



Montgomery County Government

A METHODOLOGY FOR CONDUCTING A PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY TELEVISION, INC.

AUTHORITY: Council Resolution No. 11-1907, CY 1990 Work Program of the Office of Legislative Oversight, adopted March 13, 1990.

SCOPE: This report offers a methodology for conducting an evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc.'s (MCT) performance under MCT's Master Contract with the County Government. It is anticipated that the County will contract for the actual conduct of the evaluation during FY 1993.

BACKGROUND: In 1989, at the request of the County Council, the Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) conducted a study of the relationship between Montgomery Community Television, Inc. and the County Government. In early 1990, OLO proposed a package of recommendations to address both the need for effective County oversight of grant funds appropriated to MCT, and ". . . the need for MCT to continue to operate free of government control over programming content and to be perceived as fair and impartial in its programming decisions and interactions with the community", (OLO Report No. 89-5, A Study of the Relationship Between the County Government and MCT).

One of the OLO recommendations was that the County should conduct an evaluation of MCT's performance under MCT's Master Contract. In particular, OLO recommended that the evaluation be designed upfront, with input from both MCT and the County Government. The purpose of designing the evaluation in advance is to establish the scope of the study, to identify the specific performance measures that will be used, and to enable MCT to begin collecting any additional data that will be needed.

During the FY91 operating budget deliberations, the Council and County Executive voiced support for conducting the performance evaluation, and requested that the Office of Legislative Oversight oversee its design. The FY90 Cable Plan included appropriation of \$10,000 in Cable TV Special Revenue Funds for the purpose of hiring a consultant with specific expertise in cable television.

Through a mini-contract, OLO hired Dr. Barry Orton, a University of Wisconsin telecommunications professor, to assist with the design of the performance evaluation. The attached report, A Methodology for Conducting a Performance Evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc. is most aptly described as the result of a collaborative effort among: Dr. Orton, Kay Stevens of the Cable Office, John Hansman of the Office of Management and Budget, Ralph Malvik, Executive Director of MCT, MCT Board Members, MCT Senior Staff, and Karen Orlansky, OLO Program Evaluator. Written comments on the final draft of this report received from MCT and the Executive Branch are included in their entirety beginning on page 21.

A METHODOLOGY
FOR CONDUCTING A
PERFORMANCE EVALUATION OF
MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY TELEVISION, INC.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report offers a methodology for conducting an evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc. (MCT), a non profit, tax-exempt corporation established in 1984, that currently manages two of the 13 access channels reserved for public, educational, and governmental use under the terms of the County's cable franchise agreement. It is anticipated that the County will contract for the actual conduct of the evaluation during FY 1993.

Under MCT's Master Contract with the County, MCT's responsibilities include operating two access channels, producing local news and public affairs programming, training community producers, providing and maintaining a central studio and equipment for public access use, and providing technical support to the municipal governments' cable channels. While MCT receives most (approximately 90% in FY90) of its funding on a non-competitive basis from the County's Cable TV Special Revenue Fund, MCT also conducts fundraising activities.

The methodology recommended for evaluating MCT's performance under the Master Contract recognizes the unique aspects of MCT's multiple missions and the difficulty of finding easily comparable peer operations. It also attempts to balance quantifiable measures of performance with qualitative judgments. As far as can be determined, no similar comprehensive evaluation of a cable access provider has ever been performed before. It is recommended that MCT's Public Access functions be evaluated separately from MCT's Professionally Produced News and Public Affairs Programming, and that the evaluation of each of these major functions include:

- Objective measures of MCT's contract compliance and operating efficiency;
- Comparative analysis; and
- An evaluation of programming quality by a structured panel of experts.

It is recommended that surveys be used to obtain feedback from the general viewing public and from MCT's certified producers and technicians, and that interviews be used to obtain feedback from MCT's other clients (e.g., City of Rockville). In addition, the report recommends assessing MCT's fundraising efforts in terms of net funds raised.*

It is estimated that the County should be able to contract the entire evaluation project to a consultant for a total cost ranging between \$35,000 and \$50,000. Considering the various dimensions of the methodology proposed, it is estimated that the evaluation would take six to nine months to complete.

* The scope of the evaluation recommended does not include evaluating MCT's performance under its Service Contracts with the County Government and County Council to provide support to the County Government Channel.

I. INTRODUCTION

Montgomery Community Television, Inc. (MCT) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation that, among other functions, manages two of the County's public access channels, produces a daily local news program, trains public access users, and provides technical assistance to the County Government Channel. MCT receives the bulk of its funding (approximately 90% in FY 90) from the County's Cable TV Special Revenue Fund. MCT was established in 1984.

At the request of the Montgomery County Council in 1989, the Office of Legislative Oversight conducted a study of the relationship between MCT and the County. In early 1990, OLO proposed a package of recommendations to address both the need for effective County oversight of grant funds appropriated to MCT, and "...the need for MCT to continue to operate free of government control over programming content and to be perceived as fair and impartial in its programming decisions and interactions with the community." (A Study of the Relationship Between the County Government and Montgomery Community Television, Inc., OLO Report No. 89-5, p.1)

One important OLO recommendation is that an evaluation of MCT's performance under MCT's Master Contract with the County be conducted. OLO recommended that this evaluation be designed in 1990 with input from both the County and MCT. (Recommendation E, P.76.) Such a process establishes the scope of the evaluation in advance, and identifies specific data for MCT to collect.

