



We need an organization “...like ProPublica, which is free from the control of business and politics.”
–Chinese journalist Liu Jianfeng

ProPublica Report to Stakeholders January-April, 2013



This is the latest in a series of periodic reports to our stakeholders about progress at ProPublica. Earlier reports, including our [annual report for 2012](#), are available at [ProPublica.org](#).

The first period of 2013 saw a range of important indications of ProPublica's growing reach.

In March, the Committee to Protect Journalists published a [video](#) with the story of Liu Jianfeng, a Chinese journalist who had worked for 15 years for China's state-controlled press, and left his job last summer. In the video, Liu sought to explain what moved him to continue his efforts to bring accountability to a closed system. His quiet courage was evident, as he described how, "Many journalists couldn't understand why we did investigative reports on big political events. They thought that the reports done by the investigative department I worked for could put the whole newspaper at risk."

But it was what came next that took our breath away:

"After I left the Economic Observer, I was wondering if we could build up an organization belonging to investigative journalists like ProPublica, which is free from the control of business or politics. But of course, under the current environment in China, it is very hard to get funded to build such an organization."

Needless to say, we can imagine few greater honors than serving as an inspiration to courageous people like Liu Jianfeng.

The previous month, senior reporter Charles Ornstein, after years of covering health care (and serving as the president of the Association of Health Care Journalists) wrote a [moving piece](#) for ProPublica and the Washington Post about how his thoughts on end-of-life issues had been re-shaped by the death of his own mother. ProPublica's unique publishing model, including not just leading media partners such as the Post, but also reprints through Creative Commons, resulted in Ornstein's story being republished on the sites of NBC's Today Show, the Philadelphia Inquirer, an NPR health blog, AARP, Salon and six local public television and radio stations. The cumulative result was a story read by more than 400,000 people.



This image (and those on the cover) by Jonah Kessel for the Committee to Protect Journalists.



Charles Ornstein with his mother Harriet Ornstein on his wedding day (Randall Stewart, Photo courtesy of Charles Ornstein)

An article by research director Liz Day, published in March, [explained](#) that the failure of the U.S. to meaningfully deploy a system that would make paying taxes simpler and less expensive for millions of Americans was due in part to lobbying by Intuit, the company that sells the TurboTax service. Day’s report was read even more widely—not only by well more than 125,000 people on ProPublica’s own site, but also by more than 600,000 others on sites ranging from the Today Show to the Huffington Post to Mother Jones to Business Insider.



Meanwhile, an expanded and updated release of the data that powers ProPublica’s “[Dollars for Docs](#)” news application charting pharma company payments to the nation’s physicians showcased another part of ProPublica’s increasingly effective publishing model. In the first two weeks after the new data’s release on March 11, local stories based on it were published by 33 different news organizations, including NBC4 TV in Washington, NBC4 New York, KMOX TV St. Louis, the Bergen Record, Columbus Dispatch, Contra Costa Times, Denver Post, Memphis Commercial Appeal, New Haven Register, Oregonian, Philadelphia Inquirer and Salt Lake Tribune.

Impact

The most important test of ProPublica is whether our work is having impact. By this, we mean not audience size or prizes, but real world change. Examples of what we mean can be found at <http://www.propublica.org/about/impact/>, as can a recently-published white paper on how ProPublica thinks about impact and related questions.

In the first period of 2013, ProPublica stories produced such change in a number of important areas:

