

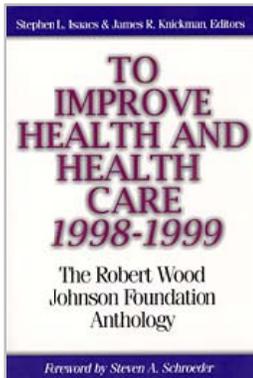
The Foundation's Radio and Television Grants, 1987–1997

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Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

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**To Improve Health
and Health Care,
1998–1999**



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Editor's Introduction

Traditionally, communications departments of philanthropies try to inform the public about the foundation and its work through press releases, annual reports and dissemination of findings from grantees' work. In recent years, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has also taken a somewhat different and parallel approach—using communications itself as a strategy for attacking some of the nation's health problems. Just as some grants use demonstration or research projects to advance a goal of the Foundation, the grants discussed in this chapter use communications as a strategy.

As the chapter makes clear, the Foundation has experimented with a broad range of media approaches. Some represent core funding to encourage better and more extensive reporting of health news, whereas others support a television or radio production aimed at a specific health issue. There have been successes and failures, and, as is typical, not everyone scores successes and failures in the same way.

The communications office at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and its grantees have received numerous awards in honor of its efforts in the emerging field of philanthropic communications.

Victoria Weisfeld, the author of this chapter, has been a key player in the communications unit of the Foundation for over 10 years, and has been responsible for a range of grants to radio and television for health-related programming.

Information comes to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation from many sources—the experiences of the Foundation's grantees, the deliberations at conferences that the Foundation funds, the knowledge base of the fields the Foundation works in. Information of different types can be used to raise awareness about a problem or an issue, to describe promising innovations that others may want to adopt, to encourage collaboration among people working in similar areas, and to report on outcomes, good or bad. Properly used, information is capital—even more valuable, on occasion, than the dollars the Foundation awards.

Just as there are many sources of information, so there are many different places to distribute it: to other grantees, to professionals and policy-makers, to the public. The appropriate place to distribute information will depend on what it is, what problem or issue it addresses, who may need to act on it and how timely it is. Information for its own sake is not very interesting to the Foundation, which is more concerned with information that people can act on.

Putting these two ideas together—the type of information and who needs it—creates an almost limitless array of communications possibilities. Just like every other organization and individual in the country wanting to reach audiences with a message, the Foundation works with the full array of news and information media. How it has worked with radio and television between 1987 and 1997 is the subject of this chapter.¹

In a nutshell, the Foundation's communications strategy is built around activities that foster its programmatic goals. In its relations with broadcast media, the Foundation tries to capitalize on the different roles of broadcasters, some of which aid and some of which inhibit its work.

- Both the news and information side of broadcasting and the entertainment side hold potential in *health education*—conveying new information about preserving health and treating illnesses or about getting access to health care. The Foundation tries to encourage such messages through grants to the media or to other organizations that work with them, through briefings for journalists, and through continued media relations activities.
- The media also portray people engaged in *risky behavior* (tobacco, drug and alcohol use, for example), which the Foundation hopes to counter. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America and the Center for Tobacco-Free Kids are good examples of grantees that try to change the media climate.
- The broadcast media are an important source of *public information* regarding key health policy questions—in fact, their coverage of an issue at all is essential to *public agenda setting*.

A grant enabling National Public Radio to increase its coverage of health care reform and to award small grants to local stations to do the same are two such activities.

Although the Foundation's informal interactions with the news media are numerous, it has seen a special opportunity to make grants in certain areas:

- to broadcasters themselves and
- to independent producers for broadcast programs.

WE DON'T FUND MEDIA—DO WE?

In the mid-1980s, the Council on Foundations and the Benton Foundation produced a landmark video, *We Don't Fund Media*. The title reflected the typical response that producers and broadcasters received from foundations at that time. Most foundations had no appreciation of media's potential and lacked expertise to work with them; they saw media grants as costly, risky ventures—particularly proposals that had a policy edge to them. This video laid out a case for the support of media projects as an essential tool for foundations attempting to create social change. A decade ago, many foundations ignored several facts about the broadcast media. Although foundations might recognize that the media are pervasive and might concede that they have an important educational potential, they were generally less willing to acknowledge that broadcast media were—and are—central to certain aspects of modern life:

- Setting the public and political agenda.
- Describing the cultural context for decisions about the policy issues of the day.
- Suggesting alternative visions for how some aspect of social and economic systems could work.
- Giving an increasingly diverse society some common reference points (values, history, ideas).
- Serving as the primary source of news for large numbers of Americans.
- Shaping people's perceptions of the "other" in society.

