

The Role of Grassroots Organizers in Challenging Media Consolidation in the U.S.

*A summary report on the second in a three-part series
of funder briefings entitled DEMOCRACY AT STAKE?
CURRENT ISSUES IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA POLICY
AND THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE*

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About This Report

How do public policies shape the form and content of our media? How does media consolidation influence what we see, hear, and read? How do copyright laws limit access to information? How should public resources like the radio frequency spectrum—better known as the airwaves—be allocated to ensure the constitutional right to free speech?

These were some of the issues at the heart of Democracy at Stake?—Current Issues in Electronic Media Policy and the Future of the Public Sphere, a three-part series of funder briefings organized by Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media’s Working Group on Electronic Media Policy in partnership with a diverse array of grantmaker affinity groups to introduce colleagues in the foundation community to the dynamic and cutting edge field of electronic media policy. The series, which took place in winter 2005 at the Ford Foundation, brought together media reform groups, activists, researchers, and leading policy thinkers, spotlighting media reform and media justice work around three pivotal policy issues:

- **“Securing Our Rights to Public Knowledge, Creativity and Freedom of Expression” (January 7, 2005)** examined how copyright and technology policy is impeding the free flow of information, artistic creativity and innovation, highlighting interventions by media policy advocacy groups to protect the public domain.
- **“The Role of Grassroots Organizing in Challenging Media Consolidation” (February 25, 2005)** presented a compelling and cohesive picture of media policy activism and grassroots organizing. Panelists discussed the decisive role media activists and organizers have played in recent policy victories and outlined the challenges they now face in their effort to uphold the public interest in upcoming policy battles.
- **“The Future of the Public Airwaves as a Common Asset and a Public Good: Implications for the Future of Broadcasting and Community Development in the U.S.” (March 11, 2005)** focused on the transition to digital broadcasting and the role that advocacy groups are playing in securing the public interest in the digital age. It also showcased innovative uses of radio spectrum (“the airwaves”) such as wireless technologies, low power FM radio, and other community-driven programming that is bringing connectivity to rural and disadvantaged

communities.

These are hotly contested public policy issues, and the ways in which they are resolved in the coming years will have profound implications for democracy. The following report summarizes the proceedings from the February 25th briefing on policy activism and grassroots organizing. It is the second of three reports from the series. By documenting the debate around the vital issues raised at these funder briefings, the reports aim to advance learning among grantmaker colleagues and spur further support the important policy work that is occurring in this field.

Introduction

For most of the twentieth century, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the agency that regulates electronic media and telecommunications, had taken a judicious approach to media concentration, limiting the number of media properties—radio and television stations, newspapers, cable networks—any single company or conglomerate could own. The FCC was the product of the New Deal, and the rules reflected that era's commitment to both democratic principles and market capitalism. A free press works in the service of democracy only to the extent that it ensures access to the widest possible number of viewpoints and contributes to a robust public debate. And media ownership rules were intended to ensure the free flow of information and opinion.

Over the past thirty years, however, the FCC has taken a more *laissez faire* approach to media regulation. Beginning in 1981, the agency lifted caps on television ownership, allowing a single company to own up to twelve stations as long as they reached no more than twenty-five percent of the nation's population. This move inaugurated a twenty-five year trend towards media deregulation. Since then, critics argue, the FCC has moved steadily away from the public interest principles it is charged with upholding. According to the media reform organization Free Press, the number of corporations controlling the production and distribution of media—television, movies, music, radio, cable, publishing, and the Internet—dwindled from fifty to less than two dozen, with ten conglomerates dominating the industry.

In September 2002, Federal Communications Commission announced that it would undertake a review of federal media ownership rules. Michael Powell, who served as FCC chairman from 2001 to 2005, was an ardent proponent of deregulation and a skeptic of the FCC's role in upholding the public interest. A few months after President Clinton appointed him to the FCC in 1997, Powell delivered a speech to the American Bar Association in which the commissioner outlined five questions he would ask himself whenever questions emerged about the need for broadcast regulation in the public interest: Do we have the authority? Should Congress do it? Is the issue more fitted for another agency? Should we address the issue at all? And, Is it constitutional? In what came to be one of the defining comments of Powell's tenure, he seemed to challenge the very notion of the public interest. "The night after I was sworn in"—as an FCC commissioner—"I waited for a visit from the angel of the public interest. I waited all night, but she did not come. And, in fact, five months into this job, I still have had no divine awakening and no one has issued me my public interest crystal ball." Four years later, Powell, promoted to the position of

FCC chairman by President Bush, pushed through a slate of sweeping reforms that critics saw as a fundamental abrogation of the public interest—raising the market caps on national television ownership from 35 percent to 45 percent; lifting the ban on newspaper-television cross-ownership in large markets; and expanding the number of media properties any single company could own in a single market.

But a funny thing happened on the way to more deregulation. A groundswell of ordinary citizens of all political stripes began speaking out against the proposed rules. Citizens around the country began organizing local hearings and teach-ins. Media activists, writers, and community journalists began speaking out against the rules. A group of activists calling themselves “Angels of the Public Interest” donned wings, robes, and halos, and dogged Powell at public events. FCC commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein organized public hearings around the country, including stops in Los Angeles, Seattle, and Phoenix. By the time the FCC approved the rules, by a 3-2 vote, 2.3 million people had contacted the FCC to register their opposition to the proposed rules. The FCC held only one official public hearing.

Public opposition to the new rules received scant coverage in the mainstream media, which largely

characterized the struggle as bureaucratic tussling between industry lobbyists and public interest groups. But citizens themselves realized what was at stake. It was nothing less than the free flow of information in a democratic society. How could democracy—which requires the informed consent of the governed—work unless citizens had the broadest possible variety in what they see, hear, watch, and read? How could an open society address the complex social, economic, and political challenges facing it without a

About The FCC

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulates communications by telephones, television, radio, newspapers, wire, cable, satellite, and the Internet. One of the most powerful federal agencies, the FCC has jurisdiction over all fifty states and territories. Created during the New Deal as part of the Communications Act of 1934, the FCC’s purpose is to “make available to all the people of the United States, without discrimination, a rapid, efficient, nation-wide, and world-wide wire and radio communication service with adequate facilities at reasonable charges.” The agency reports directly to Congress.

The FCC is directed by five commissioners. All five are appointed by the President and must be confirmed by the Senate. Only three commissioners can be of the same political party and none can have a financial interest in any commission-related business. From the five commissioners, the President selects one person to serve as Chair. All the commissioners, including the chair, have a five-year term, except when filling an unexpired term. By tradition, the chair resigns when a new president is elected.

The FCC delegates responsibilities to six bureaus and eleven staff offices, which are organized by function. The chair of the FCC generally sets the FCC’s agenda and directs the work of the Bureaus. The bureaus do most of the legwork of the agency and are responsible for processing applications for licenses and other filings, analyzing complaints, conducting investigations, developing and implementing rules, and holding hearings, among other things. The major bureaus are: Consumer and Government Affairs, Media, Wireline Competition, Wireless Telecommunications, and Enforcement. The Offices provide support services for the whole agency. The two most important offices are the Office of the General Counsel and the Office of the Secretary.

