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EXPANDING MEDIA REFORM MOVEMENTS: MAKING POLICY  
RELEVANT THROUGH COMMUNITY MEDIA JUSTICE ORGANIZING

by

Brenna Wolf

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through Communication Studies  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Arts at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2008

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395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
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395, rue Wellington  
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Canada

*Your file* *Votre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-47049-7*  
*Our file* *Notre référence*  
*ISBN: 978-0-494-47049-7*

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**Abstract**

This comparative case study investigates dynamics of organizational structure, strategies and outcomes of the Media Empowerment Project (MEP), a democratic media organization that works to empower historically marginalized communities in the United States working for media and social justice in site locations. Through a combination of semi-structured interviewing with MEP staff and volunteers as well as document analysis, this evaluation illuminates how the organization's structural and operational frameworks influenced the strategies and outcomes of the local sites and how the autonomy and rootedness of the local MEP sites in turn shaped the project as a whole. Through locating this case study within social movement and organizational theory, the case study analyzes the influences of philanthropy and social movement organization models upon grassroots media reform and media justice organizations.

## **Dedication**

The completion of this Master's thesis has been a long time coming. I talked for many years about how I'd go 'back to school', as if it were some mythical far away kingdom or possibly on another planet. But the dream actualized, due to hard work, material support from the student loan industry and most importantly, due to the amazing support of my friends and family. I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my grandmothers who passed while I worked away on it, Ova Lou Albright and Katherine (Kay) Coopman.

And this thesis dedication would not be complete if I didn't give a shout out to all the amazing and inspiring media justice activists of the Media Empowerment Project and the Office of Communications, Inc. of the United Church of Christ, without whom this project would not be possible.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my committee who helped me shepherd this project: Veronika Mogyorody, Paul Boin and my amazing advisor, Jim Wittebols. A special shout out to Jim, who epitomizes the best type of advisor I could have imagined. I only hope I get to work with such compassionate and critical people throughout my life.

Additional thanks go to my friends and comrades in Windsor, Ontario, especially the FedUp Community Garden Network and 'spud'. Without the community that I found here in Windsor, the long work of completing this project would have been far more lonely and a lot less fun!

There are too many people to thank who've supported and encouraged me throughout this process, but a special thanks to my west coast friends who answered my late night phone calls with a generous ear.

And a final thank you to Darlene Williams, of Walkerville, who found my wallet and thus saved me millions of headaches and heartaches in my final days in Windsor.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Like everything else in this country, internet access is based on your monetary means – if you got bucks you got the best, if you don't got bucks you gotta take what's left. Or nothing at all. And I didn't realize it at the time, but I was representative of a community that really had nothing at all. (personal communication, March 21, 2008)

One of my biggest things why the Media Empowerment Project is also very important to me – for the cultural aspect. Media is killing culture, you know. Like literally. (personal communication, March 8, 2008)

Had they not hired someone from the community, none of it would have happened. It was already hard as someone coming from the community, but if there was no one who had worked within the community, there was no way it would have happened ... Not because, necessarily they didn't want to, but because ... there's a lot of fear of who do you trust, who do you not trust. (personal communication, April 28, 2008)

No one has ever argued transformational social change is easy. Contemporary social movements, such as the one examined here, are arenas where bureaucratic, organizational and cultural relationships and tensions get played out in ways successful and less so. The sentiments expressed above from participants in the Media Empowerment Project represent some of the key layers and tensions within social justice projects working to improve media systems in the United States. Three primary issues confront this burgeoning movement. First, in order to improve the situation of the media within the United States, we need to improve policies that regulate the distribution of and access to communications resources. Second, the fact that cultural environments are influenced and increasingly are encroached upon by media products, like advertising and content designed solely for profit making goals, is not only a policy issue, but directly impacts people and communities' survival. Finally, if struggles to improve media

systems are to expand, how best to do this? What types of organizations and strategies are needed in order to really see a broad-based social movement develop around media?

In his recent review of literature concerning the burgeoning media reform movement, Philip Napoli (2007) notes there is a tendency for researchers of the movement to come from activism within the media reform movement. I am a part of this trend and therefore, approach this research from my own background as an activist engaged in democratic media activism. Democratic media activism

implies a redefinition of the very idea of democracy to include new rights – the right to communicate – and a broader and deeper vision of democracy as entailing not simply elections and individual liberties, but also popular participation and social equality. (Hackett and Carroll, 2006, p. 13)

Democratic media activism is concerned with a wide range of issues, including: regulation of the television, cable, radio industries; media ownership; the quality of journalism; intellectual property; communications infrastructures – like broadband internet and the wireless spectrum; as well as the ideological dominance of commercialism over civic values of community, democracy, and communication rights. Activism around these issues occurs in a variety of ways, ranging from policy work and analysis, lobbying for improved regulations or against deregulation of existing structures, independent media production and distribution (through community radio, television, print publications and the internet), education around media literacy skills, media monitoring, and development of community driven communications projects, like community technology centers and neighborhood wireless networks.

It is because of my experiences as an activist for democratic media systems that I seek to work on research that will potentially benefit activists and organizations working for democratic media systems. Additionally, I have personal experience with research

performed on activist groups which were studied academically yet the research did not benefit our organizing. After sitting through numerous interviews with researchers about the projects I worked on and never receiving any direct impact of the research or sometimes even a copy of the final publication, I also approach my project committed to the participatory and liberatory potential of social movement research that is relevant and useful to the movement participants.

One of the challenges in organizing for democratic media is that it is an abstract issue. Media activists still struggle with how to expand their organizing to a wider audience, especially when many people and movements are working on very concrete issues, like access to housing, food and safety. While democratic media activism is increasingly located in a variety of sites, as the activism congeals into a larger political and social movement, how is it linking and working with other, existing social movements? If democratic media activism is to be more than a policy reform movement, how are issues of justice dealt with by movement organizers? Additionally, despite a recent slight increase in academic research concerning democratic media activism, there are gaps within the literature which need to be filled. As Pradip Thomas (2006) notes,

While the theories and practices of a variety of social movements and new social movements ... have been intensely debated, discussed in a variety of forums, and documented extensively, the specific instance of global media reform movements has remained a marginal concern, yet to receive critical theoretical attention. (p. 291)

The majority of scholarly research primarily focuses on reformers and advocacy groups or alternative/autonomous media production while there are noticeable gaps in research examining global media reform movements and media justice organizing. Additionally, there are serious gaps in literature that try to address critical media literacy as part of democratic media activism. Finally, the very notion that media reform is a social

movement is still being addressed, yet the organizations who are directly involved in building this movement at the grassroots, local levels have been understudied.

### **Project Description and Research Questions**

This thesis reports a comparative case study of the Media Empowerment Project (MEP), a program managed by the Office of Communications, Inc. of the United Church of Christ (OC), a secular nonprofit that has a lengthy and successful history of prioritizing civil rights, social justice and community organizing within the context of media policy reform. The MEP is primarily where OC works on grassroots community organizing related to media justice issues. According to OC,

**Media Empowerment means communities taking back the power to define themselves, their needs and their vision. It means empowering people with the knowledge and skills to make media work for justice in their communities (Office of Communications, Inc., 2008a, para 1)**

Composed of three diverse partner communities with local organizers in addition to a project manager who was based in Washington, DC, the MEP strove to facilitate and support local organizing around media justice, access and accountability issues. Utilizing a range of tactics including media monitoring projects, policy advocacy, media production, community development and media training, the MEP represents an unique approach to grassroots and community driven media policy organizing.

Through a combination of semi-structured interviewing with MEP organizers, staff and volunteers as well organizational document analysis, the goal of this evaluation of the MEP is to illuminate the organizational structure, strategies and outcomes of the project. The research aims to answer the following questions:

**RQ1. Organization:** How does the organizational structure of the MEP influence their organizing goals and outcomes? How do local communities' needs and desires figure into the MEP organizational structure? Is the MEP sustainable through communities; is it a model or an experiment?

**RQ 2. Strategies:** How did the MEP organizational strategies manifest at the local sites? What impact do community media needs assessments and community media monitoring play in grassroots organizing?

**RQ3. Outcomes:** What can we learn from democratic media activists who incorporate community media needs assessments and media monitoring into their strategies for social justice? What does critical media literacy have to do with social movement theory and theories of engagement and participation within social movements?

I will highlight relationships between these research areas in order to examine the influence of these aspects on each other, or the dialectical relationships of how the MEP organizational structure influenced and was influenced by the strategies used to mobilize resources to achieve goals and create a variety of outcomes. In the next section, a look at the analytical tools and theoretical frameworks which were incorporated in the evaluation provides a map for the rest of the thesis.

### **Frameworks: Theory and Analysis**

A key aspect of the MEP is the role that material resources played in its inception and development. A large, nationally based organization raised significant funds in order to start projects in local communities to expand grassroots organizing around democratic media activism. Additionally, the national organization prioritized working with and in communities that were geographically and ethnically diverse and marginalized in various ways – through historical and current economic, racial, religious and gender oppression.

Finally, the national organization sought to take leadership and direction from these local, partner communities so that the development of goals and strategies to achieve goals come from the communities themselves. These foundational aspects of the MEP set the stage for a dynamic and potentially very powerful social movement model that evolved in relationship to these initial dynamics.

In order to evaluate these dynamics, I incorporate theoretical frameworks that address organizational structures within social justice organizations. Social movement theory emphasizes social movements, yet the MEP, while connected to and participating in the growing movement to reform the media, is also functioning as a non-profit organization under the auspices of the Office of Communications of the United Church of Christ (OC). Therefore, in order to illuminate both of components of the MEP and the OC identity, I use analytical tools derived from both social movement theory and organizational theory and the relationships between these theoretical frameworks. The literature review of this report, chapter two, investigates literature concerning these relationships between social movement theory and organizational theory.

As the structure of the MEP includes full, part-time staff and volunteers, I focus particularly on the role that professionalism and volunteerism play in non-profit organizations as well as the impact on participant efficacy and empowerment. Additionally, organizational theory investigates how cultural and cognitive frameworks influence organizational structures which can influence how an organization develops. Thus in the evaluation of the MEP, I examine how the cultural and ideological frameworks of organizational structures influenced the operations of the MEP, locating this within tensions between bureaucratic-rational and collective associational practices.

Finally, I use Edwards and McCarthy's (2004) typology of resources (moral, cultural, human, social-organizational, material) to analyze the relationships between the various mobilizing strategies and their impact on both the organization and the outcomes.

In addition to the theoretical and analytical frameworks that I use in this evaluation, I also investigate the trends within social movement literature and democratic media activism. Social movement theory, as will be discussed in chapter two, has tended to not focus democratic media activism. I review this trend and identify areas where social movement scholars have investigated aspects of democratic media activism and media reform movements in the United States. Primarily scholars have used framing theory and resource mobilization theory (and usually in combination with other theoretical frameworks, like public sphere theory) to examine democratic media activism, especially around independent and radical media production networks and organizations. Despite these examinations of how resources are mobilized within media social movements, there is limited literature that examines the role of foundations and philanthropy within the media reform movement.

The MEP is a project of the OC, an organization with a fifty year history of media policy activism, therefore, I investigate the historical accounting of twentieth century media reform events and movements as well as current media policy reform activism. There is a noticeable gap in research that examines grassroots and community organizations within the media reform movement that are lead by and represent marginalized communities. I also review reflective research generated between democratic media organizations, usually in collaboration with academic researchers and foundation support. The MEP manifested differently in each of the local communities,



however there were some common strategic threads – media literacy and media monitoring. Therefore, I conclude chapter two with an examination of media literacy and media monitoring literature that locates these activities within the context of democratic media activism.

My involvement as a researcher and democratic media activist are foregrounded throughout this investigation. This includes using a relevant social movement theory approach, which attempts to locate theorizing and research about social movements within the social movements being investigated (Bevington and Dixon, 2005). The research methodology follows a feminist evaluation framework whereby my position as democratic media activist is explicitly acknowledged and political nature of evaluations is addressed. Additionally, the methodology of this project, located in chapter three, includes a review of case study research and semi-structured interviewing, followed by a description of the research and analysis process.

There is power in the telling a story. The story of the MEP told through this thesis is just one piece of a far larger narrative. There were many paths that I could have taken with this research, however, the choices I made regarding which pieces of the story to illuminate reflect my experiences as a democratic media activist and a researcher. The research, analysis, and the write up of my findings in chapter four also reflects my background and identity as a highly educated, white, straight, middle class woman who has worked for many years on a variety of grassroots democratic media activist projects in the United States. Through using the feminist evaluation framework, I situate myself as a researcher and an activist. But locating myself in this research is only one component of this evaluation. The method triangulation (case study, semi-structured

interviewing, document analysis) used in this evaluation creates space with which other people can voice their experiences and multiple stories and versions can be revealed. Through this a more complete picture is available of how the relationships between the organizational structure, strategies and outcomes impacted the Media Empowerment Project. The findings of this evaluation are reported in chapter four, followed by a review of conclusions and directions for future research that this project has generated.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite continued assessments that demonstrate the direct relationship of the mass media to the rise, growth, success and failure of social movements, social movement theory is surprisingly quiet when it comes to thinking about how social movements might leverage and change media systems as part of a larger project of social justice. I will examine social movement theory, highlighting trends and absences in social movement theory that investigate relationships between mass media and social movements. As part of my review of social movement theory, I will also examine aspects of organizational communication theory and organizational psychology that are derived from social movement theory. Additionally, I will review literature that examines activism and burgeoning movements for democratic media. Finally, I will investigate literature within critical media literacy studies and research on media monitoring.

### **Social Movement Theory**

Early sociological research viewed social movements in reference to larger society as “collectively experienced ‘relative deprivation’ or as symptoms of normative breakdown,” while Durkheimian sociology, according to Carroll (1997), “defined the collective action of social movements as ... mass deviance” similar to fads, panics or mobs (p. 6). However, social movement studies changed dramatically in response to the rise of a range of social movements during the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, as scholars sought new theories to explain collective action.

Snow, Soule, and Kriesi (2004) note the proliferation of scholarly literature surrounding social movement studies, especially in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There are many critical reviews of social movement theory (Buechler, 2000; Carroll, 1997; Davis, McAdam, Scott, and Zald, 2005; Della Porta and Diani, 1999; Goodwin and Jasper, 2004; Milberry, 2003; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004a;) which reflect numerous definitions of social movement theory and social movements. In the introduction to an extensive collection of social movement theory scholarship, Snow et al. (2004) define social movements as

Collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity outside of institutional or organizational channels for the purpose of challenging or defining, extant authority, whether it is institutionally or culturally based, in the group, organization, society, culture, or world order of which they are a part. (p. 11)

This definition alludes to the shifts and contentions in social movement theory that developed over the last thirty years. Primarily, these shifts are related to dominant paradigms of social movement theory and their various orientations towards culture or structure. Carroll (1997) illuminates the major distinctions between the two dominant traditions within social movement theory: resource mobilization theory (RMT) and new social movement theory (NSM). According to Carroll (1997), RMT “focuses primarily upon *how* [italics added] movements form and engage in collective action” whereas NSM theory “focuses primarily on *why* [italics added] specific forms of collective identity and action have appeared in late twentieth-century Euro-North American societies” (p. 8).

While there are two dominant traditions within social movement theory, these traditions can be further clarified into three major theoretical trends: resource mobilization, political process and cultural/cognitive. Resource mobilization “seeks to understand how organizations contribute to movement coordination and stability... [as well as] social movement organization structures, practices, and process (Caniglia and Carmin, 2005, p. 203) The political process approach grew from the resource

mobilization tradition and emphasizes “explanations of movement success and failure rather than...structures and process” in relationship to external conditions and tends to not investigate “individual” organizations but rather “organizational fields and networks” and (p. 203-204), while cultural and cognitive social movement theory is a refinement of NSM which examines the “social and cultural contexts” that encourage social movement participation, identity and goal framing (p. 205). Additionally, this analysis also looks at how “cognitive and normative attributions” influence organizational choices regarding structures, practices, values and beliefs (p. 206).

Meyer and Corrigall-Brown (2005) have noted a lack in social movement research on social movements as coalitions. Additionally, Rolfe (2005) has called for more research into “electronic repertoires of contention” because social movement theory has yet to adequately address resistance organized through and about the internet, which increasingly is a location for democratic media activism (p. 65). Finally, Vasi (2006) has noted a need to “develop a synthesis between traditional resource mobilization, political process and new social movement theories of mobilizations” while also noting an increase in “simultaneous mobilization efforts by movements with compatible ideologies and shared activist communities and organizations” (p. 137). The ‘synthesis’ Vasi calls for can possibly be found in an earlier work that attempts to bridge RMT and NSM. The cognitive approach of Eyerman and Jamison (1991) introduced the concept of ‘cognitive praxis’ or “the relations of knowledge ...which turns groups of individuals into social movements, that which gives social movements their particular meaning or consciousness” (p. 3).

Caniglia and Carmin's (2005) review of the trends of social movement organization scholarship notes that social movement organizations are often examined primarily in their relationship to "mobilization and to the achievement of movement goals" (p. 206). They note that cognitive and cultural schools of social movement research demonstrates potential to explore the "interpretative and sense-making processes" of social movement organizations through "explor[ing] the internal processes and dynamics" Caniglia and Carmin (2005) state that it is through these areas

where we see emerging research on the ways cognitive factors such as ideology, values, and beliefs, as well as on how culture and the production of meaning, can shape SMO practices and relations with their external environments. Attempts to bridge social movement and microlevel organization theory from within the cognitive and cultural traditions offer a promising means for understanding SMOs [social movement organizations] both as unique types of organizations and as social movement actors. (206)

Bevington and Dixon (2005) review the major debates surrounding social movement scholarship and declare that the field of social movement studies concerned with U.S. based movements, needs, following Flacks (2004), relevant social movement theory which would move academic research of social movements beyond "good case studies and histories"(p. 8). Relevant social movement theory would research social movements "from a variety of contexts and translate it into a form that is more readily applicable by movements to new situations— i.e. theory" (p. 8) Bevington and Dixon make the claim for relevant social movement theory based upon their experiences as globalization activists from North American social movements but more importantly, on their qualitative research with globalization activists. In addition to assessing the decline of relevance in U.S. social movement studies, Bevington and Dixon (2005) articulate a rough sketch of the process of doing relevant theory:

there is a distinct process that involves dynamic engagement with movements in the formulation, production, refinement, and application of the research. Moreover, the researcher need not and in fact should not have a detached relation to the movement. Rather, the researcher's connection to the movement provides important incentives to produce more accurate information, regardless of whether the researcher is studying a favored movement or its opponents. (p. 8)

Finally, Bevington and Dixon (2005) offer a description of methods for creating relevant theory. These include:

- 1) locating the issues and questions of most importance to movement participants;
- 2) developing questions and issues that are pertinent to the movement being studied; and
- 3) finding out what academic literature the activists are working with prior to your research. (pp. 20-21)

It is important to note that Bevington and Dixon also caution that scholars can pursue research issues that movements have not yet identified, as long as the researcher is directly engaged in the social movement. Klandermans and Staggenborg's (2002) compilation, *Methods of Social Movement Research*, addresses issues of usefulness and relevancy from a variety of engaged social movement scholars. More so than Bevington and Dixon, this compilation includes a variety of scholarly perspectives and experiences with social movement methods and research.