An overall evaluation of MCT's operational and programmatic performance is necessary for the County to assure itself that MCT has effectively and efficiently lived up to its responsibilities under the Master Contract with the County. The evaluation is also intended to provide data about the estimated number of cable subscribers who watch MCT's channels, the frequency of their viewing, and their opinions as to the quality of MCT's programming; and to provide some basis of comparison between MCT and other non-profit public access corporations.

Consequently, this report, produced under contract to the OLO, develops a multiple-measure methodology for the future evaluation of the performance and operations of MCT. The report recommends:

- (1) Quantitative measures of MCT's operational efficiency in delivering contractually obligated Public Access and Professionally Produced News and Public Affairs Programming (PPNPAP) services to the County;
- (2) Procedures for generating qualitative judgments about the Public Access and PPNPAP programs MCT produces; and
- (3) Specific means by which the audience impacts of these programs can be assessed.

The methodology recommended assumes that the County will hire a consultant to conduct the evaluation. The consultant's tasks will include gathering and analyzing the operational and performance data provided by MCT, evaluating whatever comparative data can be obtained by similar operations

elsewhere, conducting the surveys of the audience and MCT users, managing the expert panels convened to judge programming quality, and conducting a site visit to include interviews with MCT and County personnel. It will be the consultant's job to make the appropriate connections among the quantitative and qualitative data collected, and to reach overall conclusions as to the effectiveness and efficiency of MCT's delivery of services under MCT's Master Contract with the County.

Definitions of terms used in this report are attached as Appendix A (pages 18-19). The list of literature reviewed and individuals interviewed is attached as Appendix B (page 20). Comments received from MCT and the Executive Branch on the final draft of this report are included in their entirety beginning on page 21.

The quality of any evaluation depends heavily upon the level of cooperation extended by the organizations involved. The author thanks the staffs of both MCT and the County for their highly professional level of collaboration in the preparation of this report.

II. METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

As far as can be determined, there have been no comprehensive evaluations of public access corporations elsewhere, making this a pioneering effort. In general terms, the purpose of a public access cable channel is to provide a forum for community expression and the free exchange of ideas. Because not all elements of public access organizations' activities are quantifiable, it is necessary to create meaningful qualitative measures that complement those aspects that are quantifiable.

Compounding the challenge of designing an evaluation of MCT is the lack of easily comparable "peer" operations. Specifically, MCT's approach to its multiple missions is unique nationally in that MCT generates both professionally-produced programming (which includes the news and public affairs programs) as well as the more traditional volunteer-produced public access programs. MCT maintains two channels: the Montgomery Channel, which combines both professionally-produced and volunteer-produced programs; and the Open Channel, which is more analogous to a typical public access channel.

The broad objectives of increased public information and awareness generated by public access and local news programming forces the evaluation process to include a variety of measures that are subjective in nature. The challenge in using these subjective measures, which offer the flexibility needed to evaluate MCT, is thoroughly grounding them within a framework of objectivity. The report suggests traditional methods for accomplishing this, such as audience and user surveys, and a panel of outside experts to evaluate MCT's programming efforts.

The specific methodological challenges that the evaluation of MCT presents are:

- Separating the evaluation of the Public Access functions MCT provides from the other government-related video services MCT performs, and from the altogether different Professionally-Produced News and Public Affairs Programming MCT produces;

- Establishing a process by which agreed-upon experts are charged with making qualitative judgments about the programs produced;

- Identifying appropriate comparative data for quantitative measures of operating efficiency and performance, and adjusting this comparative data for size, mission, budget, and facilities to allow meaningful comparison with MCT;

- Assuring that the evaluation include both quantitative and qualitative measures of MCT's performance that reflect the nature of community-based cable television; and

- Estimating the number of MCT viewers and assessing the audience impact of MCT's programs in the midst of the abundant electronic entertainment available via cable television. Since the viewership of community cable programming is too small to register on the standard metered television ratings systems, we are forced to rely on self-reported viewer opinions and recollections, which are not nearly as reliable as actual measurements of viewer behavior.

The following chapters outline the quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered and analyzed as part of the County's overall evaluation of MCT's delivery of contractually obligated services under the Master Contract:

- Chapter III outlines data needed to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of MCT's Public Access functions;

- Chapter IV outlines data needed to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of MCT's Professionally-Produced News and Public Affairs Programming (PPNPAP);

- Chapter V outlines methods for obtaining feedback from the general viewing public and from MCT's direct users about MCT's performance and operations; and

- Chapter VI recommends an approach for evaluating MCT's fundraising efforts.

Although the collection of data is outlined in discrete terms, it is anticipated that the end result of the MCT evaluation will be conclusions and recommendations based upon analyses that relate quantitative data to qualitative measures. It will be the consultant's task to make the appropriate connections among the data collected, and to produce a fair and balanced judgment of MCT's operational success. In addition, such a balanced evaluation should be accomplished with input from MCT in the consultant selection process, the design of survey questions, the choice of expert panels, and the data collection.

III. EVALUATING MCT'S PUBLIC ACCESS FUNCTIONS

There must be a blend of quantitative and qualitative measures to fully evaluate the Public Access functions MCT provides. Many aspects of MCT's operations are easily quantifiable, and are in fact already reported to the County in data forms that are readily adaptable for evaluation purposes. Some of these data categories are also potentially comparable to Public Access providers in other jurisdictions.

There are other contractual obligations that are quite specific but not as easily quantified, and these can best be assessed by an evaluation consultant on a simple 1-10 quality judgment scale based on analysis of performance data that are available, supplemented by narrative reports and a site visit.

Finally, to fairly assess the qualitative aspects that must be addressed, a method for assembling an expert panel to judge the quality of MCT's Public Access programming is advanced.