In short, foundations didn't sufficiently recognize that the important decision-making in various sectors of society increasingly takes place in a media-driven environment. For all the frustrations that working with the media entail, it is virtually impossible to think about changing public views on important issues without engaging the media. Because half of Americans today obtain most of their information from television, the term "mass media" often signifies one medium and one medium only—TV. "Most large foundations now recognize that they must be in that marketplace if they want their ideas and their

grantees' ideas to be seen," says Karen Menichelli, associate director of the Benton Foundation, a Washington, D.C.-based organization concerned with the public-interest use of communications.

Although the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation made only a few media grants in its first fifteen years, in her view it was an early exception to the we-don't-fund-media rule, in that it was an early foundation funder of National Public Radio for programming related to health care. The Foundation made these grants for strategic reasons: funding NPR was seen as an opportunity to reach a relatively small but influential audience. The Foundation's rationale for NPR support, as stated at that time, applies equally well to its approach to broadcasting grants today: "Public consensus is increasingly essential for progress to occur. The soundness of any such consensus, in turn, is dependent on a public informed about all sides of the issue."

With its broadcasting grants, the Foundation has a secondary agenda, too: it derives a public relations benefit from its association with well-regarded programs and organizations. According to Menichelli, its issue-oriented support of NPR has become "almost a branding," given our tagline that associates the Foundation's name with "making grants to improve the health and health care of all Americans."

BROADCASTING PROJECTS THE FOUNDATION FUNDS: OVERVIEW

With few exceptions, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation considers only those media grant proposals that directly relate to its access, substance-abuse and chronic-care program goals. In the 1987–1997 period, the Foundation made more than \$56 million in grants to broadcasters. This funding has been divided into several major categories in the accompanying Exhibit 10.1. Listed first in the exhibit are projects that support the continuing news gathering and analysis functions of a broadcast organization. This kind of funding has enabled radio and television networks to expand their news coverage of health care issues. The second category (Grants for Specific Productions) funds producers of specific programming—usually one-time specials. Some of these grants include funding for outreach, promotion and other corollary activities. Grants devoted solely to these corollary activities are the third category.

The dollar figures noted in Exhibit 10.1 for the specials do not necessarily reflect the total cost of the programs, merely the Foundation's investments. Sometimes a project has multiple funders. Sometimes the Foundation's grant covers more than just production costs (including, for example, outreach, promotion, marketing, distribution, training, additional products, Web sites and research). As an example, the \$4.38 million grant to Public Affairs Television for an addiction series includes the production of a four-part broadcast program featuring Bill Moyers, the cost of a community and

educational outreach campaign, minigrants to stations for community activities, preview screenings of the series in Washington, D.C., and state capitals, print materials, a national video conference and a state-of-the-art on-line project. Other times, such corollary activities are funded separately.

The two main categories in Exhibit 10.1 arise from different motivations:

- Grants to *news organizations* for "hard news"—ongoing reporting, over a period of years, via short news pieces on a wide variety of timely health care topics; the information is useful for audiences interested in breadth and staying current; much of the value of the grant depends on the credibility of the news organization; these grantees treat the funder like any other news source; the goal is to keep the public generally informed.
- Grants to *producers* for specific productions—specials—are one-shot or for only a few feature programs, usually on a very well-defined topic; the value depends in part on the ultimate venue in which the project airs; specials appeal to people who want depth; these grantees are more open to the funder's ideas, at least in a project's formative stages; the goal is to convey a complex subject in a dramatic, compelling way.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SELECTED GRANTEES

A few of the Foundation's larger grants to broadcasters illustrate the range of projects and suggest some lessons.

Grants for News Coverage

WGBH. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation had limited experience with grants to television until a series first funded in 1988, called *The AIDS Quarterly*, out of Boston public television station WGBH. At that time, the Foundation was heavily invested in two major AIDS programs—one a demonstration program of the "San Francisco model" of AIDS care in eleven communities and the other a group of fifty-four innovative, independent community projects. The call for proposals for this latter program elicited more than a thousand replies. Public concern about AIDS was rising, yet serious shortcomings existed in HIV and AIDS treatment. The prevention of HIV infection—through significant, long-term behavior changes—was the only apparent solution, but how to achieve such changes was unclear.

High-quality, thoughtful television appeared to be a promising way to explore these issues for the broadest possible audience. The characteristics of AIDS itself helped justify this choice of medium, because the actions that would have an impact on the epidemic were far beyond the control of the health care sector. This award-winning magazine-format program, hosted by Peter Jennings, attracted around eight million viewers per airing. And the segments that aired stimulated additional print news coverage.

