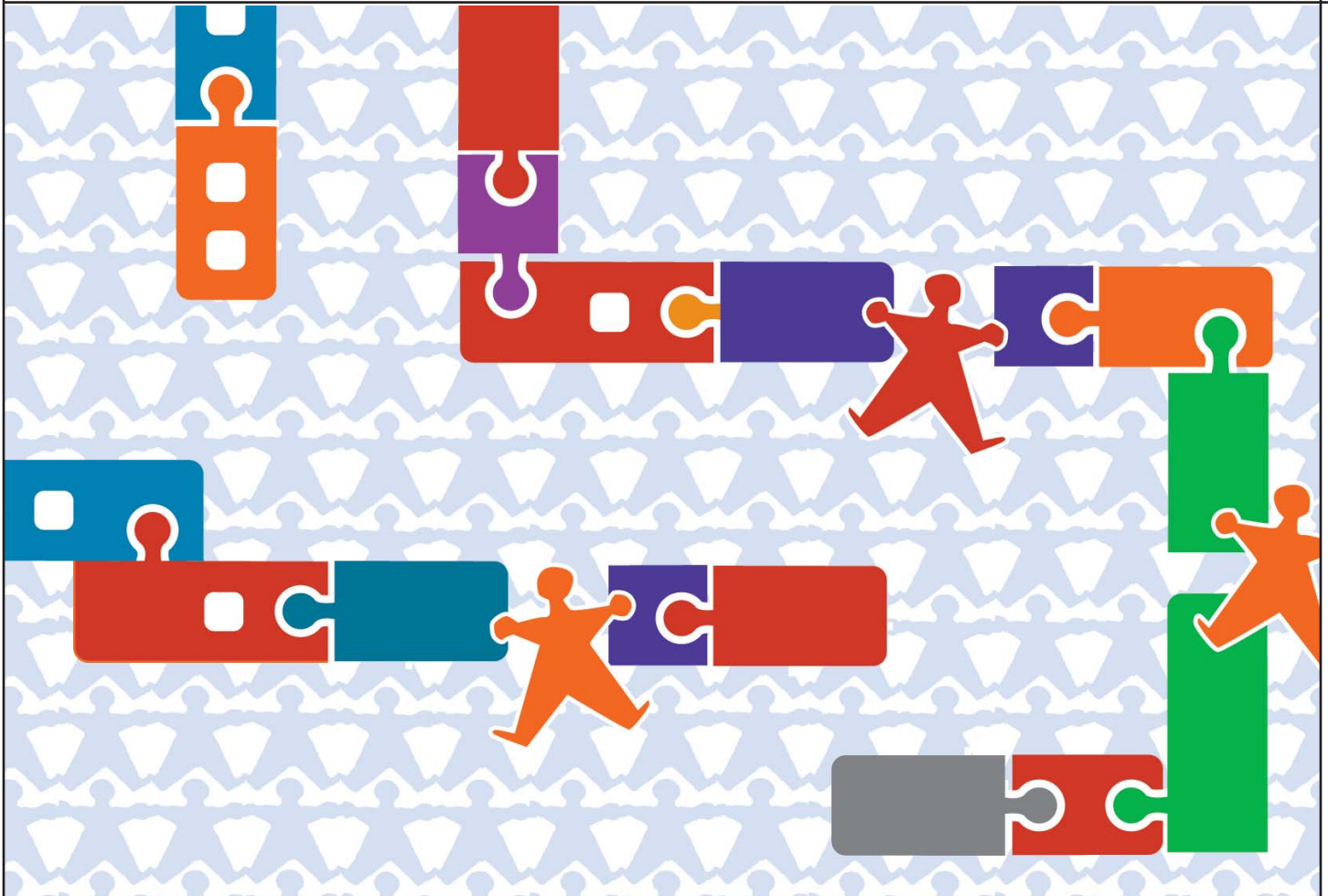


# Mobilizing our resources:

How nationally focused media policy groups  
can help organizers build the base



**A summary report featuring perspectives and suggestions  
from media policy advocacy groups across the United States.**

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# Mobilizing our resources



Most people have complaints about the media. Many of them agree that the system is broken and undermining the very things they care about. How can advocacy groups help channel that frustrated energy into strategic action to change policy, hold corporations accountable and build alternative media?

Media policy advocates often talk about the need to get the public involved, engage community groups, activate constituencies on these issues. One key strategy for doing this is to meet the needs of community organizers and membership associations who are already working within constituencies. Organizers and associations want the expertise, information, access and collaboration that policy groups can provide, if it can be provided in ways that strengthen on-the-ground work.

This report offers some specific ideas for how this mutual support can happen. It compiles thoughts and recommendations from the leaders of eighteen local and national organizations across the U.S. (please see list at end). We are grateful to all the individuals who took time to share their insights with us. We acknowledge this brief summary by no means reflects the full depth and range of their perspectives and ideas.

