



Report to Stakeholders



May-August
2011



ProPublica Report to Stakeholders, May-August 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.

The middle months of 2011 were a period of continuing impact and recognition for ProPublica. We're pleased to share this report laying out the details.

But we begin with a word of context. ProPublica's progress comes, of course, in a time of great upheaval in publishing. Amid that, ProPublica is at the forefront of innovation, and also of the debates on the way forward for quality journalism.

In June, the Federal Communications Commission staff released a 360-page report on the "changing media landscape." ProPublica is cited no fewer than eight times in the report—for our "significant contributions" overall, our initial funding, our statement of the problem of investigative journalism today, our collaborations specifically with television, our Pulitzer Prizes, our data applications, our investigative reporting, and our collaborations generally with for-profit publishers.

Moreover, the staff made clear their view that support for ProPublica and similar organizations at the local level around the country is increasingly critical. A couple of key excerpts:

"Ensuring that communities have a healthy media system is not in conflict with foundation efforts to other important goals; it's a prerequisite for them to meet those needs. Foundations or philanthropists that focus on particular issues should be conscious of the role of media in a) educating the public and b) holding officials and the institutions that oversee reforms accountable. Spending money on a cause without ensuring that there are reporters to analyze the problem, and the proposed solutions, makes it more likely the money will be wasted."

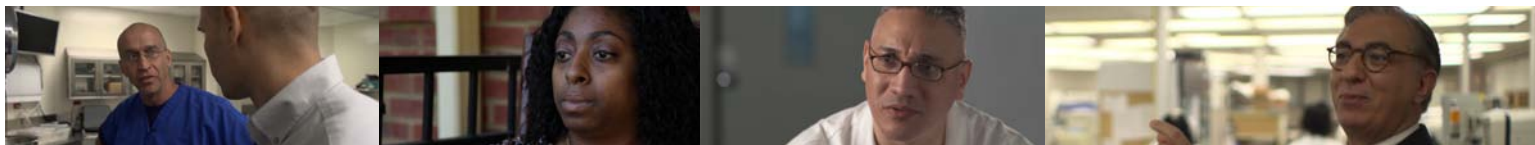
"If Americans spent one percent of their charitable giving on nonprofit media, that would generate \$2.7 billion per year.... We hope that the foundation sector will consider year-over-year increases in the funding of accountability reporting and we hope that each year more individuals will do the same."



IMPACT

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

- Leading university medical schools reacted to ProPublica’s “Dollars for Docs” series by tightening conflict of interest rules. Schools taking action included Stanford, which disciplined a number of faculty members, the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Colorado. Meanwhile, the National Institutes of Health is considering mandating online disclosure of payments to researchers. A report on PharmExec.com concluded, “Call it shameless promotion or kickbacks or a necessary part of sponsor-organization relations—whatever you call it, ProPublica will continue to make sure that the financial relationship between pharma and other healthcare industry players is fully transparent to stakeholders—including the public.”
- In May, the National Academy of Sciences published the first scientific study to link hydrofracking for natural gas to a risk of flammable drinking water, and the Department of Energy named a panel to recommend steps to make fracking safer and cleaner. ProPublica has consistently led the way in reporting on this subject, and especially on the challenges posed to our nation’s water supplies by fracking. In June, fracking companies accelerated disclosure of the chemicals they employ in drilling—a move suggested by some of our earliest reporting in this area. Over three years, we’ve now published nearly 150 stories on the subject.
- An SEC inquiry in the wake of our reporting on deals that may have had the effect of delaying but then exacerbating the financial crisis led in June to a \$154 million settlement by J.P. Morgan Chase.
- A ProPublica investigation of Heart Check America, a medical imaging company, and its high-pressure sales tactics was followed by a lawsuit brought against the company in June by the Illinois Attorney General’s office. The lawsuit seeks civil penalties, voiding of contracts and restitution to affected consumers. In August, Colorado regulators followed with a \$3.2 million fine.



STORIES

The important stories published by ProPublica in the middle months of 2011 ranged across a number of critical issues:

- Equality of opportunity is a major issue in American education, but one that often feels theoretical and abstract. ProPublica tackled the subject head-on, with reporting on the “Opportunity Gap.” But we went much farther, taking federal Department of Education data never before released and creating a news application that offered key indicators of opportunity—like Advanced Placement courses offered—and charted them, school by school, for more than three-quarters of the nation’s public schools. Our app offers comparisons against state norms, racial breakdowns and the percentage of students eligible for free lunch, a sign of poverty. And then we went farther, integrating the app with Facebook. The result enables parents to compare local schools in ways never before possible, and also empowers local journalists seeking answers for their communities. *Through August, more than 30 local news organizations around the country, ranging from the Dallas Morning News to the Las Vegas Sun to the Orlando Sentinel, and including the Chicago News Cooperative, MinnPost and voiceofsandiego, had used the app to craft local stories.* More than 75 journalists joined a conference call on August 2 to hear tips on how to participate in this initiative.
- The second major installment of our hard look at the state of death investigations in America in partnership with Frontline. This story, published and aired in late June, focused on the issues surrounding child deaths, many of which have been mishandled, resulting in tragic convictions of innocent parents.
- Even before the world’s attention was riveted by the meltdowns at the Japanese nuclear facility in Fukushima, ProPublica was investigating nuclear plant safety in the U.S. The result has been penetrating stories on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s coziness with industry in drafting regulations, the particular risks of fires at U.S. plants and troubling questions surrounding the NRC’s internal watchdog unit.
- False documents and bank errors resulting in wrongful foreclosures have been the subject of our latest stories on the scandals of the home loan modification business. This remains an active area of reporting and engagement with readers.
- Our path-breaking coverage of the risks of natural gas drilling continued, with one highlight being the release of an [“explainer” video](#) prepared by a class of New York University. The video has now been viewed more than 150,000 times.