A. PUBLIC ACCESS: Quantitative Measures of Operational Performance

Fortunately, most of the data now generated by MCT and regularly reported as "Performance Indicators" are appropriate quantitative indicators of operational performance. Much of this data is already required of MCT under MCT's current Master Contract with the County.

Specifically, the following data categories should be included in the evaluation of the Public Access component of MCT:

1. Number of Public Access programs. The numbers of Public Access programs in pre-production, in progress, and completed are already reported to the County.* For comparative purposes, the number completed will likely be the most valuable.

MCT's reporting of programs in progress and in pre-production planning adds some useful depth to the data regarding the level of current production activity. Breakout of field vs. studio productions for completed programs is also very helpful and should be continued, along with MCT's reporting of the percent of volunteers and professional staff who worked on the production of each show.

An additional data element that should be required in the reporting on completed programs is program length. A 30-second PSA (Public Service Announcement) should not count equally with an elaborate 90-minute

* For purposes of calculating the number of Public Access programs, MCT should not include text-based announcements. Since this bulletin-board style programming is an integral part of MCT's efforts, it is recommended that an assessment of MCT's text programming be made on a "1-10" quality scale by the evaluation consultant; and that a question regarding audience opinion of text programming quality be included in the audience survey.

public affairs program. Suggested categories are: less than 5 minutes, 5-25 minutes, and over 25 minutes. This data set would allow a better picture of the totality of MCT's production efforts.

MCT has been examining various methods for providing meaningful measures of volunteer participation that recognize variables such as a field vs. studio production, length of programs, and the extent of a volunteer's participation. As an initial step, MCT can compile the information that volunteer producers provide as a final credit list for their programs; although this data do not account for the many variables that describe volunteer participation, it would represent a gross measure of the total number of individual volunteers who have participated in the production of programs.

2. Proportion of locally produced and acquired programs. Currently, MCT reports data on the hours of locally-produced versus acquired programs, and the number of first-run vs. repeat programs. This reporting should be continued because it allows comparisons to be made about the amount of local production and programming effort in relation to the total air product. It should also be of some comparative value with data from other jurisdictions.

3. Number of individuals trained in production skills. Current reporting of MCT's training efforts provides breakouts of field vs. studio production, class trained vs. equivalency tested, and production function (producer/director vs. technician). Waiting list size and average wait for classes are also provided. These data sets form a detailed picture of MCT's Public Access training program, and should continue to be compiled and provided in their current form. The evaluation should use these data to verify compliance with training requirements in the Master Contract.

4. Number of active user certifications and number of dues-paying members. MCT currently reports the number of active user certifications and number of dues paying members. As currently reported, these data provide a chronological record for assessing trends, and may be useful for comparative purposes. MCT should continue to report this information in its current format.

Because a single individual can hold more than one active certification (e.g., an individual can be certified as both a field producer and a studio producer), keeping separate track of the number of dues paying members provides a quantitative measure of individuals involved that eliminates any double-counting of individuals.

5. Facilities usage. Specific data on MCT's hours of operation, hours of use for studio, control room, editing and logging stations, and field equipment are useful for determining operating capacity and making judgments about comparative efficiency. Hours of operation should continue to be reported, and should provide some comparative value. Special event attendees should continue to be reported for the County's information.

6. Public Access budget. Public Access budget data should continue to be reported in the categories of personnel, operating expenses, and capital expenditures.* When analyzed in conjunction with training, facilities, and program production data, this information will allow for basic, albeit primitive, cost efficiency calculations, (e.g., cost per individual trained, cost per program produced, and cost per hour of programming produced). These calculations should also be of some comparative value, although that will depend upon the type of data available from other Public Access providers (see page 8).

Table 1 (page 7a) summarizes the Public Access data categories, indicates whether the data are currently being generated and reported by MCT, and notes whether the data are likely to have comparative value to other Public Access providers.

B. PUBLIC ACCESS: Evaluating Other Contractual Obligations

Under contract to the County, MCT performs a number of other functions that do not generate easily countable products such as the number of programs produced or number of volunteers trained. The evaluation of MCT's performance in these areas should be made by the evaluation consultant on a quality judgment scale (such as 1-10 points: 1 = terrible; 10 = outstanding), based upon an assessment of any quantitative data that are available, supplemented with narrative reports provided by MCT, a review of sample materials, and a site inspection.

MCT's contractual obligations that lend themselves to this relatively simple measure of performance quality are requirements for MCT to:

1. Develop (and revise) policies for the operation and management of the Montgomery Channel and the Open Channel.
2. Develop (and revise) procedures for the operation and management of the Montgomery Channel and the Open Channel.
3. Provide services to encourage more public access productions, e.g., newsletters, workshops, meetings, awards.
4. Promote the program schedule and programming of MCT's two channels.
5. Provide and maintain in good working order studio, editing, and field production facilities for use by certified community producers.
6. Provide character-generated text services for MCT's two channels.
7. Provide playback services for MCT's two channels.

* MCT should continue its current practice of reporting personnel, operating, and capital expenditures in three functional categories: Public Access, PPNPAP, and Fundraising.

