



allied media conference

July 16-19, 2009 • Detroit, MI

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MISSION

“Media is anything that gives people the ability to imagine a different kind of world.”

A collective definition of “media” created at the INCITE!-Speak strategy session during the 2008 Allied Media Conference

“In order to transform our world we must transform ourselves.”

Grace Lee Boggs, closing remarks to the 2008 Allied Media Conference



AMC Organizers Named UTNE Visionaries

UTNE Reader has named the organizers of the Allied Media Conference as one of “50 Visionaries who are Changing the World” in the cover story of their November/December 2008 issue. The AMC was one of the few projects rather than individuals who was singled out for recognition and appreciation in the magazine. Utne writes, “What goes on at the hundreds of sessions and workshops doesn’t go the way of yet another stodgy PowerPoint presentation. Participants and presenters take what they hear and learn about taking back the media to heart—and back home. ...No matter the specific subject area, it’s all about using the tools of journalism to strengthen and expand a grassroots push for democracy.”

The Allied Media Conference (AMC) cultivates strategies for a more just and creative world. We come together to share tools and tactics for transforming our communities through media-based organizing.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUR NETWORK

The Allied Media Conference is the central project of the Allied Media Projects (AMP) network, which emerges out of ten years of organic relationship-building. Since the first conference (then the Midwest Zine Conference) in 1999, people have been compelled by the concept of do-it-yourself media. Later, as the Underground Publishing Conference, the emphasis was on building a movement of alternative media makers. With the shift towards Allied Media, the AMC has attracted more and more people who are interested in using participatory media as a strategy for social justice organizing.

A LABORATORY FOR PARTICIPATORY MEDIA

We believe we can create the world we want to live in through participatory media. It is a process of speaking and listening that allows us to imagine other realities and then organize our communities to make them real. When we choose to use media in this way, we transform ourselves from consumers of information to producers, from objects within narratives of exploitation and violence to active subjects in the transformation of the world. Our participation is needed now more than ever. As the planetary crises of the 21st century intensify, we need the creative contributions of a multitude in order to solve them. The Allied Media Conference provides a critical convergence point for a network of networks to share and innovate strategies for participatory media-based organizing.

With this document we hope to illustrate the breadth of our community and the intentional process through which we are supporting a movement.

FROM CONFERENCE, TO NETWORK, TO MOVEMENT-BUILDING HUB

We build the AMC from the ground up. Promotion for the conference is overwhelmingly word-of-mouth, which means the participant base has grown along the paths of pre-existing networks. But even for people who don't come to the AMC with any prior relationships, the fact that it is an annual conference held in Detroit makes it easy to develop strong relationships over the years. These ongoing relationships and the year-round collaboration that results from them is what fuels the evolution of ideas at the AMC.

The AMC models a new kind of relationship between national conferences and their host cities. The conference is profoundly shaped by the local community and it, in turn, leaves a lasting impact on Detroit. In 2008 more than 200 conference attendees took part in tours led by long-time community organizers, around the themes of independent media, music, urban agriculture, environmental justice and labor. They learned about Detroit's powerful legacy of independent media and its growing reputation as a center for grassroots solutions to the post-industrial urban crisis. The story of Detroit is a direct lesson in the importance of creating our own media.

At the 2008 AMC, women from INCITE! and Speak organized a caucus for women of color with disabilities. Stacey Milbern, one of the caucus organizers says it was one of the most exciting parts of the conference for her, but equally exciting is the work that's taken place afterwards: "Folks living on the intersections of many communities, in this case queer disabled women of color, are so isolated from each other in daily life. I am thankful to the AMC in bringing us together. The projects we are working on now, an anthology, a documentary, a social networking site all sprouted in the AMC and are rooted in AMC philosophy."