Source: Media Access Project (www.mediaaccess.org/fcc)

proliferation of diverse viewpoints? How could the principles of republican self-government apply unless citizens were informed about issues of local concern—school board meetings, city council races, municipal zoning hearings? These aren't sexy stories, but they are the very lifeblood of a democratic society.

On February 25, 2005, Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media's Working Group on Electronic Media Policy organized a funder briefing to discuss the role that grassroots organizers have been playing in challenging media consolidation in the United States. Co-sponsored with the Funders Committee on Civic Participation, Grantmakers in the Arts, the MediaWorks Initiative, the National Network of Grantmakers, the Neighborhood Funders Group, and the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers, the briefing sought to highlight the key issues, strategies, and challenges of the emerging media reform movement. The briefing was organized around two panel discussions featuring ten speakers—organizers, activists, policy advocates, and media producers. This paper presents an overview and synthesis of the panel discussions, providing context for the policy issues and events panelists described.

In opening remarks, Amy Goodman, the award-winning radio host and executive producer of Pacifica Radio's Democracy Now! outlined how media consolidation has imperiled democracy in America. Media ownership is not an obscure policy issue, she argued. When the same handful of media companies control the production and distribution of news and opinion, she said, debate narrows and dissenting voices are silenced. But there are hopeful signs, Goodman said. Recognizing the threat media consolidation poses to democracy, people have united across the political spectrum. Communities across the country are joining together to make their own media, bringing the voices of real experts and community members into the political discourse. This, Goodman argued, was democratic media in action.

The first panel focused on grassroots media reform, highlighting success stories and lessons from the field. Inja Coates, the co-founder and director of Media Tank, a nonprofit media education organization based in Philadelphia, outlined how the current grassroots media reform movement took shape around the FCC's proposed rule changes in 2002. Although Americans are constantly surrounded by media, there is little analysis of media systems, she said. Getting people to think about how media ownership and communications policy affect their own lives, she said, is a requisite to building a broad-based reform movement.

Next, Reclaim the Media's Jonathan Lawson discussed how his Seattle-based organization and its allies around the country have

used public meetings as a tool to galvanize communities around media reform issues. “Local communities have expertise about these issues,” he said, “even if they don’t identify where the sources of power are or know how to change them.” The challenge for activists is to channel this popular discontent into action. As the founder and director of Prometheus Radio Project, Pete Tridish has built dozens of such avenues for action by helping communities across the country build and operate low-power FM radio stations. Tridish outlined how putting technology in the hands of local people achieves several goals at once: it creates responsive local media, helps organize residents to tackle local problems, and builds a national grassroots constituency for media reform.

Finally, Malkia Cyril argued how, for communities of color, media reform is a matter of social justice. When the media giant Clear Channel Communications dropped community affairs programming at KMEL, a community radio station in Cyril’s hometown of Oakland, Cyril’s Youth Media Council ran—and won—a campaign to hold the station and its parent company accountable to the local community. “Accountability is the force behind alternatives,” she said. “People stand up for alternatives when they have a way to hold what exists accountable.”

The second panel examined the intersecting roles of local grassroots organizers and Washington, D.C.-based advocates in advancing media policy change. Gene Kimmelman, senior director of public policy and advocacy for Consumers Union, highlighted how a bipartisan coalition, which included Republican senators Trent Lott and Kay Bailey Hutchinson, opposed the FCC’s proposed ownership rules. The key, Kimmelman said, was that “people were becoming aware in Congress that this mattered to their constituents”—a direct result of grassroots organizing. Harold Feld, associate director of the Media Access Project, built on Kimmelman’s insights, highlighting the unique structure of the emerging media reform movement, which he described as a “cloud of local groups” organized around broad principles. Decisions are made on rough consensus, not policy orthodoxy—a decision-making structure that is flexible, responsive to local issues, and accommodating of various political viewpoints.

But how can funders support a decentralized movement? Saskia Fischer, project manager for the Media Empowerment Project, urged funders to build long-term relationships, particularly as they seek allies in communities of color. Working in North Carolina, San Antonio, and Detroit, Fischer has focused on building relationships and letting communities define their own needs in the struggle for media justice. Finally, Jeff Perlstein, executive director of the San Francisco-based Media Alliance, echoed the call to support local organizing efforts. The grassroots are the principal site of

innovation and the source of political power. “The way we expand the base, and expand the leadership, is by making sure there are resources and infrastructure to keep people engaged at the local level.”

Media Policy Reform: How Grassroots Organizing is Making a Difference

In opening remarks, Amy Goodman, the host and executive producer of Pacifica Radio's Democracy Now! outlined how consolidation in the commercial media has undermined the press's central role in a democratic society: to report the news without fear or favor. Instead of asking hard-nosed questions, seeking the truth, and acting as a check on those with political and economic power, Goodman called the mainstream media little more than a mouthpiece for "corporations that have nothing to say and everything to sell." On the other hand, Goodman traced the contours of an emerging reform movement: the growth of local independent media and its trickle-up influences on the mainstream media; the public outcry over the FCC's 2003 vote to overturn media ownership rules; the breakdown of traditional left/right dichotomies around the war in Iraq. As the media reform movement gains momentum, and as independent media begins to flourish, Goodman sees an opportunity to reclaim the media's role as an instrument of democratic self-government. "I see the media as a huge kitchen table that stretches across this country," she concluded.

Amy Goodman has made a career of asking uncomfortable questions of politicians, presidents, and corporate leaders. For the past nine years, Goodman has been the host and executive producer of Pacifica Radio's award-winning news and public affairs show Democracy Now!, which began in 1996 as the only daily election show in public broadcasting but has since grown into a daily radio and television news program carried on over 300 stations. It is the largest community media collaboration in the United States, but just one example of the independent media outlets that Goodman said are emerging in this country. This media structure, she said, "will give voice to what I think is not a fringe minority, not a silent majority, but the silenced majority—silenced by the corporate media."

This independent media structure has its roots in community journalism, which Goodman noted, was still a part of mainstream journalism as little as thirty-five years ago. Goodman pointed to the legacy of Ruben Salazar, the Mexican-American journalist who left a prestigious position at the *Los Angeles Times* to work at KMEX, a local Spanish-language station because that was where most Mexican Americans got their news in 1970. "He wanted to be able to open the microphones for them to be able to dialogue with each other, to hash out the most important issues of the day," she said. Salazar was killed shortly thereafter by a sheriff's deputy as he and his camera crew were having a beer in a local café after covering a

"I see the media as a huge kitchen table that stretches across this country"
-Amy Goodman

What citizens need,

massive anti-war rally. As tragic as Salazar's death was, Goodman said, it is heightened by the fact that the type of reporting to which Salazar dedicated his life scarcely exists in today's corporate-dominated media.

Nevertheless, Goodman took heart in the fact that there is profound and widespread discomfort with the state of the media today, as evinced by the outcry over the FCC's proposed rule changes. "People know what it means when a media mogul owns a newspaper, a radio, and a television station all in one town," Goodman said. "It means the silencing of the majority. And it means pushing through one corporate view that everyone had a visceral response to, that it wasn't democratic, that it actually subverts a democratic society."