TABLE 1
PUBLIC ACCESS
OPERATIONAL DATA REQUIREMENTS

<u>DATA</u>	<u>CURRENTLY REQUIRED?</u>	<u>COMPARATIVE VALUE?</u>
<u>A. Access Programs</u>		
1. Number in preproduction	Yes	No
2. Number in progress	Yes	No
3. Number completed	Yes	Yes
a. Program name	Yes	No
b. Short description	Yes	No
c. % Volunteer v. professional	Yes	No
d. Studio v. field production	Yes	Some
e. Length of program	No	Some
<u>B. Channel Scheduling</u>		
1. Hours of locally-produced v. acquired programming v. text	Yes	Some
2. Hours of first-run v. repeats	Yes	Some
<u>C. Training</u>		
1. Number of field v. studio trainees	Yes	Yes
2. Number of trainees: class-trained v. equivalency tested	Yes	Some
3. Trainees by production function (e.g., producers v. technicians)	Yes	Some
4. Waiting list		
a. Number of people on list	Yes	Some
b. Average length of wait	Yes	Some
5. Number of certifications		
a. Total	Yes	Yes
b. Active	Yes	Yes
6. Number of dues paying members	Yes	Yes

TABLE 1
PUBLIC ACCESS
OPERATIONAL DATA REQUIREMENTS
(Continued)

<u>DATA</u>	<u>CURRENTLY REQUIRED?</u>	<u>COMPARATIVE VALUE?</u>
<u>D. Facilities</u>		
1. Field equipment		
a. Number of ensembles checked out by use-type (public access v. news)	Yes	Yes
b. Number of hours used (by type)	Yes	Yes
2. Hours of studio use by type	Yes	Yes
3. Hours of control room use by type	Yes	Yes
4. Hours of edit station use by type	Yes	Yes
5. Hours of logging station use by type	Yes	Yes
6. Hours facility is open to the public		
a. For field equipment check-out	No	Yes
b. For studio use	No	Yes
c. For control room use	No	Yes
d. For edit/logging station use	No	Yes
<u>E. Special Events</u>		
1. Name of special event	Yes	No
2. Number of attendees	Yes	No
<u>F. Public Access Cost Allocation</u>		
1. Breakdown of costs by catagories: personnel v. operating expenses v. capital expenditures	Yes	Yes *

* Cost data are of comparative value when analyzed in conjunction with training, program, and facilities data; and when appropriate adjustments to comparative data are made.

An additional group of MCT's contractual obligations involves specific services provided to local governments and educational institutions. These services (numbered 8 -13 below) lend themselves to "1-10" rating scale determinations after the consultant reviews any performance data that are available and conducts in-depth interviews with representatives of the local governments and educational channel operators. These interviews would involve rating scale quality questions as well as open-ended opportunities for detailed comments.

8. Maintain City of Rockville equipment.
9. Provide technical advice to municipal co-franchisors upon request.
10. Provide character-generated text services for the co-franchisors.
11. Provide playback services for the City of Rockville channel.
12. Provide support to educational channel operators and special needs groups upon request.
13. Provide staff assistance to local community groups in acquiring programs from elsewhere for local cablecasting.

C. PUBLIC ACCESS: Sources of Comparable Data

There are many jurisdictions that have public access providers with similar structures to MCT in terms of being not-for-profit organizations with a board of directors. For comparative purposes, public access providers should be chosen that, like MCT, serve major metropolitan markets, have sizable budgets, and serve similar functions with regard to public access.

For comparison with MCT, the following ten Public Access organizations are recommended, all of which serve a metropolitan market and have total budgets of at least \$400,000 per year. These organizations should be contacted soon to begin the process of developing a comparable data base of operational performance:

1. Boston (MA) Community Access and Programming Foundation
2. Chicago (IL) Access Corporation
3. Columbus (OH) Community Access, Inc.
4. Northwest Community Television Corp. (Hennepin Co., MN)
5. Milwaukee (WI) Access Telecommunications Authority
6. Fairfax (VA) Cable Access Corp.
7. Multnomah (OR) Cable Access Corp.

8. Prince George's (MD) Community Television, Inc.
9. Tucson (AZ) Community Cable Corp.
10. Austin (TX) Community Television.

The County, with MCT's assistance, should contact these groups to develop the data base needed for comparative analysis. Table 1 (page 7a) identifies those data most likely to be of comparative value.

D. PUBLIC ACCESS: Qualitative Judgments

The recommended method for reaching conclusions about the quality of the programming produced by certified MCT volunteers is to impanel a jury of experts to examine a sample of programs.* The panel would then reach a determination as to the quality of MCT's locally produced Public Access programming. The evaluation consultant would manage the panel's participation in the evaluation process and coordinate the logistics of the panel's screenings and operations.

The Public Access panel should consist of three members:

- One experienced manager of a comparable public access institution to be nominated by MCT;
- One cable administrator from a franchising authority that funds an independent public access provider to be nominated by the County; and
- One panel Chair to be agreed upon by both MCT and the County. (The Chair could be the overall evaluation consultant, another access manager, another cable administrator, or any other individual agreed upon as qualified by both MCT and the County.)

The sample of programs reviewed by the panel should be, at maximum, 25 separate programs selected as follows: MCT should select ten programs as representative examples of the different types of programming it produces. Insofar as possible, MCT should select a representative balance of program lengths, of field and studio productions, and of the normal range of proportions of volunteer and professional production staffs. Another ten programs should be selected at random from the program schedule with a view toward balancing program lengths and types. In addition, if the panel feels the need for additional balance, it should be allowed to request up to another five specific programs from the program schedule for inclusion in the package.

* As outlined in Chapter V, it is recommended that feedback from the viewing public be obtained as part of a general survey of cable subscribers. (See page 13.) It will be important for the consultant to examine and compare the qualitative conclusions reached by the expert panel to the opinions voiced by the average viewer.

The programs could be screened jointly or individually by the panel.* The program quality should be rated on a scale recommended by the consultant and acceptable to all three jurors, MCT, and the County. (This could be a simple 1-10 point scale, with 1 being "terrible" and 10 "outstanding.") The panel jurors should base their judgments on overall production quality and program value, but not on editorial content.