Following Bevington and Dixon's call for relevant social movement theory, this comparative case study, as described in the methodology section below, is a project that is enthusiastically supported and derived from expressed needs of the MEP organizers. The methodology of the project consciously locates the researcher as a participant in the social movement under examination. The research process has been iterative and responsive to the social movement organization and the case study evaluation addresses concerns and questions from the organization as well as the researcher. The research goals include an analysis of the organization as a whole as well as the MEP's relationship

to funding and philanthropy, two areas of inquiry that are important to the research participants.

Building on Caniglia and Carmin's (2005) assessment that social movement research is strengthened by making links with organizational theory in order to explore the "interpretative and sense-making processes" of social movement organizations, I will now review some relevant aspects of organizational communication theory and organizational psychology in relationship to social movement theory, particularly resource mobilization theory (p. 206).

### **Organizational Theory and Social Movements Organizations**

Rothschild-Whitt (1979) introduced the concept of collectivist organization as opposed to rational-bureaucratic model in order to account for alternative forms of organizations that differed from those typically studied by organizational theorists. The rational-bureaucratic model stems from Max Weber typology of social action: "traditional, affectual, instrumentally rational, and value rational" (p. 509). The first three are related to authority within organizations and how organizational aims are implemented, but the value-rational type, according Rothschild-Whitt had only begun to be explored in relationship to professional and church organizations (p. 509). Rothschild-Whitt notes that a value-rational organization "is evidenced by actions to put into practice people's convictions" and links this behavior to collective-democratic organizations (p. 509). Using Grounded Theory, Rothschild-Whitt explores "collectivist work organizations" like collectively run bookstores, newspapers and schools and examines the role that authority plays within their organizational structures (p. 511).



While focusing on the ideal situation of a democratic-collectivist organizations, Rothschild-Whitt notes that most organizations are often hybrids.

Almost twenty-five years later, Chaskin (2005) demonstrates that the trends and tensions that Rothschild noted between rational-bureaucratic and democratic-collectivist organizations are still around. Chaskin explores community planning processes or comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs), or “efforts to revitalize poor communities through participatory, collaborative planning” and how these efforts are “often problematic” due to the tensions between the ideologies embedded in the design and implementation plans (p. 408). These ideological tensions are a result of the difference between the

associational action and local democracy [of] fluid grassroots movements and voluntary associations; the other is an adherence to rational-planning, essentially bureaucratic approaches common to the world of government, philanthropy and the professions. (Chaskin, 2005, pp. 408-09)

Kelley, Lune, and Murphy (2005) note that this tension often is located in “the conflict between organizational imperatives and cultural values” (p. 363), while Chaskin (2005) identifies this a result of a “framework of the dominant culture’s version of decision making and planning” (p. 414).

Chaskin’s investigation of CCI’s demonstrates Rothschild-Whitt’s assessment that organizations “often operate through a kind of hybrid organizational form and combine aspects of collectivist and voluntary association structures and processes with those of more bureaucratic organizations” (Chaskin 2005, p. 409). This is very similar to the operations of the Office of Communications, Inc. (OC) and the MEP local projects. The bureaucratic requirements of funders and the documentation of outcomes contrasted

with the goals of “empowerment” and growth of the local initiatives at the grassroots, community level which influenced the strategies and outcomes of the MEP as a whole.

Building on Rothschild-Whitt’s definition of collectivist organizations regarding the relationship of authority to the structure of the group and participatory decision making processes, Chaskin (2005) notes that voluntary associations have shared aspects and “tend to be characterized by a degree of uncertainty and limitation” (p. 409). Roles in voluntary associations can be fluid and loose, participation can be “episodic and subject to only limited supervision or regulation” and significantly, sustainable organizations are “highly dependent on the voluntary contribution of members’ time and the resources (human, social , capital) they may bring” (p. 410).

The model that the OC attempted to implement was to pay local staff to organize and develop an organization sustained by volunteers in their various communities. In order to assess the impact organizational structures had upon the MEP it is necessary to look at the role that professionalization and volunteerism plays within social movement organizations.

The main innovators of resource mobilization theory, McCarthy and Zald, defined a professional social movement organization as one that is “founded and run by paid staff members who raise money rather than recruit volunteers...and rely upon resources raised from outside of any active membership” (Kleidman, 1994, p. 258). Professionals are staff that are in “leadership and decision-making roles” and do not include clerical or support staff (p. 258). This distinction assumes that staff are not doing clerical and support work in addition to their leadership and fundraising responsibilities. In the case of the MEP, this distinction is important because the paid staff at the local projects were

“professionals” in the sense that they were paid to be leaders and fundraisers but also were responsible for a wide range of support work because they lacked any initial infrastructure of volunteers in their communities. Additionally, as Ostrander (1999) notes, clerical and support jobs in social movement organizations often reflect structural inequalities whereby, these types of jobs are gendered and racialized positions.

As Kleidman (1994) notes, the influence of professionals upon volunteer activism in social movements plays out in three ways, usually expressing a combination of the following: (a) the increase of professionals “inhibit or erode volunteer activism”, (b) “replace” volunteer activism, or (c) professionals “facilitate” volunteer activism (p. 257). Kleidman’s work examines the impact of these professional influences on social movements organizations, specifically looking at peace movement organizations. Kleidman further expands how to analyze the influence of professionals on organizations through four types of mechanisms whereby professional staff can have an effect on volunteer participation: (a) leadership, planning, coordination; (b) strategies and tactics; (c) organizational structure; and (d) resource mobilization and deployment (p. 267).

Kleidman (1994) also identifies variations in voluntary activism which are useful analysis categories for examining the MEP projects: voluntariness, autonomy, rootedness and efficacy. *Voluntariness* is the range which participants supply their labor as uncompensated to full-time paid staff for the organization (p. 264). *Autonomy* relates to the structure of the social movement organization and how much ability participants (volunteers and staff) have at the local level to steer the direction of their local project, while *rootedness* is connected with the concept of the “grassroots” or “the base in a community” (p. 265). Maton (2000) further defines grass-roots organizing as “a...social

action approach, involv[ing] direct work with oppressed or marginalized populations” (p. 35). Kleidman (1994) and others note that the degree of rootedness of a grassroots movement is important for the durability of movements and the development of leaders and networks and that social movement organizations are strongest when they “establish deep roots” (p. 265). Volunteer *efficacy*, Kleidman notes, is a “difficult variable to measure” and can be influenced by the role of “volunteer training” (p. 265). Efficacy “refers to people’s assessments of their effectiveness, competence and causal agency (Gecas, 1989, p. 292). Gecas (1989) notes that a “combination of high self-efficacy and perceptions of system unresponsiveness and high outcome expectations that generates not only resentment but also efforts at political change” (p. 310). Kenski and Stroud (2006) expand political efficacy into two constructs: internal and external. Internal is personal sense of political efficacy while external political efficacy is more systems oriented, or “beliefs about the responsiveness of government authorities and institutions to respond to citizen demands” (Kenski and Stroud, 2006, p. 175, quoting Neimi, Craig, & Mattei). Gecas (1989) also identifies that “concerted political action may depend on perceptions of the group’s efficacy”(p. 310). Citing Bandura, Gecas notes that “collective efficacy” or the degree of “members’ judgments about their group’s capabilities to engage in successful political action...as an important element in sustaining members’ commitment” (p. 310).

In order for a social movement organization to have paid professional staff, a significant amount of resources must be mobilized. As will be further discussed in chapter four, the role that resources played in the organizational structure and strategies of the MEP significantly impacted the outcomes of the project. Edwards and McCarthy

(2004) note that “resource mobilization theory is at root aimed at better understanding how groups are able to overcome prevailing patterns of resource inequality in their efforts to pursue social change goals” (p. 118). Furthermore, Edwards and McCarthy note the resource mobilization analysis must “define and specify” the types of resources before examining “issues of their use-value to social movements, transferability among groups, and the extent to which access to them can be controlled” (p. 117). Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of capital, “economic, cultural, and social”, Edwards and McCarthy offer a useful typology of “moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources” that will be applied to the analysis of the Media Empowerment Project (p. 117).

Community psychology would likely identify the Media Empowerment Project (MEP) as an intervention by the United Church of Christ. Maton’s (2000) review of community psychology’s potential impact on social change identifies that capacity-building at the community level uses “joint problem solving ... based on collaborations with local groups representing various community domains” (Maton, 2000, p. 32). The OC began the MEP to:

provide local communities with the tools to enter the national conversation about broadcast/communication ownership, consolidation, hiring practices, programming, corporate greed and other realities that impact the public trust (United Church of Christ, 2003, p. 3)

Scholars like Maton (2000) note that “enhancing the access of marginalized groups to economic, psychological, and political resources is central to transformative social change” (p. 33). Maton also notes that the

bottom-up approach to group empowerment is the development of empowering community settings, [where] key psychological expectancies and competencies linked to economic mobility, psychosocial adaptation,

and social activism can be developed in individual members of disempowered populations (Maton, 2000, p. 34)

Furthermore, similar to the MEP model, “collaborative interventions that help develop and strengthen such empowering community settings represent a primary, desired means of [social] action” (ibid). Social action “encompasses a number of approaches, united by an emphasis on consciousness-raising, critical analysis, advocacy, conflict, power tactics,...direct action [and] citizen grass-roots organizing”(p. 35). One of the outcomes that was very clear through the interviews was the impact of having had the support of OC and staffing resources contributed to clear expansion of

psychological resources, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy, [which] have been linked to a wide diversity of positive social outcomes, and emerge in part from involvement in settings that allow individuals and groups the opportunity to develop key competencies, carry out socially valued roles, and enlarge personal networks” (Maton, 2000, p. 33).

Given that one of the main goals of the MEP was to empower communities and that this empowerment is closely related to feelings of internal and external political efficacy, how does organizational communication theory address issues of empowerment? Ashcraft and Kedrowitz (2002) note that organizational communication theory maintains assumptions about what empowerment means, particularly around how empowerment “translates into specific organizational structures, like flatter structures and participation programs” ( p.89). They also note that, generally, the literature, “neglects” work in alternative environments, like non-profit and activist organizations (p.90) because the role of “volunteer and part-time labor...as well as contingent labor” are often disregarded (p. 88). Empowerment is often “conceptualize[d] empowerment as a perception and process that fosters [organization] members’ competence and control” and emphasizes the development self-efficacy of employees through “self-direction...[and]

decentralization” (p. 90). Ashcraft and Kedrowitz pose examining empowerment “as enabling relations of power” which “directs us to the experience of those allegedly empowered” (p. 90).

If empowerment is to be examined, as “enabling relations of power” (Ashcraft and Kedrowitz, 2002, p. 90) then a brief consideration of how organizational communication has examined systematic power and oppression is necessary, especially given that the organization examined for this project attempted to empower people and communities from historically marginalized groups. Orbe (1998) notes that organizational communications theory has a

neutral...monocultural assumption...that marginalizes the experiences of nondominant group members and resulted in literature largely void of the experiences of the “Other”...[and how] cultural variables such as race or ethnicity affect workplace dynamics (p. 230).

Five years later, Ashcraft and Allen (2003) examination the field of organizational communications finds that “rarely and inadequately” does it address race despite expansions in gendered analysis of organizing and organizational theory (p. 6).

Furthermore, “complex accounts of organizing race will likely elude us until we confront the ways in which our scholarship helps to craft the dominance and invisibility of Whiteness” (p. 7). These critiques emphasize the significant failure of researchers to address and account for the “other” in organizational communication scholarship.

Despite these gaps, for the purposes of this project, social movement theory and organizational theory do offer analytical tools for case study analysis. Through incorporating relevant social movement theory practices as addressed by Flacks (2005) and Bevington and Dixon (2005) to explore the “internal processes and dynamics” (Caniglia and Carmin, 2005, p. 206) through analysis tools offered by organizational

scholarship derived from social movement organization studies in order to address some aspects of the research questions for this project. However, while researchers have made many linkages between social movement scholarship and organization theory, scholars are just beginning to apply social movement theory to media activism and organizations working for democratic media reform.

### **Social Movement Theory for Media Activism**

Despite the expansive literature on social movement research, there is surprising little research on movements working to change and challenge media systems. Phillip Napoli (2007) notes that one reason for this gap is that

the application of this analytical approach to this area is a relatively recent phenomenon, with earlier analyses [on media reform movements] more often grounded in theories of regulatory decision-making or the policymaking process, or, being primarily historical narratives lacking in a particular theoretical grounding. (p. 8)

The majority of research that does exist approaches social movements' relationship to media from a media effects model, i.e. how can various movements improve their position, their coverage, within the media. Charlotte Ryan's (1994) groundbreaking *Prime Time Activism* introduced a guidebook for activists, building upon Gitlin's (2003) assessment of media influence on social movements. Ryan's work and other media effects and media strategy literature, expanded from Gamson and Wolfsfeld's (1993) important article addressing media and movements as "interacting systems", noting that "movements need the news media for three major purposes: mobilization, validation, and scope enlargement" (p. 116).

Other areas where social movement theory does deal with media is within framing literature. Carragee and Roefs (2004) quoting Pan and Kosicki describe "framing...as a



strategy of constructing and processing news discourse or as a characteristic of the discourse itself” (Carragee and Roefs, 2004, p. 215). Additionally, Carragee and Roefs note that “frames, as imprints of power, are central to the production of hegemonic meanings” (p. 222). They also highlight recent trends in framing research that have increasingly failed to account for power and the influence of hegemony on framing, despite earlier scholarship that linked these connections. Specifically, they “call for further integration of the framing and hegemony perspectives” (p. 222).

Carroll and Ratner (1996) address the relationship between “between framing and networking in social movement organizations because, among other effects, we recognize that this relation has an important bearing on the potentialities of a counter hegemonic politics” (p. 619). Through their research using case studies and organization surveys and in-depth interviews, Carroll and Ratner locate the relevancy of counterhegemonic theory and Neo-Gramscian analysis within social movement research on collective action frames.

The arrival in 2006 of *Remaking Media: The Struggle to Democratize Public Communication* by Robert Hackett and William Carroll was a welcome addition to the small body of literature that examines democratic media activism through social movement theory. The book presents five years of research using organizational and campaign case studies and activist interviews to examine media activism as a social movement, utilizing normative democratic theory, social movement theory and critical media scholarship (Hackett and Carroll, 2006, p. 15). Demonstrating that democratic media activism is a nexus of social movements, Hackett & Carroll also summarize potential challenges and strengths for democratic media activism. Additionally, the book

addresses ideological and strategic differences within various networks of communication activism.

Thomas (2006) notes in his analysis of the Communications Rights in the Information Society Campaign that despite the problems and critiques of resource mobilization theory, it might be suited to studying media reform activism because “there is no denying the fact that movements and the networks that sustain them are actors in the real world, increasingly organized along the lines of other organizations in civil society and prone to the very same pressures of survival” (p. 305).

Hackett and Carroll (2006) use resource mobilization theory (RMT), to study social movement emergence and effectiveness on the basis of “socially-constructed grievances, mobilized resources that enable collective actions to be mounted, and structural opportunities to mobilize resources and to act” (p. 50). In this case, the media’s democratic deficit is a shared grievance which becomes a “socially constructed collective action frame” (p.51). Hackett and Carroll (2006) identify three constituencies of democratic media activism through which movement resources can be mobilized: (a) media workers, producers, researchers; (b) subordinated and marginalized communities; and (c) generalized constituencies who are concerned about the impact of commercialized media upon “human and democratic values” (p. 51). These various constituencies offer numerous opportunities for collective action, using a range of strategies, including reform from within the media system, the creation of counterpublic spheres, or “parallel fields” and work that aims to influence media policy or “changing the enviroing conditions of the field of power” (p. 52).

Hackett and Carroll do not assess relationships between democratic media activism

and philanthropic organizations, which Thomas suggests might also be an appropriate use of RMT in order to “tease out the relational dynamics between media reform movements, networks and organizations on the one hand and funding agencies on the other” (Thomas, 2006, p. 305). The scant literature that does address social movement theory and media activism rarely mentions funding realities and relationships within democratic media activism or, has a policy centric focus, like Kogen’s (2008) thorough account of the Ford Foundation’s funding of scholar/advocate collaborative media policy research.

Literature that examines philanthropy, (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004; Moody, 2008), focus primarily on the nonprofit ‘sector’, especially social service providers like hospitals, the United Way, and the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004, p. 135). On the other hand, critical assessments of philanthropy, like Faber and McCarthy (2005), address social movements, but make little mention of media in relationship to social justice organizing .

A compilation critical of philanthropy, *The Revolution will Not Be Funded* (INCITE!, 2007) introduces and explores the concept of the ‘Non-Profit Industrial Complex’ (NPIC). The NPIC is defined

as a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements. (Smith, 2007, p. 8)

However, this collection, while covering a wide range of current and past US and global social movements and their relationship to the non-profit system, as well as offering a comprehensive historical account of the rise of the non-profit system in the United States, has no reference to democratic media activism or the media as a social movement concern (INCITE!, 2007). Where this collection does relate to democratic media

organizing is in its examination of the role of the Ford Foundation in funding various social movements.<sup>1</sup>

While public administration and nonprofit management scholars tend not to address social justice organizing for transformative structural societal change, these scholars do offer useful analysis of trends within philanthropy. The critique of the non-profit funding infrastructure is useful to my analysis because the majority of the funding for the MEP is from one large foundation, the Ford Foundation. These assessments of nonprofit funding note trends that reflect “a marketization” or “adopting the methods and values of the market to guide policy creation and management” (Eikenberry and Kluver, 2004, p. 132) Moody (2008) reviews the influence of “venture philanthropy” or “philanthropy [that] involves close monitoring of predetermined performance goals and measurements as well as joint problem solving with nonprofit investees throughout the long-term duration of the funding” (Moody, 2008, p. 238) As discussed earlier, there is overlap between social movement theory and organizational theory, especially regarding the role that resources play within organizations; therefore, assessments of philanthropy are very relevant to assessing the impact of foundation funding on the Media Empowerment Project. However, there remains a severe gap in literature that addresses the influence of philanthropy upon democratic media activist organizations and media reform movements.

The one area of literature that does explicitly deal with media and social movement theory is research concerning independent, autonomous or radical media

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<sup>1</sup> In 2005, the Ford Foundation was the second largest foundation in the United States, with assets of “around \$12 billion” (Alexander, 2007, para 4). During the same year, they were one of the top three foundations funding media policy activism, who accounted for 60% of total funding for democratic media activist organizations (Louie and Luckey, 2006, p. 5)

production. Downing, Ford, Gil and Stein (2001) offer a critical review of social movement theory accounting for radical media projects, while Atton (2002) examines alternative media's relationships to social movements. These projects also address the economic infrastructure and challenges of financial stability of autonomous and independent media. Opel (2004) and Coopman (2008) utilize Eyerman and Jamison (1991) cognitive theory of social movements in their investigations of micro-radio and FCC policy activism derived from the micro-radio movement. Additionally, Indymedia and the global network of Independent Media Centers have been examined through the lens of social movement theory by Downing (2002), Milberry (2003) and Atton (2004).

Hackett and Carroll have opened an important space within social movement literature. Their approach illuminates the need for multiple perspectives when researching democratic media activism. The MEP projects use a variety of strategies to engage communities in media activism. While social movement theory has been somewhat silent on the various movements to change and challenge corporate media hegemony, there exists within the literature analytical tools which will be useful to my project. Despite the silence in the literature that addresses media activism through social movement theory, increasingly there is more research that examines key moments, organizations and media projects derived from media activism.