After a few seasons, *The AIDS Quarterly* metamorphosed into *The Health Quarterly*. This program employed a similar format and looked at issues in health care generally. Decreasing public anxiety about AIDS and a stronger care system response supported this shift to new topics. An early segment of *The Health Quarterly* examined the plight of America's uninsured work force and the competing interests trying to affect American health policy, for example.

The project had a dramatic finale in late 1993, midway through a \$10 million renewal grant. Long-standing friction between Foundation staff members and the show's producers reached a critical point, and the Foundation canceled its funding. Foundation staff members believed that long delays between programs—it was never truly quarterly—undercut the potential value of having a regular media presence. They also thought that the outreach was minimal, and the show's costs were high. Moreover, they were frustrated by the producer's lack of responsiveness to topics they suggested—and to the choice of topics made instead. This type of friction, which can occur in any media grant, reflected a basic unresolved difference of opinion: the WGBH producers thought of their project as a hard news endeavor—in which case the Foundation's role normally would be hands-off—whereas Foundation staff members viewed the project more as feature programming, which to them meant working more closely with the producer. This quarrel eventually came to public light in a June 1997 *Boston Globe* series by Daniel Golden. He saw the principal quarrel in stark terms: the Foundation concerned about project management, high overhead and productivity, WGBH concerned about "interference with editorial decisions." As a result, in subsequent negotiations with potential broadcasting grantees, Foundation staff members have worked before the grant is awarded to clarify the kind and amount of input they will have.

NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO. NPR and other radio news networks have received grants to establish continuing coverage of health news. Foundation communications staff members who want to pitch a story about a particular grantee or issue to these outlets approach their reporters and editors just as they would approach any other news organization. Sometimes they succeed, and sometimes they don't. The potential awkwardness of this situation—the Foundation's being both news source and funder—has been overcome by scrupulous separation of the business, or grant, aspects of its relationship from the media relations aspects. The grant is handled by the NPR development office, news items by the news and information staff.

Support for NPR's coverage of health care for the last thirteen years is widely viewed within the Foundation as a success, contributing in a very real way to its goal of having a more informed public on

health care matters. Much good reporting and much public understanding would have been lost over the years without the special expertise NPR's several full-time journalists and skilled stringers have developed. For example, they broke the story on the Food and Drug Administration's move to assert regulatory control over tobacco and won a prestigious Peabody Award for this coverage.

The Foundation also funds National Public Radio because of the audience it reaches—12.4 million listeners every week, 56 percent of whom hold college degrees. NPR reaches educated, activated listeners, and the Foundation believes that this audience needs to be well informed about health issues, particularly at a time when the health care system is changing so profoundly.

At the height of the national health care reform debate, NPR approached the Foundation regarding separate support to enable small grants for local public radio coverage and outreach projects around health reform. The Foundation funded this project jointly with the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation and the Commonwealth Fund. Under it, NPR assembled a panel of experts and reviewed stations' proposals, ultimately awarding thirty-three grants for a variety of community activities and enhanced coverage. NPR provided programming and outreach materials to aid them. Called *Critical Decision*, this project enabled public radio stations in many locales to become actively involved in helping citizens discuss and understand problems in the health care system and the potential impact of changes. The local stations produced lively, award-winning coverage that engaged a wide cross-section of their communities. The success of *Critical Decision* prompted the Foundation to develop its own grant program for local public radio, Sound Partners for Community Health.

SOUND PARTNERS FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH. This program, announced in the late spring of 1997, offers competitive national grants for local public radio stations. It is administered for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation by the Benton Foundation. Grants of \$15,000 to \$35,000 are awarded to stations to increase public awareness of one of four key health issues and to facilitate citizens' involvement in making decisions affecting health care.

There will be two rounds of grantmaking, totaling \$2 million altogether. As of this writing, grants have been awarded for the first round of funding. Of the 408 stations eligible to apply, 104 did, and 35 ultimately received grants. Their projects cover the four topic areas as follows:

- The impact of welfare reform on access to health care (10 stations);
- Providing health care for young children (nine stations);

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- New approaches to curtailing youth substance abuse (nine stations); and
 - Health care decision-making at the end of life (seven stations).

Some 42 million Americans live within the primary signal area of the 35 grantee stations. They serve areas as diverse as Charleston, West Virginia; Elkhart, Indiana; San Francisco; and New York City.