IV. EVALUATING MCT'S PROFESSIONALLY-PRODUCED NEWS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING

As with MCT's Public Access functions, a fair evaluation of MCT's Professionally-Produced News and Public Affairs Programming (PPNPAP) requires quantitative performance measures balanced with qualitative expert judgments. The cost and operational data that MCT currently generates for this portion of its operations should be supplemented with several new measures of effectiveness ("assists" and "scoops") that delineate MCT's success in increasing coverage of County news by other media.

The comparative value of any of this operational data is problematic for several reasons. Commercial television and cable origination stations will likely hold comparable data as proprietary, and their operations will only be relatively comparable to MCT's rather unique structure. Public television might better serve for comparison, but only two stations with similar nightly news programs have been located.

An expert panel similar in structure to that for evaluating the quality of the Public Access programs should be used to address the qualitative aspects of MCT's PPNPAP.

A. PPNPAP: Quantitative Measures of Operational Performance

Unlike MCT's Public Access function, MCT's News Department generates little quantifiable product other than the programs themselves. These programs consist of the 30-minute daily news programs focused on the County that are cablecast Monday through Friday, news specials, (e.g., election debates and returns), and focused public affairs programs. These are all produced by MCT's News Department, using primarily professional staff.

For the purpose of generating generally comparable or otherwise useful quantitative cost efficiency and effectiveness data, MCT should track and report the following:

1. The news budget in dollars, person-years, and equipment complement. Included should be any overhead charges, breakouts of operating expenses, and number of field production units (camera/recorder ensembles) in use.

* According to MCT, most cable television award competitions provide for group screenings.

2. The number of 30-minute news programs and total hours of related special programs (election coverage, debates, etc.). These programs should be delineated by title and program length.

3. The number of MCT news "scoops", or stories first reported by MCT that were subsequently reported by local commercial TV, radio, or print news. Story titles and dates should be specified. This measure indicates the extent to which MCT's coverage "sets the agenda" or increases the commercial media's coverage of the County.

4. The number of news "assists," or footage used by other media entities (includes major market stations) enabled by MCT video feeds, tape availability, or other technical or editorial assistance. For each, the type of assist, story title, date, subject matter, and media outlet should be specified. This measure indicates the extent to which MCT's news department operationally aids and enhances commercial media's coverage of the County.

The following table lists these news program data requirements, indicates whether they are currently being reported to the County by MCT, and notes the likelihood of their comparative value. Collecting this data will allow for the most basic cost and output measures to be calculated. An estimate of the number of cable subscribers viewing the daily news program and other News Department programs will be obtained as part of the audience survey. (See page 13.)

Table 2

NEWS PROGRAM
OPERATIONAL DATA REQUIREMENTS

<u>DATA TYPE</u>	<u>CURRENTLY REPORTED?</u>	<u>COMPARATIVE VALUE?</u>
1. News budget	Yes	Some
2. No. of News Programs		
a. No. of 30 min. News Programs	No	Some
b. No. of other PPNPAP (by title and length)	No	Some
3. No. of News "scoops"	No	No
4. No. of News "assists"	No	No

B. PPNPAP: Sources of Comparable Data

As far as can be determined, no other public access providers produce a professional daily local news program of the type and quantity of MCT's productions. There are a few that do produce a news program in some form, but they either produce a weekly show or one that essentially is a compilation of footage shot by access volunteers.*

* OLO Report, page 66.

MCT's PPNPAP efforts are more appropriately compared to small-market commercial television stations, cable operator-owned local origination news efforts, and public television stations with daily news programs. A task for the County between now and the actual evaluation process will be to sift through the possibilities and identify the closest comparables, and then to convince the private sector stations to share budget and performance data. (Table 2 shows these data sets with a judgment about the likely comparative value of each.)

Even after similar budget-level efforts are found, the County should remember that operational comparisons yield only one measure of efficiency, the cost per news program. Factors such as the availability and use of network news footage and the reliance on non-local and "soft" feature material must be considered in order to make any comparative analysis meaningful.

Many small-market commercial television stations will have news operations of similar scale to MCT's, and some will be even smaller. Several cable operators have launched commercial news ventures that seem to be comparable. The most likely are: Colony Cablevision, Fall River, MA; Greater Media Cable, Worcester, MA; Greater Rochester Cablevision, Rochester, NY; Media General Cable, Fairfax, VA; and Adelphia Cable, Ocean City, NJ. Among public television stations, New Jersey Public Broadcasting, Trenton, NJ, and WITF-TV, Harrisburg, PA have regular nightly news programs of a similar scale.

C. PPNPAP: Qualitative Judgments

As with Public Access, the best method for generating an informed judgment about the quality of the PPNPAP is to assemble a panel to screen a sample of programs.

The PPNPAP expert panel should be somewhat different than that impaneled for Public Access. The group should be mutually agreed upon by MCT and the County, and should include at least two news directors from among the following types of comparable operations:

- Small commercial TV station;
- Cable television local origination operation; or
- Public television station.

The third panelist should be a Montgomery County community leader who could add an understanding of the importance of the local news covered by MCT.

The quality judgments should be based on production quality, depth of news coverage, and overall program flow, but not on editorial content. MCT should clearly be given complete freedom regarding its news judgment and editorial content, and in no way should this portion of the evaluation impinge upon that freedom.

* Also similar to Public Access, feedback from the average viewer as to the quality of PPNPAP will be sought as part of the audience survey.

The sample of programs reviewed by the panel should total no more than 25. The programs to be judged should include five regularly scheduled News-21 programs and five specials and public affairs programs nominated as representative by MCT. Another ten programs (in no fixed proportion of News-21 and specials) should be selected at random from the program schedule. If necessary for balance, the panel could include up to five other programs at its discretion.