That kind of year-round development of relationships and ideas that started at the AMC is prevalent. In a survey following the 2007 conference we found that a majority of people said that they collaborated on new projects coming out of the AMC. We see the fruits of the network multiply each year, as more and more people build off ideas at the previous conferences and invite new groups to join them at the following year's conference. "Being at the AMC feels like there is a bigger vision happening, like you're part of a network, not just one individual, isolated organization," says Ravi Ramaswamy of the Ozone House in Ypsilanti, Michigan.



"I know I am part of a network and that opens up possibilities. The AMC is a place where you realize you are part of a national movement. You realize you are not alone. It is sustaining the movement."

Tennessee Watson, Youth Noise Network

"More than any other conference I go to, it feels like a network. Even if I only see the people I meet there once a year, it has this great welcoming feel, and we build upon those relationships each year."

Andalusia Knoll, Prometheus Radio Project





(Photo: Media Lab Documentation Crew)

CASE STUDY: TRANSNATIONAL YOUTH ORGANIZING AT THE AMC

Since 2006, the AMC has provided resources and space to the U.S.-Palestine Youth Solidarity Network (YSN), a transnational project using media to create connections and build a movement between youth of color in the U.S. and youth in Palestine. YSN partners Palestine/Israel Education Project (PEP), Detroit Summer, and SNAG Magazine, have used the AMC as a space to share their collaboration with others by facilitating joint workshops, showcasing their media, speaking about their goals and process during plenary sessions, and holding valuable face-to-face meetings to plan for the future.

This year, YSN organized a live video conference in the AMC's media lab, during which a packed room of youth from the Bay Area, Detroit, Chicago, and Brooklyn connected with a classroom of thirty young people in Balata Refugee Camp in Palestine. This was a profoundly moving experience of transcending geographic distance and militarized borders. Through traditional music, hip hop, poetry, and speaking, the video conference participants shared stories and ideas about criminalization, displacement, and the duty to struggle.

Ora Wise, member of the PEP collective says, "The AMC allows us to break through the physical and monetary barriers that prevent oppressed young people in Palestine and throughout the U.S from connecting with each other. After the live video conference this year, so many educators told me that this experience helped them imagine a million new ways of doing things that they hadn't imagined were possible before. And through this experience of communicating about their shared oppression alongside their knowledge of struggle and survival, the youth came away with a sense of their own power and significance. That's a huge thing in a world that is currently designed to tell them their knowledge doesn't count and they don't matter. At the AMC, reaching out across these borders and walls that divide us and keep us isolated, our youth took a step towards building a movement of movements that can identify the systems that are effecting all of us and figure out together how to change things."

“There’s very few spaces where you see such amazing, ground-breaking, do-it-yourself activists coming together with all these young people from all these communities where they’ve traditionally been told not to try to do it themselves or that they can’t do it for themselves. You get to see the best of both communities coming together in this space.”

Adrienne Maree Brown, Executive Director of the Ruckus Society and AMP board member

TRACKS OF THE ALLIED MEDIA CONFERENCE

As of 2008, the Allied Media Conference featured five core tracks: the Detroit Summer Youth Media Track, the INCITE! Women and Trans People of Color Track, the Peoples Production House Media Policy Track, the How-to Track and the Popular Education Track. These reflect some of the core values of Allied Media Projects. But less like “railroad tracks” that would route your interest in a particular direction, tracks at the AMC are more like “animal tracks” that end up criss-crossing each other repeatedly as they travel in unexpected patterns.

HOW-TO TRACK: DEMYSTIFYING MEDIA-MAKING THROUGH HANDS-ON LEARNING

Since its earliest years, the AMC has brought people together around the idea of “do-it-yourself” media. That concept has evolved from zines and other print media to include everything from cell-phone hacking to breakdancing. Through the hands-on experience of making media at the AMC, participants walk away with concrete skills and new sense of their own power.

In 2007, a media lab evolved out of the Youth and How-To tracks. The lab is an open, collaborative space where people can go to make media together, after being inspired by the things they learn in conference workshops. Youth are the main teachers and learners in this space, leading workshops in animation, beat-making and recording.