Goodman pointed to the media's coverage of the American-backed coup in Haiti last year as a chief example of how the mainstream corporate media undermines democracy, both here and abroad. When Haitian President Aristide was ousted in 2004, the corporate media parroted what the Bush administration said—that he left of his own accord. A couple days after the coup, however, Goodman got a call from Representative Maxine Waters and Randal Robinson, the founder of TransAfrica, who claimed that Aristide was the victim of a kidnapping in the service of a *coup d'etat* backed by the United States. A few weeks later, Goodman and a colleague from Democracy Now!, tracked Aristide down in the Central African Republic, where, he claimed, he had been forcibly rendered by American intelligence agents. Goodman's reports made it to the Associated Press, then to CNN. Eventually, the administration was forced to admit its role in Aristide's removal.

It is precisely this type of "trickle up journalism" that can be an antidote to the biases and blindness of the mainstream media, Goodman said. She offered another example of media bias: In the weeks running up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the major newscasts did 393 interviews related to the war. Despite polls showing a country deeply divided over the wisdom of invading, only three of the interviews were with anti-war representatives. Media consolidation, she noted, has real-life consequences. "That is not a democratic media expressing the views of the people in this country, when more than half the people in this country were opposed to the invasion. That is a media beating the drums for war. And that is what has to be challenged. Because when the media does that, we're not talking about minor issues here, we're talking about issues of life and death."

What citizens need, Goodman said, is an infrastructure that allows people to speak to one another. Media democracy is not about top-down broadcasting, but rather a grassroots media system with

Goodman said, is an infrastructure that allows people to speak to one another. Media democracy is not about top-down broadcasting, but rather a grassroots media system with numerous poles and many voices.

numerous poles and many voices. This, she argued, is how we will hear the stories that now go underreported by the mainstream media: the hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed in the war, or the brave men and women in the intelligence communities who are risking their careers by speaking out against the war. “Once you start doing your own programs, it makes you immediately a media analyst,” she said. “You understand how the images are constructed and you can deconstruct what you see on television. You can challenge them.” This is how citizens cultivate the dissent and debate that is critical to the informed consent of the governed.

Media Victory From the Bottom Up: Success Stories and Lessons From Grassroots Organizing

Activists and advocates around the country, though under-resourced, are building a grassroots reform movement that is gaining momentum. But what do these efforts look like? What are the issues communities are organizing around? What are their goals, tactics, and strategies? What does organizing look like in this field? How do you work on media reform when the media is the target of reform? Or, as panel moderator Helen Brunner asked, “How do you speak truth to power when power controls the microphone?”

Making Policy Resonate at the Grassroots: Inspiring Communities for Media Change

A central paradox lies at the heart of the movement for media reform. Media products—film, television, music, print, Internet—are ubiquitous, yet the underlying institutions and policies are often abstract and arcane. How do media activists help citizens make the connection between content and policy? This is a question Inja Coates, co-founder and director of Media Tank, a nonprofit media-education organization based in Philadelphia, has spent a lot of time wrestling with. “It’s sort of getting fish to recognize the water they swim in,” Coates said. Once people understand the how the water works, she said, they need “mechanisms to channel the engagement and awareness into real action and real change.”

The emergence of a grassroots media reform movement over the past five years is a classic example of how content influences action. A lot of the current media activism emerged in the wake of 9/11, when people began to realize how the corporate media sounded the drumbeat for war and squelched dissent. Discontent was galvanized a year later when FCC Chairman Michael Powell announced the review of ownership limits. “People that were following this knew that this was a really important time to engage the public,” Coates said.

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In the fall of 2002, organizers from around the country met at Reclaim the Media's national media reform conference in Seattle, where they began assembling a national grassroots strategy to defeat the proposed rules. Working with FCC commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein, D.C.-based advocates were able to extend the window for public comments on new FCC rules from sixty to ninety days. Meanwhile, Media Tank and other activist organizations churned the issue at the grassroots, reaching out to the anti-war movement and other activist groups. "They were really getting the connection between the movements and the media system, and the threat of more consolidation was terrifying to them," Coates said. Media Tank also developed an online system for filing public comments with the FCC, creating a one-stop shop for the 2.3 million people who spoke out against the rules.

Building on its successes, Media Tank is now supporting a handful of local campaigns around cable ownership and broadband access. With new technologies delivering communication services over the Internet, cable is no longer a luxury entertainment medium, Coates noted. It's a core communications tool, and the right to access is tantamount to the right to communicate. Across the country, local coalitions have taken root to address local issues, but they are also linked through Media Tank to a broader national network—a strategy that is local in its impact but national in its scope. "I'm really excited about this campaign because it represents a new organizing model, where networked local efforts have the potential of having a national impact, and it's really driven from grassroots organizing," Coates said.

Organizing to Speak Out: Using Public Meetings to Transform Media Policy

The 2002 conference of the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) in Seattle was a pivotal moment in the emergence of a grassroots media reform movement. For Jonathan Lawson, executive director of Reclaim the Media, a media reform organization based in Seattle, the NAB conference represented the confluence of several issues: public dismay over the media's failure to ask difficult questions of the Bush Administration's case for invading Iraq; the FCC's upcoming review of media ownership rules; and building momentum from the fight over low-power FM radio. "This was a pivotal moment," Lawson said. "We thought this was an opportunity to talk about greater range of issues, particularly the threat to remove the limits on ownership in the media. We wanted to galvanize opposition to that move." Cobbling together some funding, Reclaim the Media hosted a five-day shadow conference that brought together media activists from around the country to meet, collaborate, and strategize.

When the University of Washington invited FCC commissioners

Reclaim the Media has used local hearings to galvanize communities around the country. Working with local groups in Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, Reclaim the Media began helping communities hold local cable franchises accountable for public access, governmental, and educational programming.

Copps and Adelstein to an informal policy conference in the Spring of 2003, Reclaim the Media convinced the university to expand the meeting's scope. They eventually organized a rock show featuring musician/activist Chuck D, progressive congressional representatives, and other speakers that drew over 800 people. "That weekend rally transformed the movement," Lawson said, noting that the commissioners stayed an extra three hours to hear from everyone. "From that moment on, the commissioners began to feel free to speak out. They were empowered because they felt like we had their back."

Since then, Reclaim the Media has used local hearings to galvanize communities around the country. Working with local groups in Chicago, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, Reclaim the Media began helping communities hold local cable franchises accountable for public access, governmental, and educational programming. Working as a network has allowed Reclaim the Media and its allies to lay the groundwork for long-term success. "Collaborating has allowed us to combine our strengths and take on projects that could never be managed by a single organization," Lawson said. Similar efforts have focused on broadband access and commercial radio.

Lawson is heartened by the resonance media issues have in local communities. Though victories have been episodic, the groundwork is in place for a more sustained movement—if local groups receive long-term, patient support. "People understand what's wrong with the media even if they don't identify where the sources of power are, or where to take their complaints," Lawson said. "But they have complaints, and they're articulate. And given the chance to format those together through local organizing, local expertise can be unleashed."

