MEDIA IMPACT PROJECT
USC LEAR CENTER

understanding
media metrics

METRICS

for Nonprofit News Organizations

A 2-in-1 Guide

DEVELOPING IMPACT METRICS FOR NONPROFIT JOURNALISM PROJECTS is no simple matter. Over the past several years, foundations, researchers and nationally recognized investigative newsrooms have all waded into the fray, offering competing models and arguments for and against. In the end, impact assessment comes down to a dialogue—about goals; how news informs, connects and engages communities; and how best to maintain journalistic integrity in the process.

That's why we've created this guide, which features both conceptual perspectives for foundations and nuts-and-bolts advice for nonprofit news organizations. We hope you'll begin by reading the side that's most relevant to you, and then be drawn into the conversation by reading the other side. We also hope it sparks dialogue about your own projects—among staff, and between foundations and newsrooms.

Text by Jason Alcorn & Lauren Furhman

Jason Alcorn is a multimedia journalist who leads technology projects and online strategy for Unicef, The Conservation Fund, and eBay, among others. His writing has been published by *The Washington Post* and *Americas Quarterly*, and his documentary video by Forbes.com.

Lauren Fuhrmann has worked for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism since 2011. She previously researched audience engagement as a social media intern for Harvest Public Media and spent two years as a multimedia reporter for KBIA 91.3 FM and the *Columbia Missourian*.

Edited by Veronica Jauriqui and the Media Impact Project
Publication design by Veronica Jauriqui

For reprints, email **media.impact@usc.edu**.

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INTRODUCTION

You're at your desk working on a proposal for a grant that could transform your organization. It might give you the money to hire a new staff reporter or add an events manager. It might underwrite a series of stories on a critical topic or provide general operating support.

And then you get to the part of the proposal that asks how you will measure the impact of your project.

How do you answer that question?

It may seem nearly impossible. The time frame of the grant seems too short for your grand vision. And you don't know what news you'll publish in the next 12 weeks, much less the next 12 months. Democracy itself depends on journalism, you might think.

Fortunately, there are some templates to follow. In this guide, we give you concrete examples and recommendations based on our own experience writing successful proposals—and successful grant reports—that have brought more than $1.5 million to our nonprofit newsrooms.

Let's get started!

Getting Started: We're on a Mission

GOOD IMPACT MEASUREMENT STARTS WITH A CLEAR MISSION. PUT EVEN MORE simply: What problem was your organization founded to solve, and how do you solve it? That's the standard you hold yourself up against at the end of every year and measure how much progress you've made.

JASON: At **INVESTIGATEWEST**, our mission is to build a powerful citizenry in the Pacific Northwest. We do that through consequential storytelling.
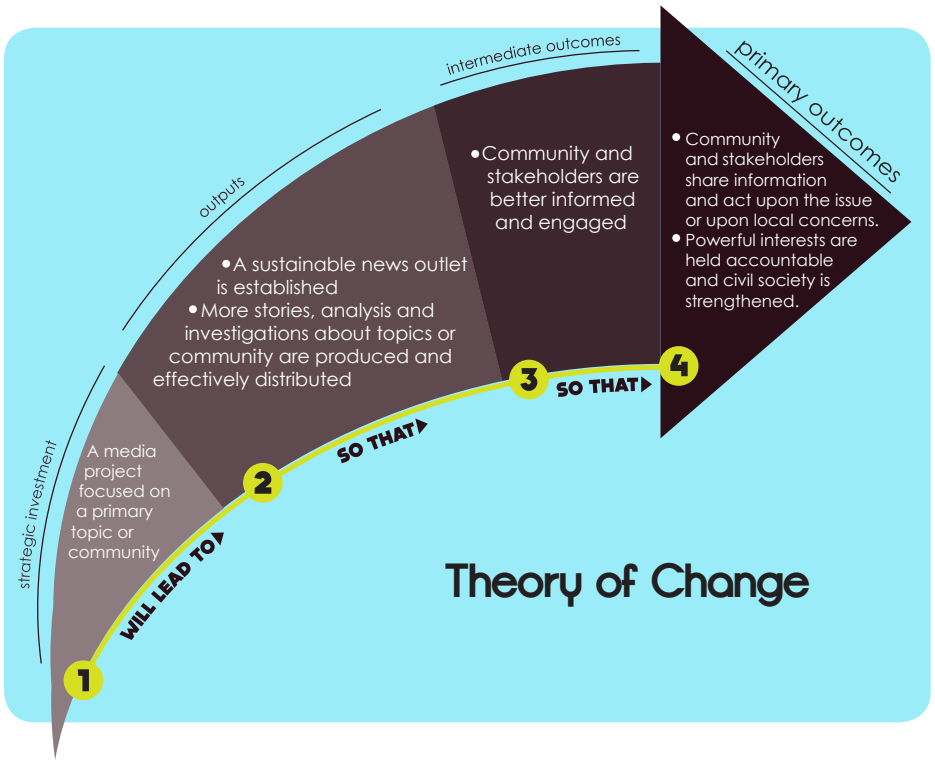