Diana Nucera, coordinator of the media lab says, “My favorite moment from the media lab this year was when the Beehive Collective came down and led a spontaneous workshop. They had these huge, elaborate posters which used insects to tell stories about global politics. It was so different from a lot of the types of media youth are used to, but it was still so powerful and they were totally engaged in the storytelling aspect of it.”

The diversity of the How-To track is its greatest strength. While much of the How-To track is about demystifying digital technologies and making it useful to people who don’t automatically see themselves as media makers, it’s just as much about sharing low-fi media skills like stenciling, zine-making and spoken word.

It is also a space for communities to strategize on how to build community-based resources for media-making and sharing. Community radio pioneers, Prometheus Radio Project have made it an annual tradition to spend the weekend of the AMC in the media lab building a radio transmitter in conjunction with a local grassroots organization. Two years ago, they partnered with youth from Detroit Summer. The following year, they partnered with Centro Obrero, a worker center in Southwest Detroit and the youth from Detroit Summer were helping teach. Conference participants drop-in on the build, solder some pieces of wire to a circuit board or tune an antennae. They walk away with a more tactile understanding of how communication happens and how they can make it happen for themselves.

YOUTH TRACK: A NEW GENERATION OF LEADERS

The AMC is the most diverse, youth-oriented national gathering of its kind. More than just providing “space” for youth, the AMC is cultivating a new generation of leaders.

Detroit Summer, a local youth media collective, sponsors the Youth Media Track at the AMC with a goal of showcasing youth-oriented and youth-led content. It also offers a space for youth to self-organize a network of ongoing relationships. Programs like Detroit Summer, BUMP Records in Oakland, CA, Youth Noise Network in Durham, NC and the Palestine/Israel Education Project (PEP) in Brooklyn, NY have built trips to the Allied Media Conference into their annual programming.

Carlos Nuñez, a young person from Bushwick Community High School in Brooklyn, who traveled with PEP to the AMC in 2008, said the experience of organizing a workshop for the youth meet-up prior to the conference was empowering: “It showed me I could do things like that. What comes out of it is confidence.”

The types of youth-led workshops vary from “Inciting Change through Digital Storytelling” to “Hip Hop for Participatory Research.” “It was fun and eye-opening to get to know about people’s different cultures and different styles of hip hop in other cities,” says Darnell Williams of Detroit Summer.

The AMC pushes the field of youth organizing forward through important strategy conversations. In 2008, Global Action Project hosted a panel called “Youth Media to What End?” which explored the potential for youth media to go beyond personal storytelling to support organizing for social justice. That panel represents a larger conversation about the future of youth organizing that has grown over the past three years at the AMC. As a result of their involvement in the conference, groups like BUMP Records have developed a social justice focus in addition to media-making. At the same time, groups like the Philadelphia Student Union and Urban Underground in Milwaukee have come to the AMC in search of media-making skills to advance their social justice work.

The Youth Track becomes more youth-led every year. This year, the track coordinator is Mariana Castañeda, a 20-year-old Detroit Summer alumnus. She is organizing a Youth Advisory Board that will shape the 2009 track. People who came last year are spreading the word to their friends and organizations are furthering the incredible work that will be showcased at next year’s conference. As the Youth Advisory Board organizes for next year’s conference, they are also building a vision for how Youth Media organizations can support each other year-round through AMP.

For the past 3 years, the participation of people under 18 has doubled with each year to more than 150. In 2008, 28 youth organizations came to the AMC, a vast majority from low-income communities of color. This year 15 sessions (30% of the conference content) were youth-led.



Photo: Media Lab Documentation Crew

“Because of the AMC and being a part of developing the conference, we’ve added a social justice aspect to our curriculum. We are now working to use our skills to impact our community, to build a social movement around access to media and technology.”