### **Democratic Media Activism**

As in the past, popular forces are organizing on a significant scale, highly decentralized in the familiar American style, with its weaknesses and strengths... We may be in 'the early stages of a serious social movement,' for which democratization of the media will be a central focus of discussion, activism, and reconstruction. (Chomsky, 2002, p. 23)

Media reform scholar and activist, Robert McChesney, notes that the history of citizen resistance to the commercial radio system is often ignored and marginalized. In general, traditional broadcast histories generally agree that the public was not opposed to the trend of private enterprise regulation of the broadcast media system. McChesney (1994) argues that this historical consensus naturalizes the system of corporate ownership of the broadcasting infrastructure by marginalizing or ignoring resistance and diverse perspectives about the early direction of broadcast regulation, especially by educators who understood the powerful potential of the mass media. McChesney and other scholars have demonstrated that there has always been citizen resistance to the trends of corporate media.

McChesney (1994) offers a well documented account of early media reform movements during the late 1920's and early 1930's. Through examining citizen resistance to the commercialization of the broadcast airwaves prior to Telecommunications Act of 1934, McChesney offers illustrative trends and lessons that bring today's movements within historical context. The under-studied history of unions and the postwar media reform movement is revealed by Elizabeth Fones-Wolf (2006).

As noted earlier, the MEP is sponsored by Office of Communications, Inc. (OC) of the United Church of Christ (UCC). The impact of UCC's work for media justice during the civil rights movement, through using media activism to confront and eventually change racist broadcasting, has been documented more extensively than most moments in democratic media activism. Steven Classen (2004) notes that the majority of the histories, including Mills (2004) and Horwitz (1997) tend to

“reproduce histories that highlight perspectives of northern activists or powerful industry and government officials” whereas his historical research examines the oral histories of local activists involved in the struggle to change the racist broadcasting systems in the south and highlights the often “unofficial stories” behind the community organizing that led to the policy changes (p. 14). Classen’s (2004) account also explores the “relationships of social and cultural forces to changes in television, regulation and representation” (p. 13).

Some scholars have explored the histories of specific mediums and the communities that work with them and their impact upon media policy. The movements surrounding micro, pirate and low-power radio are explored by Opel (2004), who links the media production of these communities with their impact upon media policy organizing. Howley’s (2005) comprehensive account of four community media projects examines the “communicative forms and practices” of community driven media (p. 10). Halleck (2002) investigated community media producers and their relationships to media policy and media activism, particularly within public access television and the history of Paper Tiger TV and Deep Dish Television. Atton’s (2002) expansive documentation of alternative media, especially zines and radical papers of the 1990’s, illuminates how media production is used by radical social movements as a communicative strategy and organizing tool. Downing et al. (2001) comprehensively examine radical media, “that express an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” (p. v) while the edited compilation of Couldry and Curran (2003) offers a variety of essays addressing alternative media and global resistance to media hegemony. These types of research

projects examine radical social justice and community organizing around independent and alternative media production and give historical context for grassroots organizing around democratic media activism in the years preceding the implementation of the Media Empowerment Project.

In addition to literature that explores alternatives to corporate media, a small but growing body of work exists that examines current democratic media activism. Research which examines current cases in democratic media activism tend to be case studies of specific campaigns or policy battles or explore the impact of corporate media ownership on communities. Eric Klinenberg's (2007) *Fighting for Air*, a wide ranging account of the effects in the United States of a corporate driven media system and resistance to corporate media systems, is based on hundreds of interviews as well as archival research. Ben Scott's (2005) account of the congressional struggle inside the policy battle during the 2003 national campaign against increased media consolidation, uses congressional records, newspaper coverage and his personal experience as a congressional aide to illuminate the often murky workings of policy negotiations inside Congress. Holman (2005) also examines the 2003 campaign but looks at the role of information and communication technologies on public participation within the policy process. Kidd's (2005) contribution examines the same time period, but from the perspective of the grassroots organizing occurring outside of Congress, using a case study of the organizing coalition in the San Francisco Bay area.

Democratic media activism is itself a contested frame. Some of the generalized critiques of the "democratization" frame are worth reviewing. Key



concerns include: framing around terms of citizenship excludes people who are not citizens and democracy as a benchmark goal dismisses the historical realities of communities of color, women and other marginalized groups for whom democracy still has yet to be fully realized (Baines, 2005; Cyril, 2005; Dichter, 2004).

Klinenberg (2005) addresses some components of the relationships between the youth movement and the media justice, locating his account within Bourdieu's field theory. Simone's (2006) investigation of both the history of the term 'public interest' as well as the relevancy of the using the frame "public interest" for the current media reform movement concludes with suggestions that the media reform movement expand its messaging and discourses "to those of media rights and justice" (p. 1). This account also links public sphere theory to the study of the various components and frames of the larger media reform movement. Hackett and Carroll (2006) and Kidd, Barker-Plummer, and Rodriguez (2005) also use counter public sphere theory to locate various participants within and around democratic media organizing. Napoli (2007) offers a review of literature surrounding the various frames incorporated by the broader media reform movement. Napoli's review of public interest media activism and advocacy as a social movement is weakened by a limited investigation into social movement theory. Additionally, despite being very comprehensive and accounting for the terminology used within and by the movement, Napoli has limited sources that investigate media justice organizing and media activism that is led by marginalized communities.

In addition to accounts and case studies of policy struggles, organizations and campaigns, over the last few years a couple of evaluative works have appeared. These

reports incorporate a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and aim to illuminate areas of strategic concern for democratic media activism and were collaborative projects conducted by movement organizations and universities, like the Free Expression Policy Project work with the Brennan Center of the New York University Law School, (Trivedi, 2006). For the purposes of this project, evaluative reports that were funded by foundations that support democratic media activism, particularly the Ford Foundation will be examined in order to examine the influence of strategic planning and evaluation by foundations. These reports include a comprehensive survey of foundation giving which determined that in 2002 the aggregate annual giving of media and communications grants was \$ 4 billion out of a total of \$30 billion annual in foundation grants; however, out of all foundations that grant money to non-profit organizations in the United States, a little more than one percent of foundations or almost 700 out of 62,000 foundations surveyed, funded media and communications projects (Rubin and Maeda, 2003, p. 3).

More recently, the Ford Foundation supported Grantmakers in Film and Electronic Media (GFEM) in expanding Rubin and Maeda's (2003) research concerning foundation support of media activist organization. Whereas Rubin and Maeda examined the entire field of media, including university journalism programs and television/film production facilities, GFEM's report focused specifically on the role of funding in media policy activist organizations. Through surveying twenty-five funders of media policy activism and 110 nonprofits who work on media activism, GFEM found that in 2005, out of \$13.2 million granted to media policy organization, 60% of all grant dollars for media policy activism came from three national foundations – the Ford Foundation, the Open Society Institute, and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation (Louie and

Luckey, 2006, p. 5). Furthermore, 40% of the nonprofits surveyed, received no funding for their media policy/media activism work. (Louie and Luckey, 2006, p. 5) GFEM's report notes that the funders were "less focused on people's experiences with media and privacy" though "slightly more than half of the grantmakers fund[ed] efforts regarding people's interaction with media [including] media literacy" (Louie and Luckey, 2006, p. 9). As the research focused on the role of media policy in grantmaking, the results demonstrated that funders were concerned with "increasing representation of diverse voices in mainstream media" and that over 60% were funding the "production and distribution of mainstream media" while "over half of the funders" were "supporting efforts to increase representation of marginalized communities in mainstream media" (ibid) However, the GFEM report noted that while

55% [of nonprofits surveyed] said that ... media justice is the driving motivation for their work in media policy. Although we are encouraged by the high number of nonprofits that expressed concern for this important issue, more in-depth research is need to clarify how these organizations are defining "media justice" and whether there is shared understanding (Louie and Luckey, 2006, p. 15).

GFEM also surveyed strategies that nonprofits are using to make improvements in media policy and the priority of these strategies for funders. Significantly, media policy funders prioritized "coalition building, grassroots community organizing and conducting public education campaigns" (Louie and Luckey, 2006, p. 12) yet funders prioritize that the focus of these campaigns to be primarily U.S. government decisions makers, "71% of funders is targeted at influencing the behavior of specific decision makers...most likely to be from the U.S. government". However, as GFEM reports

Nonprofits...not only target U.S. government decision makers but also media corporations and the general public (57% and 46% of nonprofits [who target particular decision makers], respectively, compared to 18% and 12% of funders). (Louie and Luckey, 2006, p. 12)

That the report expressed “concern” for a lack of shared understanding about media justice among nonprofits, yet the funders and nonprofits strategy prioritizes are markedly disparate, points to some of the concerns highlighted by the critics of the non-profit industrial complex or trends of ‘marketization’ of the non-profit sector discussed earlier. The Office of Communications, Inc. (OC) was included in this survey, which occurred during the maximum year of funding for the MEP projects by the Ford Foundation, yet the strategies of media monitoring and community media needs assessments are not included anywhere in the GFEM survey. However, the individual MEP staff members were not surveyed by GFEM, just the OC. This means that the voices from the staff members at the local level who are doing “coalition building, grassroots community organizing and conducting public education campaigns” are not included in this report. The lack of local organizer voices and grassroots perspectives can also be seen in another Ford funded research project.

In collaboration with the Syracuse University and the Ford Foundation, Mueller, Kuerbis, Page (2004) completed a comprehensive overview of more than 40 years of advocacy around communication policy to perform a “long-term, strategic analysis of public interest advocacy around communication and information policy” (p. 5). A variety of methods are used to develop this analysis. First, organizational ecology is used, examining public interest organizations which work on communications-information policy (CIP) from 1960 –2002. This method looks at an organization as a population and examines the organization’s membership size and composition, as well as how these factors change over time. Through organizational ecology, the report assesses how many CIP organizations were formed or disbanded within a given year as well as the

ideological composition and their area of focus and advocacy. Mueller, et al. (2004) also performed a quantitative examination of Congressional hearings and testimonies concerning CIP organizations in order to determine how often these organizations gained access to lawmakers. Finally, the advocacy report offers a historic evaluation of the evolution of media advocacy according decade by decade. The recommendations in this report are for the broad field of media activism yet the researchers only look at “public interest advocacy groups.” Mueller, et al. (2004) define advocacy groups as

formally organized citizens groups that interact directly with the policy, laws, and regulation-making apparatus of the government...attempt[ing] to directly influence what happens in government...and as such must participate in making the bargains and trade-offs that define public policy.  
(p. 6)

This is in contrast to how they view activism or social movement activity:

a buzz of loosely coordinated communications, meetings, demonstrations and cultural activities based upon interpersonal networks...participating in a local demonstration, attending a meeting, handing out leaflets on the street or a shopping mall, or just persistently promoting one’s political views among friends. (p. 6)

These two definitions are important for understanding some of the problems with the Mueller, et al. (2004) report, especially when examining the methodological underpinnings through which they make their recommendations. Through their use of organizational ecology and their emphasis on testimonies in Congressional hearings, Mueller, et al. (2004) only focus on policy negotiations and the impact of these policy interventions. However, they use this examination to then create “a critical historical narrative...that trace[s] the evolution of citizen advocacy groups” (p. 6) but in doing this they necessarily must address the role of social movement activity and activism within

this history because the advocacy groups cannot function effectively or independently from social movement activism.

Another evaluation document produced by The Listening Project (2004), entitled *The Makings of a Social Movement: Strategic Issues and Themes in Communication Policy Work*, uses a thoroughly qualitative approach, focused on assessing the “field” that is “advancing a communications policy agenda that reflects public concerns, involvement and accountability” (p. i). The Listening Project report documents the results of a combination of in-depth conversations and interviews across various sectors of the field, noting that the field is a

network of diverse players working on a variety of issues that are focused on making media and communications technology better – through a variety of strategies – as well as more responsive to the public interest. In this case public refers to local and national publics. Also, making media better includes the work of groups that focus on making alternative forms of media. (p. 5)

Additionally, the Listening Project (2004) defined four approaches to social change: “influencing or making content, impacting industry practices and standards, structural and regulatory change and knowledge and capacity building” (p. ii). This approach is different than the report by Mueller, et. al (2004) which viewed institutional change as the primary goal. Additionally, the Listening Project approach revealed that these multiple theories of change are strengths of the field, but an area from which more shared collaborations potentially can grow to create a mutually shared theory of change.

One of the unique aspects of the Media Empowerment Project is that the various site locations and organizers, despite being a part of one national organization, work from different theories of social change. Through the comparative case study, the differences and similarities between these various approaches will be highlighted. One approach or

strategy that is used in different ways by the different site locations is media monitoring. Another is the use of critical pedagogy and media literacy to expand communities' involvement with the various projects. Therefore, a review of trends within the literature surrounding critical media literacy and media monitoring is necessary.

### **Critical Media Literacy and Media Monitoring**

Those currently campaigning for media reform...are stymied not because their ideas are unpopular, but because, at a fundamental level, their relevance is not appreciated...Media literacy is, therefore, a way of extending democracy to the very place where democracy is increasingly scripted and defined. (Lewis and Jhally, 1998, p. 114)

Media literacy literature broadly looks at media as a variety of texts and mediums and is often found within educational contexts. While media monitoring traditionally emphasizes news stories, the literature about media literacy tends to address cultural products like movies, television shows, and advertising (Cooks and Scharrer, 2008; Kavoori and Matthews, 2004 Sandlin, 2005; Tisdell, 2008; Vande Berg, Wenner, and Gronbeck, 2004). There are few connections to social movement theory and research within literature that examines media literacy and media monitoring.

In the 1998 the Journal of Communication devoted an entire issue to media literacy, however, as Nam (2003) reports, "most articles except one written by Justin Lewis and Sut Jhally, ... did not discuss the need for "critical" media literacy." (p. 18). Douglas Kellner (1995) had called for critical media pedagogy in order that readers "critically dissect the artifacts of contemporary media and consumer culture, help them to unfold the meanings and effects on their culture, and thus give individuals power over their cultural environment" (p. 10). Lewis and Jhally (1998) argued for an emphasis on political economy within media literacy education as well as a contextual approach that

emphasizes the “media text [as] a stage in a process of ideological production” (p. 114). Despite Lewis and Jhally’s arguments, media literacy in the United States tends to follow a rather uncritical, apolitical approach that emphasizes deconstruction of texts without a political context. Nam (2003) notes that issues addressed by Lewis and Jhally are still unresolved and calls for critical media literacy that incorporates Freire’s (1990) liberatory pedagogy, Giroux’s (2001) politics of mass media and culture and Kellner’s (2000) multicultural and multiple literacies and notes that “there are not many instances of situating media literacy within the broader project of critical pedagogy and the shared vision of cultural democracy” (Nam, 2003: 3).

Additionally, as Tisdell (2008) notes, much of the literature on critical media literacy tends to focus on youth learning, especially elementary through high school age and research with college/graduate students (Cooks and Scharrer 2008; Heins and Cho, 2003; Mihailidis, 2006; Yosso, 2002), while there is “relatively little among adult education scholars” (Tisdell, 2008, p. 49). Tisdell focuses on the role that critical media literacy plays in “transformative learning” or learning that emphasizes “critical reflection” by individuals and “the way that critical, feminist, and antiracist adult educators more specifically concerned with social transformation discuss challenging power relations based on race, gender, class and sexual orientation” (p. 51). However, Tisdell’s work continues the trend of work with adult learners who are actually graduate students in universities. Yosso’s (2002) work with Chicano/a community college students reflects more the community that one of the MEP sites works with, yet there is little research on transformative critical media literacy with adult learners who are not university students, particularly adult learners from marginalized communities, like the



communities of the MEP sites. Finally, despite the increase in research concerning critical media literacy, there is limited research that links this educational work to social movements for media reform. When these links are made, the work focuses on the expansion media literacy education programs in school systems, or media literacy as a 'movement' (Considine, 2000; Heins and Cho, 2003; Wehmeyer, 2000).

Other research incorporates critical media literacy into a framework that uses cognitive dissonance to explore audience/consumer commitments to dominant paradigms hidden in media texts. Sun and Scharrer (2004) use audience research, media literacy, critical pedagogy and cognitive dissonance theory to assess student responses to critical interpretations of the Disney film, *The Little Mermaid*. This study expands the discussion of critical pedagogy and media literacy further because Sun and Scharrer address why people might not change their minds about a media text. The use of cognitive dissonance theory is also used by Claussen's (2004) study concerning which types of media do people find more trustworthy regarding news - broadcast television. Claussen offers an overview of public opinion surveys done in the last twenty years which assess audience perceptions of television and newspaper news stories and highlights the trend that despite evidence that television news has decreased in quality, the public perceived newspapers less positively than television news. He attributes this to cognitive dissonance and media illiteracy, for example that "many consumers do not know that television news is largely driven by newspapers and wire services, the latter of which are fed by newspapers; that talk shows are not news broadcasts; or that editorial pages are supposed to be opinionated" (p. 216). An area that Claussen does not address is the role that internet news plays or might possibly play on news perceptions. While Claussen's work on news

perceptions is important for revealing why people may internalize certain perspectives about news coverage, there is little research that links transformative critical media literacy with news analysis, like analysis done in media monitoring campaigns.

Within the field of communications, there have been numerous studies that investigate media coverage and framing of various issues, events, campaigns and historical moments. Nordenstreng and Griffin's (1999) edited collection reviews international media monitoring, highlighting the various approaches and methodologies used by academic researchers, like content analysis, framing and critical discourse analysis. However, there are far fewer examples of research that examines media monitoring not conducted by academics and media monitoring as a community or social movement practice; furthermore, this dearth of literature often does not discuss the social and political outcomes from media monitoring projects.

Turley's (2006) reports on the global media monitoring initiative sponsored by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) which addresses gender inequalities in global media. Every five years, since 1995, GMMP coordinates a worldwide media monitoring day that utilizes feminist networks and women's organizations in more than 70 countries to monitor media coverage of women (Turley, 2006, p. 11). The article reports on the goals and achievements of GMMP, particularly that

the GMMP has move[d] beyond one-sided complaints *about* the media to constructive dialogue *with* the media...In discussions about what is wrong with, or missing from, the pictures of the world we get from media content, hard data—together with concrete examples—reaches media professionals with an immediacy never achieved by theory or abstract argument. (pp. 13-14)

When Turley's research is combined with work the few articles that address activist collaborations using media monitoring, like Ryan (2005), Ryan, Anastario, and Jeffreys

(2005) and Hoynes (2005) it is clear that there is space within the literature to address media monitoring as an organizing strategy for social movements.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

a researcher who sets out to study social movements is faced with a range of methodological possibilities ... students of social movements [are encouraged] to approach their research questions from various angles and to employ multiple methods. (Klandermans and Staggenborg, 2002, p. xv)

The range of activities and geographic locations of the projects necessitate a range of methodological approaches. Given my background as a democratic media activist and my prioritization of relevant social movement research on and for democratic media activist organizations, this project uses qualitative method triangulation, or a multi-method approach. Method triangulation, or a multi-method approach, “reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Objective reality can never be captured. We can know a thing only through its representations” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 8). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) also note that triangulation in qualitative research “is the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously” (p. 8). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) also define qualitative research as “a commitment to some version of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of post positivism” (p. 13). Additionally, a multi-method approach has its roots in feminist methodology in that feminist researchers have worked to address “what can count as true knowledge” and have critiqued assumptions like objectivity and neutrality; while arguing that conceptual frameworks that “dictate what is meant by scientific method, affect how we can validate knowledge about the social world” (Brunskell, 1998, p. 43).

The case study data reported here are the result of semi-structured interviewing and organizational documents analysis. The methodology aims to create an evaluation

of the MEP as a whole which highlights the various goals, strategies and outcomes of both the localized projects and the MEP as an organization. The following sections examine the framework for the evaluation and the two approaches used in my research: case study and semi-structured interviews and conclude with a review of my research and analysis process.