LAUREN: At the **WISCONSIN CENTER FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM** (WCIJ), we foster an informed citizenry and strengthen democracy. We do that by increasing the quality and quantity of investigative reporting in Wisconsin, while training current and future generations of investigative journalists.

You probably have an official mission statement, and unless you've reviewed it lately, it's probably long with a bunch of fancy words in it. Take our advice and use the plainest language you can.

Along with a mission, you also need what people in the nonprofit and foundation world call a "**THEORY OF CHANGE**." Your theory of change is the arrows you draw between your organization's activities, the outcomes of those activities, and—ultimately—the impact.

Theory of Change

Diagram labels: strategic investment · outputs · intermediate outcomes · primary outcomes

1 — A media project focused on a primary topic or community

WILL LEAD TO ▶

2
- A sustainable news outlet is established
- More stories, analysis and investigations about topics or community are produced and effectively distributed

SO THAT ▶

3 — Community and stakeholders are better informed and engaged

SO THAT ▶

4
- Community and stakeholders share information and act upon the issue or upon local concerns.
- Powerful interests are held accountable and civil society is strengthened.

Sometimes the arrow is short and direct. You publish a story that is read by a legislator who passes a new law. That's an easy story to tell, but it's sure hard to promise to a funder, so it's not a great answer to that all-important impact question.

In the rest of this guide we'll show you patterns for each step of your theory of change that you can use with foundations to make the case that you—yes, you!—are a brilliant investment.

WHAT IS YOUR MARKET?

IN FOUNDATION LANGUAGE, WHO ARE YOUR "CONSTITUENTS"? JUST LIKE HAVING a clear mission and theory of change, knowing who you serve is one of the building blocks of an effective evaluation framework for nonprofit news.

If you're a local newsroom, you serve a geographic market. How many people live in your city or your region? If you specialize in political reporting, how many lobbyists, staffers, lawmakers and politicos are around? If you specialize in a particular topic, like education or health, what is the potential audience for your work? News organizations—nonprofit or otherwise—can't thrive if they try to be all things to all people.
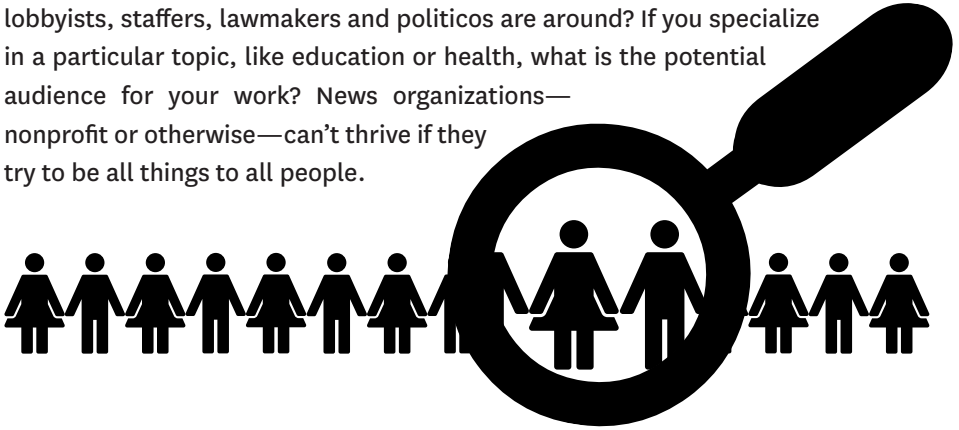
The more you can define your target audience, the better you can estimate its size, and how many you're reaching. Just like a business, your goal is to get as much market share as possible.

