



Report to Stakeholders



January-April 2011



ProPublica Report to Stakeholders, January-April 2011

The latest in a series of periodic reports to our stakeholders about progress at ProPublica. Earlier reports, including our [annual report for 2010](#), are available at [ProPublica.org](#).

ProPublica is an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. Our mission is to expose abuses of power and betrayals of the public trust by government, business, and other institutions, using the moral force of investigative journalism to spur reform through the sustained spotlighting of wrongdoing.

This April ProPublica won its second Pulitzer Prize in as many years. Last year, ProPublica reporter Sheri Fink won a Pulitzer for Investigative Reporting for her article “The Deadly Choices at Memorial,” on euthanasia at a New Orleans hospital in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, published in partnership with The New York Times Magazine. That was the first Pulitzer Prize ever awarded to an online news organization. This year’s Prize, for National Reporting, went to reporters Jesse Eisinger and Jake Bernstein for their stories on how some Wall Street bankers, seeking to enrich themselves at the expense of their clients and sometimes even their own firms, at first delayed but then worsened the financial crisis. It was the first in the history of the Pulitzers for a group of stories not published in print. This year, we’re also proud to note that no other news organization in history has ever won two Pulitzers in its first three years of eligibility.

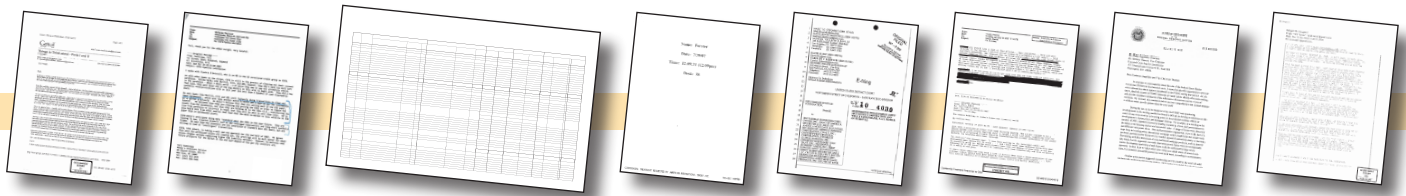
The first period of 2011 for ProPublica was marked by impact from our stories on a wide range of fronts, recognition for the best work we did the previous year, again across a number of areas, and continued progress in building ProPublica’s publishing platform, especially in social media, which is an increasingly important vehicle for news distribution. At the same time, we also broadened our relationships with traditional media, adding six new publishing partners—including The New Yorker, the UK’s Guardian, Fortune magazine, the Chronicle of Higher Education and Amazon.com—while also publishing articles with existing partners the New York Times, Washington Post, NPR, Frontline and a number of others. The number of ProPublica publishing partners now stands at 78.



STORIES

The important stories published by ProPublica in the first months of 2011 included:

- “[Post Mortem](#),” an investigation with Frontline and NPR of the state of death investigation in America, with particular focus on the weakness of a system that, in many places, depends on elected coroners with little or no expertise in forensic medicine—and in other places calls repeatedly on doctors with dubious professional records.
- Some of the earliest and most probing original [reporting on nuclear safety](#) in the wake of the partial meltdowns in Japan. ProPublica was the first major outlet to point out the risks from spent fuel rods at the Japanese plants, and has followed up on the accident with reports on deficiencies in U.S. preparedness for an emergency at a nuclear plant here.
- Continuing [coverage](#) (begun in 2008, when no one else in the media was paying any attention) of the risks of unregulated and sometimes sloppy practices in drilling for natural gas, and the threat posed to water supplies across the country.
- Relentless [reporting](#), in partnership with NPR, on the lack of adequate care for American troops suffering traumatic brain injuries in combat, the consequences for their lives, as well as the lack of respect shown the injured when they were systematically denied Purple Hearts for their wounds.
- A [riveting account](#) of what really happened in the toppling of the statue of Saddam Hussein on the day U.S. troops entered Baghdad in 2003—with important implications for the role of the news media in such situations, and why things in that iconic moment were not what they seemed.
- A [report](#) on profiteering in the wake of the BP spill.