### **Evaluation and the researcher**

Given my previously stated background as a democratic media activist and researcher concerned with relevant communications research that furthers social justice projects, I sought to find a model for evaluation that would help me frame my work and help me locate myself as a researcher within the evaluation. Feminist evaluation, according to Brisolara and Siegart (2007) existed before the name ‘feminist evaluation’ was used:

Evaluation practitioners who espoused feminist beliefs were engaged in what they had begun to call feminist evaluation long before the term was recognized in the field as an emerging model. (p. 277).

Brisolara and Siegart (2007) also note “program evaluation emerged as professional field in the United States during the 1960’s with the expansion of social programs during that time” (p. 277). Program evaluation is often designed according to various models, or “approaches to evaluation that espouse particular theoretical values and methodologies” (Brisolara and Siegart, 2007, p. 277). Evaluation models include responsive, utilization and stakeholder; however as the field developed, newer models like participatory evaluation and empowerment evaluation “challenged the core beliefs and practices of the evaluation professional” (p. 277). The field had positivist underpinnings and as critiques

to these epistemological assumptions around the knowing of reality grew, newer evaluation models posed “ontological and methodological challenges”, which expanded questions around “what can be known” and “what is reality” (p. 277). Additionally, practitioners questioned, “what are the most ethical and effective ways of understanding a program, its outcomes and program dynamics” (p. 277). The main thrust of my research questions stems around this very concern.

There is not space within this paper to adequately address the body of work that explores feminist methodologies. Hesse-Biber (2007) offers that

feminists ask ‘new’ questions that place women’s lives and those of ‘other’ marginalized groups at the center of social inquiry. Feminist research disrupts traditional ways of knowing ... and is mindful of hierarchies of power and authority in the research process (p. 3).

Campbell and Wasco (2000) state “feminist approaches to research are most clearly identifiable by the processes used to construct knowledge” (p. 783). Campbell and Wasco also identify the wide variety of feminism(s) (liberal, radical, socialist, and womanism) and the expansive literature that explores feminist theory (p. 775). These areas of feminisms incorporate different theories of social change. Liberal feminism focuses on reforming the current system for equal access to resources and socialist feminism focuses on inequalities of stemming from capitalism, while radical feminism aims for “restructured social institutions” and privileges that women’s “systemic marginalization” is the “fundamental form of inequality” (p. 776). Womanism “emerged as an explicit race critique of feminism” and shares the structural critiques of socialist and radical feminisms but focuses on “differing experiences among women of various classes and racial/ethnic groups” (Campbell and Wasco, 2000, p. 777).

I share the larger critique of the radical, socialist and womanist feminists in that “society is sexist, racist, and classist, and therefore requires substantial transformation” (Campbell and Wasco, 2000, p. 777). I seek an expanded version of feminism that will address the larger questions I have concerning intersectionality and how systematic oppression and systems of power work together and are experienced in multiple ways by individuals and communities. Intersectionality asserts that “people live multiple, layered identities and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege” and grows from the work, writings and experiences of women of color which “reveal how aspects of identity and social relations are shaped by the simultaneous operation of multiple systems of power” (Dill, McLaughlin, and Nieves, 2007, p. 629). “Intersectional work primarily takes place in the academy, communities, foundations, and social justice organizations dedicated to bringing about change” (Dill, McLaughlin, and Nieves, 2007, p. 633). Given that the majority of the participants within my project are people of color, particularly women from marginalized class, sexual orientation, and religious/ethnic groups and that the MEP organization “was developed as a model for marginalized communities” (Office of Communications, Inc., 2008b, para 1), I wanted to foreground the concerns of intersectionality of oppressions within the following guidelines proposed by Brisolaro and Siegart (2007) for feminist evaluation, or evaluation done by feminists:

1. Evaluation and research methods, institutions, and practices are all social constructs and have been strongly influenced by a dominant male or patriarchal ideology [and white supremacy, colonialism, heteronormality and capitalism].
2. Gender inequities are one manifestation of social injustice and are an important starting point given that gender issues have long been and are frequently overlooked.

3. Discrimination based on gender is systemic and structural. Although it may manifest differently, it cuts across and is inextricably linked to race, class, and culture.
  4. Evaluation is a political activity...and is imbued with asymmetrical power relationships. The personal experiences, perspectives, and characteristics evaluators bring to evaluations...both come from and lead to a particular political stance.
  5. Knowledge is a powerful resource that serves an explicit or implicit purpose. Knowledge should be a resource of and for the people who create, hold, and share that knowledge.
  6. Action and advocacy are morally and ethically appropriate responses of an engaged feminist evaluator. The purpose of knowledge is action.
  7. There are multiple ways of knowing; some ways are privileged over others (e.g., within the social sciences or evaluation) by those with the power to sanction or privilege certain ways of knowing. Consequently, engaging a range of stakeholders in a participatory manner is important to feminist evaluation practice.
  8. Knowledge is culturally, socially, and temporally contingent. Knowledge is also filtered through the knower.
- (Brisolara and Siegart, 2007, p. 280).

Feminist research methodologies encourage triangulation of methods. Given the above epistemological and ontological framing of my evaluation, I will now examine the types of methods used to triangulate the research: case study and semi-structured interviewing. The case study can be seen as “as a triangulated research strategy” (Tellis, 1997). Feagin, Orum and Sjoberg (1991) define case study “as an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single social phenomenon...and often relies on the use of several data sources” (p. 2). Within social movement research, the case study has increasingly been used to address social movement research needs.



## **The Case Study**

Social movement researchers, David A. Snow and Danny Trom offer the following characteristics of a case study:

1. investigation and analysis of an instance or variant of some bounded social phenomenon that
2. seeks to generate a richly detailed and “thick” elaboration of the phenomenon studied through
3. the use and triangulation of multiple methods or procedures that include but are not limited to qualitative techniques (Snow and Trom, 2002, p. 147).

The above characteristics define how case studies are used within social movement research. Snow and Trom use these characteristics so that researchers can distinguish between generally researching a social movement as opposed to creating a case study of a social movement.

The first characteristic of a case study – what constitutes a ‘case’, is that it is (a) “temporally and spatially contingent” or “bound by time and place”; (b) a study of a subset of a larger group; (c) examining “an instance of an important theoretical concept or process”; and (d) the focus of inquiry is “an intrinsically interesting historical or cultural entity in its own right” (Snow and Trom 2002, p. 147). The second characteristic of case studies, a detailed and “holistic elaboration” is used throughout literature that describes case studies (Snow and Trom 2002, p. 149; Feagin, et al, 1991; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Snow and Trom (2002) see it as a “holistic analysis of cultural systems of action” (p. 149). It is these systems of action that form the ‘unit of analysis’ for social movement case studies. Case study research can have levels or units of analysis that examine micro, meso or macro systems within movements. The objective, according to Snow and Trom (2002), “is to understand and illuminate how the

focal actions, events, and/or processes” interact within the movement (p. 150). The final characteristic of case study research, triangulation of methods, is a fundamental component of case study research and aims, ideally, to generate “multiple sources of evidence” usually through a mix of qualitative methods or procedures like participant observation, interviewing or document and archival analysis (Snow and Trom, 2002, p. 150).

Snow and Trom identify three types of social movement case studies: (a) normal or representative cases, where “the case is fairly or reasonably representative of the larger social movement”; (b) critical cases, where “the particular features of the case...are ideal for clarifying empirical and theoretical issues”; and (c) negative and extreme cases, where the case studied is a negative example of the situation studied. While these latter cases are used less frequently in social movement research, it is used to demonstrate “deviant” or “extreme” examples. A classic example of this type of case study is Lofland’s “doomsday cult” study, which revealed the practices of member recruitment and conversion within the context of extreme religious behavior, as opposed to a representative case study that investigated a social movement organization’s strategies of member recruitment (Snow and Trom, 2002, pp. 158-159). As this project is evaluating one social movement organization and aims to address whether or not the MEP is an experiment or a model for replication, this critical case study will illuminate issues relating to the organizational structure, strategies and outcomes of the project.

Another aspect of case study analysis is the scope, or the number of organizations or types of processes investigated. The scope of a case studies can examine single, multiple or revelatory cases. Single case studies are often descriptive and focus on a

single movement's history, beliefs and operations. Single case studies can also focus on a movement's processes and issues. Multiple case studies can be "illustrative or comparative" whereby an illustrative study would highlight multiple organizations or events that are representative of the larger movement and a comparative study would examine "a more nuanced assessment of variation among the cases...[with respect] to the broad movement and processes or conceptual issues" (Snow and Trom, 2002, p. 162).

The case study research strategy offers social movement researchers the possibility to create broad, nuanced understandings of cases as cultural systems of action. Along with methodological triangulation, which encourages multidimensional analysis, case study research procedures and analysis can help generate "significant empirical, conceptual and theoretical" advancements in "understanding movements and the dynamics and processes [of social movements]" (Snow and Trom, 2002, p. 163). Case study research, whether for social movement research or other disciplines, may suffer from not being generalizable, or that the case study conclusions might not represent anything that is duplicable or generalizable to a broad group, especially when statistical generalization is required. Despite this limitation, case study research is useful for theoretical generalization. Snow and Trom, quoting Yin on the goal of case study:

is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization)... case studies are more like experiments than surveys...generalizable to theoretical propositions ... not to populations or universes. (Snow and Trom, 2002, p.164)

Case study research works within the constructivist paradigm; therefore, case study research "assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings) and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 35).

However, case study research also requires triangulation which includes methods like participant observation or semi-structured interviewing. These methods have more materialist-realist ontological underpinnings, while also having commitments to empiricist and postmodern epistemologies (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). However, Holstein and Gubrium (1995), state that all interviews “are reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions, whether recognized or not” and thus posit interviewing broadly as social constructionist (p. 4).

### **Semi-Structured Interviewing**

Social movement research often uses interviewing to “generate data about the motives of ...[participants] and the activities of social movement networks and organizations” (Blee and Taylor, 2002, p. 92). Interviewing can be structured or unstructured, with unstructured interviewing encompassing a wide range of techniques, including semi-structured interviewing. Structured interviewing is used for survey research and opinion polls and emphasizes quantitative scientific methods. A criticism of structured interviewing is that the technique tends to “elicit on rational responses [while] inadequately assessing the emotional dimension” (Fontana and Frey, 2000, p. 651). Semi-structured interviewing differs from structured interviewing because structured interviews use a “pre-established schedule of questions or a questionnaire” while in semi-structured interviewing the researcher uses an “interview guide that includes a consistent set of questions or topics, but the interviewer is allowed more flexibility to digress and to probe based on interactions during the interview” (Blee and Taylor, 2002, p. 92). While there is an abundance of literature pertaining to semi-structured interviewing, I will

concentrate on semi-structured interviewing as it relates to social movement research.

Social movement scholars Kathleen M. Blee and Verta Taylor (2002) offer seven reasons why semi-structured interviewing is useful for social movement research. These reasons are: (a) researchers gain access to “motivations and perspectives of a broader and more diverse group of social movement participants” (p. 93); (b) researchers can analyze “semantic context of statements” of participants and can locate “activists’ talk within wider social understandings and discourse” while gaining access to “motivations, beliefs and attitudes” (pp. 94-95); (c) subjective meaning can be scrutinized, particularly how activists “make sense of and justify their actions” (p. 95); (d) researchers can explore the ebb and flow of social movements because semi-structured interviewing can “provide a longitudinal window on social movement activism” (p. 95); (e) researchers can reveal “nuanced understandings of social movement outcomes as the construction of collective and individual identities” (p. 95); (f) human agency is at the “center of analysis” (p. 96); and finally, (g) researchers can also analyze how social movement messages “are received by members, targeted recruits, intended audiences and others” (p. 96).

Blee and Taylor (2002) note that it is important for researchers/interviewers “to understand their own position [in relation to] participants in the social movement” (p. 97). Researchers can be participants of the social movement under study, which can increase trust and empathy between the interviewees and the interviewer. However, ‘insider’ researchers can have difficulty maintaining neutrality during conflicts or disputes within the social movement. Researchers can also be ‘outsiders’ to the movement, which can “provide valuable perspectives on the taken-or granted assumptions of social movement participants” (p. 97). Outsider researchers can have

difficulty accessing social movements and building trust with participants. The researcher's position inside or outside social movements also impacts data collection, especially when factions or conflicts exist within the social movement (Blee and Taylor, 2003). As discussed earlier, I come from the social movement I am researching and thus have existing relationships to the larger movement for democratic media. While I do not come from the organization that I am studying, it is because of my existing work as a media activism in other, allied organizations that I have been able to develop the project because I was able to establish trust and respect at a very early stage with the MEP organizers.

In general, all interviewers, whether researching social movements or social problems, are encouraged to take regular, prompt and inconspicuous notes; to write down everything possible; and analyze the notes frequently (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). Analysis and interpretation in semi-structured interviewing are ongoing throughout the research process. Additionally, researchers "clarify concepts and categories through successive, alternating waves of data collection and interpretation" (Blee and Taylor 2002, p. 110) Blee and Taylor (2002) also describe the interpretive process as "working up from the data and down from existing ideas, propositions, concepts, theories and hypotheses in the social movement literature" (p. 111).

Originally I planned to incorporate a combination of an interview guide and structured open ended questions, however, as will be discussed later, I ended up using just an interview guide. For the semi-structured interviews, both phone and in-person, I used an interview guide, described by Patton (1987) as "a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview" (p. 111). The guide "serves as a basic

checklist during the interview to make sure that all relevant topics are covered” and the interviewer “is required to adapt both the wording and sequence of questions to specific respondents in the context of the actual interview” (Patton, 1987, p. 111). Through using this approach, the researcher is able develop a conversational approach to the interviews but with a focus on predetermined topics. This was particularly useful in the interviews with the organizers from the various site locations because I needed the flexibility to address the specific context of the localized projects, while attempting to gather similar information from all my participants. This is ideal for the comparative aims of the study because the topics of the interviews were the same for all site locations and organizers but allowed the space for the differences between the local situations to emerge. Interview guides are also recommended because they help make efficient use of time because the interviewer has pre-determined her topics prior to the interview and interview guides “help make interviewing different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting the issue to be discussed in the interview. A guide keeps the interaction focused, but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge” (Patton, 1987, 111).

Through the feminist evaluation framework this report documents a critical comparative case study that uses qualitative research method triangulation. The feminist evaluation framework locates myself as a researcher and social justice activist within the project. The semi-structured interview guide offers the most flexibility for interviewing participants but still allows the research question areas and topics to be investigated with all participants. As the research questions aim to illuminate the organizational structure, strategies and outcomes, a variety of data sources obtained through method triangulation

will provide “multiple, refracted realities” of the organization (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 8). The process for utilizing the multi-method approach to the case study of the Media Empowerment Project is discussed below.

### **Research Process: Confidentiality/Ethics**

This project needed approval from the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. I established relationships with key participants from the various site locations and the organization as a whole, the United Church of Christ’s Office of Communications, Inc. (OC) and confirmed their commitment and willingness to participate. While I was working with human participants, because the participants were willing and in fact, excited, to participate, I did not see significant ethical concerns and felt that the project had a very low degree of risk. The only area of minor concern was regarding confidentiality. Since the project is a comparative case study, it was difficult to mask responses within my writing because the organizers of the localized projects discuss their specific project.

Names of participants are not used in the write up of the research; however, due to the organizers working out of specific local projects, it would be possible for another MEP organizer to identify the participant. However, since OC and the organizers of the local sites desired an evaluation of their project, I did not see this as a significant problem because the research is needed by the social movement organization I am working with. For the purposes of the write up of this project, participants will be referred by their roles within the organization: national project manager, managing director, executive director; advisory board member, local staff, volunteer, and community partner. These roles will



be useful for analysis as the organizational structure and the coordination of the participants significantly influenced the outcomes of the project.

### **Research Timeline**

This project has taken quite some time to see through completion. After researching the history and online communication of the United Church of Christ , OC and the MEP, I attended the National Conference on Media Reform in Memphis, Tennessee in January 2007, where I made contact with MEP local staff from Michigan and Texas. In the spring I met with the Dearborn staff member where they expressed enthusiasm for having outside help in documenting the project as well as comparing the outcomes of the different projects. During the summer of 2007 I conducted a couple of conference calls with the Texas and Michigan staff, followed by a conference call with the managing director of the Office of Communications, Inc. During this conference call, OC, committed verbally to participating in the project and expressed their desire to have me include document analysis in my research, whereby I would collect documents from the various site locations and help OC organize the information. This piece of the project is the component that will occur after the thesis is complete and is the component that ensures that the organization is not just being studied by me, but is also benefiting from my research.

### **Site Visits and Phone Interviews**

After receiving my Research Ethics Board approval for my project, I then proceeded to visit the various Media Empowerment sites in Texas, North Carolina,

Michigan and OC office. I completed in-person interviews with staff members of all the local MEPs, as well as volunteers and community partners in Texas and North Carolina. I then went to the OC office in Washington, DC where I interviewed the managing director. At each site I collected various printed and electronic documents. The remaining interviews were conducted via phone and included one member of the original advisory board, the former executive director of the OC and the former national project manager of the Media Empowerment Project. I spent two months trying to secure an interview with an additional member of the advisory board, but this interview did not happen. Additionally, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, due to staffing cuts, I was not able to interview the most recent MEP national project manager.

All in total, I completed eleven interviews, eight in person interviews and three phone interviews. I gathered a total of 17 hours of interviews. I then transcribed the interviews into a word processing program, creating 207 single spaced pages of transcriptions. I also collected approximately 1000 pages of paper documents and 1,085 files of electronic documents.

### **Documents**

The role of the document analysis in this project began as an additional area for data collection as well as post-thesis collaboration with the MEP that I committed to working on for the organization. However, the role that documentation played in the successes and failures of the project proved to be far more significant in my evaluation than I imagined when designing the project.

According to Hodder (2002), documents are “prepared for personal rather than official reasons and include diaries, memos, letters, field notes, and so on” while records are things like banking statements, building contracts, licenses, etc. (p. 267). A distinction for organizational documents is that of internal vs. external documentation; internal documents would include emails, notes of conference calls, strategic planning documents, etc. whereas external documents would include websites, promotional materials, outreach materials, and legally public documents required by non-profit law. Given the amount of interview transcriptions and documents that I collected, it was not possible to do a complete document analysis for this project. Therefore, I choose to look at documents that were specifically mentioned by participants in the interviews. These types of documents included: grant applications, websites, community media needs assessment tools, media monitoring documentation, internal evaluations, emails between myself and interview participants and strategic planning documents.

### **Analysis Process**

The analysis process of this project was very fluid. Prior to my site visits, I initially imagined the interviews to be combination of both an interview guide and standardized open ended questions. In response to feedback I received at my proposal defense, I incorporated a testing process of the interview questions. I recruited a couple of friends who are also social justice activists and tested my interview questions with them. I also used to this step to practice with my audio recorder. During these practice interviews, I noticed a couple of issues with my prepared questions.

First, the questioning seemed slightly forced. Since I had existing relationships with these local organizers, it was a bit like role playing at interviewing. Despite this reality, the actual questions posed some problems for the activist testers. Some of the language did not make sense, for example when I used the phrase 'types of outcomes'. I also noticed when they answered a question they often were answering other questions with the same answer. Rather than force the conversation to be overly formal, I opted for a less formal, more conversational approach. Additionally, the time and length of the test interviews were far longer than I had anticipated. Since I had time commitments from most participants for no more than two hours for their interviews and some extra time for document collection, I was concerned that by having a strict, formal approach to the interviews I would not get to the questions that I really needed answered before the time ran out.