Getting Specific: Evaluating Your Impact

In this guide, we'll help you evaluate the impact of your work through three lenses: *What did you do? Who did you reach? What happened?*

Before we get started, open up your calendar and set a recurring weekly reminder to gather and analyze your organization's metrics. Set another recurring reminder to review the metrics you gather on a quarterly basis to determine if you're looking at the right numbers. It's easy to put these tasks off when you're faced with a constant barrage of fundraising deadlines and editorial work, but if you keep up with it week by week, when grant report time rolls around, you can spend your time thoughtfully reporting your impact, rather than hustling to find all of the different numbers from the various sources.

The information you gather should be shared on a regular basis with staff members, whether it's in a weekly email update or discussion at staff meetings.

Goal Setting: What Did We Do?

The first question you want to answer is: *What did we do?* **Or, in other words, what did we cover?** The answer will include a total number of stories and details of that coverage—how many stories did you produce? What communities did you cover? What topics did you focus on?

The easiest way to do this is by establishing an internal list of stories. Your content management system may have this capability, but if not, a Google spreadsheet will do the job.

Update it on a weekly basis, including the following information:
- slug
- run date
- headline
- reporter(s)
- partner/collaborations: Keep track of who you worked with and the nature of the collaboration. Did you split the work evenly? Did a newspaper provide images for your story? Was it a tip from a news organization lacking the resources to complete the story?

- subject or categories (*i.e.* education, environment)
- market/geographic location
- any other characteristics that are critical to your coverage goals (minority communities covered, neighborhoods, etc.)
- story elements, such as multimedia, interactive databases, etc.

Slug	Status	Run Date	Headline	Project Reporter	Partner	Subject	Market
Grand Juries	Published	1/2/15	Grand jury reform	Lee van der Voo	The Portland Tribune	Government Accountability	Oregon
Grand Juries	Published	1/7/15	If secret grand juri	Lee van der Voo	The Guardian	Government Accountability	U.S.
Halibut	Published	2/4/15	Fish sticks, export	Lee van der Voo		Government Accountability	Pacific Northwest
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	After 10-Year Pla	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health	Greater Seattle
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	Homeless Familie	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health	Greater Seattle
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	Privacy Or Fundin	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health	Greater Seattle
Homeless	Published	3/3/15	What Homelessn	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health	Greater Seattle
Oly – Fish Consumption	Published	3/10/15	Balancing risks a	Chris Dunagan	Kitsap Sun	Environment	Washington
Oly – Fish Consumption	Published	3/10/15	Feds watch closel	Chris Dunagan	Kitsap Sun	Environment	Washington
Oly – Solar	Published	3/20/15	Homeowners' Pay	Chris Dunagan	Kitsap Sun	Environment	Washington
John Marshall	Published	3/24/15	State Health Offici	Kim Drury	KING 5	Public Health	Greater Seattle
Oly – Energy Efficiency	Published	3/27/15	Energy advocates	Chris Dunagan	Olympia Syndication	Environment	Washington
Oly – Energy Code	Published	4/4/15	Energy Code Edit	Kim Drury		Environment	Washington
Oly – Toxics	Published	4/5/15	Senate Committe	Chris Dunagan	Olympia Syndication	Environment	Washington
Homeless	Published	4/7/15	Amid Seattle's Affl	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health	U.S.
Homeless	Published	4/8/15	Homeless Familie	Robert McClure	KUOW Public Radio	Public Health	U.S.
Wage Theft	Published	4/9/15	Winning in Court	Stuart Silverstein	FairWarning	Government Accountability	Bellingham
Oly – Puget Sound	Published	4/12/15	Budget-Cutters T	Chris Dunagan	Olympia Syndication	Environment	Washington
Oly – Microbeads	Published	4/13/15	Microbeads Ban	Kim Drury		Environment	Washington

- Finally, you should track the quality of your work as recognized by others. Receiving awards and honors for stories proves to your funders, readers and supporters that you are producing professional, high-quality coverage. Keep track of any instances in the same spreadsheet or a detailed page on your website.

InvestigateWest has won nearly three-dozen journalism awards since we began publishing in 2010.

Goal Setting: Who Did We Reach?

There are two main ways that many nonprofit news organizations reach their target audience. The first is **DIRECT DISTRIBUTION** through your website and social media channels. The second is **PARTNER DISTRIBUTION**, or distribution through partner news organizations. Each is tracked differently, but together they give a general view of who you reached.