As with Public Access, the programming should be rated on a simple scale (1-10) or quality rating. The evaluation consultant should manage the quality panel process.

V. OBTAINING FEEDBACK FROM THE VIEWING PUBLIC AND MCT USERS

This section outlines methods for generating feedback from the general viewing public, and from MCT's direct users, defined as MCT's certified volunteer producers and technicians. It is important to estimate the number of cable subscribers who watch MCT's channels and to ascertain viewers' satisfaction with MCT's programs, their perceptions of the quality of the programs, and their opinions of the reasonableness of the use of public funds to support them. It is also important to determine the satisfaction levels of MCT's volunteers, and to probe their opinions regarding specific aspects of MCT's operations.

A. Audience Survey

There already is a baseline for estimating how many (and how frequently) cable viewers watch MCT's channels and for measuring the cable viewers' perceptions of both MCT's Public Access and News Program efforts. In September, 1988, the "Montgomery County Cable Television Viewer Survey," was conducted by researchers from the Public Administration Department of George Washington University on contract to the County's Cable Office. The survey asked a random sample of 600 cable subscribers about their viewing of the various community channels available in Montgomery County.

The study claimed broad audience support for the principle of the availability of the community channels,* and strong approval for the current system of financing the programming. Approximately 69 percent of the

* The 1988 study claimed an "unambiguous endorsement" of the principle of the availability of access channels. However, the response categories for the survey question ("Regardless of how much you personally watch them, how important do you think it is to have these community channels available to the public - very important, somewhat important, or not important?") were structured so that this conclusion was preordained. When given the choice of "Very Important, Somewhat Important, or Not Important," particularly with the 65-word description of the access channels that preceded the choices, most people would rank access as at least somewhat important. Any revisitation of this key issue should be done with a classic "Likert-type" balanced scale, with a neutral position such as "not sure" between an equal number of "important" and "not important" choices.

subscribers reported watching community channels in the past year, with the County Government Channel enjoying the widest recognition and largest audience, followed by The Montgomery Channel, the Public Schools channel, and the Montgomery College channel.

Breakouts for particular programs had relatively low responses, with no single program having any sizable following. Only the County Council meeting sessions stood out with any responses beyond a handful.

Essential to the MCT evaluation is another viewer opinion sample survey, asking many of the same or similar questions. The survey will again provide an estimate of the number of cable subscribers who watch MCT's channels, the frequency of their viewing, and comparisons among the various community channels. Similar telephone methods could be used. The following are some specific recommendations for improving the survey instrument:

- Include a question regarding the quality of the programming viewed to allow some baseline creation. If possible, some easily understood scale (1=terrible to 10=outstanding) should be introduced for comparison with other programming.
- Include the names of key programs to assist viewer recall. If possible, viewers should be probed whether they remember watching specific programs.
- Add a question regarding the audience's opinion of the text information provided between programs to allow evaluation of this important element of MCT's programming.
- A better alternate to the 1988 questions regarding funding (Nos. 3&4) is: "Do you consider these channels to be a worthwhile and reasonable use of the franchise fees paid to the County by the cable company?" Response categories are: Very Worthwhile, Somewhat Worthwhile, Uncertain, Not Very Worthwhile, Not at all Worthwhile.
- MCT should be invited to review and comment on the proposed survey instrument.

When the results of a new audience survey are compared to the 1988 study, it must be remembered that the 1988 survey was conducted only seven months after MCT began full operations. Channel 49 was launched in November, 1985; followed by Channel 21 in February 1988.

B. Public Access User Survey

Another important measure of effectiveness of the Public Access portion of MCT's operation is the level of satisfaction expressed by access users. The population of current and former certified producers and technicians should be surveyed to generate their overall evaluation of MCT and its performance, as well as their specific opinions as to the effectiveness of MCT's training programs, equipment, programming, and the like. The views of former active (dues-paying) producers who still live locally but no longer participate should be sought as well.

The views of current and former certified volunteers could be sought through either a mail or telephone survey. At minimum, the users should be asked:

1. Basic factual information:

- Demographic information such as race, gender, age, area of residence in the County.
- Type of MCT certification held.
- Amount of involvement they had with MCT training and productions.
- Timeframe of their involvement.

2. Opinions of MCT: (Use 5-point Likert-type scale or 1-10 point system for all these opinion questions.)

- Opinion of quality of training.
- Opinion of quality of training staff.
- Opinion of quality of other MCT staff.
- Opinion of quality of MCT's special workshops.
- Opinion of quality of equipment. (Breakout field production, studio, and editing equipment.)
- Opinion of facilities' availability.
- Opinion of overall programming quality.
- Amount of viewing and opinion of quality of specific community channels in the same format as the audience survey.
- Suggestions regarding improving MCT's operations. (This should be both open-ended and offer specific alternatives.)

It will be very difficult to obtain comparable user survey data from other access operations, but it is possible that several might have attempted something similar. At the very least, the comparison of the viewing patterns of access users with the viewing patterns of the general audience generated by the audience survey will provide some interesting data.

VI. EVALUATING MCT'S FUNDRAISING EFFORTS

Net funds raised (total revenues less fundraising expenses) is the standard measure of fundraising effectiveness that should be used to gauge MCT's success in this category. MCT already does much of the data collection

and reporting necessary to generate this measure of fundraising cost-effectiveness. The difficulties arise in allocation of resources budgeted to fundraising versus operations. To the extent possible, MCT should provide revenue and expense breakouts of fundraising and other commercial activities by type (e.g., corporate sponsorship, production services, tape dubbing), including the best estimate of the value of tradeout (in-kind services) resources.*

Identifying sources of comparable fundraising data is difficult because most public access operations are constrained from engaging in the kinds of commercial activities and ventures that MCT has attempted. It is tempting to look to small public or commercial broadcasting stations for comparisons, but MCT is constrained from many of the commercial activities that both types of broadcasters engage in.

