



# **Report to Stakeholders**

**January-April, 2010**



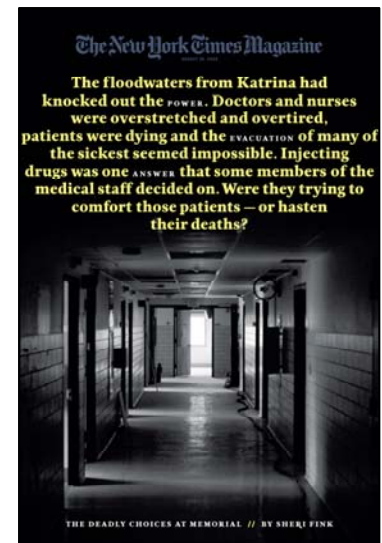
## ProPublica Reports, January-April 2010

*First in a series of periodic reports to our stakeholders about progress at ProPublica*

ProPublica is an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. ProPublica is a new kind of institution: staffed with top talent but unencumbered by legacy costs. Our work focuses exclusively on truly important stories, stories with “moral force.” We do this by producing journalism that shines a light on exploitation of the weak by the strong and on the failures of those with power to vindicate the trust placed in them. With 32 full-time reporters and editors, ProPublica has the largest investigative news staff in the nation.

The first four months of 2010 saw a number of important breakthroughs for ProPublica:

- **Awards.** We were honored to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Investigative Reporting, the George Polk Award for environmental reporting, the National Magazine Award for Reporting, the Selden Ring Award for “investigative reporting that has brought results” from the Annenberg School of the University of Southern California, both the Magazine Award and the Online Award from Investigative Reporters and Editors, the Overseas Press Club Online Journalism Award, the Sigma Delta Chi Award for online investigative reporting, the Edward R. Murrow Award for Media Entrepreneurship, the Dart Award for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma and the James Aronson Award for Social Justice Journalism. We were also a finalist for a slew of other awards, ranging from the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service to the Goldsmith Prize for investigative reporting from Harvard’s Kennedy School. All of these honors were for work published in 2009, ProPublica’s first full year of publication.
- **Leverage.** ProPublica works hard to leverage our journalism, often using new and innovative techniques. Those efforts took significant steps forward in early 2010. We made possible local stories across the country based on our data on stimulus spending broken down to the county level; to date, there have been more than 110 such stories. We tracked members of Congress fund-raising at the Super Bowl through our “Super Bowl Blitz.” We matched homeowners seeking modification of their mortgages with local reporters who could shine a light on the delays the homeowners were experiencing. We published the “reporting recipe” for



our coverage of state nursing oversight and hosted a well-attended conference call to offer tips to reporters interested in executing the recipe in states around the country. Our Reporting Network, engaging in what others call “citizen” and we term “distributed” journalism, increased 64% to more than 4800 members.



- **Reach.** We continued to build our own publishing platform, with subscriptions to our daily email list rising 87% in the first four months of 2010 to more than 25,000. Over the same period, the ranks of our Twitter followers rose 81% and our Facebook fans increased 371%. We launched an iPhone app that had been downloaded more than 3000 times by the end of period and a podcast that had more 800 subscribers.

- **Stories.** We published 24 long-form stories with 15 publishing partners, with new partners ranging

from public radio’s This American Life, to the Daily Beast online, Newsweek magazine, the Fresno Bee and the Memphis Commercial-Appeal. Continuing partners included the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Politico and Marketplace on public radio. Major stories included a look at state unemployment insurance fund shortfalls, a Newsweek cover story on problems in the training of Afghan police, the tale of one Senator’s lobbying to forestall formaldehyde’s designation as a known carcinogen, an investigation of congressional fundraising at a Bruce Springsteen concert and a careful deconstruction of how trading in mortgage-backed securities by a firm named Magnetar may have intensified the financial panic of 2008. We also launched a blog that spurs greater awareness of outstanding investigative reporting by others as well as of our own work.

- **Impact.** Most important, our journalism continued to have impact:
  - In New Orleans, reporter AC Thompson’s stories on police violence in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, published in partnership with the New Orleans Times-Picayune and public television’s Frontline, have helped spur investigations that are beginning to yield results. Five people have



so far been charged by a federal grand jury, including four police officers; three of the officers have already pleaded guilty. Our related stories on vigilante violence during the same period have also moved forward, with one of the latest stories presenting significant evidence about the identity of the shooter in a fatality we first reported in December 2008 in partnership with the Nation magazine.

- A story by reporters Tracy Weber and Charles Ornstein on problems with a federal database of dangerous or incompetent caregivers led quickly to the replacement of the team overseeing the database. A division director and four managers were reassigned less than a month after our story was published in partnership with the Los Angeles Times and Chicago Tribune. At the same time, federal officials posted a warning along with the database, noting remaining questions about its completeness and accuracy.

- A team led by fellow Olga Pierce and news application developer Jeff Larson created the only version of the historic health care reform legislation available before Congress enacted it that melded the editing instructions of the “reconciliation” bill with the earlier-passed House bill to yield a complete text of the proposed statute. The result was cited as authoritative by the New York Times, Politico, BusinessWeek, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Tribune Washington Bureau and Talking Points Memo.



- After nearly two years of reporting, and more than 75 ProPublica stories, most of them by reporter Abrahm Lustgarten, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation took steps to slow if not ban hydraulic fracturing for natural gas in areas near the state’s reservoirs. When ProPublica’s reporting began, the State had literally been on the verge of approving such drilling without any oversight whatever. ProPublica’s reporting on the dangers to water supplies posed by “fracking” has heightened awareness around the country.

- **Legal.** Our two outstanding legal cases were resolved, both in our favor. A libel suit against reporter Sheri Fink’s article about the deadly choices at a hospital in the wake of Hurricane Katrina was dismissed by a federal court in New Orleans; the plaintiff dropped his appeal in exchange for not having to pay our legal fees.

(Fink later won a Pulitzer Prize and a National Magazine Award for the story.) In affirmative litigation, a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit concerning our request for a list of private jets blocked from federal tracking databases was decided in our favor (and that of the FAA) by a federal court in Washington, DC. Our follow-up stories using the data the court ordered released were published in USA Today and received widespread attention.

- **New staff.** We added two regular news staffers in the early months of 2010. Senior reporter Sebastian Rotella joined after 23 years at the Los Angeles Times, and reporter-blogger Marian Wang, who now leads our coverage of investigative reporting by others, comes from Mother Jones just three years out of journalism school. In addition, we've recently added year-round internship slots in distributed reporting and computer-assisted reporting.
- **Funding.** Finally, and critically for our long-term sustainability, we continue to make important progress on diversifying our funding—an effort supported by a three-year grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. Donations and commitments received during the first four months of 2010—above and beyond those from our founding donor, the Sandler Foundation—were nearly \$2 million, easily topping the \$1 million in such funding received in all of 2009. Our new supporters include The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Woodtiger Fund, with funding continuing from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation as well as the Knight Foundation. In addition, online gifts, ranging from \$5 to \$500, were up 173% in the first four months of 2010 compared to the eight and a half months we sought such gifts in 2009, with the number of such donors up 193%.