IMPACT

The most important test of ProPublica and its work is—and will remain—whether our work is having impact. By this, we mean not publicity or prizes, but real world change. In the first period of 2011, ProPublica stories produced such change in a number of important areas:

- An SEC investigation of the collateralized debt obligations market that did so much to fuel the financial crisis was spurred by ProPublica reporting on the hedge firm Magnetar, Merrill Lynch and others. At least two bankers have received formal warnings of **possible SEC action**, while the staff report of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations issued April 14 repeatedly cited, and developed additional evidence to support, our reporting.
- In response to our “Brain Wars” series with NPR, the Army on March 16 announced **new guidelines** that will result in the awarding of Purple Hearts to many soldiers injured by explosive devices who had been denied them. This result, the Green Bay Press Gazette wrote in an editorial, “shows that in this ever-evolving media landscape, there’s still no replacement for thorough, quality reporting that can make a true difference.”
- ProPublica, in partnership with the Chronicle of Higher Education and the Center for Public Integrity, published a story on February 13 about inefficiencies and injustice in the federal Department of Education’s system for dealing with people who received student loans and have since become disabled. The department responded within 10 days with **important reforms**, and the promise of more in forthcoming regulations. The upshot will be quicker decisions on loan forgiveness requests for disabled borrowers and lower costs for taxpayers.
- The Special Inspector General for the federal government’s TARP program, in his final personal report to Congress on March 17, **based his sharp criticisms** of the troubled Home Affordable Modification Program on what he called the “extensive research conducted by ProPublica,” citing our reporting three times in six page of testimony.
- The Justice Department on March 17 found “systemic violations of civil rights” by the New Orleans Police Department, and the city agreed to a **consent decree** governing the department’s future conduct, marking another milestone in the inquiries triggered by reporting we began publishing in 2008 and have continued to this day.
- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services **moved to release**, on requests from the general public, and on a continuing basis, the data on the quality of dialysis facilities ProPublica first published in its Dialysis Facility Tracker.



Honors

We were especially pleased that no fewer than eight separate reporting projects undertaken by ProPublica in 2010 received important recognition during the 2011 awards season:

As noted above, ProPublica reporters Jesse Eisinger and Jake Bernstein were awarded the **Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting**. In addition to the Pulitzer Prize, their work, in partnership with NPR's Planet Money and This American Life, was a **finalist for the Goldsmith Prize** for investigative reporting from the Kennedy School of Government and a **finalist for the Investigative Reporters and Editors Award** for Partnership/Collaboration.

Reporter T. Christian Miller's series "Brain Wars" on traumatic brain injuries to U.S. troops, reported and published in partnership with NPR, was honored with the **George Polk Award** for radio reporting and the **Dart Award** for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma from Columbia University's Dart Center, and was a **finalist for the Investigative Reporters and Editors Partnership/Collaboration Award**.

Reporter AC Thompson's coverage of "Law and Disorder" in New Orleans, in partnership with PBS Frontline and the New Orleans Times-Picayune, received the **George Polk Award** for television reporting, and Thompson personally received the American Society of News Editors **Batten Medal** for sustained reporting over a three-year period.

Robin Fields' reporting on dialysis care won the **Investigative Reporters and Editors Online Award**, is a **finalist for the National Magazine Award** for Public

Interest and was a **finalist for the Investigative Reporters and Editors Freedom of Information Award**. Our broader work in this area, including our Dialysis Facility Tracker, with news application development by Al Shaw, received the multimedia Award for **Excellence in Health Care Journalism** and the **Society for News Design Award** of Excellence for Information Graphics.

Reporters Charles Ornstein and Tracy Weber’s “Dollars for Docs” articles and the related database by news application developer Dan Nguyen won the **Investigative Reporters and Editors Award for Innovation** in Watchdog Journalism and was a **finalist for the Investigative Reporters and Editors Online Award**. The judges for the Innovation Award said, *“ProPublica’s extraordinary efforts to obtain previously obfuscated data and then transform it into a dataset the public can use represents an outstanding investigation and public service. Each drug company had its own way of making it difficult to track doctor payments. ProPublica cracked each and carefully melded the mix so that patients anywhere in the country can see whether their doctor is collecting money from a pharmaceutical company, and for which drug. ProPublica went the extra step to teach journalists around the country how to use the embeddable searchable interface to do their own stories. Truly innovative, the work represents the best media can do for the public good.”*