In the short term, the Foundation believes that the Sound Partners program will permit local stations to devote the resources necessary for good, in-depth coverage of important health issues in their community—a luxury that tight budgets often do not permit. It also will help them to establish strong partnerships with local organizations as they work on the project together. Each party in the effort can gain from these relationships. The Foundation expects the grants to increase the impact of the stations' reporting and to bring more community residents into contact with public radio. In the long run, the outreach skills developed under the program and the involvement of new audiences may help stations in their quest for sustainability.

Grants for Community Radio

The Foundation's grants to community radio over the past five years have supported several activities: reporting on health issues, call-in programs, marketing and training. The community radio grantees—Radio Bilingüe, National Native News and High Plains News Service—are all networks or news services that provide programming to subscribing stations in many states. They perform an invaluable service for niche audiences (Spanish speakers, Native Americans and rural residents) very different from NPR's "elites."

Radio is a particularly effective way to reach people isolated by culture, geography, or language, many of whom do not have newspapers available to them, and some of whom cannot read. Radio listenership among these groups tends to be higher than average, and radio programming that is sensitive to their culture—and, in the case of Hispanics, in their own language—is particularly valued. These three news services combined reach some 2.5 million people weekly, and all three consider health topics a strong area of listener interest. Community radio networks cover more than hard news; they also have a commitment to improving the health of their listeners and will run stories about, for example, the importance of mammograms or preventing substance abuse.

- Radio Bilingüe used its first two-year grant to establish a national health desk for its nationwide Spanish-language radio news programs. In early 1995, Radio Bilingüe introduced the first national Spanish-language daily talk show, *Linea Abierta* ("Open Line"). Radio Bilingüe also produces public service announcements and radio *novelas* about health topics. Such community-

service programming led to Radio Bilingüe receiving an award for excellence in community health promotion from the Secretary of Health and Human Services in 1994.

- High Plains News Service, a radio network created by the Western Organization of Resource Councils, established a rural news and multicultural information program for public and community radio stations in 1989. It serves mainly the North Great Plains and Rocky Mountain West areas, but has station subscribers in twenty states, from Alaska to Arkansas and Kentucky to California.
- At National Native News, the first national news service for Native Americans, the health reporting unit established with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding has produced stories affecting Native Americans throughout the country and has guided more than a hundred correspondents in their coverage of Native health issues. NNN's public affairs call-in program, *Native America Calling*, for the first time gives Native Americans the chance to engage in a direct dialog with health care leaders. A measure of NNN's significance is the Smithsonian Institution's decision to preserve its broadcasts in an archive at the new National Museum of the American Indian.

The three community radio grantees face common problems. One is the lack of skilled reporters. In part to compensate, all three networks use advisory committees or other experts, sometimes people they have encountered through their Foundation connection, to provide story leads and interview ideas and to help monitor the quality of their health coverage. They also engage in training programs.

Their other large problem is financial viability. They have differing organizational structures, but all face cutbacks from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. They must increase both the number of stations subscribing to their service and the number of listeners to their programs. Many subscribing stations are small and cannot afford high programming fees or promotion, but the networks have survived by changing from providing services free to developing a fee structure. Radio Bilingüe developed an innovative marketing approach, requesting funding for satellite equipment that it could give to seventeen small stations in return for carrying the programming. Health programming is very popular with listeners, so it helps build the station's audience. Increasing the subscriber base also makes the programs more attractive to national underwriters, and the networks need to improve their fundraising capacity, too. This involves obtaining grants and underwriting, not on-air fundraisers such as individual stations conduct.

Recognizing that these three networks had limited resources, in 1993 the Foundation funded a radio technical assistance project to help address such issues as editorial content, technical quality, marketing and fundraising. Under the direction of an experienced radio consultant, a Media Resource Committee was established, involving representatives from the three grantee networks, their radio reporters and editors, and other Foundation grantees and consultants involved in health care policy, rural health and minority issues. Four semiannual meetings were held, offering a variety of program ideas and resources.

The radio grantees met a wide variety of other Foundation grantees in Denver, Albuquerque, Minneapolis and Phoenix, enriching their pool of resources. A by-product of the regular interaction among the radio grantees is a heightened sharing of their human resources and increased cooperative training.

American News Service

A relatively recent trend in the news media, which some foundations have supported, is the development of "public journalism" or "civic journalism." These terms are defined variously, but, according to one of the movement's leaders, Jan Schaffer of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, civic journalism can be distinguished from "everyday good journalism" both by its attitude and by the tools it employs.