- Facing mounting pressure, including as a result of [our coverage](#), the federal government in April finally forced Westchester County, New York to move to comply with its settlement of a case involving racial discrimination in public housing. The County Executive reversed himself, introducing local legislation to ban discrimination against people who pay rent with government assistance.
- Fines continue to mount in the wake of our reporting on complex mortgage-backed securities deals and the role of hedge fund [Magnetar](#) in the years leading up to the crash of 2007-08—the reporting that earned ProPublica our second Pulitzer Prize. In March, a Massachusetts regulator fined Deutsche Bank \$17.5 million, bringing the total of fines in Magnetar deals to more than \$300 million.
- A complex set of tax deals which were the subject of a [ProPublica investigation with the Financial Times in 2011](#) (and won an Overseas Press Club Award last year) resulted in a federal court decision against Bank of New York Mellon in February. While the bank is appealing, it took an \$850 million charge after the decision.
- In January and February, the Department of Interior’s Bureau of Land Management issued new rules governing the round-up and sale of wild horses—a program in which a ProPublica report last September [revealed](#) widespread problems. The new rules restricted horse adoptions with the aim of preventing illegal slaughter and heightened transparency.
- Fallout [continues](#) over U.S. Rep. Bill Owens’s trip to Taiwan at that government’s expense. The story of the trip, and how it was financed, was broken by ProPublica last year. A congressional ethics investigation found in February that there was “substantial reason to believe” the trip had violated the law; sanctions remain a possibility. Taiwan opted not to renew the contract of the lobbying firm involved.
- A U.S. security contractor in Iraq was [fined \\$75,000](#) in February by the Department of Labor for abuses in the treatment of workers in the war zones first revealed in a 2009 ProPublica series.

What People Are Saying

“During a period of marked decline in reporting resources in much of the American news media, ProPublica focuses on important stories of accountability journalism.”

Columbia University, in announcing the award of an honorary Doctor of Laws degree to ProPublica founder Paul Steiger, April 8

“ProPublica is Redefining the Journalism Industry”

Business Insider, March 27

“ProPublica’s big data projects made it easy for the reader/user to view specific information most relevant to him or her while seeing the big picture from different angles.”

Mark Briggs, Poynter.org, March 15

“journalists haven’t managed to shed nearly as much light on the inner workings of so-called ‘dark money’ nonprofit groups [as on] super PACs... One notable exception is ProPublica.”

Mariah Blake, Columbia Journalism Review, February 21

“ProPublica, by the way, is a must read if you are a serious news junkie. Nothing about the Kardashians, but lots of articles on drone strikes, fracking, health care, voting rights and other hot topics.”

Tom Jackson, Sandusky [OH] Register, February 26

“Officials Say the Darndest Things, a tumblr blog run by investigative journalism organization ProPublica, is a fascinating look into the world of US politics in the most humorous of ways. The political blog is a hilarious and thought-provoking collection of quotes, tweets and more from US politicians, leaders and trailblazers.”

Nancy Messieh, MakeUseOf.com, April 17



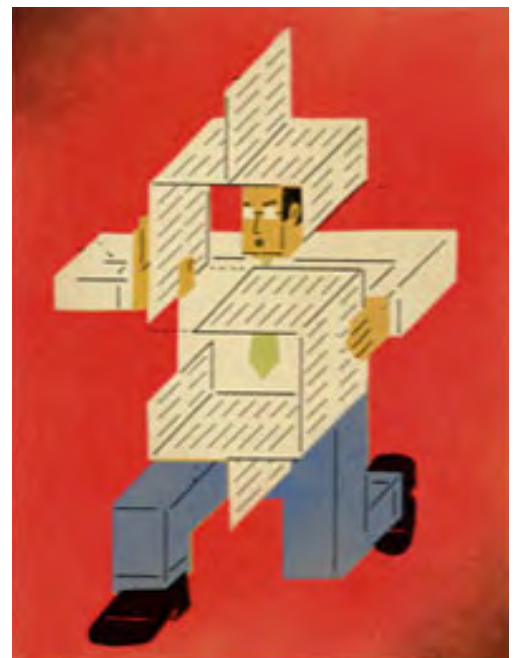
Honors

ProPublica was the first online news organization to win a Pulitzer Prize (2010) and the first to win a Pulitzer for stories not published in print (2011). We did not win a Pulitzer in 2013, but much of our best work from last year has been honored this Spring.