Direct distribution

To track growth and changes over time on your website, pull the numbers you care about on a regular (weekly is ideal, monthly is okay) basis and compile them in a "digital dashboard" spreadsheet. The exact numbers should be tailored to your organization's goals, but may include pageviews, sessions and/or users, and engagement action analytics, like polls, interactive databases and photo galleries. More details on web metrics and what they mean can be found in our previous guide, *Web Metrics: Basics for Journalists*. If you use Google Analytics, you can set up a custom dashboard that's e-mailed to you weekly.

This digital dashboard should also contain social media and other engagement tool analytics. Track Facebook fans, Twitter followers, and email newsletter subscriber growth, and any metrics that are important to your engagement strategy (*i.e.*, Twitter retweets, FB shares, newsletter open and click through rates, etc.).

Your spreadsheet might look something like this:

Week	Visits	FB likes	Twitter follows	Twitter story shares	Newsletter subscribers	Donations	Event attendees
1/4-1/10	4055	2492	3377	75	933	3	0
1/11-1/17	4536	2506	3389	76	936	2	0
1/18-1/24	4081	2515	3402	86	937	1	0
1/25-1/31	5305	2521	3402	104	940	0	0
2/1-2/7	5085	2526	3427	106	943	5	0
2/8-2/14	4519	2526	3451	95	946	3	0
2/15-2/21	4257	2528	3451	87	942	2	0
2/22-2/28	4353	2536	3468	93	941	0	0
3/1-3/7	5419	2540	3507	99	940	1	0
3/8-3/14	6884	2513	3523	131	942	3	0
3/15-3/21	5076	2515	3523	115	943	2	0
3/22-3/28	4913	2524	3536	106	943	1	0
3/29-4/4	5325	2526	3551	163	945	0	0
Total	31838			1336		16	0
Weekly avg (total or percent change)	4548.285714	0.24%	0.36%	102.7692308	0.16%	2.285714286	0

NewsLynx

NewsLynx (newslynx.org) is a tool that helps you categorize stories, connect them with mentions in Google Alerts, Facebook, Twitter and other sources, and gather basic Google Analytics, Facebook and Twitter metrics. It was built by Michael Keller and Brian Abelson while they were fellows at the Columbia Tow Center for Digital Journalism. It's still in beta testing now, but stay tuned. It may be more widely available to nonprofit news organizations by late 2015.

Partner distribution

Use two different spreadsheets to track the use of your content by other news organizations.

1 Story tracker: a list of the stories that ran in your partners' media channels

2 Partner organizations: a list with details about your partners

STORY TRACKER

The data you gather for the story tracker spreadsheet should include information about how your partners used your content, including:

○

- slug (the same slug used in your internal story list)
- date
- partner organization
- headline
- url or link
- pageviews
- column/editorial
- sidebar
- photo

- graphic
- other multimedia
- [Your organization] mentioned?
- customized/localized?
- print
- web
- radio
- TV
- comments

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

This list should includes descriptive information about your partners that will help you analyze who you have—and who you don't. Include the following:

- name
- type
- location (city, state)
- affiliation
- overall reach, e.g., monthly sessions/pageviews/unique visitors; circulation and ratings

|	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	**News outlet**	**Type**	**City**	**State**	**Affiliation**	**WNA member**	**Unique visito**	**Circulation**
11	Amery Free Press	Newspaper	Amery	WI		1		
12	Ames Tribune	Newspaper	Ames	IA		0		
13	Antigo Daily Journal	Newspaper	Antigo	WI		1		
14	Appleton Post-Crescent	Newspaper	Appleton	WI	Gannett Wisconsin Media	1		
15	Arizona Daily Star	Newspaper	Tucson	AZ		0		
16	Ashland Current	Blog	Ashland	WI		0		
17	Ashland Daily Press	Newspaper	Ashland	WI		1		
18	Associated Press	Newspaper	New York	NY		1		
19	Augusta Area Times	Newspaper	Augusta	WI		1		
20	AV Club Madison	Online	Madison	WI		0		
21	Badger Herald	Newspaper	Madison	WI		1		
22	Baldwin Bulletin	Newspaper	Baldwin	WI		1		
23	Baraboo News Republic	Newspaper	Baraboo	WI	Capital Newspapers	1		
24	Barron News-Shield	Newspaper	Barron	WI		1		
25	Beaver Dam Daily Citizen	Newspaper	Beaver Dam	WI	Capital Newspapers	1		
26	Before It's News	Online communit	Mill Valley	CA		0		
27	Beloit Daily News	Newspaper	Beloit	WI		1		
28	Berlin Journal	Newspaper	Berlin	WI		1		
29	Black Dog Tribe	Online communit	Amsterdam	The Netherlands		0		

Description of Target Audiences

Now it's time to populate your story tracker. The way you distribute your content will determine how you should track its use.