"The attitude is an affirmation that journalists have an obligation—a constitutionally protected obligation—to give readers and viewers the news and information they need to make decisions in a self-governing society," she writes in a description of the program. That is, "simply raising an alarm or spotlighting an injustice, which is traditional journalism, is not enough." People need to see that they can "play a role, have a voice, or make a difference" in improving society. The Foundation's grant to the American News Service, or ANS, in Brattleboro, Vermont, is just such a project. ANS's goal is to cover initiatives in various communities that tackle such thorny problems as race relations, education, crime, poverty, health care and the environment.

"Millions of people across America are engaged in constructive, solution-oriented activities that directly address the key issues confronting society," the ANS project director, Frances Moore Lappé, says. Yet many news media rarely cover them or the positive steps individual citizens and projects are taking. The more typical "if it bleeds, it leads," approach to journalism contributes to "growing despair, cynicism and feelings of powerlessness," Lappé says. Ironically, "today's problems can be successfully addressed only with the active engagement of millions more Americans."

In its pilot phase, the American News Service produced stories used by the nation's top newspapers and broadcast media outlets—1,700 media outlets overall, as of summer 1997. Examples of the kinds of stories covered in the health area include these:

- *Elderly Avoid Nursing Homes, With Community Support.* Concerned about the unmet needs of the elderly and an unusually high proportion of elderly people moving into nursing homes, some neighbors in the Twin Cities took action. They created the Living at Home/Block Nurse Program, which saves money and allows the elderly to remain in their homes longer. It thrives on neighborly support and is becoming a national model.

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- *"Doulas" Help New Moms When Family Support Is Missing.* As professional women move away from their extended families and poor women, too, often lack family support, a new term has entered the American childbirth scene. "Doula," a Greek word, refers to experienced women who help, encourage and accompany women during pregnancy and labor and after birth. Having gained a certain cachet among highly mobile professionals, new doula programs are arising to meet the needs of more vulnerable women. Their benefits are many, advocates say.
 - *Unique Approach Fights Teen Drug Epidemic With Treatment for Every Child.* Little Rock, Arkansas, has embarked on a unique program giving every youngster in the city access to drug-abuse treatment. Called Insure the Children, it provides services for all youths from the ages of seven to eighteen. It is free to those not covered by private insurance or Medicaid. Citing early signs of effectiveness, sponsors hope it will become a national model.
 - *Peers Teach Abstinence—Plus a Whole Lot More.* In the often-contentious arena of teenage pregnancy prevention, slogans range from "just say no" to "safe sex." Some new programs are dramatically reducing teenage pregnancy rates with a new "abstinence-plus" message: don't have sex, but know what you're getting into if you do. A new nonprofit initiative called the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy also says that a mixture of strategies is most effective.

Some early responses suggest that ANS stories have stimulated greater citizen involvement and replication of good ideas across communities. Some journalists and editors have become more interested in this type of story, too.

Grants for Specific Productions

Most of the grants in the second group in Exhibit 10.1 are for broadcast projects brought to the Foundation by producers—usually video producers. In general, the Foundation has an opportunity to have an impact at the beginning of these projects, providing background and suggesting ideas and sources. But good producers conduct many such interviews, and ultimately the decisions—which issues are covered in the program, who is interviewed, what the bottom line is—are theirs. Occasionally, as research on a project unfolds, the producers return for additional ideas, clarification, or sources, or to test their conclusions. This happened several times in the production of the Fred Friendly special *Before I Die*. Sometimes producers have nearly completed a project before they even request funding, in which case the content decisions are already made.

When a documentary is being produced in a field where the Foundation has been working, staff members may hope and expect that the show will highlight some of the Foundation's work, but they do recognize that the piece is not a promotional vehicle for Foundation programs, and, in fact, would be weakened if it appeared to be so. Still, the Foundation and its grantees often can use these video productions in multiple ways after they are broadcast. In at least one case, the producer made a separate,

short video for each Foundation site where he taped, which the grantees then used for community education, training and fundraising.

Another type of project in this category is the development of pilot programs that the producers hope will be picked up by either public or commercial broadcasters. So far, the Foundation has made only two such grants, and these quite recently. Both are for pilots aimed at children and have education and entertainment goals.

The kinds of nonbroadcast support activities funded under this category are enormously varied. They can include activities like the elaborate community meetings and outreach built around the April 1997 Public Broadcasting Service airing of *Before I Die* or the Bill Moyers addiction series broadcast in March 1998. What follows are some examples of the variety of special programming.