From Breaking the Law to Making the Law: How Low-Power Radio Stopped the Corporate Takeover of the Airwaves

Prometheus Radio Project is an activist organization that has managed to make the arcane rules and regulations governing media policy immediately tangible by building low-power community radio stations. Pete Tridish, Prometheus Radio's founder and director, cut his teeth in the anti-apartheid, environmental, and homeless activism of the 1980s. Back then, he recalled, Tridish and his fellow activists found that while they could force an issue into the public sphere, they could never shape the public conversation. "We could go out there with our sign, and we could chain ourselves to something, and we could get people talking about the issue. But our opponents would always end up on The News Hour with Jim Lehrer for fifteen minutes getting to explain why we're wrong and they're right."

"Our principle is that technology is not something that should be administered by an elite of technocrats. It's something that has to be in the service of everybody. And it's

In 1996, Tridish and some colleagues bought a radio transmitter and began broadcasting in their neighborhood, their first foray into “pirate radio”—broadcasting at low power without an FCC broadcast license. Within three months their low-power FM station had eighty programmers on the air, and they found themselves running an actual community radio station. Though the station wasn’t interfering with commercial broadcasts, the FCC threatened to confiscate the transmitter and close the station. But the activists had gained the attention of local politicians and sympathetic newspaper editors, who began editorializing in favor of looser FCC restrictions on low-power radio. Over the next two years, Tridish and his colleagues traveled around the country building radio stations as acts of civil disobedience. “There was really no way that you could apply for a neighborhood radio license,” Tridish said. As they saw it, the best way to force a change was to create a law-enforcement nightmare for the FCC.

something that everybody can understand.”
-Pete Tridish

Two years later, the FCC agreed to reconsider low-power radio. In January 2000 the FCC allowed low-power radio in certain markets, but not before broadcasters convinced Congress to attach a rider to an appropriations bill that took away low-power licenses in most major markets. “Under the original FCC plan there would have been about twenty-five new stations in the top ten urban markets in the United States,” Tridish noted. Under Congress’s rules, there was only one station given out in the top fifty urban markets.

Working with local communities, Prometheus has done dozens of “radio barn raisings” over the past five years, organizing communities, training local volunteers, and setting up a station over the course of three days.

Nevertheless, that fact that Prometheus Radio went from breaking the law to making the law was a major accomplishment. Since then, Tridish and his colleagues have made the most of the new FCC licenses. Working with local communities, Prometheus has done dozens of “radio barn raisings” over the past five years—organizing communities, training local volunteers, and setting up a station over the course of three days. Barn raisings, Tridish explained, bring together up to 200 volunteers to share skills, organize, and demystify the technology. “Our principle is that technology is not something that should be administered by an elite of technocrats,” Tridish said. “It’s something that has to be in the service of everybody. And it’s something that everybody can understand.”

The effect on communities has been profound. In Maryland, Prometheus Radio helped build the first radio station owned and operated by an environmental organization. In Opelousas, Louisiana, the Southern Development Foundation’s radio station serves not only as a crucible for public conversations about school reform and local development but also as the only broadcast outlet for local Zydeco music. But the greatest radio success comes from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW), a group that represents farm workers in southern Florida. Earlier this year, CIW used its radio station to organize over 300 temporary workers to demand

wages from a contractor who had been withholding pay for several weeks.

On the national stage, Prometheus Radio was also the lead plaintiff in the case that led to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals' June 2004 decision overturning the FCC's new rules. "The lesson here is that solidarity works," Tridish said. "It's that working on your particular interest is very, very important. But it's also important to see the larger issues around you. Working together, we can move these seemingly small, technocratic issues to the point where we can really win on them."

Dismantling the Double-Bind: How Media Consolidation is a Racial Justice Issue

As a young person of color growing up in Brooklyn in the 1980s and 1990s, Malkia Cyril came to see the media as a point of engagement for social change—but also as a potentially devastating threat. On one hand, the media framed the issues facing her community—the “crack epidemic,” AIDS—in terms of a war on drugs and crime. On the other hand, the media could not be ignored since they really did shape public perceptions and frame political issues. Herein was the paradox many people of color face in dealing with the media. “What does it mean to engage an institution that seems intent on defaming you?” Cyril asked. “How can you engage around policy if you can't engage decision makers, if the media is one of the few avenues for engaging in policy?” This is why, Cyril noted, media policy is racial justice issue.

Consider how these issues played out in Cyril's adopted hometown of Oakland, California. After the 1996 Telecommunications Act lifted some ownership restrictions on radio stations, Clear Channel Communications, one of the nation's largest radio corporations, bought KMEL, a local hip hop station and a touchstone for the local African America community. “If you need to reach young people and young adults, you needed to get with KMEL. It was a good thing,” Cyril said. After the sale, Clear Channel began gutting the station of community content in an effort to boost profit. In the economic downturn following the attacks of September 11th, 2001, KMEL fired Davy D, host of the popular show “Street Knowledge.” But as Cyril pointed out, “It wasn't a personal beef—it was a corporate agenda.” After Davy D was fired, KMEL ended the show and eliminated the position of community affairs director, replacing it with promotions director.

Clear Channel's regional programming director wrote a letter to the Youth Media Council, denying that Clear Channel had a responsibility to address local concerns and arguing that if folks were poor that was their fault.

For the local community, the changes at KMEL were a devastating loss. “He was the entry point,” Cyril said of Davy D's show. “He was a doorway...He opened a door for hundreds of people to get on the radio that normally would be able to get on.” Cyril's Youth Media Council responded with a vigorous grassroots campaign

against Clear Channel. The organization charted play lists, documenting the paucity of local artists. It tracked political bias in public service announcements, noting that the Youth Media Council's institutional members couldn't get their PSAs on the air, but the Boys and Girls Club could. The campaign culminated in a report, "KMEL: The People's Station?" which garnered significant attention among the Bay Area's sympathetic independent print media.

In response, Clear Channel's regional programming director wrote a letter to the Youth Media Council, denying that Clear Channel had a responsibility to address local concerns and arguing that if folks were poor that was their fault. Cyril and her colleagues passed the letter to local newspapers, where it generated more coverage. As the campaign heated up, the activists did delegation visits, phone and fax actions. Clear Channel eventually caved. "It took a little shame, a little light, that's all it took," Cyril said. "It's secrecy to allow these deals to be made."

Strategies for Media Policy Change: The Intersecting Roles of Grassroots Organizers and D.C. Advocates

Media policy is too often viewed as an insiders' game: Big Media and their political allies inside the Beltway versus Washington-D.C.-based public interest groups. But the reality is much more nuanced. Advocacy and public interest groups play an important role in developing policy ideas, monitoring federal rule-making bodies (Congress, the FCC, the courts), and acting as the public's eyes and ears. Real change however requires a constituency that demands reform, takes action, and exerts pressure from the ground up. As panel moderator Aliza Dichter, co-founder and director of programs for the Center for International Media Action, noted: "Even an email list of 200,000 activists ready to sign petitions needs to be backed up by sustained grassroots and community organizing so people will continue to fight for media rights after that action alert has passed." This panel examined the relationship between grassroots organizers and Washington, D.C.-based advocates who are together transforming media policy.