Jason: At InvestigateWest, we work with more than a dozen media partners to produce and distribute our stories in the Pacific Northwest.

Lauren: At WCIJ, we give our content away for free to news media in Wisconsin. More than 230 news organizations have used our content. Partners log in to our website and download what they want to use. To estimate the size of our reach, we search for pickups and citations of our work online, in print and broadcast.

If you have content agreements with a small number of organizations, like InvestigateWest, try to establish a relationship with their analytics staff to request pickup details and metrics on your content on a regular basis. You can accomplish this by calling or emailing each person to request specific numbers, or sharing a Google Form for them to fill out that will feed into a Google Spreadsheet.

If they provide web analytics by story, keep track of those in the "Story tracker" worksheet. Otherwise average monthly pageviews, circulation and broadcast details can be kept in the "News organization" database. For partners, the number of pageviews isn't as important as who the partner is and the implied audience it reaches.
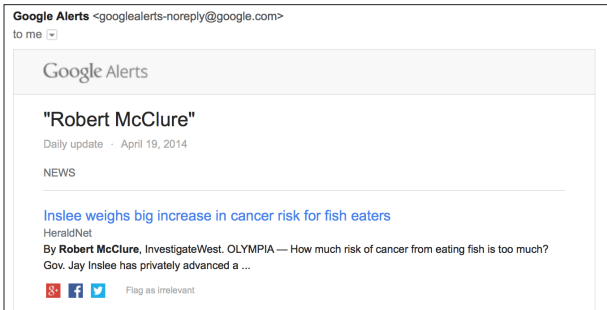
If you have too many partners to request analytics from each, it's time to get searching! Set up **GOOGLE ALERTS** for all variations of your name, reporters' names and story-specific keywords. To find results that Google Alerts may miss, search for the same keywords on different search engines and the top 10 news sites that use your content.

Alternatively, if you have the budget for it, use a paid clipping, or media monitoring, service like **MELTWATER** and **VOCUS**. Media mentions will be compiled for you, along with audience estimates from ComScore and Compete.
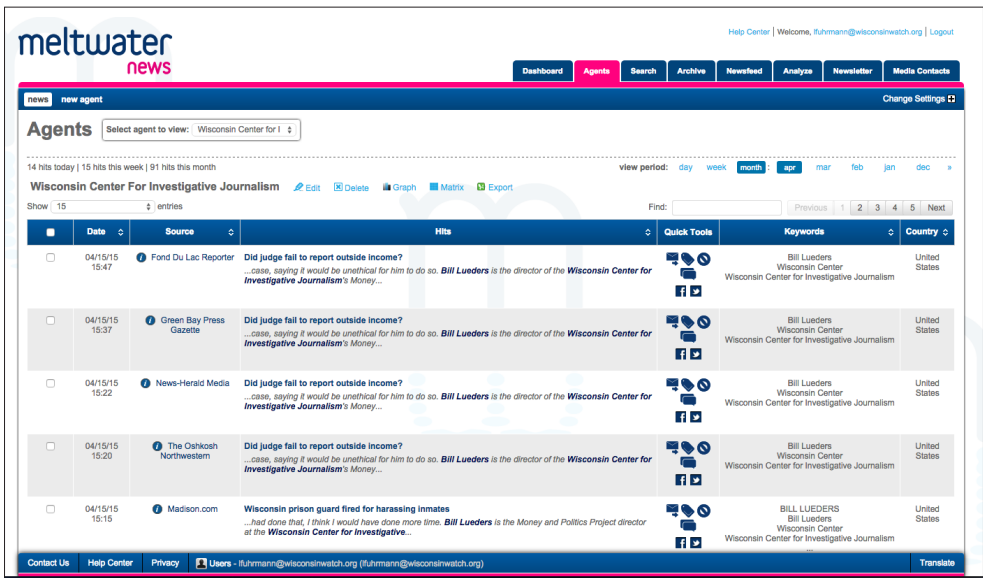
You should also check with newspaper associations in your area to see if they offer print monitoring or a searchable archive of their member newspapers.