ROCK THE VOTE. This grant took advantage of the highly visible policy debate about health reform to educate young people (ages sixteen to twenty-four) about the health care system, various health reform proposals, and behaviorally linked health problems that disproportionately affect young people. A pamphlet, *Rock The System: A Guide to Health Care Reform for Young Americans*, was published and promoted through video public service announcements. It included an overview of the problem of health care costs and why that problem motivated health reform efforts; sections on problems of young people in which prevention could avoid costs later (substance abuse, pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, violence and sexually transmitted diseases); a section on then-current legislative alternatives; and a report on the Rock the Vote 1994 survey of young people. More than a million copies were distributed through requests to an 800 telephone number and in places frequented by young people, and the brochure was promoted in youth-oriented publications. As the issue of health care reform faded from daily headlines in the fall of 1994, the project shifted gears to produce videos on health issues of concern to young people. The videos were collectively called *Out of Order*. They were aired on MTV on three consecutive nights in May 1995 to an audience of 200,000 to 300,000. A significant increase in calls to the 800 number resulted. MTV also distributed ten thousand copies of the *Out of Order Resource Guide*, which listed national and state organizations involved in the health issues addressed by the specials.

THE NBC HEALTH CARE REFORM SPECIAL. At the time of the national health care reform debate, Foundation staff members were frustrated by the lack of public engagement in the process and the lack of solid, helpful information available to the public. For good policy to emerge, it seemed

essential that the public understand what was at stake and what some of the choices were. Yet the viewpoints being heard were almost solely those of the special interests—people with a financial stake in the outcome of the debate.

What should be the venue for such a public education effort? Public television's reach was too small, and the Foundation had decided against a costly paid advertising campaign supporting expanded health insurance coverage. It instead turned to a commercial broadcaster, NBC News, with a request for a two-hour television event to inform Americans about the upcoming choices for the nation's health care system. NBC News promised its best production and on-air talent and, according to the network's president, Andrew Lack, "a highly visible, serious and creative exploration of a topic that is vital to the well being of everyone in the country."

A front-page story on this unprecedented partnership in the *New York Times* on May 4, 1994, began, "A leading foundation active in health care has bought a two-hour block of prime time on NBC television and has asked the network's news division to fill the slot with an ambitious examination of health care reform." Of the \$3.5 million budget, \$2.5 million was for air time and \$1 million for promotion. The program was broadcast by the network commercial-free; local affiliates were asked not to accept advertising relevant to health care reform during station breaks.

Clearly, this would be the Foundation's most highly visible—and highly watched—television foray. Staff members were concerned about both objectivity and depth. Although the NBC team was willing to listen to the Foundation's ideas up front, just as it would solicit the ideas of many others, the Foundation would not have any say over the ultimate content. The Foundation had to rely completely on the professionalism and reputation of NBC News. The broadcast, on June 21, was watched by thirty million American adults.

The impact of this special was evaluated by two separate surveys—one by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of The Annenberg School of Public Communication of the University of Pennsylvania, and one by Robert Blendon, professor of health policy and political analysis at Harvard University's School of Public Health. Using different designs, the two studies came to different conclusions. Both evaluations concluded that viewers saw the program as balanced and thought they learned something, but the Penn survey concluded that viewers actually did learn something and were less cynical as a result of the

program, whereas the Harvard survey measured no actual learning and no change in cynicism. These results show how difficult assessing media impact can be.

ANALYSIS OF HEALTH REFORM COVERAGE. The way the media covered health care reform itself became a topic of national interest. The Foundation wanted to learn from this experience, so it funded a special PBS program to look at the way health reform had been presented to the American people. Aired in October 1994, it featured Bill Moyers and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, who under another grant had been assessing media coverage of reform in both news reporting and advertising. In this broadcast, the commentators made several principal critiques:

- The debate had been conducted in language not accessible to many people.
- Although TV, radio and print media dedicated significant time and space to the reform debate, their reporters focused on political strategy, not on the content or pros and cons of the various health reform proposals.
- Reporters focused so heavily on the fortunes of the President's health care plan that other proposals were virtually invisible and, consequently, unlikely to succeed.
- The public's lack of exposure to multiple ideas meant that polls necessarily narrowed their queries to a thumbs-up or thumbs-down on "the Clinton plan."
- The majority of ads from all sides were designed to stimulate fear, not provide facts, and engaged in attack, not advocacy.

Dean Jamieson's project had followed the news articles, analyses, editorials, op-eds and cartoons in 10 newspapers, as well as coverage of health reform on the morning and evening news shows on the major broadcast networks, CNN, *The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour* and others. This study ran from mid-January 1994 through early October, when it became clear that Congress was not going to act on the issue. Subsequently, the Annenberg project published a report, provided videotapes of the Jamieson/Moyers special, and conducted a symposium on "The Role of Communication in the Reform Debate." This set of materials, called *Media in the Middle*, showed serious shortcomings in journalism's ability to cover such a complex issue. Sets were distributed nationally to schools of journalism and of public policy studies.