Another step that I added to my research process was to listen to the presentation by Media Empowerment Project staff members on a panel at the Memphis conference where I had initially made contact in January 2007. I reviewed the audio from the panel (Smith, Johnson, Schwallie, Cuellar, Meroueh, and Soriano, 2007) and generated some questions from their presentations and comments. Based upon reviewing this conference audio, I developed some revised questions prior to conducting the first interview.

Prior to conducting my first interview, the interview questions were still categorized as Interview Guide and Structured Open Ended questions. However, once I was conducting the interviews with the organizers, it became necessary to use only the interview guide as opposed to having a section of the interviews that were standardized. This enabled me to have more conversational interviews, building on the trust

relationships that I had built with the organizers over the year of developing the project. Through the interview guide, as discussed above, I was able to address similar topics with each participant, but I did not address the topics in the same order for each interview nor were the questions asked in exactly the same ways. This enabled the interviews to go in more varied directions, enabling some answers to some topics to be revealed without me asking the participant.

Additionally, I had divided up my question sets based on whether the participant was a local organizer or was connected to the national organization. When interviewing the national organizers/participants I asked slightly different questions that were more suited to their knowledge of the national organization. Please see Appendix A for a list of the questions/topics asked in the interviews. Finally, the majority of all the questions were coded according to the research question areas prior to beginning the interviews.

Following the interviews, I transcribed the audio content. After completing an interview transcription, I made notes about my initial impressions and any relationships that I noted to my three research areas (organization, strategy, outcomes). When I completed transcribing all eleven interviews, I conducted three readings of the interview transcripts, using color coding according to research categories and reading for various themes relevant to the larger research questions and theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter Two of this document. Through this lengthy process, beginning with conducting the interviews, through the audio transcribing, reviewing and coding I became very familiar with the data.

Another recommendation from my proposal process was to journal about my experiences throughout the interviews in order strengthen research reflexivity throughout

the process. This process proved to be extremely helpful. While I did visit the various local sites of the Media Empowerment Project, the research was not participant observation. Therefore, there were moments during my visits that brought up some challenging issues regarding what was and was not official interview information. The only information that I analyzed from my conversations with the participants were the recorded interviews and any documents that the participants supplied. However, through the journaling process I noted various ideas, themes and questions that developed through my experiences which helped me formulate my analysis reported in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Organization

When I left Ontario there was a foot of snow. As soon as I exited the San Antonio airport, I was hit by a wave of south Texas heat. After preparing for almost one year, I finally was beginning the interviews with the staff and volunteers of the Media Empowerment Project. Through these interviews and subsequent document collection from each of the sites, I have identified some significant tensions, challenges and successes of the project as a whole and how it manifested at the local levels in Texas, North Carolina and Michigan. Throughout my report, I refer to the interview participants by their roles within the organization: local staff, volunteer, community partner, advisory board member, and the national staff, which included the former national project manager, current managing director, and the former executive director.

In order to better understand the Media Empowerment Project, some background on the project and its sponsoring organization, is necessary. Founded in 1957 through a union of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the United Church of Christ (UCC) has over 1.2 million members and 5,567 churches in the United States (National Council of Churches, 2006). The denomination has a long history of involvement with social justice issues, beginning with their early involvement in the abolitionist movement against slavery (United Church of Christ, 2008).

The UCC's history of involvement with civil rights and social justice issues made it one of the early supporters of the civil rights movement during the mid-twentieth

century. During the process of building the union between the denominations that later became the United Church of Christ, the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ was created to convey information to the affected congregations about the merger (Mills, 2004). The head of this department, Rev. Everett Parker, created a separate organization, the Office of Communication, Inc. (OC), which was a part of the Office of Communication, but was a legally separate organization. Between the late 1950's and early 1980's OC was instrumental in working with the civil rights movement to bring legal challenges to the broadcast licensing system of the Federal Communications Commission<sup>2</sup>.

OC continues to work toward increasing public access to broadcasting and improving media systems in a variety of ways. In addition to running the Media Empowerment Project (MEP), OC coordinates publicity for UCC, produces documentaries on range of social justice topics and works on education and advocacy on media policy and communications access issues. Their involvement with media policy activism uniquely positions the OC within networks of grassroots organizations, non-profit advocacy organizations, regulatory bodies and academic institutions.

Despite this lengthy and successful history that continues to prioritize civil rights, social justice and community organizing within the context of media policy reform, the OC, according to former and current national staff, is “marginally known within the UCC itself” (personal communication, May 27, 2008). By all accounts, the structural

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<sup>2</sup> Some of these policy changes include the Fairness Doctrine and public participation in communication policy issues (which had previously only been allowed to business and government interests). OC and their work with the civil rights movement introduced the idea of telecommunications law (and firms) for the public interest and citizen media monitoring as a political strategy to social justice organizing.



relationship between these entities is complex. Following a restructuring in 2000, the Office of Communications of UCC was disbanded and reformed as the Proclamation, Identity and Communication (PIC) Ministry and OC was made independent of the PIC Ministry. The two organizations share the same executive director, but OC has an autonomous board of directors (OC, Inc., 2005a). Around this same time, OC began a project that is the predecessor to the MEP – the Microradio Implementation Project (MIP). This project, funded by the Ford Foundation and other large foundations, sought to expand Low Power FM (LPFM) radio stations throughout the United States, through working with “historically marginalized communities” in applying for LPFM licenses (Cano, 2002, p. 1). Additionally the MIP aimed to educate communities about FCC regulations and policy, assist them with setting up approved stations and facilitate a “broad-based collaborative network” around LPFM issues (p. 6). The MIP ended the year before OC initiated its next media policy organizing project, the Media Empowerment Project. In the initial grant proposal to the Ford Foundation, OC directly referenced the proposed Media Empowerment Project (MEP) as the next logical step following the work begun by the MIP, specifically emphasizing that the new project would work to change the dynamic of policy debates which are “segregated to the Washington ‘beltway’” and “fram[e] national policy in terms of local consequences” (OC, Inc. 2003, p. 4).

Despite this important linkage to a previous project, the MIP was not mentioned by local staff or the national project manager, while the advisory board member, the OC managing director and former executive director were aware of the project. General knowledge about UCC’s involvement with civil rights and media policy was understood

and mentioned by local staff, but the immediate predecessor to the current MEP projects was unknown. This is unfortunate because in addition to the two years of work that the MIP engaged in, current staff of the MEP were not unaware of an evaluation report on the impact of the MIP. This MIP evaluation report reflects, as will be discussed later, an impetus for describing quantifiable ‘deliverables’ such as the number of unique website hits or the number of media outlets the MIP staff contacted (Cano, 2002, pp. 7-10). However, the evaluation lacks a great deal of detail about how the MIP actually worked—the processes by which the staff organized the various communities – and the report has limited critical assessment or ‘lessons learned’ from the project. There is a note in the MIP evaluation report that suggests future projects, “receive from the foundations at the time of the grant, the format for the end-of project report, in order to record as the project proceed [sic] the quantifying and qualifying data needed” (Cano, 2002, p. 32). As will be addressed, the role that reporting and documenting successes and outcomes of projects like the MIP and the MEP to the financial sponsors of these projects cannot be understated.

### *OC Structure*

The relationship between the original vision for the MEP and the practical realities of creating the organization as a part of the OC speak to challenging issues of securing funding, negotiating organizational culture(s), and the dynamics of non-profit operational structures. After reviewing how OC’s vision and funding for the MEP affected the project’s deployment and the subsequent community responses, I will explore the organizational structures of the MEP, looking the challenges of accountability

and sustainability. I will also investigate the dynamics of goal setting, documenting outcomes and the dynamics between the local MEP projects and OC.

It is difficult to determine the exact number of grants that OC received for starting the MEP. From the documents I reviewed, there were two grants to the Ford Foundation that initiated the project: an initial grant specifically for the Media Empowerment Project and a much larger, comprehensive grant for OC covering four project areas. These project areas include: (a) a national education campaign involving public speaking events and the production of various media products, including documentaries and the Media Empowerment Manual<sup>3</sup>; (b) an expansion OC's network of legal, research and activist organizations through FCC license challenges and children's TV content monitoring, a range of legal petitions, and participation in the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis by the MEP national program manager; (c) funding for the Media Empowerment Project; and (d) an internal strategic planning and organizational assessment of OC's relationship with the United Church of Christ (OC, Inc., 2005b).

These above project areas reflect many priorities for one organization and according the former executive director, highlight "the problem [was] that UCC had many priorities at that time" (personal communication, May 27, 2008). The fourth project area is significant because this assessment of the relationship between OC and the larger organization of the United Church of Christ revealed structural deficiencies

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<sup>3</sup> OC produced a 47 page guide to organizing media monitoring and media accountability campaigns distributed almost 11,000 copies, in English and Spanish. The manual was made prior to the development of local MEP infrastructures and therefore, according to the national project manager, did not reflect the lessons of the MEP. Within the local sites, there was mixed response. Some of the local staff did not think it was useful while others expressed that they used it to educate community members.

between the organizations and possibly illuminates why the later fiscal crisis that impacted UCC and OC in 2007 was not foreseen<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, because this assessment had not yet occurred when the MEP site selection began, there was little emphasis on selecting sites that had strong UCC communities/churches, thus in some of the local MEP sites, “there wasn't a relationship” between the MEP project and the UCC community (personal communication, March 7, 2008). National staff reflections about the lack of relationships between the MEP and the larger UCC constituency confirmed this assessment:

there wasn't even a thought, let's do work somewhere, let's find out who the partners could be and sort of try to bring them in the beginning. Maybe we're going to do our project in Texas and there's going to be less of a UCC presence just cause we're not as strong there, but a least there'll still be a some connection and we can work on building it, or whatever. Whatever the thinking was, but there was no thinking in that regards. (personal communication, March 24, 2008)

The strength of various UCC communities seems to have not been considered when selecting MEP site locations. The MEP advisory board, in committing to serve in an advisory capacity thought there was a stronger relationship between OC and the churches and it took “almost a year” for “us to understand that OC was such a separate entity” (personal communication, April 17, 2008).

In the initial grant, OC established broad criteria for selecting the three site communities. These criteria sought to locate the MEP in communities where OC had identified “a potentially unhealthy relationship between the community and the local

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<sup>4</sup> The managing director reported that at the end of 2007, UCC and OC realized that they “had a lot more severe financial situation than it had thought. UCC as a whole and really OC, Inc. but related to things related to the church, as a whole.” OC ended the position of the MEP national project manager and some administrative support positions for OC. OC also ended the fiscal and administrative support of the Dearborn MEP and informed the remaining MEP sites in Texas and North Carolina that they would need to be financial independent within six to twelve months.

media” – things like negative or “neglect” in media coverage “relevant to the community”, absence or concentration of broadcast media outlets and discrimination or lack of representation of a community in employment media outlets (Initial Ford Grant, 2003, p. 4). The OC executive director established initial relationships with communities prior to the hiring the national project manager. This process, according to the former executive director, sought to collaborate with existing “church or civic groups” in order “to build an interest group or an advisory committee ... that would work together to identify problems that they felt the media was not addressing in their local setting” (personal communication, May 27, 2008). After the national project manager was hired at the end 2003, she refined the criteria for site selection. The criteria enabled the MEP to have sites that demonstrated diversity of geography, with both urban and rural locations and ethnic diversity.

### *Funding the MEP*

Refining the criteria for the MEP site selection was not the only revision to the original vision for the MEP. The initial grant for the MEP affected the development of the project because, as the former national project manager noted, “the tension between the initial grant's model and mandate – which was quite top-down and academic in approach – and the realities of organizing with communities.” Furthermore because the MEP,

was not conceived of by organizers or activists ... many of the challenges of organizing, especially with a national-local model, were not anticipated. These included questions of *how precisely to define the project's goals and strategy nationally and in the communities, accountability and sustainability, and the relationship between the project manager, OC, and the communities* [italics added]. (personal communication, June 4, 2008).

As Chaskin (2005) notes, “bureaucratic organizations are goal-orientated collectivities that are formally organized to coordinate action rationally toward the achievement of defined objectives” (p. 410). This goal-orientation, specifically around requirements for fiscal support from foundations, is clearly shown in the approach to the initial grant. During the eighteen month initial granting period, OC committed to delivering proof of successful achievement of the stated goals through the submission of “deliverables” summarizing “ongoing quantitative and qualitative assessments” (Office of Communications, Inc., 2003, p. 6). The deliverables promised in the grant included: “Hands-On Material, Regional Workshops, Published Local Case Studies, Evaluative Reporting and [a] Website” (p. 5).

The initial grant’s vision on the MEP’s structural foundation reflects the earlier quote from the former national project manager on the dynamics of the relationships between the national and local organizations as opposed to the national determining the entire project for, or on behalf of, the communities. Furthermore, the model proposed in the grant reflects the tendency of “most non-profits and voluntary organizations [to be] ... influenced by the (real and perceive) interests, values and requirements of funding organizations (Chaskin, 2005, p. 411). For example, the former national project manager noted that,

We also got sidetracked sometimes by Ford's ideas about what the [MEP], and more often, OC, should be doing. For example, I spent a lot of time working on the series of brochures that we produced (although someone else was hired to write them), “Why Media Matters”<sup>5</sup>, which were not an idea that came out of OC and not something that I thought was necessary or useful at the time.

The project funding initially called for a full-time paid national manager, based in

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<sup>5</sup> The brochures addressed the influence of media on seven constituencies – Faith, Immigrant, Labor, Environment, Parents, Musicians, and Community Organizers.

Washington, DC, to locate partner organizations and volunteers in three communities. The communities finally selected were located San Antonio, Texas; Tillery, North Carolina and Dearborn, Michigan. A fourth site was added in Edenton, North Carolina later. In all communities, the national manager created or attempted to create an advisory committee composed representatives of existing community organizations. As previously discussed, there was no long range plan to integrate these projects within the UCC church structure, however, the initial relationships with some of the communities did occur through UCC organizations.

### *MEP Communities*

In North Carolina, a relationship with a community organization in Tillery was formed through an existing UCC relationship with the Franklinton Center at Bricks, a UCC run facility and conference center. The national project manager later added the Edenton site due to the geographic proximity of Tillery and Edenton, “so that there would be a linkage between them” (personal communication, June 3, 2008). While the Tillery project later ended their relationship with OC<sup>6</sup>, Tillery and Edenton staff and volunteers are still working together and the Tillery organizers have been instrumental in connecting the Edenton staff to philanthropy networks in North Carolina (personal communication, March 21, 2008). Edenton is a rural community in northern North Carolina with high rates of unemployment and limited educational opportunities for the large African American population. The Edenton MEP works with a multi-generational community,

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<sup>6</sup> According to both local staff and the national project manager, one of the reasons for this split was because of differing goals between the Tillery community and OC. Except where mentioned by interview participants, the Tillery site will not be covered in this project. No interviews or documents were acquired from this site.

focusing their efforts on African American youth and elders in the rural community.

The second MEP was<sup>7</sup> located in metro Detroit, specifically in the city of Dearborn, an area with the largest density of people of Arab descent in the world outside of the Middle East. This site also had some linkages to the UCC community, specifically one UCC church in the region, which supplied office space for the local staff person for a short time. The Dearborn MEP developed a broad coalition of allies and partners within the Michigan Arab American community. The local advisory committee, later called the steering committee, was composed of various activists and community organizations from the Arab American community. The Dearborn MEP worked with a very diverse population within the Arab American community, having volunteers from a range of class, education, gender and religious backgrounds.

The final MEP, in San Antonio, Texas, had no connections to the UCC community and was a direct result of the very successful FCC hearings in early 2004, organized extensively by the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, which eventually became a partner and mentoring organization to the Texas Media Empowerment Project (TXMEP). San Antonio, a very diverse city with large populations of Latino and African American, Muslim and Asian communities, has a history of social justice activism and is also the corporate headquarters of media conglomerates, Clear Channel and SBC, in addition to numerous military bases. The TXMEP primarily works with “women, people of color, immigrants, and low income people. It's cross generational, it's bi-cultural, and definitely bi-lingual” (personal communication, March 7, 2008).

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<sup>7</sup> While the other MEP sites are still currently active, at the time of this research, the Dearborn MEP had already ended. The local staff but no volunteers from the Dearborn MEP participated in the interview and document collection process for this project.



### *Hiring of Staff*

The initial grant focused on the empowerment of marginalized communities but also made commitments to quantifiable “deliverables” (Office of Communications, Inc., 2003, p. 6). While the project framed itself as empowering, the process of imagining what the project could possibly be had occurred mostly independent of the communities’ involvement. One of my biggest surprises in the interviews for this project was learning that initial project plan and grant request was to fund only one national organizer. That staff person would then ‘organize’ the projects in the local communities, basically building a community organization with someone not from the community. Because I was only reading the external communication of the organization, primarily website communication, this issue was not apparent until I began interviewing. The transition to paying local people to organize in their own communities reflected through the learning process of the national staff members:

It became apparent early on that it was going to be an untenable situation for one staff person to be in three different parts of the country that do this work in a way would provide lasting change in the communities themselves. (personal communication, May 27, 2008)

However, a response from the San Antonio advisory committee’s reaction to the project proposal, whereby they were not willing to participate without multiple year commitment from OC and without fiscal support for a local organizer reflected a reaction which occurred in all the communities, as the national project manager describes:

I went to the communities and said hey you're going to volunteer and do all this work and they said, ... well, where's the money?...And how long are you going to be around for? ... And so they were very clear about wanting to work with us only if we could commit to multiple years and paying local staff. (personal communication, June 3, 2008)

OC prioritized the funding for local staff and hired part-time<sup>8</sup> staff through a reallocation of the grant money they had received and included funding for local staff positions in subsequent grant requests. After OC responded to the communities' requirements for multiple year commitment and local paid staff, local staff were then hired through relationships and advisement from the local advisory boards. Initially, the national staff approached this hiring process in a more traditional manner, seeking to put an open call out for the positions. But the local communities argued for hiring staff who had pre-existing relationships with the partner community organization.<sup>9</sup> The shift in funding priorities reflected the influence and resistance of the communities and the openness of OC to change plans based on the needs and autonomy of the communities.

A strength of the project was the diversity of backgrounds of the MEP participants (local and national staff and advisory members) which meant that a variety of approaches and strategies manifested throughout the project. However, there was not clarity between the national and local staff about their respective broader visions for how to bring about social change. Because OC sought to encourage autonomy and locally rooted projects, the local organizers were influenced significantly by their community partners and community mentors.

All local staff had been organizing or living in their communities for over fifteen years. However, they exhibited differing degrees of rootedness within their communities. In Dearborn and San Antonio, the staff had political and cultural relationships within the community and built their projects through existing trust relationships as a result of their

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<sup>8</sup> The local staff positions that were funded were part-time positions, ranging between 20-30 hours per week, with no health benefits.

<sup>9</sup> The exception to this is the Edenton site, where the staff member hired was one of the first people involved in setting up the Edenton project.

community involvement. However, in Edenton, the local staff person, despite having resided in her community for a long time, had not worked in the community and felt that she did not have the trust relationships with people to build the project in the early phases:

People knew my name maybe, but they didn't know me. So I had all that to deal with the first year or so, even now. But now I've got more community than I did then. I think I was at a great disadvantage because people would listen to me, but they were like, who the hell are you? (personal communication, March 21, 2008)

In both Dearborn and Edenton, national and local staff noted that while there were community partners for the projects there was no real anchor organization to really connect the new project to the community. As the Dearborn staff noted, the MEP's partner organizations were very rooted in the community but lacked the grassroots "feel" present at other sites: "they [Dearborn's partner organizations] still consider themselves grassroots but are not really grassroots, they're huge ...organizations with like, 200 employees" (personal communication, April 27, 2008). The Dearborn staff person also noted this affected her ability to develop as an organizer and to be mentored from her community partner organization.