Winning Coalitions: How Grassroots Activism Can Shape Federal Media Policy

Gene Kimmelman is accustomed to forging odd-bedfellow coalitions to fight for change in the political arena. Over the years, Kimmelman, public policy director of Consumers Union, has learned just how hard it is to perform these acts of alchemy. "We're always looking for unexpected combinations that can actually move policy," he said. "And one of the difficult things in this [media policy] arena is that it's hard to find them." Only a handful of publishers want to preserve locally owned newspapers, he noted. And just a few broadcasters truly care about not being part of larger conglomerates. With a near absence of public interest defenders within the industry itself, the work local grassroots coalitions have done in finding those few supportive industry voices—in independent media, among conscientious mainstream journalists, in local communities—is all that more important to reforming policy in Washington.

Kimmelman noted how important grassroots activists had been in shaping the debate inside Washington over the FCC's proposed new media ownership rules. When the rules came down, the Senate Commerce Committee convened quickly to vote on a resolution to reject the decision. Kimmelman met with North Dakota Democratic Senator Byron Dorgan, who had been a leading critic of the rules. "He said, 'I don't think we can do it,'" Kimmelman recalled. The media companies were backing the changes, and it was a Republican Congress and a Republican White

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House—all of whom, Dorgan said, would support Chairman Powell. Meanwhile, beleaguered Democrats would save their meager political capital for more visible battles—education, appropriations, military spending.

As it turned out, however, the politics of media reform didn't break cleanly into partisan camps. Commerce Committee member Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson, a Texas Republican, had several run-ins with the Belo Corporation, which published the *Dallas Morning News* and owned nineteen television stations nationwide. Mississippi Senator Trent Lott was known to have a dim view of his local paper after it had been bought by Gannett, the publisher of *USA Today*. While there is no love lost between conservatives and the media, Republican legislators needed a reason to buck their president and their party to vote against the FCC rules.

That reason came from their constituents. As the grassroots activities built up, it became clear that congressional leaders of all stripes had the political cover they needed. "People were becoming aware in Congress that this mattered to their constituents," Kimmelman said. The National Rifle Association was against the rules as was the National Organization for Women. "It was these interdependencies that brought these people together," he continued. In the end, almost half the Republicans on the Commerce Committee voted to overturn the rules.

Though the victory invigorated opponents, Kimmelman warned that the fight will be harder next time. "The next fight will be tougher because they learn from their mistakes. We have to be that much stronger next time. That's why the grassroots matter even more."

Building a Bottom-Up Movement: A Citizens' Movement Across the Spectrum

As associate director of the Media Access Project, one of the leading public interest law firms working to ensure a public voice in telecommunications policy, Harold Feld has managed to combine an insider's knowledge of Washington policymaking with an activist's view of change. "The old view of how advocacy is done is that the issues are complicated, the technology is hard to understand, and people don't care," Feld said. "Those who do care join advocacy organizations. It is a top-down structure to social change." It is also deeply ineffectual. "People do care. They do get it. People are fed up with feeling powerless. They understand they do have power. At end of the day, politicians work for us."

Feld sees the media reform movement emerging from a different model—one that is based on cooperation and common goals, a network of overlapping interests. The reason for this is both practical—media policy is simply too complicated, and there is too

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-Harold Feld

much going on for any organization or handful of organizations to lead in any conventional sense—and tactical—it is harder to smother or discredit a movement without a leader. “We’re shifting from a top down model to something else,” Feld said. This model has roots in Internet and how it evolved. National organizations play a coordinating and resource role, but the real political power lies with a “cloud of local groups.” Decisions are made on rough consensus rather than adherence to policy orthodoxy.

Consider how this model played out in the fight over municipal broadband. Across the country, telecommunications companies have persuaded state legislatures in at fifteen states to pass bills restricting municipalities from offering broadband infrastructure to local citizens. Earlier this year, Indiana legislators proposed a bill that would prevent any locality from offering new broadband services, and freeze existing services at their current level—meaning that a citizen on one side of the street might have access to cheap municipal broadband service, while the neighbor across the street might be stuck paying fifty dollars per month for commercial services. But the bill didn’t pass: people got organized. Citizens’ organizations on the left and on the right showed up at hearings last week and the bill didn’t get out of subcommittee. Industry lobbyists, Feld said, “were sent with tails between their legs when citizens told representatives, ‘You work for us.’”

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Sustaining Grassroots Action: National Support for Local Capacity

How should national organizations and funders support media organizing work in marginalized communities? This is the question Saskia Fischer has been trying to unravel as a project manager for OC, Inc.’s Media Empowerment Project, which works with people of color, women, and youth in low-income communities around the country to help them think about how media could best serve their needs and advance their struggles for social justice. For Fischer, grassroots organizing around media justice emerges from a broader concern for social justice. “We also recognize that organizing has a distinct value in and of itself,” she said. “We need to organize to build community capacity to define needs and fight our own battles.”

Fischer cautioned against expecting quick victories and immediate action. “National organizations can’t parachute in with an agenda,” she said. “We have to listen and collaborate.” Foremost, she said, it takes time to develop relationships. Fischer has been working in San Antonio, with a coalition of Latino community organizations, in Dearborn, Michigan, with Arab American organizations, and in two primarily African-American communities in North Carolina. “The first questions I am asked is, ‘How long are you going to be here’

“National organizations can’t parachute in with an agenda. We

and ‘How much are you going to give us?’” Funders and national partners need to demonstrate their commitment over time. This means dedicating staff and resources for sustainability as well as building the leadership of people of color in a national movement.

have to listen and collaborate.”
-Saskia Fischer

At a national level three things need to happen, Fischer said. First, grassroots groups need the resources to build infrastructure so local groups can work with national groups. Second, there needs to be better communication between D.C.-based advocates and local groups, particularly those in communities of color. “Ideally, I’d like to see D.C. groups defining policy issues and areas of focus in conjunction with grassroots groups, and particularly with people of color, groups that are not usually part of this conversation,” she said. Finally, grassroots organizations need to communicate with each other. “We need to develop some kind of network where we can share resources, share ideas, share strategies with each other.”

Strengthening Local Organizing: Building for National Impact

Since it was founded nearly thirty years ago, Media Alliance has developed into one of the nation’s largest and most active regional media advocacy organizations. Based in San Francisco, Media Alliance comprises media workers, non-profit organizations, and social justice activists. As Executive Director Jeff Perlstein noted, this diverse membership creates an ongoing dialogue between working journalists and community members, grounding reform strategies in the concerns of local citizens and creating mutual accountability. “We feel all the work that happens needs to be driven from and grounded in the organizing and concerns we’re hearing daily in the racial justice work that we do, the economic justice work that we do,” Perlstein said. “It’s a very interesting grounding and make-up in that way, and I think very powerful.”

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Drawing on Media Alliance’s organizing work over the years, Perlstein highlighted a handful of strategies he felt could be replicated elsewhere. Chief among these was the role Media Alliance played in the long-running struggle in the late 1990s and early 2000s over the control and direction of KPFA, the flagship station of the progressive Pacifica radio network. For years, KPFA had offered organizers and activists an unfettered platform from which to address the issues of the day, and many saw the board’s attempt to expand the station’s audience as a repudiation of the station’s motto of “Free Speech Radio.” “Organizers came to us and said this is a very rare, powerful, and important space for us to do our organizing, to have conversations around what our communities are facing and what strategies are for change,” Perlstein explained. When Pacifica’s national board sought to move KPFA’s away from its longstanding commitment to what Perlstein characterized as “community-driven, listener-sponsored” radio, Media Alliance organized protests and helped wage a two-and-a-

half-year campaign to save Pacifica from “corporate raiders.”