As a report reviewer reminded us, it is important to recognize that information-sharing and coordination of efforts require significant commitments of time and resources from all partners - and that both "D.C. advocate" and "local activist" organizations may require additional help and training to communicate better. All groups can make better communication and coordination with others an organizational priority, but additional funder support is needed to ensure that it can actually happen.

Our primary recommendation for media policy lobbyists, researchers and funders who are seeking to engage the public is to start by building principled alliances with groups representing the people you want to reach, and by listening to them about their specific needs, goals and strategies. We also find it valuable to regularly check in with groups we are working with to make sure that the support we think we are providing is being received in helpful ways.

Many of the interviews that informed this document were conducted as part of a project for Consumers Union, a national advocacy organization seeking to learn how they can better support community organizing through their work on media and telecom policy. CIMA contributed to Consumers Union's new web site, HearUsNow.org, and provided recommendations similar to those outlined here. We believe Consumers Union's effort is an important step forward in addressing the gap between D.C. policy groups and local organizers.





## Mobilizing our resources

CIMA: Center for International Media Action has produced this document, and our collaborations with national and local organizations, as part of our ongoing work to support strategic connections among groups working to change media policy and practice. Future editions of this report may include brief case studies, please contact us with any suggestions.

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# I. Organizers Need Access to Hard Facts and Statistics



Many public-interest advocacy groups are already doing some polling, policy-impact research and industry tracking for their own campaigns. Making this information accessible and relevant to other organizers can help them build strategies and get the attention of press, community groups and local policymakers.

In general, organizers recommend that research is most valuable when it:

- ✓ *prioritizes information that can be pegged to specific action (for example, research related to the timing, locations and corporations involved in specific localism hearings, license & cable franchise renewals, FCC rulemakings)*
- ✓ *is relevant to specific constituencies (for example, several local activists noted CWA's poll on how media ownership affects workers was very helpful for organizing against media concentration; Latino groups have asked for more research on disparate impacts and discriminatory practices within media industries and policies)*
- ✓ *uses clear scientific and/or journalistic methods and a national reputation to establish credibility and authority*

## Organizers Want Useful Data, Information and Real-Life Stories:

- statistics on the impact of specific bad (or good) policies
- examples of how lives are affected by specific policies; impacts on individuals, families
- data focusing on a specific geographical area (for example, the Center for Public Representation supported California-based campaigns by providing research on the local impact of media consolidation)
- data/examples of corporate media misconduct, such as labor violations, consumer abuse, discriminatory pricing, fraud, etc
- research/data on the value of community media, public networks and noncommercial media
- collected stories about the impact of consolidation, deregulation, etc (more than just Minot, ND)

## Needed Monitoring and Tracking Projects (a wish-list from organizers):

- monitoring/tracking license transfer applications at the FCC
- following FCC investigations of corporations, including who has been fined for infractions
- compiling current industry statistics and figures complete with sources and diagrams
- pulling together news on specific major player corporations (e.g. Clear Channel, Comcast, Verizon, Fox, etc)
- collecting and disseminating activism stories and model policies from a range of local groups
- exposing industry controlled/funded front groups operating as public interest groups; helping advocates and consumers figure out who is sponsoring certain advocacy efforts by listing all groups and their primary bases of support





## II. Federal Policy Advocates Can Provide Inside-the-Beltway News & Analysis

Organizations that are expert at watching national media policy and working "on the Hill" need to find better ways of sharing tactical and strategic information with allies around the country.

Possible methods for sharing insider knowledge with allies include:

- ✓ *clear, concise and timely updates sent to focused email lists*
- ✓ *regular newsletters or a website (could be password-protected) designed for advocacy allies*
- ✓ *conference calls, in-person meetings, workshops at conferences (note that calls need to be toll-free and meeting travel funded for some to be able to participate)*

**What Organizers Want To Know (some examples):**

- regular updates on what's moving at national and state policy levels, what's upcoming
- corporate broadcaster lobbyists: who are they and how do they work?
- who is easy to work with on the Hill and at regulatory agencies, who are potential allies
- what tactics have been successful vis-à-vis congress and the FCC
- lobbying tactics: what's effective, who are we up against, specifically?
- heads up on developments before they reach the press (to plan local media responses)
- analysis, synthesis, commentary about what is going on and what it means

**Information Wanted About Congressional and FCC Hearings:**

- advance notification of upcoming hearings (to watch on C-SPAN or online)
- concise summary reports on the testimony which:
  - bullet point the main points mentioned by speakers & questioners
  - highlight any specific data mentioned (and annotate)
  - list points, claims and promises by the other side including industry, the FCC, legislators
- "the analysis that you can't get from reading the testimony, who is kissing up to whom, who seems too cozy, the stuff that is between the lines"



## III. Training and Research Tools Needed on the Ground



Grassroots activists can help build national campaigns by monitoring local media content and companies, especially if the methods can be standardized and shared with others around the country. At the same time, national policy groups can play a key role in strengthening local advocacy by providing groups with the tools they need to conduct their own campaigns. National organizations and funders can help identify existing "best practices" and successful models for action research and local campaigns and then work with experienced grassroots organizers to develop tools that others can use.