Local staff in Texas discussed the impact of having a strong partner organization on both the development of the project and upon her personally. The Esperanza Center provided not only material support, but also leadership and political development for the local staff person. As she noted, "I really do believe that my knowledge around the interconnected of race, gender and class and how it relates to the media and the effects of media, comes from learning from the Esperanza Center" (personal communication, March 7, 2008).

As discussed earlier, OC sought to establish advisory boards composed of various

community organizations in the respective communities who then worked with the local staff. Appendix B depicts OC's vision for this structure. The structural relationship between community organizations, OC and the local staff played out in different ways in the three sites. In San Antonio a strong community partnership was formed with the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, but in the other two sites, no clear partner organization developed throughout the duration of the projects. While an advisory board continued to exist in Dearborn and in Edenton a couple of civic organizations supported the initiative from OC, local staff in both these sites expressed frustration that they lacked a strong community partner and mentorship like the San Antonio site. At the national level, the national project manager created an advisory board, composed of three media justice activists with a range of organizational, academic and media production experience. The advisory board consulted with the project manager through phone calls and occasional in person meetings and sought to link the MEP with the larger media reform and media justice movement. Furthermore, the structural challenges of the OC meant that the MEP advisory board did not work with OC's Board of Directors, which national staff noted, influenced the project:

to really be a national organization helping people on the local level in finding the resources of a national organization available to the local level, never bore fruit, because they [MEP Advisory board and OC's board] weren't given the opportunity to be in same room with each other. There was not enough communication. (personal communication, March 24, 2008)

The development of the MEP reflects the influence of both the historical legacy of OC's complex structural relationship to UCC as well the creation of the MEP through a large, external funding source. OC prioritized the communities' autonomy to determine the definition of the local projects and supported this commitment through reallocating

funding to meet the needs of the communities, particularly around the hiring of local staff. These staff and their local partner organizations were rooted in various ways to their communities. The structural foundations of the MEP reflect these local and national relationships and shape the project as a whole.

### *Accountability*

The origins of funding from a national organization necessarily means that local projects are also accountable for how those resources are used. Having a partner organization(s) meant successful collaborations and brought a variety of benefits, like mentoring, emotional support, and a variety of resources. However, even in the sites with stronger community advisory organizations, issues of accountability were not clarified and were difficult for local staff and the community partners. For example, local staff reflected that, “I’m trying to meet the needs of the local community ... but I’m also trying to meet the needs of the people who are paying me to do the job” (personal communication, March 7, 2008), while the community partner reflected that:

it's just a confusion of who are you responsible to. Is your community going to hold you accountable or is DC going to hold you accountable and I think on some level that's where OC/DC rules what it wants and needs and if they decide that she needs to be meeting with us [local advisers] monthly then she'll have that happen and if not, then she'll do other sort of work around it. (personal communication, March 9, 2008)

Accountability was also unclear for the national project manager, partially due to the porous structure of OC and limited supervision. The amount of time that OC dedicated staff to the MEP influenced the relationships between UCC, OC, and MEP. The executive director of the OC only had “maybe twenty percent” of his staff time to work on the MEP, thus the national project manager was left with much responsibility

and limited supervision. As the national project manager noted,

in terms of being accountable to OC, obviously, legally and in many ways that would be the main body I was accountable to... I updated them ... when there were board meetings, but there wasn't much of a two way accountability thing going on. I didn't feel very strong connection or line of communication. (personal communication, June 3, 2008)

This relates back to the structural challenges that OC faced in regards to its relationship to UCC. This dynamic was even more noticeable when the new national project manager began working, as the lines of communication and responsibilities were already not very defined and there was not a knowledge transfer between the two staff persons (the former and new national project managers). The MEP advisory board was also a structure that had some potential for some degree of oversight/accountability for the national project manager. Their role was primarily for advising the national staff member and offering support and feedback to the local sites when needed or appropriate. The second national project expanded the advisory board but it seems to have been “more like a collection of individual advisors for her” rather than part of the MEP organizational structure (personal communication, March 24, 2008). Local staff made little mention of the newer advisory board members, whereas, the original advisory board members had developed and continued to have relationships with some of the local staff members.

### ***Organizing Models and Documenting Success***

To some extent, the general model of organizing that OC sought to use with the MEP was to take leadership and direction from the communities in which the projects were located and to encourage increased autonomy of these local sites. The dynamic of encouraging autonomy while meeting the broader requirements of their funders created

problems for the MEP, particularly around the documentation of outcomes and successes.

A common theme amongst both local and national staff was the challenge of documentation. Documentation for the MEP included: the local staff tracking their hours, recording outcomes from events and projects (like how many people attended the event), bookkeeping and tracking of expenses, logging volunteer hours (how many hours have people volunteered), creating project plans, evaluation reports about the work, and other activities which are recorded with quantifiable data. The managing director further clarifies documentation as:

a sort of a hierarchical evidentiary based system that says that the evidence that you need to demonstrate that you are a successful organizer should look a certain way. It should have numbers, it should say how many campaigns you did, it should have a goal that you started with, achievement of a goal, revision of a goal, a new goal, numbers that calculate how many things you've done ... you have to have some statistics and some photographs, news articles. You have to put all that together in a package that looks like a PR presentation to show people that you are successful. (personal communication, March 24, 2008)

The tension that this research examines is not the fact that documentation needed to happen – OC agreed to participate in the outcomes based paradigm through receiving money from foundations like the Ford Foundation. This paradigm, which is encouraged by the foundation sector, requires organizations to demonstrate that funding has ‘made a difference’, usually through the reporting of quantifiable deliverables, as noted in the previous quote by the managing director. This tension is about the communication of evidence of success – success defined in different ways depending on the cultural and organizational context. As Chaskin (2005) notes that “the central issue here stems from a tension between a focus on short-term, visible achievement and long-term, systemic change” (p. 415). The requirements and necessities of the documentation in order to satisfy grant requirements were interpreted in different ways, partially due to the various

organizational and cultural backgrounds and experiences of the participants.

For the OC, documentation of the project was directly linked to funding and thus sustainability, but also to accountability of the local paid staff. It is unclear how this imperative was communicated at various stages of the project. Job descriptions do not clearly spell out requirements for documentation. Additionally, the jobs evolved as the project evolved and as the managing director notes,

If you're a paid organizer and you need to know that your position depends upon external funding by these certain groups, that changes your behavior and helps you, the organizer to understand what they're doing, what the accountability is, what they can expect... But if you don't write that down [things like attendance at events, results of activities, etc], then your salary is going to go away. You're dependent upon an external, national philanthropic source for your revenue. (personal communication, March 24, 2008)

This lack of understanding created a vacuum for 'learning' the imperatives of documentation, because the staff lacked knowledge about the larger fundraising that occurred on behalf of the local sites<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, the first national project manager attempted to generate reporting from the local staff in a variety of ways, ranging from monthly and weekly reports through "rigid forms" to more descriptive reports where the local staff would write up their activities. These reports were eventually "abandoned" and the weekly phone calls<sup>11</sup> began to be used for reporting purposes (personal communication, June 3, 2008).

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<sup>10</sup> While there were aims to increase local staff skill sets around fundraising, budgeting and fiscal management of non-profit organizations, the local staff were not involved in writing or reviewing any of the large grants for the MEP and OC.

<sup>11</sup> Part of the organizing structure was to have the local staff and national manager and sometimes members of the advisory board have regular conference calls, these ranged from weekly to monthly, in addition to site visits by the national project manager.



For the local projects, the requirements and processes for documentation were a consistent problem from the early stages of the project with the original national project manager to the later stages with the new national project manager. Staff reported that they did “not know, really, what sort of documentation UCC wanted” and that the reports seemed to be more about tracking what they were doing (like for payroll purposes) and that the reporting “wasn’t so much about organizing” (personal communication, March 10, 2008). Staff also noted that OC eventually “realized...they’re [the local sites] not going to do it like they’re supposed to do it” (personal communication, March 21, 2008). This tension between understanding the role the documentation played in the revenue flow for the larger organization and accountability mechanisms for staff is noted by the managing director:

if you know that you don't get paid unless you organize that paper ... then you will do it. But if you are allowed to continue on, without causing that to be a critical part of your work, then you won't do it. Nobody does that sort of stuff, it's no criticism of them at all... For very few people is documentation of their work, interesting and primary... and so they weren't ever held accountable in that way. (personal communication, March 24, 2008)

The managing director noted that the options OC had for documentation of the projects were to do it for the local staff, “which meant they didn’t learn or understand the capacity” or make the staff do the reports, and “they did it in their own way”. Furthermore, OC did not “get [the local staff] to the point where they could do it themselves” (personal communication, March 24, 2008).

In addition to the lack of a plan for managing documentation and teaching these skills to the local staff, there was not a universal approach to goal setting for the local sites. The original intention was to have the various communities conduct some sort of media monitoring campaign in order to push for greater media accountability. However,

this broadly defined goal did not include organizational planning for the local sites. National staff, an advisory board member and a community partner noted there was a lack of training and skills building around organizational development, specifically around non-profit development. The organizational development of the local sites occurred organically, in site-specific ways, often contingent on the partner organization relationships and the involvement of the advisory/steering committees. While the local projects generated site specific goals and projects through OC's support, these goals and project planning did not clearly envision sustainability, thus the reality of becoming sustainable was hard to achieve.

The staff changes at the national level also influenced this dynamic because while both the national project managers envisioned the local site projects becoming sustainable, there was not a clear plan for how this would happen, nor was this communicated explicitly to the local sites. The conversations concerning financial sustainability and thus increased autonomy from OC began to happen towards the end of the first national project manager's term. With the new project manager, OC sought to strengthen the working relationship between the managing director and the national project manager, partially to improve accountability, but also to facilitate increased collaboration between the MEP, OC and UCC, per the results of the previously mentioned internal organizational assessment. Had this continued, the national office had a three year goal of making the MEP projects independent and volunteer run. Yet the process for envisioning these goals was still being directed from the national office to the local sites, while at the same, the new national project manager was working to expand

the project to additional sites.<sup>12</sup> Local staff increasingly asserted their needs for allocation of resources for trainings and to attend conferences that were relevant to their work, especially around fundraising. Had OC prioritized this type of staff learning early in the project, the local staff potentially could have developed a shared understanding of the requirements that OC had to adhere to, given the rational outcomes paradigm of its major funding sources.

The national goals reflected the need to produce measurable outcomes, which the communities resisted. This collective and individual resistance, while a key part of their increased efficacy, created space for new locally driven goals, however, the linkage between the goals and the national office's requirements to demonstrate success remained in the communities. Because the documentation process was linked to national goals and not local sustainability, the documentation was not seen as a priority. This dynamic was affected by both limited training and communication structures within the organization.

### **Strategies and Resources**

Despite the challenges and impact of the organizational structure of OC on the local projects, the MEP organizers incorporated a wide variety of strategies in order to accomplish their goals. How the organizers were able to mobilize the successes they did have is a testament to their creative and innovative ways of tapping into their existing resources within their local communities. These were in many ways strategic choices

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<sup>12</sup> This expansion was noted by the community partner as a concern especially since there was a lack of money for the existing projects, "if you don't have money why are you starting new projects? ...Take care of the ones you have because you have commitments to them" (personal communication, March 9, 2008)

intended to mobilize a variety of resources in response to the scarcity of money (material) resources. Throughout my interviews, I noticed that there was a tension between the local MEP staff working to acquire resources while working to build an organization that sought to become a resource to the community. Part of this tension is illuminated in the following statement from a local organizer:

Since there w[ere] limited resources, we couldn't just plant the seed and pour the water and expect for those models to work. We had work with what we had, work with the resources we had. We had to be a resource to the organizations that already existed because we could not compete for the funding that that they use to exist (personal communication, March 7, 2008)

Given that the communities were generally material resource scarce, the local staff were faced with situations of starting organizations within the present reality of their communities, thus there were no significant material resources they could mobilize independent of OC. This engendered creative responses.

Edwards and McCarthy (2004) identify five types of resources: moral, cultural, human, socio-organizational and material resources and examine how the acquisition and “exchange relationships [of resources influence] movement goals and activities.” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p. 118). I will briefly review this typology and examine the MEP local and national strategies within each of the categories. I will link this discussion to the previously discussed issues of organizational models, sustainability and documentation from the earlier section of this chapter. This chapter will close with a discussion of the outcomes of the local MEP media accountability projects, which include media monitoring and community media needs assessments.

### *Moral Resources*

The OC and thus the United Church of Christ, brought not only the funding to start the projects, but also, its moral legitimacy as a resource to the MEP. Moral resources include “legitimacy, solidarity support, sympathetic support and celebrity” and tend to “be bestowed by external source” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p. 125). Edwards and McCarthy (2004) note that religious organizations can “bestow” moral legitimacy on social movement organizations (p. 123). However, this moral legitimacy played out in different ways, given the previous discussion about the failure to select sites that had a strong UCC communities. In the Dearborn site, the fact that UCC was a Christian church that lacked history within the Arab American community was one of the impetuses for hiring a local staff person from that community, in order to create trust relationships between the local community and the national organization. As the local staff person describes:

For the Muslim community here, there was no access to any churches, other than the interfaith events. But those are with local churches that they already know well, so this was this huge organization coming in from DC and Cleveland<sup>13</sup> and starting this project. I think had it not been for me knowing the people that I was working with, I don't think it would have gone anywhere at all. (personal communication, April 28, 2008)

Moral resources were also harnessed at the local level, particularly in the Dearborn and Edenton sites. Both of these sites worked within faith communities and the organizers themselves came from strong faith backgrounds. In Dearborn, the partner organizations were faith based community and social service organizations; while in Edenton, meetings were started with prayer and the primary volunteers came from the local African American (non UCC) churches. In Texas, the moral resources of UCC were not a

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<sup>13</sup> The headquarters of the United Church of Christ is in Cleveland, Ohio. The main offices for the OC are located in Washington, DC.

strategic advantage because there was no relationship with UCC churches. They did garner moral legitimacy through their partnership with the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, which had a lengthy and well respected history of supporting and leading social justice campaigns in San Antonio.

### *Cultural Resources*

Examining the MEP strategies through a cultural resource lens offers illumination into how local and national staff mobilized the less tangible resources they had available. Cultural resources, according to Edwards and McCarthy are “conceptual tools and specialized knowledge that have become widely, though not necessarily universally, known” (p. 126) These resources include:

tacit knowledge about how to accomplish specific tasks like ... holding a news conference, running a meeting...initiating a festival ... [as well as] tactical repertoires, organizational templates, technical or strategic know-how encompassing both mobilization and production technologies (p. 126).

The cultural resources category also includes media production as a mobilizing strategy or the creation/production of media products in order to recruit and expand skill sets of new participants. At the local level, one noticeable difference between the sites was the varying degrees to which the local staff mobilized their available cultural resources. The Texas site harnessed a wide range of cultural resources, specifically around their use of the internet and technology to promote and expand their organizing. Additionally, all volunteers and staff of the Texas MEP emphasized their focus on cultural event organizing and media production as a way of engaging with their community about issues of media justice and policy reform. As local staff note:

if we were going to become autonomous and build a movement around media justice, in a city where nobody knows what that word means, we had to create the environment that we needed. And so we just did not reinvent the wheel...let's just keep going with the media and cultural arts stuff that we do really well .... That's why you get the models that we do, ... usually where all those elements [music, media and technology] are present and it's not until we get those people there, that we can actually talk about media reform, media issues and structural change. (personal communication, March 7, 2008)

Some types of programming that the Texas MEP initiated included building coalitions with local musicians, organizing a hip-hop summit, doing public relations for other local organizations or for specific events, doing media trainings (how to make media, work with media outlets, etc) as well as partnering with local musicians and promoters for fundraising benefits for the MEP and other local organizations. The Texas MEP, with the mentorship of the Esperanza Center, tapped into both the experience and expertise of the staff and volunteers, and developed their cultural resources in relationship to the historical modes of organizing in San Antonio, specifically around linking cultural work and political organizing.

In the Edenton site, cultural resources were mobilized in a far different manner – through tapping into the role that history plays within the rural community of Edenton. A central component of the Edenton project was a historical documentation and archiving project that uses media production and technology (like video and mapping software) to publicize the African American history of Edenton. As described by the local staff, “we are endeavoring to collect it and archive it and put it online and make it accessible to the world. There are so many things that have happened here that are based in our history, in our roots” (personal communication, March 21, 2008). This project is one of the main sources of volunteer and civic organizational support for the MEP and links the cultural role that history plays within African American community to the work of the MEP.

### *Social-Organizational Resources*

Social-organizational resources include “intentional social organization[s] [that are] created specifically to further social movement goals [while] appropriable social organization[s] are created for nonmovement [sic] purposes, but movement actors are able to gain access to other types of resources through it” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p. 127). Edwards and McCarthy further delineate this category by “infrastructures, social networks, and organizations” (p. 127). One strategy that the national project manager used was to bring the local staff to large national conferences where they would be exposed to media reform and social justice networks. Linking the local staff to social-organizational resources of national social movement organizations had some positive outcomes, including expanding training for the local staff, but there were missed opportunities to use the physical gatherings to create space for internal MEP organizational development.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between social-organizational resources and material resources is important to note in the context of the media reform movement, especially when the MEP began, which was around the same period of expanded growth of this still marginal movement. OC acquired significant seed funding for the MEP project yet the OC, while having relationships with many national media reform policy organizations, was, at that time, less connected to the grassroots media justice and reform organizations that were growing at the same time OC received funding. This impacted the national project manager’s ability to form relationships with the grassroots media justice organizations

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<sup>14</sup> The advisory board member noted that these opportunities could have been “more intentional” using the moment of having all the MEP staff and often most of the advisory board in the same place to meet and strategize, which did not occur very often (personal communication, April, 17, 2008).



around the country partially because of the scarcity of material resources and the lack of clear accountability to a specific organizing community, which ironically, is what she was trying to create and build. With time this dynamic improved as result of relationship building through bringing the local staff to conferences and gatherings of media justice organizers.

The role that relationship building and field building within the nationally forming networks of media justice organizations also was an area that local staff expressed as a step that could have been introduced earlier within the project.

What helped me, for the kind of work that we were wanting to do, was the field building. It wasn't until I had an opportunity to talk to group after group... doing the work, and doing the work in different ways that was cross sector, cross issue, multi-discipline... we should have been shadowing and field building with other groups who had similar models that we could duplicate or learn from and then come back here to establish an organization. (personal communication, March 10, 2008)

This also relates to the previously mentioned challenges of developing, between the local and national staff, shared understanding of social change models, particularly the outcomes funding paradigm on which OC and the MEP were dependent.

