



MAG-Net Socially Responsible DTV Transition Campaign Report

April, 2009

"Media Change is about more than transforming the rules and conditions that reduce democratic engagement for underrepresented communities; it demands participatory regional-to-national organizing that achieves new social conditions, builds community and reclaims progressive power for us all."

-Out of the Margins, Malkia Cyril & Karlos Schmeider

Introduction

In 2005, the federal government passed the Digital Television Transition and Public Safety Act. Signed into law by President Bush Feb. 8, 2006, the legislation established a hard deadline for broadcasters to cease analog television transmissions and transition to digital technology. The bill gave the FCC the authority to terminate analog licenses for full-power television stations and reclaim the spectrum for public safety and commercial wireless broadband services. By the end of this transition, all digital television transmissions will be in the spectrum currently occupied by TV channels 2 through 51 — the "core" TV spectrum. While television channels 52 through 69 in the 700 MHz band will be cleared for wireless communications.

The original transition plan created by the FCC, the NTIA and Congress had little public education targeted to communities of color, used distribution methods that would not reach the poorest and most vulnerable communities, and provided insufficient subsidies to the poorest households to alleviate the financial burden the transition would place. This misdirected information and resources were structural problems resulting from structural racism and economic inequity in our media system- including the predominance of English language media, the most professional and clear ads appearing on costly cable programming, and the lack of accessible public education in locations frequented by communities of color and poor people. Examples of structural inequities in media led to racial and economic disparities in the DTV Transition abound. As a result of these inequities and their resulting disparities- the DTV Transition would have left tens of millions of people without television access- most of the people of color, poor people, the disabled, and the elderly.



Roughly two-thirds of people in the U.S. base their electoral and other political decisions on what they read, watch, and listen to in the news. For communities of color, the elderly, the disabled, and the poor, losing television access during the DTV Transition won't simply mean the loss of luxury entertainment—at stake is the ability of the nation's most vulnerable populations to maintain their fundamental right of access to a key affordable source of news and information.

Purpose: Campaign for a Socially Responsible DTV Transition

*"This campaign [brought] the framework of communication rights to the lives and work of many community members, activists, organizers, and general public."
-Andrea Quijada, New Mexico Media Literacy Project*

The June 12th DTV transition means changes for over-the-air TV viewers, who will gain access to more channels and clearer signals, but many of whom will also need new equipment to continue watching free TV. MAG-Net was concerned that no one should have to pay to continue receiving basic information, news, and culture. MAG-Net members knew from Nielsen and other reports that low-income families, immigrants, elders, communities of color, and people with disabilities in our communities would be the hardest hit by the DTV transition--many unable to afford converter boxes costing even ten or twenty dollars over the \$40 coupon provided by the US government.

MAG-Net decided to design and carryout a *Socially Responsible DTV Transition Campaign* to

- a) address the racial and economic inequities and resulting disparities in the DTV transition,
- b) maintain and expand media access for people of color and poor people in the regions most impacted, and
- c) introduce the framework of socially responsible media regulation into the public debate on a specific media rule or policy

The role government plays in the DTV transition is a good indication of how they will handle future issues of Digital Access and Inclusion. MAG-Net wanted to demonstrate the role government should play, while mobilizing regional organizations and leaders as a front-line of service and action, and engaging thousands of people from under-represented communities.



Campaign Goals

- Secure commitments from local and national retailers to carry a \$40 DTV Converter Box with analog pass through capability and closed captioning
- Raise awareness of the transition and frame the transition as an issue of racial and economic justice as well as a human right to information access
- Build the membership base of MAG-Net members
- Establish MAG-Net (through the anchor and partner groups of the network) as *the* leading voice for grassroots media policy

Campaign Overview & Elements

The campaign for a socially responsible DTV Transition was coordinated by CMJ and implemented by all of the anchor groups of MAG-Net. MAG-Net's unique approach to advocacy utilizes the power of media and cultural organizations working together to engage disenfranchised communities to build a powerful integrated movement for media change through the lense of media justice. This campaign reflected our change model in four key ways:

- 1) Grassroots Policy Advocacy
- 2) Regional DTV Assistance Centers
- 3) Community based, culturally competent public education
- 4) Collaborative Retailer Actions & Communications

Allies/Partners Participating

In addition to the leadership provided by anchor groups, leading regional hub members also participated in the campaign. Willie C. Velasquez Institute, Local 782, Communication Services for the Deaf, MN Center for Neighborhood Organizing, Lao Assistance Center, Somali Action Alliance, All Parks Alliance for Change, Indigenous Peoples' Green Jobs Task Force, Minneapolis Urban League, Youth Media Institute, ARC of King County, Youngstown Cultural Arts Center, Seattle Housing Authority, Leadership Academy/Para Los Niños, National Asian Pacific Council on Aging, FCC, Hard Knock Radio, Daily Yonder, Harlem Seniors Landlords and Tenants,



Harlem Consumers Educational Council, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund

Cities/Regions Represented

Manhattan/Harlem, Minneapolis, St. Paul, San Antonio, Seattle, San Francisco Bay Area, Appalachia, Lexington, Philadelphia, Albuquerque

Campaign Strategies

Following the collaborative development of a campaign plan, the creation of basic campaign and campaign related communications materials, MAG-Net anchor groups worked with the CMJ Network Coordinator to implement the following strategies:

Strategy #1: Grassroots Policy Advocacy

The FCC kicked off the road to transition with a series of public hearings in regions around the country to educate advocates about the transition and evaluate the success of the rules and allocations related to public education and the federal coupon program. MAG-net anchors and their regional hubs in New Mexico, The SF Bay Area, and New York, mobilized thousands from under-represented communities to participate in these regional hearings with the explicit purpose of amplifying the call of our beltway allies to increase spending on the coupon program and extend the date for DTV Transition. Working closely with Consumer's Union and LCCR, these and other forms of grassroots advocacy played a large role in the subsequent victory of an additional 600 million dollars allocated and the DTV Transition extended from February 17th to June 12th, 2009

Strategy #2: DTV Technical Assistance Centers

To ensure that millions didn't get left on the wrong side of the digital divide following the transition, CMJ negotiated with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights Education Fund to contract with four MAG-Net anchor groups to serve as DTV Outreach or Tech Assistance Centers. MAG-Net anchors- including the Main Street Project/Minnesotano Media Empowerment Project, Media Alliance, Reclaim the Media, and Texas Media Empowerment Project helped thousands of people of color, the



poor, and the elderly apply for federal coupons, buy and install the right converter boxes, and understand what you need to make a successful transition.

MAG-Net DTV Technical Assistance Center Outcomes

SF/Bay Area

- 23 individual DTV Tech Assistance Center or No-Cost Box stories/ interviews in print, radio, television or Blogs
- 553 Clients, 398 with complete email/contact information, 9 allies and partners we had not worked closely with before.
- 27 DTV events

Minneapolis

- 29 individual DTV Tech Assistance Center or No-Cost Box stories/ interviews in print, radio, television or Blogs
- 13 new partner organizations
- 28 DTV events/trainings
- 8977 people reached and trained

San Antonio

- 18 individual DTV Tech Assistance Center or No-Cost Box stories/ interviews in print, radio, television or Blogs
- 12 organizer volunteers and 10 new partners
- 36 DTV events/trainings

Seattle

- 16 individual DTV Tech Assistance Center or No-Cost Box stories/ interviews in print, radio, television or Blogs
- 200 new email list members, 14 dedicated volunteers, and 6 new organizing partners
- 41 DTV events
- 1357 people reached and trained

Strategy #2: Community-Based, Culturally Competent DTV Transition Campaign Activities

MAG-Net created a community-based public education strategy that focused on raising awareness of the DTV transition in under-represented



communities *as well as* framing the transition as an issue of racial and economic justice and fundamental human rights

MAG-Net anchor groups worked collaboratively to create and share tools (whether print, online, radio, word of mouth or through key opinion leaders) that reached tens of thousands of targeted communities of color, rural communities, poor communities, and the elderly to strengthen and expand the base of these communities engaged in the media justice sector, including:

- Email announcements and action alerts on list serves,
- Website Advertising
- Airing PSA's in multiple languages on local TV/Radio Stations
- Facebook messages
- Use of Twitter
- Flyering at community centers and community meetings
- Voice mail message line for people to leave their DTV stories
- Placement of customized Op. Eds
- Creative programming re: No Cost Box on cable access
- Online petitions
- Designed and used a No Cost Box T-shirt
- "Apply, Buy, and Try" table for converter box applications and demos in multiple languages
- No Cost Box Phone Banking
- Delegation Visits to stores
- Retailer Day of Action in multiple locations
- No Cost Box Pledge taken
- Online articles
- Blogs
- Radio talk show interviews
- Radio reports
- Podcasts
- Supporting elected officials to write letters to retailers for a No Cost Box
- Press conferences
- Radio call-ins

Strategy #3: Collaborative Retailer Actions

MAG-Net regional hubs conducted delegation visits and regional actions throughout the length of the campaign to demand that local electronics



retailers provide a converter box that costs no more than the value of the federal coupons. MAG-Net DTV Assistance Center led the national call for a No Cost Box.

On April 17th local retailers in Minneapolis, the SF Bay Area, Seattle, New Mexico, San Antonio and across the country participated in a national campaign led by the community organizations of the Media Action Grassroots Network (MAG-Net) to offer a “no cost” cost converter box option to consumers presenting NTIAA coupons. These converter boxes weren’t free—but they cost no more than the amount of the coupon, thus demonstrating a significant commitment from retailers to play their part in ensuring a socially responsible digital television transition.

Action Materials

- National Action Plan
- Op. Ed Template
- Online Petition Template
- No Cost Box Pledge Sticker
- Sample Phone Script
- Sample Blog
- Fax Template for FAX Campaign
- Sample Press Release

* **Utilized:** Press Release Template, Op. Ed sample, No Cost Box Pledge, Fax Campaign, Online Petition, Phone Bank/Pone Calls, Blog

* **Most utilized:** Op.Ed, Press Release, Online Petition

Action Demographics

“ This campaign helped bring awareness of communications rights and media policy as an issue for poor, working-class, and communities of color.”