The County should be comfortable, however, with using the net funds generated as an indicator of MCT's progress over time. If the County keeps in mind that MCT operates under County-imposed constraints in this area, and that these constraints have changed over time, both parties should be able to keep this evaluation criteria in reasonable perspective.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION OF EVALUATION

The first step in implementing the evaluation plan recommended in this report is for the County to identify the public access organizations and news operations in other jurisdictions that would be used for comparative analysis. Considerable groundwork in convincing others to compile and make data available to the County will be necessary, particularly in the case of the private sector organizations.

MCT should begin to compile the data identified in this report in addition to the data it already compiles and reports to the County. The additional data collection recommended should not impose a significant administrative burden on MCT.

The County should be able to contract the entire evaluation project to a consultant for a total cost of between \$35,000 and \$50,000. Considering the complexity of the process and the need to assemble expert panels to judge programming, the evaluation itself could take between six and nine months to complete. The process should allow time for MCT to review the report and comment as needed.

As designed above, the consultant would review and analyze the cost and operational reports provided by MCT, evaluate whatever comparative data can be obtained from similar operations elsewhere, conduct the surveys of users and

* An Executive Regulation governing the commercial use of the County's PEG channels is currently pending action by the County.

the audience, manage the panels judging programming quality, and conduct a site visit and interviews of MCT and County personnel. It will be the consultant's task to make the appropriate connections among the quantitative and qualitative data collected before coming to any overall conclusions as to the effectiveness of MCT's operations and organization, and its efficiency in delivering the services required in MCT's Master Contract with the County.

DEFINITIONS

This report uses the following terms as defined below:

Access is a process by which various individuals and groups can obtain, at little or no cost, the facilities, expertise and opportunity to produce and cablecast television programming. Such programming may be from an outside source provided ready-to-air by the local sponsor (locally sponsored programming), or may be produced within the County or by County residents, often with the assistance of MCT or other local facilities (locally produced programming). Access programs are generally cablecast on channels reserved in whole or in part for public access, educational access and governmental access programming, known as PEG programming.

Educational access means a process under which educational entities can cablecast educational programming on a channel reserved in part or whole for that purpose on a cable system. Such a reserved channel is referred to as an educational access channel. The purpose of educational access is to utilize the cable system as a vehicle to disseminate programming valuable for education. On the cable system at present, the Montgomery County Public Schools operate two educational access channels, Montgomery College operates one channel, and the University of Maryland operates one channel with plans to initiate a second.

Governmental access means a process under which County or municipal governments can cablecast relevant programming on a channel reserved in part or whole for that purpose on a cable system. Such a reserved channel is referred to as a governmental access channel. The purpose of governmental access is to utilize the cable system as a vehicle of public information, citizen involvement and public debate. At present, Channel 55 (County Cable) is the governmental access channel for Montgomery County. In addition, the Cities of Rockville and Takoma Park and the Montgomery County Chapter of the Maryland Municipal League (MML) are each allocated use of a governmental access channel. (The MML channel has not yet been activated.)

Likert-type scale is a rating scale consisting of a series of items to which a survey respondent indicates agreement or disagreement on an intensity scale. Traditionally, a three, five, or seven-level intensity scale is used, with a neutral midpoint. An example is: "strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree."

Master Contract means the contract between MCT and the County to fund public access services and professionally-produced news and public affairs programming. It does not include MCT's services in support of the County Government Channel, which are presently funded through separate service contracts.

Montgomery Community Television, Inc. (MCT), is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation that, under contract with Montgomery County, Maryland, receives funding to provide certain services pertaining to the cable system in the County. MCT was incorporated on September 5, 1984.

Professionally-produced news and public affairs programming (PPNPAP) means programs produced by MCT's News Department where, on average, more than half of the production and technical crew are made up of paid MCT staff. At present, it includes a 30-minute nightly news program, as well as special news programs such as candidate debates, investigative reports, and election coverage.

(Note: MCT has occasionally produced other video programs where more than half of the production and technical crew are made up of paid MCT staff. The scope of the evaluation recommended in this report does not include these other professionally-produced programs because County funds are not currently used to support these productions.)

Public access generally means a process under which any member of the public can cablecast a program free-of-charge on a channel reserved in whole or part for that purpose on a cable system. The purpose of providing public access is to allow and encourage a forum for community and individual expression, and the free exchange of ideas. A traditional public access channel is available on an open, non-discriminatory basis to all residents and groups.

In Montgomery County's current contract with MCT, Public Access specifically was defined as video programs, and services in support of creation of such programs, where half or more than half of the production and technical crew are, on average, made up of volunteers certified by MCT. Montgomery County's FY91-94 contract with MCT may substitute the term "Volunteer Support Services" for the previously used term "Public Access."

LITERATURE REVIEWED AND INTERVIEWS

This report was generated after the following steps:

1. Review of key background literature:
 - o OLO Report #89-5, 1990
 - o Montgomery County Cable TV Viewer Survey, 1988
 - o MCT Performance Indicators FY 90
 - o Contract Between Montgomery County & MCT, 1989
 - o Report of the Community Access Task Force, 1984
 - o Bylaws of MCT, 1984
 - o Cable Communications Plan, 1990
 - o MCT Executive Director's Quarterly Reports, 1989-90.
2. Extensive and repeated telephone discussions with K. Orlansky, OLO.
3. Site visit on July 11 & 12, 1990.