Sebastian Rotella and Ana Arana's account of "What Happened at Dos Erres" won a **Peabody Award** (the highest honor in broadcast journalism), **two Overseas Press Club Awards**—the Lowell Thomas for Radio (with This American Life) and the Joe and Laurie Dine Award for Human Rights Reporting—and a **Dart Award for Excellence in Coverage of Trauma** from Columbia University's Dart Center, and was a **finalist for the Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Ernie Pyle Award** for human interest storytelling. Paul Kiel's "Great American Foreclosure Story" won the **Society of Business Editors and Writers (SABEW) Best in Business Awards** for both feature and explanatory stories, and is a **finalist for the Livingston Award for Young Journalists**.

Jesse Eisinger's "The Trade" column won **SABEW's Award for commentary** for the second year in a row. Our work on tower climbers with Frontline won a third **SABEW award, for digital investigative story**. Contributor Sheri Fink won the **Association of Health Care Journalists Award for beat reporting** and is a **finalist for the Deadline Club Award** for enterprise reporting for part of the coverage of Hurricane Sandy featured in our 2012 annual report. Nikole Hannah-Jones and Jeff Larson's reporting on housing segregation won the **National Low Income Housing Coalition Media Award** and is a **finalist for the Deadline Club Award** for minority focus.

Our reporting on dark money in politics received an **Investigative Reporters and Editors Award** for multi-platform, large size, the **Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Award for Online Investigative Reporting, affiliated**, an **honorable mention for the Toner Award for Excellence in Political Reporting** and is a **finalist for the Deadline Club Award** for reporting by independent digital media. Reporting by Abrahm Lustgarten on injection wells was a finalist for the **Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Edward Meeman Award** for environmental reporting. Our report on death investigations with Frontline, "The Real CSI," is a **finalist for the ABA Silver Gavel Award for television**. And Lois Beckett was also named a **finalist for the Livingston Award**, for her coverage of new uses of data by political campaigns. This is a prize Lois shared last year with two ProPublica colleagues; ProPublica reporters have been named finalists for the Livingston every year since our founding—indeed ProPublica stories have been finalists eight times in the last five years.



Our news applications and graphics have also been widely honored this year. Our StateFace mapping technology won the **Malofiej International Infographics Awards Best Map Online and Silver Medal** as well as **Society for News Design (SND) Judges' Special Recognition**. Receiving **SND Silver Medals** were our Pipeline Safety Tracker and Nursing Home Inspect app, and **SND Awards of Excellence** went to our Great Migration maps, drones graphic, our organizational portfolio and developer Lena Groeger's personal portfolio. The Great Migration maps are also a **finalist for a Data Journalism Award**, as are our Message Machine app and our Nerd Blog. Our news applications overall were also a **finalist for the Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Award for Digital Innovation**.



Meanwhile, in social media, both ProPublica senior engagement editor Amanda Zamora and social media producer Blair Hickman were both among “**50 female innovators in digital journalism**” named in March by web site Journalism.co.uk.

ProPublica partners, January-April, 2013

Foreign Policy	New York Times	
Frontline	NPR News	
Chicago Reader*	Pottstown Mercury*	
Marketplace	Washington Post	
Monterey Herald*	WNYC Radio	
New York Daily News*		*new partner

By the numbers

Web site monthly average page views at ProPublica.org 1.2 million+, up 23% year-over-year excluding January 2012 spike

Monthly average age views from reprints via Creative Commons 700,000+

Average monthly unique visitors to ProPublica.org 495,000, up 31% year-over-year excluding January 2012 spike

Twitter followers more than 209,000, up 17% since January 1

ProPublica has more Twitter followers than most Major League Baseball, NBA or NHL teams, as well as more than 14 NFL teams

Facebook fans more than 47,000, up 16% since January 1

Daily email subscribers over 60,000, up 3% since January 1

iPad/iPhone/Android app downloads more than 156,000, up 12% since January 1

“Officials Say the Darndest Things” Tumblr followers more than 205,000, up 17% since January 1

600+ donors