Media Alliance provided critical technical and organizational support for pirate radio stations before the FCC adopted new rules governing low-power FM five years ago. In the Bay Area, the alliance worked with Free Radio Berkeley and Radio Libre in San Francisco’s Mission District, helping to link these small stations to other groups around the country that were working to change FCC policy. Pirate radio was important to organizers, Perlstein argued, not because they wanted to create radio stations but rather because radio offered a way to communicate. “Organizers in all these cities and towns around the country were shut out, and they knew and understood the power of sharing these stories and linking up with people,” he said.

Equally important, Perlstein said, funders and national media reform groups often overlook the role these grassroots efforts could play in shaping national policy. “It’s not just around winning the national victories, or about creating foot soldiers for the national policy victories,” Perlstein said. “The folks at the grassroots are innovating strategies, they’re helping frame these issues in ways that make sense to people beyond the Beltway.” For those who care about the future of media reform, he continued, the challenge is to help local groups develop stronger relationships with advocates in Washington. “The way to do that is to really hear from people, sit down with folks, and build principled, trusting relationships around what they need. Figure that piece out. Figure out what campaigns that emerge from that—and then let it ripple up.”

Conclusion: Transforming Media Policy From the Grassroots Up

The emerging media reform movement is at a critical juncture. On June 24, 2004, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Philadelphia overturned the FCC's ownership rules. The ruling was a major victory for media democracy, but as several panelists noted, it is a temporary victory in what will surely be a much longer struggle. The good news is that the courts sent the rules back to the FCC for revision; the bad news is that the FCC now has the opportunity to draft new rules—which may be even worse. And since the previous rules generated such outrage, industry lobbyists will likely try to limit public scrutiny in the next round.

It will be up to citizens to hold the FCC, legislators, and the media accountable. There was broad consensus among panelists that one of the most important mechanism for creating accountability in the policy-making process and in the media itself is to build a media reform movement from the bottom up. Policy advocacy in Washington is important but it is not enough on its own. The real energy will come from a broad-based grassroots constituency.

The good news is that these grassroots constituencies are already emerging. The reform model is more a network of local groups that operate according to ad-hoc consensus and shared values. This is potentially powerful, but it is also difficult to support. Many local groups work under the radar and on a shoestring budget. They have distinct needs that emerge from local conditions. In communities of color, for instance, media justice is part of a broader struggle for social justice. Media reform is but one part of that strategy—and funders need to honor and support those holistic approaches.

Although this meeting focused principally on issues pertaining to consolidation in the print and broadcast industries, media policy encompasses a broader range of issues, technologies, and communications platforms. Time and again, however, panelists noted that media content was the magnet for most people, the rallying point for articulating widespread dissatisfaction. On the right, conservatives are distressed by indecency and the commercial nihilism of American media culture. On the left, progressives are outraged by the media's commercialism, the narrowness of political debate, and decline of hard-edged journalism. The seeds of a bipartisan reform movement were planted in the struggle over the FCC's now-defunct ownership rules. The challenge now is to cultivate these seeds.

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***The Role of Grassroots Organizers
in Challenging Media Consolidation in the U.S.***

The second in a three-part series of funders briefings entitled

DEMOCRACY AT STAKE? CURRENT ISSUES IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA POLICY AND THE
FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Organized by Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media's Working Group on Electronic Media Policy and co-sponsored with the Funders Committee on Civic Participation, Grantmakers in the Arts, the MediaWorks Initiative, the National Network of Grantmakers, the Neighborhood Funders Group, and the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers.

Hosted at the Ford Foundation—New York, New York
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Speakers Biographies

Helen Brunner (Washington, D.C.) is consultant for the Media and Democracy Fund, a new foundation/donor collaborative supporting media reform. She also serves as director of Foundation Services for Art Resources International. Helen previously served as program consultant to Albert A. List Foundation's Freedom of Expression, Arts, and Telecommunications Policy and Advocacy Programs. She has also advised Ford, Pew, Andy Warhol, Leeway and other foundations in the areas of communications policy, First Amendment rights, and the arts. She was executive director of the National Association of Artists' Organizations from 1993-95, director of programs at the Washington Project for the Arts from 1982-85, and coordinator of the Research Center of the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, NY from 1975-82. In her role as a visual artist, she received a fellowship from the National Endowment of the Arts in 1985. She has served on numerous boards of directors, including the Progressive Technology Project, the Campaign for Free Expression, and the National Association of Artists' Organizations.

Inja Coates (Philadelphia, PA) is co-founder and director of Media Tank, a non-profit media education organization based in Philadelphia. Since 1997, Inja has helped build and serves on the planning board of the Philadelphia Community Access Coalition (PCAC), a diverse media coalition of 80+ groups working on cable access issues. She was a co-founder of the Independent Media Center of Philadelphia, a 24 hour news room that served over 600 journalists and activists during the 2000 Republican National Convention. She also worked with Prometheus Radio Project doing outreach about Low Power FM, and has over 15 years experience working with community groups and non-profits, including the Asian Arts Initiative, Spiral Q Puppet Theater, the Village of Arts and Humanities and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

Malkia Cyril (Oakland, California) is a 30-year-old queer black writer, organizer and media strategist. A working-class Brooklyn native, Malkia has worked with racial and economic justice youth, community, and activist groups in the SF Bay Area for the past nine years. As Director of the Youth Media Council and co-founder of the Media Justice Network, Malkia's goals are to build the strategic communications capacity of the progressive movement to move a racial/economic justice agenda, and to build the power of youth and other marginalized communities to hold corporate media accountable for biased content and policy. S/he believes that communications is a human right and should not be for sale. Malkia was recently featured in the documentary *Outfoxed*, and is primary author of numerous articles and studies including *Speaking for Ourselves* and *Is KMEL The People's Station?* (YMC, 2001 and 2002).

Aliza Dichter (Brooklyn, NY) is the Co-founder and Director of Programs for the Center for International Media Action (CIMA), a new not-for-profit organization providing strategic services to media advocacy, reform and education groups. Previously she helped found MediaChannel.org, where she became Senior Editor and Education Coordinator for an information network serving more than 1,000 media-issues groups. Aliza helped plan and launch the *Action Coalition for Media Education*, a national media literacy membership organization and works with the *Angels of the Public Interest*, an activist group challenging FCC deregulation.

Harold Feld (Washington, D.C.) is the Associate Director of the Media Access Project, a nonprofit public interest law firm working to ensure a public voice in telecommunications policy. He is the primary author of many of the current public interest filings on spectrum proceedings at the FCC. He joined MAP in August 1999 after practicing communications, Internet, and energy law at Covington & Burling. In 2002-2003, he served on the ICANN Names Council as representative of the Noncommercial Constituency, and currently serves as the Noncommercial Constituency representative to the Advisory Committee of the Public Interest Registry.