### ***Human and Material Resources***

While the three previous categories of resources are fairly non-tangible, human and material resources are more concrete. Edwards and McCarthy define human resources as including things “like labor, experience, skills, and expertise...and leadership, [which is] a combination of other human resources” (p. 127). They also note that human resources are specific to individuals “not social-organizational structures or culture generally” and that individuals make their time, labor, expertise available to social movements and that this participation is “shaped by spatial and economic factors as well

as social relationships, competing obligations, life-course constraints, and moral commitments” (p. 128). This aspect is important to consider in regards to the populations whom the MEP was working with. For example, in Edenton, the local staff mentioned how challenging it was just to have meetings due to the paucity of transportation in the region, where it can take an hours drive just to reach downtown Edenton from where many in their community live. In Texas, staff and volunteers noted that many of the people they work with (and who volunteer with Texas MEP) have 2 or more jobs, do not speak English and/or have multiple family responsibilities (like children and elders) therefore, organizing events and meetings must take this in to account in order to have more participation. Additionally, local staff voiced concern that the national administrative staff might not be aware of these realities in their communities and how these situations negatively affected their work and potential to mobilize participation.

Despite these and many other challenges, the local staff mobilized a wide spectrum of skills and experiences in their volunteers partially in response to their lack of material resources to pay for these skill sets but also as a mobilizing strategy for various aspects of their projects. In Dearborn, university professors donated time in helping to create media monitoring mechanisms and students volunteered with administrative and computer tasks. In Edenton, volunteers maintained the computer lab and did statistical analysis for the community internet access survey. In Texas, volunteers with a wide range of technical skill sets developed and maintain the website and server. The local staff themselves had a range of skill sets and by all accounts, the individuals running the local sites were instrumental in making the projects emerge as they did, given the staff

were paid part-time for their work, which often meant much of their expertise and skill sets were donated.<sup>15</sup>

Voluntariness, or the range of uncompensated (voluntary) to full time (paid) labor, is essential to the success of the local MEP sites. While the original plan was to have only volunteers build the local organizations, having the local part-time paid staff ensured that a volunteer base could develop. All the sites developed a core of volunteers ranging from three to ten people at any given time, not including community members who volunteered their time to work on various projects like the media monitoring programs, which ranged between 100 to 120 people in Dearborn. Despite these successes, all staff reported that having additional material resources (i.e. money) to pay people would alleviate considerable stress and isolation they experience by being the only paid labor for their organization.

The final resource category, material resources, includes “financial and physical capital, including monetary resources, property, office space, equipment and supplies” (Edwards and McCarthy, 2004, p. 128). As discussed earlier, the role that material resources, particularly foundation funding, played in the development of the project is significant. Of particular note is that, aside from the previously discussed reallocation of funding to pay local staff, the OC did not plan for other types of material resources that might be needed by the local staff. As noted by the former national project manager:

That again, [material resources on the ground] wasn't foreseen. We didn't think that through. So in the different places these things happened at different times that they were given that kind of resource. (personal communication, June 3, 2008)

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<sup>15</sup> Many volunteers mentioned how dedicated and how hard the local staff worked, far beyond the allocated 20-30 hours per week.

The key material resources that were missing for local staff included office equipment (particularly computers, internet access, printers, paper, etc); physical space to work; and additional staff. Some of these needs were fulfilled through local staff mobilizing other resources, for example, in Edenton, OC helped cover internet expenses but office rent was secured through a community partnership, thus Edenton harnessed social-organizational resources within the local community in order to achieve material resource needs like office space. In Dearborn, the local staff had multiple office spaces, but none were really sufficient to build an organization (i.e. the spaces were isolated or not located in places that community members frequented). In San Antonio, an office space still does not exist and meetings for the organization are held at various public locations throughout the city, like bars, coffee shops, or at other community organizations. Additionally, the staff member works from home.<sup>16</sup>

Local staff also noted that the requirements for documentation were made more difficult through their lack of technical tools, like computers. Additionally, the very nature of the project, the Media Empowerment Project, implied a relationship to media and technology, as noted by local staff:

How can a local organizer without internet access talk about technology and net neutrality at the grassroots without internet access and a computer? (personal communication, March 7, 2008)

Edwards and McCarthy (2004) note that, “as Internet competency becomes a marker of legitimacy, which in turn facilitates the acquisition of further resources, the mobilization potential of relatively deprived constituencies may be further constrained”(p. 120). This

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<sup>16</sup> A volunteer noted that the lack of physical space for the Texas project conveys that “we’re just real free floating and we’re not very accessible. Especially for what we’re trying to do... as an organization. I think that would really help and enhance our work...I think people would be more involved.” (personal communication, March 8, 2008)

was one of the key differences between the local projects. The Texas MEP successfully mobilized skilled volunteers (human resources) to maintain an innovative internet presence, which as a volunteer states, is a strategic choice regarding the outward communication strategy to potential funders:

with website design, I have to keep it fresh, I have to keep it different. I have to keep it relevant [and] make it interesting...Because I know who I'm going up against. I'm going to be going up against other organizations that may genuinely be trying to serve its underrepresented communities and other organizations that may not be (personal communication, March 7, 2008)

Whereas in North Carolina, the project did not have access to technological skilled volunteers for a lengthy time period, and still does not have a website. The second national program manager had begun to set up a relationship with a web designer so that the Edenton project would be able to develop a website, but this was almost three years after the project was initially set up. The Dearborn project, similarly did not use electronic organizing for outreach and did not have a website. Email was sometimes used, but more often the local staff used phones.

The national staff expressed frustration with both their internal technical resources and external electronic communication as well as the challenges of coordinating these resources with UCC<sup>17</sup>. In addition to the main internet presence through UCC, OC attempted to develop a separate website for the MEP<sup>18</sup>, but this site was minimally developed and lays dormant. While national staff had email addresses attached to UCC servers, local staff had personal, often commercial, email accounts, which means that the

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<sup>17</sup> Coordination of website content and design for the OC's (and the MEP section of the site) had to happen through the UCC headquarters in Cleveland office. One of the stated "deliverables" in the initial MEP grant for the MEP was a "website and web-based services and materials for ongoing dialogue and action" (OC, 2003, p. 5).

<sup>18</sup>The site, [www.mediaempowerment.org](http://www.mediaempowerment.org), seems to have been last updated in 2004.

local staff had limited and inconsistent electronic identity as paid staff for the MEP. Technology as a material resource (like computers and internet access) and a human resource (like technical skills) influenced the outcomes of the local projects and the internal dynamics of the organization as a whole.

### **Outcomes: Media Accountability**

The original aims for the MEP stemmed from using community driven media monitoring to create change in local media landscapes and to expand policy concerns to the local level. However, as OC built the MEP sites with the local staff, the commitment to taking leadership from the communities soon revealed one of the fundamental issues for the project as a whole – that the vision for using media monitoring was not necessarily what the communities thought would be most useful or applicable to their situations. As the former national project manager says:

the initial grant was quite rigid that wasn't going to work anywhere really in the way it was. And then it was like, well even a more loose media monitoring project, based on the original grant idea, even that's not going to work everywhere, in the same way. Or be interesting to everybody or useful. (personal communication, June 3, 2008)

A real issue seems to be that the models were coming from outside and that they were being imposed by funders who were not connected to their communities. As a local staff member notes:

Funders who had funded other communities that did media monitoring work saw a huge success with that and they thought that that model could be duplicated... They made it publicly known, [media monitoring is] a successful model for organizing a community around media justice. But the idea for monitoring ... came from UCC, it did not come from us. (personal communication, March 7, 2008)

In order to learn about various media monitoring projects, the national project manager researched previously successful projects and eventually built relationships with organizations. One of the prime examples that the MEP looked to was the Youth Media Council's 'youth driven' media monitoring of radio stations in the Oakland/San Francisco area. The results of this project were published in a report that emphasized the community participation but did not really discuss the internal structure of the coordinating organization, especially that "they had a lot more staff resources than most people have access to" (personal communication, June 3, 2008). This process of researching the other models took place before the relationships between MEP organizers and these other organizations had formed. The 'field building' mentioned earlier would have accomplished this by doing preliminary research about how to do monitoring projects within the context of the realities of limited resources while at the same time, building relationships with similar organizations.

The resistance to the monitoring manifested differently, with the Dearborn project eventually doing a type of monitoring project that was less focused on publishing the results (as had been done with the Youth Media Council report) and more focused on building media literacy skills and relationships with local journalists to improve coverage of Arab Americans. In Texas, the media monitoring concept turned into a community driven project that generated a cross issue, cross platform monitoring tool that spoke to a variety concerns relevant to the San Antonio community. This process took a great deal of staff time and eventually resulted in some monitoring of media but not a full monitoring program; instead the process built momentum for the development of the local MEP. In North Carolina, the community was more concerned with problems of

internet access and used the MEP to generate a community survey of internet access needs.

Through letting the communities determine media accountability for themselves, the MEP accomplished one of the main goals for the project, to empower marginalized communities about issues of media. Despite this accomplishment, defining the outcomes as successful is challenging for OC because the previously discussed issues of documentation.

### *Edenton*

One of the initial goals that OC sought to accomplish was “a comprehensive study including a “bandwidth audit,” [to determine] if discriminatory policies appear in decision-making around building the infrastructure that supplies broadband internet access to local communities (OC, Inc., 2003, p. 4). While this comprehensive study of the partner communities did not occur due to the structural problems with the OC and the reallocation of the funding to support community driven projects for the MEP, in Edenton the MEP staff organized a community survey of high-speed internet access. The survey, conducted in spring 2006, was modeled after a similar survey in Tillery.

Through the survey, the local staff member educated the community about the existence of the MEP (the survey was conducted shortly after the MEP began in Edenton), assessed if the community would be interested in a community technology center for internet access and technical skills training, and secured data concerning



internet access within the rural community. Despite an outstanding return rate<sup>19</sup> for the survey there was limited involvement from the national office with this project, which is unfortunate because this was one project that did have the potential for clear, quantifiable documentation. The results of the survey were submitted in the final report to the funder almost two years after the survey was completed<sup>20</sup>. Additionally, the survey included personal contact information for all respondents, but there was no clear attempt by the local staff to manage this data. This is not necessarily a failure of the local staff, but rather speaks to the skill sets that the local staff held and the role that the OC played in supporting and/or augmenting these skills, particularly around organizing and computer skills. As discussed earlier, the Edenton MEP differed significantly from the other sites in their use of technology. One way this could have been improved would be to have the OC utilize their networks to help coordinate the tabulation of the survey and assist with a database for the local staff to manage the contact information of potential volunteers and community members. However, as the managing director notes, “that’s dependent on her resources and her direction, and not somebody else coming in telling her what to do” which highlights some of the challenges that the MEP national staff faced when trying to find a balance between managing their local staff yet taking leadership from them at the same time (personal communication, March 24, 2008).

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<sup>19</sup> Of the 1,000 surveys distributed, over 25% of them were returned. The community of Edenton has a little over 5000 people. The local staff member reported that the return rate would have been higher but almost another twenty-five percent did not complete both sides of the survey.

<sup>20</sup> It is unclear from documentation exactly when the survey was tabulated by volunteers for the MEP. The staff member mentioned that the results were used for funding purposes and the Edenton MEP did receive an independent grant for funding the community technology center. I did not have access to this grant proposal and do not know if the results from the survey directly impacted funding for the center.

The Edenton MEP is currently running a community technology center which offers basic computer classes to senior citizens in the community and aims to be a public center where community members can access the internet, learn about technology and generally be “a community hub for all kinds of activity, not just technology”. A key component of this center is that it is grounded in the community. As the local staff member reports, community members “come in here all the time. They want answers to questions. They don't feel comfortable ... interacting with any of the [state] agencies [because] they don't feel they get an honest response” (personal communication, March 21, 2008). Finally, as mentioned earlier, the Edenton MEP has also developed a history documentation project, to help facilitate and document the untold story of rural African Americans in Edenton. While the projects of the Edenton MEP are far different the original vision for the MEP, the local outcomes demonstrates the success of OC's commitment to leadership from the community.

### *Dearborn*

In Dearborn, the local staff faced resistance and skepticism about the usefulness of media monitoring. As the local staff reported, community members were concerned with “what difference is it going to make” (personal communication, April 28, 2008). Through showing examples and outcomes of other monitoring projects, the local staff convinced her community to work on the monitoring. The steering committee in Dearborn decided to have focus groups before the media monitoring occurred and so a series of focus groups were held with a variety of groups to “to see what people thought

of Arab Americans and how much of that was based on what they saw in the media” (personal communication, April 28, 2008).

After these focus groups, media monitoring volunteers were recruited and a series of media literacy and monitoring trainings were held. In Dearborn, the emphasis of the media monitoring was to work with editors and journalists of the print media. After completing a two-week period of monitoring, the participants in the monitoring project would meet with various groups of journalists and talk about coverage of Arab Americans. The monitoring results were not specifically mentioned, and in fact, Dearborn sought to not publicize the monitoring they had done, but rather used the exercise as a educational and political opportunity to get people involved in the meetings with journalists. This difference expresses the conflict between the local projects and the national office. Generating public awareness of the study would fit nicely with the notion of discernable outcomes. Nonetheless, having meetings with local media is also another tangible positive outcome. But the documentation of this project was seen as a request by a staff person and not considered part of the organizational framework of the OC and funding of the MEP. Additionally, the national office, especially because of numerous staff changes was not aware of the cultural context that the documentation played within the community. The local staff mentioned this dynamic:

you're not a white group coming in there and telling them [media outlets/journalists] this is what you're doing wrong. You're an Arab group. You don't just go in and tell them, give them documentation and say 'oh, this is, we did the monitoring and this is what you're doing wrong. You can't do that. You just can't do that. The UCC may be able to do that. But we can't do that. (personal communication, April 28, 2008)

The Dearborn project had concerns about alienating or antagonizing journalists. The local staff person worked with an ally journalist to arrange the meetings<sup>21</sup>. Through the meetings (which were held at lunch time with food at the media offices) the MEP sought to meet with a variety of beats, like sports and business reporters, to expand the idea that better representation and mainstreaming Arab Americans within the papers was not about more features about Ramadan, but highlighting successes and struggles in the community which were similar to other communities in metro Detroit, for example, how the economy is affecting small business owners.

Community members would bring in examples of poor and good media representations to the meetings. Because these participants had developed critical media literacy skills to be able to determine and articulate the quality of the representations, the meetings with journalists offered practical advice and suggestions to the journalists about things they could do to improve coverage and representations of the Arab American community.

The community members who participated also strengthened their own community because the participants represented a wide diversity of the Arab American community, with representatives from groups who did not often work together:

You have the Yemeni organizations, Lebanese organization, the Iraqi, the Sunni, Shia mosques and none of these really talk to each other....They talk to each other when there is a protest about the war in Lebanon and you see everybody there. That's when you feel like the community is there. But in everyday life, everybody's in their own mosque and their own church ... their own living spaces. The only time they came together was at the meetings [with] the newspapers. Which is pretty incredible! (personal communication, April 28, 2008)

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<sup>21</sup> Approximately ten meetings with print journalists were held. It is unclear exactly how many journalists attending one of these meetings, but the meetings were held with a wide variety of beats and staff (including editors, photographers and reporters).

It is this type of outcome that is hard to document – the improvement of relations between different classes and ethnicities<sup>22</sup>. The local staff noted that this diversity was a benefit to with the meeting with journalists and for the project as a whole. The Dearborn MEP demonstrates how media monitoring can build bridges between communities through finding common struggle around representations in the media. The community members who participated in the monitoring were empowered through the development of critical media literacy skills and thus were able to attend the meetings and speak for themselves about the representations. Additionally, as the local staff noted, the actual act of monitoring the media created increased empowerment within her community:

To actually do the work themselves. They collected the newspapers, they recorded the news on TV, they put together these questions, and so it was a community effort and I think that was very empowering, that we're doing something. (personal communication, April 28, 2008)

The Dearborn MEP used the monitoring project to develop media literacy skills within their community and improve relationships between the community and the local print media. The monitoring project and the processes leading up to it (focus groups, media literacy trainings) aimed to improve representations of the Arab American community but also made linkages between the different groups within the larger community.

### *Texas*

Due to the strong partnership with the Esperanza Center, the Texas MEP engaged in a community generated media monitoring process which involved developing a

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<sup>22</sup> Another outgrowth of the Dearborn MEP is the initial formation of a coalition of between Arab American and African American activists to use media literacy and community media analysis to make links between these often divided communities in Detroit.

monitoring form with different community representatives. The organizing models and mentorship of the Esperanza Center<sup>23</sup> supported the autonomous development of the monitoring project centered from the community that incorporated a strong analysis of the interconnectedness of oppressions. Some key concerns that the Texas MEP had with using existing monitoring forms created by other organizations were that they did not think the tools were relevant to their community because they did not account for the numerous issues and oppressions that impacted San Antonio and that other monitoring projects were too academic and too complicated for their community members to really use. Ultimately, a expansive monitoring tool was collaboratively designed, but not without challenges. The process, according to the local staff, “took forever because it was a tool that was going to survey all of it” (personal communication, March 7, 2008). The tool is “anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-classist, anti-war” and documents coverage not just in news stories but also in commercials. Part of the challenge with the monitoring project stemmed from differing opinions about what type of media to monitor. Eventually, monitoring of the commercial radio stations occurred with volunteers and then this shifted into monitoring print media in response to a media campaign to defund the Esperanza Center.

The process of creating a media monitoring project in San Antonio reflected the political and cultural communities that the TXMEP worked with and contributed to the development of their organizational identity within the San Antonio community. While there was not a clear ‘report’ of their monitoring, as noted by the staff,

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<sup>23</sup> From 1991-1997 the Esperanza Center coordinated the San Antonio Lesbian and Gay Media Empowerment Project which used media monitoring and hate speech monitoring to organize around media and social justice issues.

You could say we don't have a successful media monitoring campaign if you define success by numbers... or you could define success by the fact that a community that already knew there was something wrong with the media, took the time to even design a media monitoring tool for radio stations they don't even hear themselves on. (personal communication,, March 7, 2008)

It is this very same community that the Texas MEP works with to make linkages between cultural production and media policy. As the local staff describe, the Texas MEP has become “the support system that the community needed to fix the systemic problems and bad relationships between them and the media” (personal communication, March 7, 2008). Through harnessing cultural resources, as discussed earlier, the Texas MEP engaged in media accountability and media education in a variety of arenas.

The Texas project is unique in it's multifaceted approach to media justice. While working on media monitoring, the Texas MEP also developed lobbying at the city and state level on media policies, like public access television and net neutrality, and built relationships with local print and radio journalists. The Texas MEP, as discussed earlier, is a resource for other organizations in San Antonio, through their media strategy and media skills building work. Additionally, through cultural and music events, the Texas MEP brought media as a political issue to community members that are either not politically engaged or do not see media as something they need to be concerned about.

As a volunteer states:

Building the coalitions with musicians is very vital because ... that is the initial, getting your foot in the door to open their minds up that there are other issues that are socially impacting, like net neutrality and all the other aspects ... It's kinda like what we call a gateway drug to all the social issues that we're trying to get them involved in. (personal communication, March 7, 2008)

Through building coalitions and producing cultural events, the Texas MEP creates educational moments to teach and inform the communities about what media is in their

lives. Furthermore, the Texas MEP uses these cultural events to raise money for their organization and other allied and partner organizations, which increases the likelihood of their financial sustainability.

All of the MEP sites demonstrate the role the relevant, critical media literacy plays in organizing for media justice. Through the cultural programming and media skills building projects of the Texas site, the media literacy workshops and journalist meetings in Dearborn and the production and creation of a digital community history project in North Carolina, the MEP illuminates a deeper imagining of media literacy beyond deconstruction of texts to include media skills like media strategy and cultural production as methods to engage different communities in media policy issues. As a volunteer states, “It's not just about handing them a flyer and saying you shouldn't be doing that. You need to explain to them why. People are brought up in different ways” (personal communication, March 8, 2008).