Goal Setting: What Happened?

We're going to shift away from quantitative analytics and talk about story vectors, *i.e.*, news with a direction and a velocity. You want to prove to your funders that your work is contributing constructively to the conversation and moving public opinion and policy.

Anecdotal evidence of impact that resulted from your work should be compiled in a spreadsheet or database similar to, and ideally linked to, those you've already created.

CIR: Distribution, pick-up, and impact
Please record deliberate distribution of CIR content, organic pick-up of stories, and impact stemming from CIR investigations.

Media

Macro

Meso

Micro

Description

Date
MM/DD/YYYY   00:00 AM

Publication

Other publication

Link
Type or paste in a web address   Attach

+ Add more

Topic

Subtopic

One strategy to compile these anecdotes is an online form shared with all staff members to submit examples of impact. One example is CIR's Outcome Tracker (shown on the left).

You might want to try classifying these qualitative indicators with the **OFFLINE IMPACT INDICATORS GLOSSARY** developed by the Center for Investigative Reporting, together with Columbia University's Tow Center for Digital Journalism and the Media Impact Project. The glossary is currently available on the Media Impact Project's website at **bit.ly/impactglossary**.

TELL YOUR STORY

NOW YOU HAVE A BUNCH OF DATA THAT YOU CAN ANALYZE ALL TOGETHER— WHAT you covered and how much, who you reached and where, and some anecdotes and other indicators on the types of impact you had.

Because much of this data has some type of geographic tag and is in spreadsheets, you might want to try mapping it out using a tool such as **BATCHGEO**. All it takes is copying and pasting the data you want to map from a spreadsheet and adjusting the settings. Use this to map where your stories have been cited or picked up and what geographic locations your work has focused on.

WRAP UP: DO's & DON'T's

READY TO FUND YOUR NEWS ORGANIZATION? HERE'S A QUICK CHEAT SHEET:

👍 Do use tools and templates that make data gathering and interpretation easier.

👍 Do make a recurring appointment on your calendar to keep data gathering manageable.

👍 Do set benchmarks and goals, and look at both trends and totals.

👍 Do help your entire team understand and discuss the data you're gathering—and why.

👍 Do tell a story—your story—with the data that really matters for your organization.

👎 Don't data dump. Every report should have a sentence or two highlighting what's important—good or bad.

👎 Don't just gather quantitative data. Sometimes it's an e-mail or a mention in a certain publication that really indicates the impact you've had.

THE JOURNALISM IMPACT PLANNING GAUGE

The methods that funders and newsrooms use to assess the impact of journalism projects depend on the goals that they define. Some goals require that evaluators pay attention to the newsroom's internal dynamics, others focus mainly on one-way dynamics of audience reach and responses, and still others take into account two-way or multi-level relationships that define what we can "story-vectors" between content, issues, stakeholders and institutions.

internal

one-way

two-way

multi-level

INTERACTION: clicking, liking, following, curating, sharing, commenting, etc.

SENTIMENT: content analysis of online responses, anecdotes re: offline responses "Driveway moments."

INCLUSION: demographic analysis of audience to see if new communities are engaged

ADOPTION: for audience reach/engagement/ stickiness of new content/platforms; for other outlets; replication

STICKINESS: "attention minutes," return visitors, subscriptions, memberships

RESPONSES & COVERAGE: fffrom audience members & stakeholders re: how content moved them to change

AWARENESS: pres/post surveys on topic, quizzes, evidence of use of content in settings designed to build knowledge

CO-PRODUCTION: content contributions by audience or distribution by partner organizations

DISTRIBUTION: broadcast, circulation, listeners, unique visitors, impressions

ACTIONS: by individuals & stakeholders: voting, protesting, holding hearings, writing bills, boycotts, etc.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE: more/better content, new revenue, new skills

ALL RELEVENT PREVIOUS MEASURES: women into a narrative suggesting how project contributed to social/cultural change

INSPIRE
ENGAGE
DIVERSIFY
INNOVATE
CAPTIVATE
INFLUENCE
INFORM
COLLABORATE
REACH
MOBILIZE
BUILD CAPACITY
TRANSFORM