Saskia Fischer (Washington, D.C.) is the Project Manager for OC, Inc.'s Media Empowerment Project, which is working with people of color, women and youth in low income communities around the country to help them think about how media could best serve their needs and advance their struggles for social justice. Of Indian and Dutch descent, Saskia was raised in Europe, and came to the United States to attend graduate school. Her main focus of study was the relationship between media and immigrants' identities in the United States. After graduating with a Masters Degree from the Annenberg School for Communication, she worked as a union organizer for the American Federation of teachers in Philadelphia. Saskia has been involved in community arts projects and grassroots media as well as independent video production.

Amy Goodman (New York, NY) is the host and executive producer of Democracy Now!, which airs on the Pacifica radio network and more than 200 radio and TV stations across the United States and around the world. She is co-author of the national best-seller "[The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing Oily Politicians.](#)" written with her brother David Goodman. The book was chosen by independent bookstores as the #1 political title of the 2004 election season. Goodman is the co-producer of *Drilling and Killing: Chevron and Nigeria's Oil Dictatorship* which exposed the oil company's role in the killing of two Nigerian villagers on May 28, 1998 and *MASSACRE: The Story of East Timor*. Goodman has

received dozens of awards for her work, including the [Robert F. Kennedy](#) Journalism Award and the George Polk Award.

Joan Grossman (Brooklyn, NY) is an award-winning media artist and producer. Her company, Pinball Films, is based in New York and Vienna. She has worked in radio, video, film and installation. Joan's work has been screened and broadcast internationally. She has also taught film and video production and theory in the public schools, to inner-city teens, and to undergraduate and graduate college students.

David Haas (Philadelphia, PA) is chair of the steering committee of Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media (www.gfem.org), an association of grantmakers committed to advancing the field of media arts and public interest funding, which serves as home of the Working Group on Electronic Media Policy. In addition, Haas serves on the board of the William Penn Foundation, a regional grantmaker focusing on greater Philadelphia area, and as a Trustee of the Phoebe Haas Charitable Trust "B", which supports a range of 501(c)3 charitable organizations, including media projects. From 1989 to 1997, Haas worked as coordinator of the Philadelphia Independent Film/Video Association (PIFVA), a service organization for independent film, video and audio makers based in the greater Philadelphia area.

Gene Kimmelman (Washington, D.C.) is Senior Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at the Consumers Union. Gene is a recognized expert on deregulation and consumer protection issues, particularly in the area of telecommunications. He is a frequent witness before congressional committees that set telecommunications policy. He was the lead consumer advocate on the omnibus Telecommunications Act of 1996 and was successful in seeing significant consumer protections added to the telecommunications deregulation legislation. Gene is widely quoted on telecom issues in a variety of publications including the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Washington Post. He has done numerous interviews for network and cable television news programs.

Jonathan Lawson (Seattle, WA) is co-founder and co-director of Reclaim the Media, which advocates for media democracy in the Northwest. Jonathan Lawson is a co-founder and director of Reclaim the Media, a Seattle-based organization. He also directs organizing communications for the Washington Federation of State Employees/AFSCME. His articles have appeared in numerous publications including Adbusters, Yes!, and Z Magazine.

Becky Lentz (New York, NY) is Program Officer for Electronic Media Policy at the Ford Foundation. In that capacity, Lentz directs a 3-year initiative called "Reclaiming the Public Interest in Electronic Media Policy in the U.S." that focuses on seeding the development of a 'field' of sustainable institutions, organizations, coalitions, and networks that can advance the public interest over the long term. As a practitioner, advocate, and academic, Lentz brings to Ford more than 20 years of combined experience in the information services industry, state and local government, the nonprofit sector, and most recently in academia. As a grantmaker, she is a member of the steering committee of Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media and chairs its newly-formed working group on Electronic Media Policy.

Jeff Perlstein (San Francisco, CA) is the executive director of Media Alliance, a twenty-eight year old media resource, training, and advocacy center in San Francisco. As director he has initiated campaigns for greater press freedom during wartime, expanded public input into the FCC's rulemaking processes, and increased accountability to local communities from Clear Channel-owned radio stations in the Bay Area. He is a co-founder of the Media Justice Network as well as the initial Independent Media Center (IMC) in Seattle and the website Indymedia.org, which now links 130 IMC's in more than 23 countries.

Pete Tridish (Philadelphia, PA) is founder and director of the Prometheus Radio Project. Tridish actively participated in the rulemaking that led up to the adoption of Low Power FM and served on the committee that sponsored the crucial Broadcast Signal Labs study, which proved to the FCC that LPFM would not cause interference. Tridish has helped build a number of low power radio stations across the U.S, as well as conducted radio trainings in Guatemala, Colombia, Nepal and other countries.

Media Ownership Timeline

Source: *HearUsNow.org* (www.hearusnow.org/index.php?id=97)

1941	Local Radio Ownership and National TV Ownership Rules limited media concentration. A 35% national cap prevented broadcasters from owning stations that would reach more than that number of the nation's homes.
1946	Network mergers prohibited. Dual Television Network Rule barred one major network from buying another.
1964	Broadcasters could only own one station per market. TV broadcasters prohibited from owning more than one station unless there are more than eight stations.
1970	Cross-ownership of Radio and TV banned. Broadcaster could not own a radio station and a television station in the same market.
1975	Newspaper and TV cross-ownership restricted. One company was prohibited from owning both a newspaper and a TV broadcast station in the same market.
1981	Deregulation by FCC and Congress. This first round of deregulation allowed a company to own up to 12 TV stations (up from seven), as long as those stations did not reach more than 25 percent of the population.
1987	DC Circuit Court eliminated fairness doctrine. Since the FCC's inception, the fairness doctrine had held that radio and TV license holders were public trustees charged with 1) taking reasonable steps to present multiple and opposing viewpoints and 2) performing public service reporting on key community issues. In 1987, the DC Circuit Court held in <i>Meredith Corp. v. FCC</i> that the FCC could not enforce the doctrine.
1992	The Cable Act of 1992 gave broadcasters the power to demand "bundled programming." Large broadcasters, claiming that cable companies were getting rich from "re-transmitting" their programming, prompted the Act's "must carry"/"Retransmission consent" option. Smaller stations elected "must-carry" in order to be sure that all broadcast programming was aired. Larger broadcasters, however, were able to negotiate favorable contracts in exchange for "retransmission consent," contracts that often required cable companies to show – and pay for – additional stations owned by the broadcasters (bundling).
Feb. 1996	Telecommunications Act of 1996 engendered further deregulation of media policy. The Act envisioned robust cross-market competition among different types of telecommunications services, eliminating Congressional bans broadcast and cable provider cross-ownership and replacing it with a directive for the FCC to review and eliminate ownership limits as markets became more competitive. The FCC began relaxing these limits almost immediately, resulting in unprecedented levels of consolidation in virtually every communications and

