation.

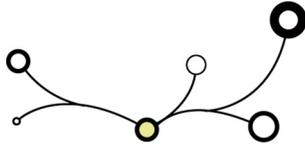
SHRINKING CHOICES & NEWSROOMS = SHRINKING ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Graciela's story is one example of the many challenges that community advocates face when they need to get the word out on vital issues. Shrinking newsrooms means the amount of local coverage and investigative pieces on vital local topics decreases. In the case of San Antonio, a deregulated media environment reduces the diversity of perspectives provided to the public and minimizes the public service role of the media. The city's only daily, the *Express-News*, suffered a cut of 75 staffers across all news departments early in 2009. In local broadcasting, the San Antonio-based broadcasting company, Clear Channel Communications, cut 1,850 jobs nationally, with plans to replace locally produced content with more syndicated content. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism, by the end of 2009, the total job loss in the field of journalism since the beginning of 2001 will likely pass 14,000 nationally – roughly 25% of the industry's news workforce lost in nine years. All of these factors lead to less access to information on local issues.

Additionally, according to the National Hispanic Media Coalition, Spanish-language media in Central Texas provides very little diversity in source, content, or exposure, leaving Spanish-speaking citizens seeking local news and public affairs programming with few options. In San Antonio, Cox, Clear Channel and Univision are owners of all the top ten stations.

NEW MODELS FOR A NEW AGE

Journalists, advocates, and funders are beginning to think together to examine viable new models and solutions that take into a new economic and technological paradigm in the Internet age. An example of this model is the independent, non-profit *ProPublica* — a newsroom dedicated to investigative journalism in the public interest. The Manhattan-based organization is led by distinguished editors and boasts an annual budget of \$10 million with a staff of 28 reporters. The Knight Foundation and others are funding a number of other promising projects that could serve as models for a new journalism. Additionally, the Media Consortium, a network of the country's leading independent journalism organizations working together to reinvent the independent media sphere, is conducting several lower-cost ventures that leverage collaboration to create the news room of the 21st century.



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WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

We are at a critical point in the upheaval of journalism. Critical issues are going unreported, quality journalism is being abandoned, and local content is being eliminated. Restoring the public interest mandate to journalism via all media formats will require critical policy decisions by the FCC and Congress. It will also require public and private interests to innovate so that alternative commercial and noncommercial models can succeed.

How do we ensure journalistic integrity and in-depth coverage of critical local, national, and international issues? How can we ensure information is available for vulnerable communities? How do we preserve what is still working in journalism and discard systemic flaws? Are there specific tax and public funding programs that could create a more robust public media? How do we increase access to the Internet and maintain freedom of speech online as the traditional media system transforms in the digital age? In recognizing the need to protect access to information, diversity in opinion and voices, funders must look at the policies needed to support the vital role of media and journalism in democracy.

ACTIONS YOU CAN TAKE NOW

- Work with Media Democracy Fund to conduct a review of your grants to learn which media policies may have an impact on their effectiveness
- Convene and educate grantees about the policy debates that will affect journalism and local news
- Join funder education and media affinity groups such as GFEM (a.k.a., Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media) that offer informative conference calls and events
- Consider participating in the Media Democracy Fund's collaborative grant making strategies
- Engage with other grant makers working on journalism and public media
- Contact MDF for assistance in planning or for customized counsel about integrating media consolidation issues and preserving diverse and local media voices into your grant making strategies

ABOUT MEDIA DEMOCRACY FUND (MDF)

The Media Democracy Fund (MDF) is a funder collaborative that serves as a catalyst for a media environment that empowers all people and enhances democratic values. The Fund makes strategic grants to organizations working on media policy issues such as digital inclusion, a free and open Internet, media consolidation, diversity in media ownership, and copyright issues. The Fund also provides grant makers from all programmatic areas with the tools and expertise to leverage the media policy issues that affect everyone's ability to learn and grow, operate businesses, participate in democracy, obtain healthcare information, and be creative.