### Tools and Training Needed for Local Action Research:

- how to do media content monitoring: step-by-step process, techniques, forms to use
- how to assess quality of a company's service in the community, places and methods to gather data and evidence for arguments
- how to investigate and document the impact & value of community/local media

### Specific Resources Needed for Effective Local Campaigns

- Campaign models and step-by-step guides
  - how to get a resolution passed (e.g. in city council)
  - license challenges: resources for filing. Ways to get people involved, while preventing them from wasting their time and unintentionally making bad law
  - overviews of specific regulations relevant to local media, how to measure corporate compliance and how to seek enforcement
  - information on broadcasters' public files and how, why and when to use them
- advice, personnel support and financial help for conducting state-level policy monitoring and advocacy
- shared press lists, a database or directory of media contacts that allies can share
- tips for talking with press and presenting data to policymakers





## IV. How to Engage the Public By Promoting Local Efforts

Even groups with huge national subscriber lists recognize the power of people joining with like-minded others in their own community. We know that strong movements are built through people meeting together, working together and taking local action. From grassroots constituent pressure on Congress members to supporting independent local media, enabling people to act where they live is a key strategy for making change.

When public-interest lobbyists, lawyers and spokespeople give more visibility to the work happening locally and show that policy advocacy is backed up by real community-based fieldwork, they help bring coherence that work, strengthening the movement from the base.

### Ways that national organizations can drive support to local work

- take all opportunities to call attention to local efforts and groups around the country in your newsletters, publications and websites, when talking to the press and at events
- guide your members/readers to groups in their town; one successful method used by MoveOn was to use zip-code sorting to send alerts from their local allies to a subset of their member list
- direct people to current and upcoming local advocacy opportunities such as license renewals, cable franchise negotiations, FCC field hearings
- online and in printed materials, provide people with tools and links to help them take action in their own communities
- call funder attention to local efforts; promote local media-policy groups to regional funders; help groups "make the case" to community-based funders by testifying to the importance of the work





## V. Strategic Collaborations with Constituency-Based Groups

When a national organization wants to reach out to a specific community or audience, strategic alliances with groups reflecting that constituency are essential. This can be tricky, as groups may have very different ways of working.

Suggestions for principled, effective collaborations include:

- ✓ *first learn what each potential partner has already been doing on the issue or campaign, as action may take very different forms and strategies*
- ✓ *support the leadership of community-based groups in organizing events and campaigns, enabling them to leverage their local expertise, strategies and relationships*
- ✓ *recognize that some allies may not want to enter into particular coalitions, such as with the political opposition or industry groups*
- ✓ *as principal stakeholders in a given policy decision or for a particular media outlet, community members (or, say, groups representing workers or independent filmmakers) need the opportunity to set their terms of the debate and frame the issues*

### **Ideas for collaborations between national groups and local or constituency-based groups**

- **work together to develop talking points that reflect both the national policy strategy and the issues and interests of folks on the ground**
- **collaboratively produce materials in appropriate formats that fit the audience (eg: posters, printable fact sheets, graphics, cartoons, additional languages beyond English)**
- **generate research and materials focused on specific constituencies/audiences (e.g. information specifically relevant for Spanish-speakers, young people, rural communities, independent artists, for communities of color, women, seniors, LGBT groups, etc)**
- **prepare campaigns around specific opportunities such as upcoming license or franchise renewals or transfers, FCC and city hearings, industry and policymaker events**
- **develop campaigns that feature current, highly strategic ways to have an impact that people can experience in their communities**
- **conduct local media-monitoring projects engaging people and groups in the community**
- **develop workshop tools and curricula for specific constituencies**





## Additional Resources

For specific recommendations on building effective, strategic and principled collaborations see:

**Strengths, Challenges and Collaboration: advocacy groups organizing together on media ownership and beyond**

*Published by the OMG Center for Collaborative Learning and CIMA: Center for International Media Action (2004). Available online or as a printed report.*

<http://www.mediaactioncenter.org/strengths-challenges.pdf>

For examples of a guide developed by a national group to serve local organizers, see:

**The Media Empowerment Organizing Manual: a guide to understanding media power and organizing for media justice in your community.**

*Published by the Media Empowerment Project (2004) Available online or in printed handbook.*

<http://www.mediaempowerment.org/>



# Participating Organizations



- Action Coalition for Media Education (ACME)
- Brennan Center for Justice/Free Expression Policy Project (FEPP)
- Community Technology Centers Network (CTCNet)
- Communication Workers of America (CWA)
- Esperanza Peace and Justice Center
- Free Press
- IP Justice
- Latino Issues Forum
- Media Access Project
- Media Alliance
- Media Empowerment Project, Office of Communication, United Church of Christ
- Media Rights
- Media Tank
- Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)
- Native Networking Policy Center
- New America Foundation
- Prometheus Radio Project
- Reclaim the Media

**We thank the many individuals from these organizations who offered their time, insights and thoughtful recommendations.**