Honors

Many journalism awards are bestowed in the early months of the year, and ProPublica was honored to win a Pulitzer Prize in April, for the second consecutive year.

But we were also delighted by the following recognition during the middle months of 2011:

Reporter T. Christian Miller's series "Brain Wars" on traumatic brain injuries to U.S. troops, reported and published in partnership with NPR, won the **Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Award for Online Investigative Reporting** and received an **Emmy Award nomination** for New Approaches to News & Documentary Programming—Current News Coverage.

Reporter AC Thompson's coverage of "Law and Disorder" in New Orleans, in partnership with PBS Frontline and the New Orleans Times-Picayune, was **nominated for an Emmy Award** for Outstanding Investigative Journalism—Long Form, and Thompson received the **I.F. Stone Medal for Journalistic Independence**.

ProPublica's work with Frontline on the BP Spill, led by reporter Abraham Lustgarten, won the **Society of Environmental Journalists Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding In-depth Reporting**, large market, and received an **Emmy Award nomination** for Outstanding Business and Economic Reporting—Long Form.

Robin Fields' reporting on dialysis care won the **Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Award for Public Service in Online Journalism**.

Coverage of defective Chinese drywall by reporter Joaquin Sapien, in partnership with the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, won the **Society of Environmental Journalists Kevin Carmody Award for Outstanding In-depth Reporting**, small market, and was a **finalist for two Gerald Loeb Awards for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism**.

Director of Computer-Assisted Reporting Jennifer LaFleur's work on foreclosures with the Seattle Times received the **National Association of Real Estate Editors Journalism Award**, first place, team award.

ProPublica's "Detention Dilemma" coverage of Guantanamo, led by reporters Dafna Linzer and Chisun Lee and news applications developer Krista Kjellman-Schmidt, received the **American Bar Association Silver Gavel Award honorable mention** for newspapers.

ProPublica work was also honored with **three designations as finalists for Online Journalism Awards**—one for general excellence for our web site, and two nominations for "innovative investigative journalism" for our Dollars for Docs and Dialysis Facility Tracker news applications.

What People are Saying

ProPublica is “doing amazing work... So there’s hope; as I worry and fret over retreat in certain places, there are new flowers blooming.”

—*Jill Abramson, New York Times then-Managing Editor at Boston University College of Communications conference on the Power of Narrative*

ProPublica is “one of the most ambitious newsrooms in the country.” “[I]t is increasingly a model of how newsrooms should produce investigative reporting.”

—*Sandy Rowe, former editor, The Oregonian in “Partners of Necessity: The Case for Collaboration in Local Investigative Reporting” discussion paper for the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy June 2011*

“By sharing data and making it easy to use, ProPublica produces more value from its deep investments of time and expertise. ProPublica can also benefit from the insights and experiences of others who share and report on data.... ProPublica’s model shows the promise of opening up [the] discussion much more broadly—not just among journalists, but for public view of how journalism is done.”

—*Melanie Sill, former editor, Sacramento Bee in the Online Journalism Review, August 4*

“along comes ProPublica to give me renewed faith in the power of data visualization by connecting it with your life through Facebook.... This is Big Data made personal, not through whizbang graphics but through demonstrated and automatic relevance.”

—*Alexis Madrigal, The Atlantic, July 6*

“ProPublica leads the field in developing news apps”

—*Megan Garber, Nieman Journalism Lab, July 1*

Jesse Eisinger’s column “The Trade” (in partnership with The New York Times) “has quickly become an absolute must-read”

—*Ezra Klein, The Washington Post, July 5*

Extending Our Reach

ProPublica can only succeed in its mission of impact resulting from our stories if they are actually read. To bolster the chances of this, we try to be creative and nimble in building a modern publishing platform. Not only do we make use of our web site and daily email (now with more than 51,000 subscribers), and employ social media aggressively (Twitter more than doubled from May 1 to August 31, to over 63,000), we also offer other publishers the ability to reprint most of our stories under a Creative Commons license. (We were even featured in the Creative Commons annual report.) And we do more than that.

Aggregation, not only on the web, but also on tablet devices, can be critical to extending ProPublica's reach. In pursuit of this, we've entered into redistribution agreements for ProPublica content with paid aggregators the **Browser, Ebyline, News.me, Newstext and Ongo**, and with free providers **Flipboard, Publish2 and Pulse**, with more to come. It's too soon to say which of these services will be the most successful in attracting readers, but, no matter which are, ProPublica content will be there.

ProPublica partners, May-August 2011

Amazon.com	McClatchy Washington Bureau*
Chicago Tribune	New York Times
Chronicle of Higher Education	NPR News
Columbia Journalism Review	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Frontline	Slate
Guardian (UK)	USA Today
Las Vegas Sun*	Washington Post
Los Angeles Times	*new partner

By the numbers

37 partner stories, with 15 partners

Web site page views up 11% over year-earlier

Daily email subscribers over 51,000, up 10% since May 1

Twitter followers more than 63,000, up 104% since May 1

Facebook fans more than 20,000, up 25% since May 1

800+ donors