Meetings with:

- o K. Stevens, B. Allen, J. Hansman, and K. Orlansky, Montgomery County.
- o R. Malvik, S. Nemerofsky, G. Smith, S. Garfinkle, D. Katzen, A. Likowski, and R. Steele of MCT.
- o R. Lozner, C. Satinsky, W. Jenkins, A. Coro, R. Adams, W. Gold, M. Grace, B. Prosterman, and D. Nilsson of the MCT Board of Directors.
- o C. Eason and L. Freeman, Cable Communications Advisory Committee Subcommittees on System Design & Community Programming.
- o B. Adams, Councilmember.

Montgomery
COMMUNITY TELEVISION, INC.
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(301) 424-1730
FAX (301) 294-7476

March 6, 1991

Mr. Andrew Mansinne, Jr., Director
Office of Legislative Oversight
Montgomery County Council
100 Maryland Avenue
Rockville, MD 20850

Dear Mr. Mansinne:

This letter is in response to your request for MCT's views on draft OLO Report No. 90-6, A Methodology for Conducting a Performance Evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc.

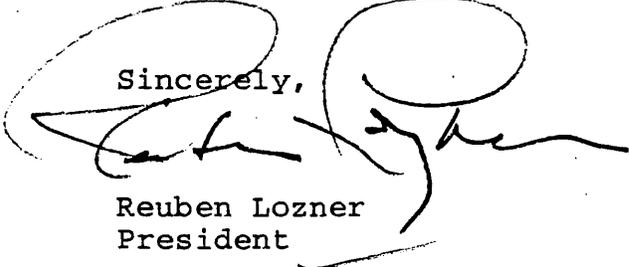
As you know there was close cooperation and collaboration between Ms. Orlansky of your staff, Ms. Stevens of the County's Cable Office, Mr. Hansman of the County's Office of Management and Budget, and MCT Executive Director Ralph Malvik in reviewing the many drafts supplied by Professor Barry Orton. Accordingly, the draft OLO Report as a whole reflects those efforts and should be a useful tool in conducting the performance evaluation during FY93.

The only point of disagreement centers on the composition of the proposed panels which would provide qualitative judgments about MCT's programs. We believe that such panels should operate in the traditional manner used by most award competitions in the television industry; that is, judges should view all programs jointly rather than individually, in isolation. Joint viewing assures that all conditions and standards are the same for each judge. This may appear to be a minor point but we believe that to do otherwise risks, for example, having each judge review different segments of the same program and thus come up with radically different results. This could easily occur as the practice is frequently to "fast forward" through parts of a program rather than viewing the entire program.

With this one exception the final product is acceptable to MCT.

Once again we thank you and Ms. Orlansky for your fine work in behalf of MCT.

Sincerely,



Reuben Lozner
President

cc: Kay Stevens, Cable Office



Montgomery County Government

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

M E M O R A N D U M

March 11, 1991

TO: Andrew Mansinne, Jr., Director
Office of Legislative Oversight

FROM: William H. Hussmann
Chief Administrative Officer 

SUBJECT: DRAFT OLO Report #90-6, A Methodology For Conducting A Performance Evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft OLO Report #90-6, A Methodology For Conducting A Performance Evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc. This report is comprehensive and provides clear guidelines on how to structure an evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc.'s (MCT's) performance. The comments from the Cable Office and the Office of Management & Budget are attached.

The Executive Branch would be glad to work with the Office of Legislative Oversight to implement this evaluation plan. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on DRAFT OLO Report #90-6.

WHH/djs

Attachments



Montgomery County Government

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850

MEMORANDUM

March 4, 1991

TO: Andrew Mansinne, Jr., Director
Office of Legislative Oversight

FROM: *Kay Stevens*
Kay Stevens, Executive Staff Specialist, Cable Office

SUBJECT: Draft OLO Report #90-6, A Methodology for Conducting A
Performance Evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc.

I have reviewed OLO Report #90-6, which is a consultant study by Prof. Barry Orton outlining a methodology for conducting a performance evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc. (MCT).

The report is comprehensive and provides clear guidelines on how to structure an evaluation of MCT and what data elements to collect. We are already in the process of implementing the study by putting Mr. Orton's recommendations on reporting requirements into the County's draft FY 92-94 contract with MCT.

Mr. Orton's report has been circulated to the Cable Communications Advisory Committee and I believe the Committee's suggestions on an earlier draft have now been addressed.

I would once again like to thank Karen Orlansky for her efforts in ensuring that the methodology recommended in this report covers all of the major concerns about accountability that have arisen over the past several years.

KS:mbw

MCT\004



Montgomery County Government

MEMORANDUM

March 1, 1991

TO: Andrew Mansinne, Jr., Director
Office of Legislative Oversight

FROM: Robert K. Kendal, Director *Robert K. Kendal*
Office of Management and Budget

SUBJECT: DRAFT OLO Report No. 90-6, A Methodology for Conducting a Performance Evaluation of Montgomery Community Television, Inc.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this DRAFT evaluation methodology. As indicated in the cover memo to Mr. Hussmann, and in the BACKGROUND section for the report on page one, John Hansman, the Chief of OMB's Interagency Review and Analysis Division, was involved in the collaborative effort to work with the evaluation design contractor. As a result, OMB has no additional comments at this time, but would be glad to work with OLO, the Cable Office, and Montgomery Community Television, Inc., as needed, to implement the evaluation plan.