Robert Collins, BUMP Records/Bay Area Video Coalition

“As women who are Arab, Muslim and from communities of color, we endeavor to position ourselves as producers, rather than objects of the mass media. Our leadership/media programs are the seedbed from which our membership grows to take leadership, developing campaigns and programs in AWAAM and in the community at large. At the Allied Media Conference, we found valuable advice, ideas for growth, and opportunities to develop individually as media organizers.”

Mona Eldahry, Arab Women Active in Arts and Media

TRACKS OF THE ALLIED MEDIA CONFERENCE

WOMEN AND TRANS PEOPLE OF COLOR TRACK: USING MEDIA TO ORGANIZE AGAINST VIOLENCE

At the 2008 AMC, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence mobilized over 30 of their chapter and affiliate members to attend the conference. They collaborated with the Speak Women of Color Media Collective to hold a day-long pre-conference gathering which included a three hour strategy session aimed at envisioning a shared approach to using media to end violence against women of color. Following that strategy session, women of color media makers led hands-on trainings on everything from blogging and graphic design to zine-making and textile design. The INCITE! Track continued throughout the weekend, with sessions ranging from “Undoing Crime: Using Media to De-criminalize and De-colonize” to a caucus for women of color with disabilities to strategize on how to build community through media-making.

One of the most impactful panels at the 2008 AMC was a conversation between members of INCITE!, Speak, Left Turn Magazine and The Final Call about the imbalanced media coverage and mobilizations for the Jena 6 and New Jersey 4 cases. It provoked critical dialogue about gender and racial violence and the role of online and offline independent media in movement-building. A Left Turn article about the New Jersey 4 case came out of the panel, continuing the conversation in a public forum.

Last year a “Kids Track” grew out of the INCITE! Track in an effort to make the conference more accessible to moms with kids, but also in an effort to engage kids as full participants in the conference rather than a burden. Kids learned how to make and spray paint stencils (safely!), basic print-making and letter-writing as an organizing tool. Dozens of people within the AMP community made small donations to make the kids track possible. Now the challenge is to make travel to the AMC accessible for more moms and their kids. At their retreat immediately following the 2008 AMC, the Speak Women of Color Media Collective recorded a spoken word CD that they will sell as a fundraiser to benefit moms bringing themselves and their kids to the AMC. Women of color have developed their participation and leadership in the AMC community through this kind of self-organizing.





CASE STUDY: WOMEN OF COLOR BLOGGERS NETWORK AT THE AMC

For many women and trans bloggers of color, who have built a community online, the AMC is the one time of year when they organize face-to-face. The Women of Color Bloggers Network grew out of the “Women of Color Bloggers Caucus” convened by blogger Brownfemipower in 2006. Since then, the AMC has been the annual meet-up place for this sprawling network of online solidarity work and community building. “Those relationships [built at the AMC] have made possible the everyday process of building networks, solidarity and love between women of color in response to sexual, economic and state forms of violence,” said Alexis Pauline Gumbs of Broken Beautiful Press. The INCITE! Track continually pushes the boundaries of what conference spaces can look and feel like and who has access to those spaces.

Members of the Women of Color Bloggers Network launched a campaign called Be Bold, Be Red to raise awareness about violence against women of color, specifically the New Jersey 4 case. They spoke about their work on a panel at the 2008 AMC and convened a caucus to launch a new online anti-violence project called Cyber Quilting. Over 15 women participated in the caucus and four months later, the project was a reality. They held five local anti-violence events in Durham, NC, Washington D.C., Chicago, Atlanta and Detroit, all connected via webcams and the Internet. Women in each city collectively read a statement of survival, then shared testimonies and performances. The technology and organizing process that made Cyber Quilting possible will be showcased at next year’s Allied Media Conference.

THE POP ED TRACK: EDUCATION AS MEDIA

A recent AMP survey found that over 50% of AMC participants identify as some form of educator—whether as k-12 educators, professors, parents, or curriculum-builders and workshop leaders in community organizations. The Popular Education Track has nurtured this diversity and brought people together around the questions of how do people learn best? and how can media transform learning?