Moreover, journalists were unable in this instance to easily assess or counter the other highly promoted stream of media information—advertising. More than 120 organizations of many viewpoints spent at least \$68 million on advertisements both for and against health care reform. The project's analysis suggests

that broadcast advertising was particularly misleading—nearly 60 percent of broadcast ads were judged unfair, compared to only 28 percent of print ads.

The result, the report concluded, was coverage "unprecedented in cost, intensity and confusion." It drew five key lessons for future programming around complex topics:

- In policy debates, journalists can play a useful role by clarifying the language and jargon being used.
- When many different pieces of legislation are being considered in Congress, it would be helpful to adopt a common, consistent description of the various proposals.
- Polls can be used to reveal how the public sees the problem and its responses to various specific aspects of proposed legislation—instead of using polls as a measure of winning and losing. When public opinion is clearly uninformed, it shouldn't be treated as important news.
- Assess the fairness and accuracy of policy-oriented ads, including who sponsors them, what issues are raised, and what the agenda of the sponsor might be.
- Assume that public policy deliberations are a serious business that needs to be responsibly and fully reported and that not all of those involved are cynically promoting their own gain.

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION PILOTS. The Children's Television Act of 1990 mandated that starting September 1, 1997, every commercial broadcast television station in the United States broadcast at least three hours a week of educational and information programs designed specifically for children ages two to sixteen. Such a requirement was long sought by parents and children's advocates, but its implementation remains in doubt because of the paucity of high-quality children's programming.

The problems associated with children's television—particularly heavy viewing—often overshadow the medium's potential to enrich children's lives. Television can and does inspire and educate the developing mind, influence behavior and health habits, and provide positive role models. Programs geared to preschool children, such as *Sesame Street*, are popular with parents and children alike and have helped children become more academically successful than their nonviewing peers. But once children reach school age, good programs are few and far between. Although children ages six to eleven are still enamored with television, the shows available to them are entertainment-driven, action-oriented and superhero-dominated. There are significant economic barriers to producing and broadcasting high-quality educational programming for this age group and little understanding of which programs will succeed.

The Foundation's goal for grantmaking in this area reflects a long-range approach to promoting health and well-being in the next generation. If the resulting programs become popular, they will help children

lay a solid foundation for good decision-making on health-related matters. By the time they are in their teenage years and faced with choices about smoking, drug use and sexual activity—choices that could adversely affect their health throughout life—it may be too late to reach them.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has funded two projects to develop pilot children's programs: one through a competitive project, administered by the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, to develop a series called *Young Heroes*, and one by the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston. (The former grant also includes an effort to improve the measurement of young audiences. Experts believe many children are not counted with traditional audience rating methods. This makes the programs they watch less attractive to advertisers and, consequently, less financially viable.) The latter program, *Willoughby's Wonders*, which premiered as a half-hour pilot on WGBH in Boston, features the players on an urban kids' soccer team. It won two New England area Emmy Awards for "Outstanding Children's Special" and "Outstanding Individual Achievement in Directing." The Foundation now has awarded a second grant to the Judge Baker Children's Center for the development of a plan to extend *Willoughby's Wonders* to a thirteen-week series for PBS. It's too soon to predict whether either of these programs will achieve financial viability—and viewership.

COROLLARY PROJECTS. Exhibit 10.1 lists a number of corollary projects to the Foundation's broadcasting grants—a list that illustrates the growing complexity of the communications field. Funding a stand-alone broadcast program probably isn't a good investment. Over time, Foundation staff have learned that such a program may require a number of supporting activities. For one, it probably needs to have a strong promotion component in order to draw a large and interested audience. It may warrant accompanying print materials, so it can become a teaching tool in communities and schools. It may require outreach efforts to let communities discuss how the problems and approaches discussed play out locally. It probably needs a plan for additional, postbroadcast distribution to stakeholders, so its full value is reaped. And today, it may need a web site too.

A recent example of this full-court press is the program *Before I Die*, produced by the Fred Friendly organization as a Socratic-style dialog on issues of decision-making near the end of life; it was broadcast in April and September 1997 in seventy-four cities. Because the program was intended to help promote a dialogue about what can be done at the community level to improve care of dying people, prebroadcast meetings were held in some forty markets. These outreach meetings involved hospice professionals, other service providers, consumer advocates, emergency medical personnel and interested citizens, who

discussed the program and its local implications. The meetings also were intended to encourage the attending organizations' members and participants' colleagues to watch the program when it was broadcast, some three weeks later. In addition, advertisements for the program were run in major markets to encourage viewing by the general public. A viewer's guide was widely distributed. Subsequently, PBS and the Foundation distributed video copies of the program, along with a "tool kit" of activities that local chapters of consumer organizations, religious congregations and professional groups could use. WNET established an interesting web site rich with information and personal stories for *Before I Die*—a site that enabled an unprecedented level of interactivity with program audiences.