– Bryan Mercer, Media Mobilizing Project

- Spanish speakers
- Community Elders
- Senior Citizens
- Low income families/individuals
- Cantonese speakers
- Asian and SE Asians (Lao, Hmong, Chinese)



- Lao speakers
- Somali speakers
- Latinos (North, Central and South Americas)
- Black Americans
- Residential/group home residents
- Residents from low-income housing
- Members of the disability community

Action Victories

- 432 people attend a DTV Day of Action Event on April 17th
- 4 retailers in 3 states take the No Cost Box Pledge (Mosquito Productions, Best Buy, Fred Meyers, and H.E.B.)
- Over 140 people sign online petition for No Cost Box in San Francisco/Bay Area
- Ruffled 55 free, donated converter boxes
- 112 families took home no cost boxes
- Processed 348 new applications
- 3 Large Press Events in different regions (Midwest, Pacific Northwest and Southwest)
- Successful Op-ed placement in Albuquerque, Minneapolis and Philadelphia, San Antonio
- Socially Responsible and/or DTV Day of Action Blogs in Appalachia, Philadelphia, Seattle and Minneapolis
- 21 News Stories running at prime time (5 PM or 10 PM news)
- Earned media estimated at \$85,830
- Google, Twitter, Facebook, PitchEngine.com and CriticalMention.com searches and the wide range of contact tactics point to successful introduction of "socially responsible DTV transition" frame to wide audience



Overview of Media Coverage

"... we've built a lot of new relationships with press-- and have gotten them to cover us on positive and proactive things--rather than just crime, poverty, etc."
-Steven Renderos, Minnesotano Media Empowerment Project

Bay Area

- Hard Knock Radio Interview: DTV Transition
- Radio Interview, KPFA, Socially Responsible Transition, No Cost Box Campaign & Communication Rights are Human Rights
- KGO Channel 7 News

San Antonio

- KABB Fox News Channel 29

Philadelphia

- Socially Responsible DTV Transition story on Media Mobilizing Project website
- Op-ed in Philadelphia Indymedia

Appalachia

- Radio Interview, Community Radio, WMMT
- "CB" with Dave and "The Stay Human Show"
- Speak Your Piece, editorial for Daily Yonder
- Web Article, Radio Business Report/Television Business Report

New Mexico

- Op. ed. New Mexico Independent
- Article, Santa Fe Reporter
- KNME Public Television Channel 5

Seattle

- Op. ed. Seattle Post-Intelligencer
- Seattle Times
- Seattle Weekly
- Real Change News
- The Skanner
- Reclaim the Media blog and SeattleDTV.com site
- KOMO-4 TV News
- Q-13 TV News
- KING-5 TV News
- KBCS Community Radio



Minneapolis

- Op. ed. Twin Cities Indymedia
- Op. ed. Twin Cities Daily Planet
- Blog on My Main Street News
- FOX Channel 9 News
- KARE Channel 11 News
- WCCO AM Radio
- Public News Service MN
- Public News Service IA
- WCCO Channel 4 News
- KSTP Channel 5 Eyewitness News
- La Invasora
- MN Public Radio

*There are many clips we have not yet gathered

Number of People Reached through Earned Media

TV

Total Number of Collected Clips: 21

Cumulative Est. Audience: 1,484,469

Cumulative Est. Publicity Value: \$85,830 (Sum of Clip Totals)

*The numbers cited for TV account for each time each one of the clips that ran that we found through <http://criticalmention.com> trial account. The numbers for radio only include Minnesota and Iowa Public News Service projections. These are conservative numbers, and do not include any of the other press hits.

Radio

Cumulative Est. Audience: 307,348

Social Media Release

561 Views



MAG-Net Members Speak

Reflecting on the Socially Responsible DTV Transition, and the most significant change it created in their regions, MAG-Net members offered the following:

"It... raised the profile of MAG-Net and the groups involved. It has shown that communities of color can organize around more than just immigration, racial profiling, housing, etc. It has shown that a range of organizations--from organizers to service providers can pull off an amazing event on a budget of \$100!"

–Steven Renderos, Minnesotano Media Empowerment Project

"Reframing the issue - not just getting a box to receive "garbage" television, but using it to expose larger media injustice issues. Expose the profit-making scheme of these retailers, cable and the corporate media industries. Getting members of marginalized communities involved and interested in these broader media justice issues through the DTV campaign."

–Betty Yu, Manhattan Neighborhood Network

"Education around the impact of the transition, [being] able to link it to communication rights and civil rights."

– Eloise Rose Lee, Media Alliance

"Combining direct DTV assistance with media literacy education built trust for MAG-Net among new allies and constituencies. Revealing the broad social and environmental implications of the DTV transition helped expand the public perception of the breadth and importance of media justice work. "

–Jonathan Lawson, Reclaim the Media