At the AMC, teachers learn how to teach math through beat-making, and global politics through hip hop. Youth organizers study Google Maps as a tool for environmental justice organizing. An actress performs a one-woman show about public education in New York City, then breaks down the ways theater can transform learning in the classroom. In almost every workshop, information is conveyed through the most creative, interactive ways possible, offering useful ideas for any participant to take home and apply to their own work.

In 2007, teachers were able to receive continuing education credit in Michigan for their participation in a “Popular Education Symposium” held on the Friday before the conference. In 2008 popular education was built into the rest of the conference as it’s own track. As AMP prepares to extend our work into more year-round projects, we are planning to hold a weekend-long Symposium on Media, Education and Movement-Building during the winter of 2010. We are also building more distribution pathways between educators and media-producers within our network.



The 2008 AMC featured over 70 workshops, including:

- * Web 2.0 Innovations to Organize and Connect
- * The Internet: What it is & what it can be
- * Alternative Economies for Alternative Media Makers
- * Community Organizing through Community Radio
- * Growing the Field of Youth Media Educators
- * Copyright from an Artists’ Perspective
- * Participatory Research
- * Media Access for Prisoners
- * History, Memory & Public Space
- * Transforming Silenced Voices through Interview for Film/Video
- * Creating the Tools for an Immigrant Safety Net
- * Strategic Framing & Messaging
- * From Social Networking to Online Security
- * Social Justice & Zine-Making
- * Media Monitoring for Disability Rights
- * Party Promotion as an Organizing Tool
- * The Art of Awesome Facilitation
- * Street Art 101
- * The Future of Censorship

MEDIA POLICY TRACK: A NEW APPROACH TO MEDIA POLICY

The Media Policy Track grew out of the need for new approaches to media policy organizing that would be relevant to grassroots media makers and social justice organizers.

At the 2008 AMC, People's Production House presented the methods and results of their new Digital Expansion Initiative. Their program combines grassroots media-making with participatory research methods and popular education to give everyone a sense of expertise on the telecommunications issues that impact their lives. "It's basically a mash-up of the media policy issues and the media-based organizing strategies we found at the Allied Media Conference," Joshua Breitbart, Policy Director at PPH, says.

The AMC is a place where we make the policy issues concrete. Prometheus Radio Project teaches you to solder a radio transmitter and lobby for more community radio licenses, while others offer workshops in production and journalism. Also at the 2008 AMC, you could learn how to hack a mobile phone to save lives along the US-Mexico border, then how to support this kind of technology by advocating for more unlicensed access to the airwaves. Next, people from rural and urban communities could discuss how to use media production to connect their advocacy.

Larger media reform organizations such as the Media and Democracy Coalition (MADCo) and Consumers Union are also looking to participate in this innovative mix. "[The AMC] is a place where we can see what other people are doing in the media justice movement and how they view the rest of the movement. It is important for us to know who these people are and where the skills and talents are that we can tap," Beth McConnell, MADCo Executive Director says.





A USER-OWNED EVENT

Allied Media Projects has a proven track-record of making big things happen with limited resources. We have allocated funds strategically to benefit not just AMP the organization, but AMP the network. In return, we have a vast and growing network of support, providing diverse sources of revenue: conference registrants, sponsors, individual donors, foundations, and in-kind contributors.

The organizations that are feeding the growth in AMC participation are small, grassroots operations. Based on our annual survey of conference participants, more than half have annual budgets of less than \$50,000; two thirds are driven by unpaid labor. Our growth has been apparent in attendance at the conference – from 450 (2006) to 600 (2007), 800 (2008), and a projected 1,000 (July 16-19, 2009).

To meet the demands of this momentum, AMP staff intensified sponsorship outreach in 2008, bringing in 60% more sponsorship income than the year before and increasing our individual donor lists by 40%. We kept the same sliding scale registration and increased low-income and small-organization participation, but we had many more people pay extra to support scholarships and childcare. In 2007, nine people voluntarily paid more than the standard registration amount of \$60. In 2008, over 100 people did.