ProPublica’s “Detention Dilemma” coverage of Guantanamo, led by reporters Dafna Linzer and Chisun Lee and news applications developer Krista Kjellman-Schmidt, was honored with the **Overseas Press Club Award** for Online General Excellence. The judges said, *“ProPublica vividly illustrates the power of new media by exposing online their original source material and databases for all to see. Particularly impressive are the online tools that allow readers to compare the public and secret versions of the same legal documents and to view material deleted and added from official papers — allowing readers to do their own research and draw their own conclusions.”*

Reporter Sebastian Rotella’s work on the Mumbai attacks of 2008, published in partnership with the Washington Post, received the **Overseas Press Club Award** for Best Online Coverage of an International Issue or Event.

Coverage of defective Chinese drywall by reporter Joaquin Sapien, in partnership with the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, won three Best in Business Awards from the **Society of American Business Editors and Writers**.

More generally, ProPublica’s news applications received a Judges’ Special Recognition in the Society for News Design’s **Best of Digital Design** competition. The judges noted that *“ProPublica has established a consistent set of expectations for a new breed of storytelling. Granular, permalinkable data, clear hierarchies, simple but effective visualization and transparent engagement with its readers and partner organizations underlie all these projects and set the standard.”*

ProPublica, January-April 2011

Partners

Amazon.com*

Bloggingheads TV

Center for Public Integrity*

Chronicle of Higher Education*

Fortune*

Frontline

Guardian (UK)*

New Yorker*

New York Times

NPR News

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Sarasota Herald Tribune

Slate

Stars and Stripes

Washington Post

*new partner



By the numbers

40 **partner stories**, with 15 partners

Web site **page views** up 10% over year-earlier

Daily **email subscribers** 47,000, up 17% since January 1

Twitter followers 31,000, up 63% since January 1

Twitter was a priority, and a focus for us during this period. ProPublica now has more followers than all but 10 U.S. newspapers

Facebook fans nearly 17,000, up 36% since January 1

ProPublica **Reporting Network** 7000 members, up 11% since January 1

700+ **donors**

In the month of April alone, we received donations from 37 states, the District of Columbia and four foreign countries



Longform storytelling in a short attention span world

ProPublica mounted its first live event, a panel discussion on the subject of “Longform storytelling in a short attention span world,” in partnership with New York’s New School on March 16.

Panelists included ProPublica managing editor Stephen Engelberg, editor David Remnick of the New Yorker, host Ira Glass of This American Life and senior producer Raney Aronson-Rath of Frontline; Alison Stewart, anchor of PBS’s Need to Know, was the moderator. More than 500 people filled the New School auditorium, with scores of others in an overflow room. The event was also webcast (where 1800+ people viewed it live). The New York Times Magazine’s 6th Floor blog called the event “worth watching. It rose above the median value of the combined speakers, which panels rarely do.” More than 6000 people have since taken this advice and watched a video of the event; you can join them by going [here](#).





What people are saying

“Many media organizations now turn to readers for their experiences and for reporting help, but few do so as consistently and productively as ProPublica”.

—Tina Rosenberg, *New York Times Opinionator*, March 29

“the best way to get more high-quality investigative journalism might be to donate money to ProPublica”

—Reihan Salam, *National Review Online Agenda blog*, March 21

“thank you for the work you and your colleagues did on the Henry Glover case and the other questionable activities which occurred in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Trust me when I tell you, those of us who lived and/or worked through the chaos caused by the storm will be forever grateful for your tenacity, energy and revelations.”

—Ronnie Jones, *Confidential Assistant to the Superintendent Louisiana State Police*, March 30

“Your investigation of dialysis companies arrived in my mailbox on the day I was scheduled for surgery... I visited local dialysis centers, studied your reports, and changed the one I had originally been sent to. All is going well. Thanks!!”

—Yvonne Parker, April 8

“The quality of ProPublica’s work, on [the Wall Street] project and others, should lay to rest any lingering suspicion that digital reporting is inherently less reliable, less responsible or less thorough than its print counterpart. In fact, the digital world offers unlimited space and multiple tools that can make the work both deeper and more accessible.”

—Margaret Wolf Frievoegel, *St. Louis Beacon*, April 20