	media sector.
July 2001	Senate Commerce Committee held hearing on media ownership in which participants expressed grave concerns over the effects of further concentrating media ownership.
Sept. 2002	FCC announced upcoming review on media ownership rules.
Jan. 2003	Due date for comments to FCC on media ownership. Viacom (which owns CBS/UPN), General Electric (NBC), and New Corporation (FOX) all requested that media ownership rules be eliminated.
Jan. 2003	Senate Commerce Committee hearing on media ownership. FCC Chairman Powell declared that there would not be a radical change in the media ownership rules, after Senators of both parties expressed concerns about the increasing levels of consolidation.
June 2003	FCC voted to overhaul limits on media ownership. Despite having held only one hearing on the complex issue of media consolidation over a 20-month review period, the FCC, in a party-line vote, voted 3-2 to overhaul limits on media concentration. The rule would (1) increase the aggregate television ownership cap to enable one company to own stations reaching 45% of our nation's homes (from 35%), (2) lift the ban on newspaper-television cross-ownership, and (3) allow a single company to own three television stations in large media markets and two in medium ones. In the largest markets, the rule would allow a single company to own up to three television stations, eight radio stations, the cable television system, cable television stations, and a daily newspaper. A wide range of public-interest groups filed an appeal with the Third Circuit, which stayed the effective date of the new rules.
June 2003	The Senate Commerce Committee approved, by voice vote, a piece of legislation entitled Preservation of Localism, Program Diversity, and Competition in Television Broadcast Service Act of 2003 (S. 1046), which would have made the 35 percent cap permanent, unless Congress expressly decided otherwise. The Committee also approved an amendment that would have restored the "cross-ownership" media rules that the FCC overturned.
July 2003	A House panel voted to withhold funds from the FCC to enforce the 45% ownership cap as part of an appropriations bill (H.R. 2799). The committee amendment passed 40-25. The full House approved the bill, signaling support for the lower 35% cap.
Sept. 2003	The Senate passed a joint resolution (S.J. Res. 17) 55-40 disapproving the FCC rule changes.
Dec. 2003	Congress changed the aggregate cap to 39 percent. After having voted to keep the ownership cap at 35 percent, both the House (242-176) and Senate (65 -28)

<p>— Jan. 2004</p>	<p>raised the aggregate cap to 39 percent through a rider to an omnibus spending bill. The 39 percent cap allowed Viacom/CBS and News Corp/FOX to keep all of their stations.</p>
<p>June 2004</p>	<p>Third Circuit voted 2-1 to overturn the lax FCC rule. The court overturned the FCC's controversial media ownership rule passed a year earlier, emphasizing that the Commission's method for determining ownership limits was based on "irrational" assumptions. The Court sent the rules back to the FCC for revision. In the ruling, the Court underscored that the burden of proof was on the FCC to provide evidence to justify loosening the ownership rules. We now await the FCC's new rules.</p>

Timeline: The Movement Against Monopoly Media

A selective timeline of activism & organizing
leading to the 2003 fight against FCC media ownership deregulation

Source: Center for International Media Action (www.mediaactioncenter.org)

October 1997, New York, NY: “The Media Mogul Tour” - Hundreds of protesters march a tour of corporate media headquarters, issuing “subpoenas” against media monopoly policies.

- “Media & Democracy Congress II” - nearly 1000 attendees at this 3-day conference.

October 1998, Washington, D.C.: “Showdown with the FCC” Protest and march of more than 50 activists and community broadcasters against the FCC and NAB in support of microradio (LPFM).

September 2000, San Francisco, CA: “Slam the NAB: Media Democracy Now!”: protests, panels and a march of more than 1000 people against corporate, concentrated media.

November 2001, New York, NY: “Challenging Corporate Media: Strategy and Action Meeting”. Gathering of more than 35 organizers from across the country. Activist e-list at Media Tank founded

January 2002, Philadelphia, PA: “Organizing Summit to Free the Media” Day-long strategy meeting with media activist organizers from NYC, Philadelphia, Maine and Washington, DC.

March 2002, Washington, DC: “Angels of the Public Interest” Protest at the FCC. More than 60 activists and independent journalists present a “public interest crystal ball” at the FCC’s door.

September 2002, Seattle, WA: “Reclaim the Media: a Community Media Convergence” - founding conference of the Reclaim the Media coalition, featuring a protest against the NAB, and strategy sessions to plan for the fight to stop media ownership deregulation at the FCC.

May 2003, Philadelphia, PA: “Protest Corporate Media: March to NBC, ABC & ClearChannel”

A coalition of anti-war, environmental and media groups team up for a public demonstration.

Public hearings before the FCC’s June 2003 vote on media ownership:

All hearings except Richmond were unofficial, organized by advocates and academics. Attendance numbers are approximate and taken from newspaper reports and organizer estimates.

- Jan 16, New York, NY: Columbia U. More than 200 people. Chairman Powell in attendance
- Feb 27, Richmond, VA: (official) Convention Center. Several hundred attendees. 30+ protesters

- March 7, Seattle, WA: University of Washington: 250 at the hearing, 400+ at nighttime event
- March 31, Durham, NC: Duke University Law School: 150-200 people, many from music industry
- April 2, Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Law School: More than 150 people
- April 7, Phoenix, AZ: KAET Channel 8 television studio: 100-150 people
- April 26, San Francisco, CA: City Hall. 500-700 people (lines outside the building)
- April 28, Los Angeles, CA: U. of Southern California: attendance unknown
- May 7, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania: more than 300 people
- May 12, San Rafael, CA: Dominican University of California: more than 350 people
- May 21, Atlanta, GA: Emory University: more than 600 people

About GFEM

Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media (GFEM) is an association of grantmakers committed to advancing the field of media arts and public interest media funding. As an affinity group of the Council on Foundations, GFEM serves as a resource for grantmakers who fund media programming, infrastructure and policy, as well as those who employ media to further their program goals. GFEM members have a broad range of interests and approaches, but share the view that moving image media is a vital form of human expression, communication and creativity, and plays a key role in building public will and shaping civil society. GFEM seeks to increase the amount and effectiveness of media funding by foundations and other funders; to increase the use of media in grantmakers' and grantees' work; and to raise the broader foundation community's understanding of current media policy and trends, as they affect funders' work and the larger grantmaking community. (www.gfem.org)

GFEM's **Working Group on Electronic Media Policy** brings together funders with a commitment to building and sharing knowledge about issues in media policy, as well as to work collectively toward advancing the media policy community as a whole.

About the Author

Neil F. Carlson is a writer and consultant working at the nexus of strategic communications and knowledge management. Neil specializes in producing thoughtful, engaging, well-crafted products—articles, reports, white papers, case studies, and conference and symposium reportage—that help clients shape opinions, tell their stories, and leave their mark. In his knowledge management practice, Neil draws on his background in journalism and organizational development to deliver evaluations that are rigorous, timely, and useful, helping clients to inform practice and improve performance.

A contributing editor to the urban affairs magazine *City Limits*, Neil's freelance work has appeared in *Tompaine.com*, *Strategic Finance*, *The San Jose Mercury News*, *Ford Foundation Report*, *Business Ethics*, *Washington Flyer*, *eWork.com* and *Worth.com*. His consulting clients include the Ford, Rockefeller, Edna McConnell Clark, and Wallace foundations; Local Initiatives Support Corporation; and the Association for Neighborhood Housing Development.