As a small nonprofit organization, we face the challenge of continuing to cultivate grassroots participation without defaulting to a centralized scholarship funding that we could never sustain. We explained this challenge to past participants ahead of the 2008 AMC. Our community stepped up in such a big way that we were able to keep scholarship spending steady while doubling the participation of youth under 21.

This was possible as the sum of many local actions. In Durham, North Carolina, SpiritHouse Inc, Youth Noise Network and the Princeville Outreach Project collaborated on benefit events to fund a van of 24 youth media makers and mentors to the AMC. Women of color bloggers raised money for their AMC travel through a coordinated, online fund raising campaign. Detroit Summer threw a benefit concert, Arab Young Women Activists sold scarves at the AMC, and women from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas held a zine festival.



A few anchor organizations in New York City pooled money they would have spent on plane tickets for just a handful of people, matched it with a grant from the Media Justice Fund, and hired a 60-person bus, more than tripling the amount of people from there who could attend. With the option of cheap bus tickets, contingents from Arab Women Active in the Arts and Media and Queers for Economic Justice, were able to make a last minute decision to attend.

In October 2008, the Media Justice Fund of the Funding Exchange awarded Allied Media Projects a capacity building grant to develop our decentralized fund raising strategy. We are building the capacity of our supporters to contribute to the AMC while sustaining their own projects. We are advising them as they plan benefit events, piloting social microenterprise, and helping connect our allies with local funders. AMP is producing literature and multimedia tools that will help conference participants make their case.

We see tremendous potential for growth and financial sustainability down this path, not only for the AMC, but for all of the organizations that participate in Allied Media Projects. The fundraising strategies and the relationships that AMC participants develop in this process will stay with them and strengthen them in their work beyond the AMC.

We are documenting our work. We believe this model provides an important opportunity for foundations and large donors to support nascent projects that are innovative, energetic, and effective, but otherwise almost entirely unfundable. Two-thirds of AMC participants get 10% or less of their funding from foundations.

We are preparing to launch new initiatives to strengthen the network that are complementary to the conference. Like the AMC, these will be user-supported and will address a shared need, but they are only possible with another major expansion in contributors.



BE A PART OF IT: SUPPORT THE AMC

There are many ways you can get involved. The earlier you engage, the more you will benefit from the conference.

Sponsor the Allied Media Conference. Over 40 separate organizations sustain AMP through sponsorships. As a media conference, we have many publicity partners, but by and large our sponsors contribute cash because they share our vision and want to see it grow through the Allied Media Conference. We offer sponsors a range of opportunities to reach AMC participants. Please contact us to discuss sponsoring the AMC.

Register early and make donations. Participants drive this network through small payments and donations. Early registrations support early action. There are opportunities to donate along with the online registration, but AMP also sends requests at other times of the year. About one quarter of all conference participants make a donation beyond the standard registration fee.

Bring the whole crew. This is a conference that works for people at all levels in an organization or campaign. Everyone learns new information and new ways to teach. So start organizing your community to get to the AMC. We provide a range of support for grassroots fundraising efforts, from consultation to bulk rates for AMP merchandise. We'll help you make the case to local funders.

Host an event in your city. Last year, five cities held benefit events to support travel costs for people in their communities attending the AMC. This year we expect even more to use this fun, effective way to raise money for travel costs, build a stronger local network of media organizers, and promote the AMC. If you've never planned a big event before, we can help you get started. For some, it might make more sense to organize a small event, such as a discussion or a presentation.

Submit session proposals and spread the word. The way we keep growing the conference is that everyone who goes tells everyone who didn't go that they should have gone. If you plan on going to the AMC, let people know. The website has videos, audio pieces, text, and graphics you can use, or we'll send you postcards and posters. Or, buy a t-shirt.

**WE THANK OUR DONORS FOR THEIR GENEROSITY IN SUPPORTING
THE ALLIED MEDIA CONFERENCE IN 2008:**

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