In most cases, the Foundation funds corollary projects for productions that have already received money; occasionally, it supports these activities for an existing program, such as the Western Public Radio grants for distribution of a series on alcohol abuse to colleges and schools.

CONCLUSION

Virtually all philanthropic funding in the broadcast media goes to public broadcasting—itsself a creature of philanthropy, originating from a seminal report by the Carnegie Commission in 1967. The experience is mixed. The programs are expensive and reach a small—but presumably influential—audience. There are the almost inevitable tensions between journalistic independence and funders' interests. Sometimes documentaries take a glacially slow time to produce. Worse, as the industry increasingly recognizes, public television stations do not act like a network; just because PBS is feeding a program at a particular time, local stations across the country may not air it then, or ever. Cost-effectively promoting the program nationwide is next to impossible. Guaranteed air time is elusive, except for the most notable series and hosts. In short, public television really does not offer a news funding opportunity analogous to National Public Radio. But public radio does not offer the prime-time special.

The alternative to working with public broadcasting is working with commercial broadcasters. This has problems, too. It's costly, for one. In the case of the NBC special on health care reform that the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded, the Foundation worried about its minimal input. Would a commercial network, with its different incentive structure and operating in real time, take shortcuts, rely on analytic clichés, skim the surface? Would the show attract a big enough audience to justify the Foundation's investment, and, if it did, would it be worth watching?

Although grants for television and radio are a small percentage of the Foundation's total grant portfolio, in terms of what people see and hear that they associate with the Foundation and the issues it cares

about, they are an important component. Including radio and television in the mixture of media funding is now an accepted way for the Foundation to do business. At the same time, the politics of health care have made its issues more interesting to producers and networks. The Foundation now receives more grant applications from producers, even though its funding is targeted to a relatively narrow range of health areas. Because of the media's importance in shaping issues, the Foundation continues to look for good funding opportunities, including some in cable television and other distribution systems. These hold the potential for reaching both new and very specific audiences. Despite the tensions that are inherent in the broadcaster-funder relationship, most of the Foundation's experience has reflected a healthy balance of interests.

Notes

¹ Not covered in this chapter are routine Foundation media relations activities, grants for nonbroadcast audio and video productions and print media. Also not addressed in detail, but important to note, is another tack we have used in our grantmaking: trying to improve journalists' understanding of health care issues. More knowledgeable reporters and editors presumably will produce better stories. Our grants to community radio have included training sessions for stringers (freelance reporters) and seminars for grantees; the new local public radio grant program, *Sound Partners for Community Health*, includes grantee workshops on content and outreach; grants to the Radio and Television News Directors Foundation have attempted to improve local broadcast coverage of the changing health care system and end-of-life issues; and, finally, a new joint Peabody and Foundation broadcast media awards program will recognize good health care coverage and encourage additional reporting on health issues.

EXHIBIT

10.1 RWJF Broadcasting Grants, 1987–1997

Ten Tips for Making Broadcasting Grants

1. Keep the lines of communication clear. Arrange for grant management issues to be addressed by, say, the development officers, news issues by the journalists.
2. Smaller media grantees will need proportionally more funding than large grantees to expand their news operations.
3. Help news outlets expand their reach by funding activities and public information campaigns that they see as part of a community mission.
4. Funding public television is comfortable for foundations, but it reaches only a small audience. Secondary distribution may increase the impact.
5. Production budgets that are augmented by promotion, advertising, print materials, outreach, secondary distribution and evaluation are costly and need to be weighed against the number of viewers or listeners and the Foundation's programmatic goals.
6. A broad array of creative outreach activities and partnerships between broadcasters and community groups can increase the potential impact of broadcast investments. These relationships may not take a lot of money to nurture, but will require time.
7. Foundations like commitments to broadcast a program up front, but PBS resists.

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8. Even supporting the most independent-minded producer does not insulate the funder from criticism in a highly politicized environment.
9. Radio is much less expensive than television, is particularly suited for certain audiences, and provides name recognition through constant repetition of underwriting announcements.
10. Useful measures of impact remain elusive—aneccdotal and too particular to be generalizable or Nielsonian and too broad to be meaningful.