A key aspect of organizing around media issues that was present at all the sites, is the need to focus on local issues of relevance to individuals rather than starting off by talking about “big media”. It also takes time and individual stories. As the local staff state:

It takes examples and it takes stories. And they have so many stories... Most [people have] stories that can shake up a nation. Because of the injustices that they tolerate. (personal communication, March 21, 2008)



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS**

This project has attempted to provide a comparative analysis of local efforts to empower marginalized communities to organize around media justice. The emergence of the significant interplay between national funding concerns and grassroots organizing and organizations proved to be a substantial area of concern for both the local and the national. In many ways, what has been presented here is a holistic analysis which has just scratched the surface of the Media Empowerment Project and grassroots organizing for media justice. Through this thesis I have explored the interplay between the dynamics of the organizational structure and operational frameworks and how these influenced the strategies and outcomes of the project, but also how all these aspects were in turn influenced by the local projects.

### **Research Synthesis and Recommendations**

The complex structural relationship between OC and UCC was not sufficient for harnessing the resources potentially available through the church communities to benefit the MEP project. These structural challenges were acknowledged by the OC and UCC, unfortunately too late into the development of the MEP. While the local sites exhibited creative use of their available resources (beyond the scarce material resources) OC did not fully harness its moral and human resource opportunities, partially because the internal challenges with UCC.

While a general history of UCC was understood by the communities and staff, the legacy and lessons of immediate projects like the Microradio Implementation Project

were not incorporated into the development of the MEP. Among the lessons not carried over from the earlier MIP work were clarifying documentation requirements. This result was a key structural and training problem within the MEP. Additionally, the history of resistance and media activism in the local communities was not fully appreciated at the national level. But it was these histories and cultural contexts which made possible the local sites' successes over the course of their projects. A future project coordinated by a national organization intervening and collaborating with communities needs to prioritize learning the histories and relationships between local organizations, as much as possible.

The bureaucratic requirements of the external funding for the project were not effectively communicated to the local staff. There was limited clarity about what types of documentation were most needed, thus the national project manager(s) were left to develop documentation systems on the fly, which created an almost ad-hoc system of documentation. Requirements for documentation both shifted throughout the project and were not clearly communicated to local staff. Additionally, no clear system of accountability existed for local staff regarding this documentation. A potential improvement of this would be to prioritize training about documentation, clearly include requirements for documenting in job descriptions and involve the local advisory boards in the process of documenting the local projects. While this does not address the larger fundamental issues of cultural and philanthropic imperatives regarding the role of documentation, if a project like MEP is to be initiated with large external funding, then these requirements and rationale for the requirements must be communicated.

Furthermore, all staff members needed improved communication tools to facilitate documentation. For example, had email addresses been set up for all the local staff as

soon as they were hired, OC would have had a record of email communication of the staff members, providing another area to collect documentation (of contacts, meetings, speaking engagements, etc).

Involving activists with experiences from a variety of organizational models in the crafting of grant requests for projects like the MEP would potentially alleviate some of the problems that OC experienced in their coordination of the project. The foundational structure of the MEP reflected limited involvement from grassroots community organizing and thus the tendencies of the outcomes based evidence paradigm was embedded into the structure of the program as a whole. National staff expressed their lack of experience or familiarity with community organizing, yet they were managing a program that was trying to organize communities.

Because the project was dependent on external funding within grant cycles, the long term planning reflected these cycles, and did not encourage the local sites to be involved in determining where and how their respective projects would develop sustainability, independent of these external funding sources. The staff changes at the national level also influenced this dynamic because while both national project managers envisioned the local site projects becoming sustainable, there was no clear plan for how this would happen, nor was this communicated explicitly to the local sites.

The rootedness of the local staff and partner organizations influenced the outcomes as well. In Texas, both the staff and partner organization, were very connected to a political and cultural community, while in the other sites, the staff were connected yet the projects lacked either a strong anchor community organization or the staff were not as rooted in their community as was necessary, especially in the early stages of the

projects. The Edenton project suffered in the initial years because of this challenge, but the isolation of the rural location meant that combined with the lack of rootedness, the staff person was both not rooted and without the same potential for grassroots partners and technical resources that the urban locations had.

Accountability of the national project manager to both the national office and the local communities needed structural clarification. The individual staff persons, as activists and social justice individuals, worked within this limited structure as best they could. However, if there were clearer structural systems of accountability, this would facilitate these national staff persons' jobs by allowing them to focus on the larger project as opposed to being responsible for both their job and their accountability system. The role of the advisory board was under utilized and there was limited consistency between staff changes at the national level with the advisory board.

### **Local Impacts**

Through the harnessing of social-organizational resources to deal with a lack of material resources, like money and office space, the Edenton MEP has brought together community organizations into one centralized meeting space which also serves as the new community technology center. The Edenton MEP produced the greatest physical legacy of the three projects, generating over the duration of the project, an office, community technology center, community computer classes and history documentation project all as a result of the work of the staff person and volunteers. Edenton has also developed relationships with regional philanthropic organizations and is planning to

continue the development of the community technology center and the history documentation project, regardless of fiscal support from OC.

The Texas MEP exhibits very strong collective efficacy and continues harness their variety of cultural, human and technical resources through their cultural programming, policy work and media education. Additionally, one of the most significant outcomes of the Texas project is the role they are increasingly playing at the national level of the media justice and media reform movement. The Texas MEP became a founding member of a national network of grassroots media justice organizations, the Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-NET). MAG-NET is attempting to link locally based media justice organizations and jointly apply for foundation grants in order to re-grant the money through the network's own decision making structures and priorities, as opposed to the conditions imposed by the foundations. This collaboration, as will be discussed shortly, offers numerous opportunities for further research.

While the Dearborn MEP is no longer active, the project had a variety of outcomes in the region. Through both the focus group process and media monitoring project, the Dearborn MEP developed and expanded allied relationships between diverse groups, both within the Arab American community and externally with academics, journalists, and social justice activists. Though it is hard to gauge increased community efficacy, the local staff were able to shift pessimistic community expectations about the effectiveness of challenging and improving media representations and the project saw diverse participation in the various components of the project through the focus groups, administrative work, media monitoring and community/journalist meetings. Additionally, the local staff reported improvements in print media coverage and outreach

by journalists to Arab American community leaders for sources and quotes, a trend that was a direct result of the organizing and relationship building of the MEP. Finally, an outgrowth of the Dearborn MEP is the Center for Interfaith Studies and Dialogue, which aims to improve relationships between the Sunni and Shia Muslim community.

### **Future Research**

My initial idea for this project was to explore how the media reform movement can be more than just policy reform. However, this study examined one social movement organization thus it is difficult to answer questions about how this organization is working with others in coalitions and networks for media reform and media justice. Areas of future research, building from the knowledge learned through this project include:

1. Focus specifically on the Texas MEP site, as it develops into an independent organization. Explore its organizational gestation period, or the period from when the project was seeded by OC to the organization becoming independent, looking at the challenges of transitioning from a paid staff/founder to a community led project.

Investigate the cross-issue and cross-movement organizing that the Texas MEP works on, including how the local MEP is working with other social movement organizations, locally and nationally.

2. Investigate the Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-NET). Examine decision-making and consensus building processes within this developing network of media justice organizations. Explore how people and organizations develop shared

political values and principles. This could possibly be a participatory project that helps to identify decision-making structures, processes within the forming network.

3. Examine the impacts of the digital television transfer upon poor and lower income people communities. Observe how information about the transfer is communicated and work with media justice organizations to “monitor” the transfer. The digital TV transition was mentioned by all local projects as a specific concern for their communities.

4. Explore how media activists visualize social change - how they think about the broader pictures of social change and models of organizing.

5. Conduct a deeper investigation into the mechanisms and tools of media literacy that MEP and other media justice organizations use. What choices and why? What tools were more effective? Examine media literacy and adult education/community organizing because much of the current literature concerns research projects done with youth (i.e. schools, colleges). How does critical media literacy work with adult education and popular education models?

### **Final Impressions**

The original impetus for this project was to examine how media policy work might be generated at a local grassroots level. In choosing to examine the MEP I felt I had found an organization that said they were trying to do this. Thus, as shown through the title of this project, *Making Policy Relevant*, I sought to investigate how exactly the MEP was making policy relevant to communities who struggle with a variety of real material and social justice issues. Through the course of the developing the project and

the research plan I elevated the concerns and time capacity of the organizers to work with them in a mutually beneficial way.

One of the great challenges for this project (and there were many) was that my preliminary research and proposal was based on the external communication of OC (websites and organizing materials) in addition to preliminary conversations with the staff. After my proposal was approved, OC had a significant financial crisis and ended staffing positions and scaled back the MEP. The direction this research took on reflects this reality. While I was initially interested in the media monitoring and media literacy components of the MEP, the staff (local and national) were in the middle of a crisis of sustainability and dealing with the day-to-day challenges of running their organizations. Through the open ended semi-structured interview process I was able to address my questions about media monitoring and media literacy, but the bulk of the conversations flowed towards discussions of resources, frustrations with the organizational structure, communication issues and the serious challenges of demonstrating and documenting success. I think this direction is a positive turn for this research because through working with these concerns, I followed my commitments to bringing relevancy to social movement research – by investigating areas that the participants were concerned with (like the role of documentation and funding) while at the same time, still investigating how the outcomes and the mechanisms of the projects manifested differently. This project is just the tip of the iceberg of areas of research that could possible take off through investigating grassroots media justice projects, organizations and the movement as a whole.



## **APPENDIX A**

### **Interview Questions**

These questions represent the topics that interviews covered.

#### **Local Staff/Volunteers/Community Partners**

##### **General**

Could you briefly describe the communities that you work with?

What languages are spoken in the communities that you work with?

How many languages do you speak?

What types of issues/problems are these communities struggling with?

What are some local media policies or concerns that you feel that are relevant to the communities you work with?

How do you identify as an organizer, activist, etc?

Could you explain your role in relationship to the MEP?

Had you been a paid organizer for a non profit before?

What are your thoughts about social movements and movement building?  
How does your work with MEP flow from these ideas?

How do you address cross cultural differences within the communities that you work with?

##### **Organization**

When people got involved in the MEP were those people already involved with politics?  
Did people get involved in other media justice /social justice projects after their participation? What types of projects?

What kind of skill sets were already existing before the project was started?

How you harness or facilitate different skill sets within the people you work with?

How did the organizational structure of the OC, Inc. and their design of the MEP as a whole, influence your organizing goals?

In an ideal world where you had resources, what types/kinds of resources would you want?

What do you envision your project doing within the next five years? Hopes, dreams, visions

What type of training would have been more relevant to the work that you were being tasked to do?

What type would organizational support would have been useful

Did you have any relationships with any of the local churches from the UCC?

Could you reflect a little bit about the strengths and weakness, of the program here.

What are some goals for people learning to use computers? When people say media literacy, do you see that happening?

Could you talk a little bit more about how the organizational structure of OC, Inc. and you being here, how that affected your organizing?

Part of how you established relationships with local organizations was that you came from the local community, was there any other processes involved?

The advisory committee, how did that work with your work here?

How did you structure the running of the organization here?

### **Media Accountability**

What techniques or strategies do you use to engage people and communities about media justice issues in the community?

What did you possibly assume was wrong with media in the communities you work with and what was actually wrong? How did you discover this?

What do you think about media monitoring as a political strategy?

What was the process, how did you develop the idea to do media monitoring? How did you come up with the survey?

How did you deal with resistance to media monitoring?

How did you create/achieve community “buy in” into the project?

Who participated in the media monitoring?

The methodology of your media monitoring project or survey? How did you make the choices about types of media to monitor, what was the process? How did you define objectives?

How/Did you incorporate technology into your project?

What do you think the potential uses of digital media monitoring are?

Why is media monitoring a tool for change?

What types of media literacy or technical literacy skills do you incorporate? How?

Do you use any of the films, or other media literacy tools that have made or produced by other groups?

How do you explain media issues to them [community members]?

When you were doing the work of the MEP, a lot of times it's phrased as media justice. Was that language used when you working in the community?

### **National Staff & Advisory Board**

#### **General**

Could you briefly describe the communities that you work with?

How do you identify as an organizer, activist, etc?

Had you been a paid organizer for a non profit before?

What are your thoughts about social movements and movement building?  
How did your work with OC, Inc. relate or flow from these ideas?

#### **Organization**

Can you explain your role in relationship to the MEP?

What types of support would have been useful?

Can you talk about the relationship to UCC and local congregations in the organizing?

Was there any anti-oppression work, or dialoguing around the role of privilege within the organization?

Where do you go within your organization for questions, advice, support?

What material resources did the local staff receive? computers, office space? etc

Reflect on the MEP's strengths and weaknesses. What do you consider the program's strengths?

What about weaknesses?

What about the specific local projects?

In an ideal world where you had resources, what types/kinds of resources would you want?

Could you talk about the process for deciding which sites to fund or support? Was there some criteria? Or was it just the points that were written down in the grant and then you sort of ran with that? Was there a process for deciding?

Can you talk about how you got the advisory board together. Did you get that together before you were starting to go into the communities to find partner organizations?

How were you coordinating the various local organizers?

Was there a training plan?

How did you deal with, you had a wide variety of people and different cultures and a diversity of political experiences that you were dealing with when you were working with folks, so how did you deal with that?

What are some of the challenges you faced when organizing these projects?

What would have improved the situation?

What kind of organizational support would have been useful and at what stage of organizing?

How did the organizational structure of the OC influence your participation?

How were issues of accountability dealt with? Between staff, local organizers, advisory board and local communities?

What was the planning for the project's sustainability?

**Media Accountability**

What did you assume was wrong with media in the communities and what was actually wrong? How did you discover this?

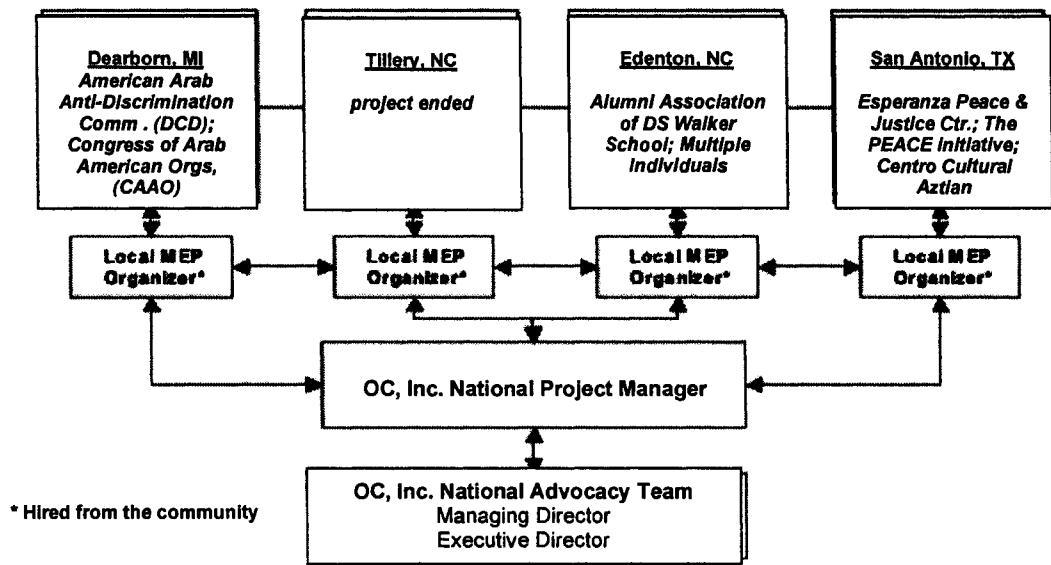
How did you decide to do the monitoring? What was the process? What goals did you have for the media monitoring project? How did these goals develop?

How effective do you think the work has been? What constitutes effective?

APPENDIX B

Organizational Structure of the Media Empowerment Project

**The Media Empowerment Project Organizational Structure**



APPENDIX C

Consent Form to Participate in Research

Signed by all participants for interviews



## CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Title of Study:** *Expanding media reform movements: Making policy relevant through community media justice organizing*

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by **Brenna Wolf**, from the Communication Studies and Social Justice Department at the University of Windsor. The results from this research study will contribute to the researcher's Master of Arts Thesis at University of Windsor.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel to contact the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Jim Wittebols, 519 253-3000 X 2909.

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This proposed project will conduct a comparative case study of the Media Empowerment Project (MEP), a democratic media activist organization that has multiple site locations which uses community driven media monitoring and community media needs assessments as an organizing strategy. Through a combination of semi-structured interviewing with MEP organizers as well organizational document analysis, an evaluation of the MEP goals, strategies and outcomes will illuminate a unique experiment in grassroots and community driven media policy organizing.

### PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Sign the letter of consent to participate and the audio taping consent form.
2. Participate in 1 or 2 in-person or phone interviews with myself (Brenna Wolf). The interview length will be less than two hours. In-person interviews will be conducted in a location near your work place or at the office of the Media Empowerment Project, depending on what works for you. The interview will be audio taped to ensure accuracy.
3. If an additional interview is needed, I will contact you by phone or email to setup a time for follow up questions. If you have follow up questions or comments, you are welcome to contact me at any time.

If you wish, you can receive a copy of the final report that I (Brenna Wolf) prepare. The Office of Communications, Inc. will receive a copy of this report as well.

### POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The researcher can offer limited confidentiality for your participation. Basically, because the various site locations of the MEP are geographically and structurally discrete, it will be difficult to mask responses from participants in such a way so your responses would not be recognized. This means that it would be possible for another staff member of the MEP to identify your comments. No names will be used in the writing of the final report. Aside from this, there are



minimal risks or discomforts foreseen with this research. The only inconvenience is your time to participate in the interview process.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

As the research will be evaluating programs that participants currently work on or have worked on in the past, the participants will benefit by receiving an evaluation and documentation of their work. The organization will receive a program evaluation which can be used for grant writing purposes. Additionally, the

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY (Continued)**

participants will receive assistance in documenting their work, as the project will be examining organizational documents.

The research will generate a knowledge map for other media activists interested in starting or using community media monitoring practices within their own localities. The research will help to illuminate a model of organization structure that offers benefits to building bridges between various social movements as well as linking policy advocacy work with grassroots organizing projects.

### **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

Participants will not receive any payment for participation in the research project.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. I will be the only person involved in the transcripts from the interviews and can ensure confidentiality. In write ups for my Thesis, you will not be identified personally. Since the project is a comparative case study, it will be difficult to mask responses within my writing because the organizers of the localized projects will be discussing their specific project. Names of participants will not be used in the write up of the research; however, due to the organizers working out of specific local projects, it would be possible for someone within the MEP or UCC-OC to identify the participants.

### **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

### **FEEDBACK OF THE RESULTS OF THIS STUDY TO THE SUBJECTS**

The investigator will publish the results on the Social Science Research Council's Media Research Hub, <http://mediaresearchhub.ssrc.org/>. The research will hopefully be published in scholarly journals and presented at conferences, both academic and activist conferences. Additionally, the thesis will be available on the University of Windsor, Research Ethics Board website.

Web address: address not yet known

Date when results are available: approximately June 15, 2008

#### **SUBSEQUENT USE OF DATA**

This data will be used in subsequent studies.

#### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact: Research Ethics Coordinator, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, N9B 3P4; Telephone: 519-253-3000, ext. 3948; e-mail: [ethics@uwindsor.ca](mailto:ethics@uwindsor.ca)

#### **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**

I understand the information provided for the study *Expanding media reform movements: Making policy relevant through community media justice organizing* as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

#### **SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR**

These are the terms under which I will conduct research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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