

2015



**Capital of Texas
Media Foundation**

2015 Annual Report



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Onward

Observations from Publisher Mike Kanin

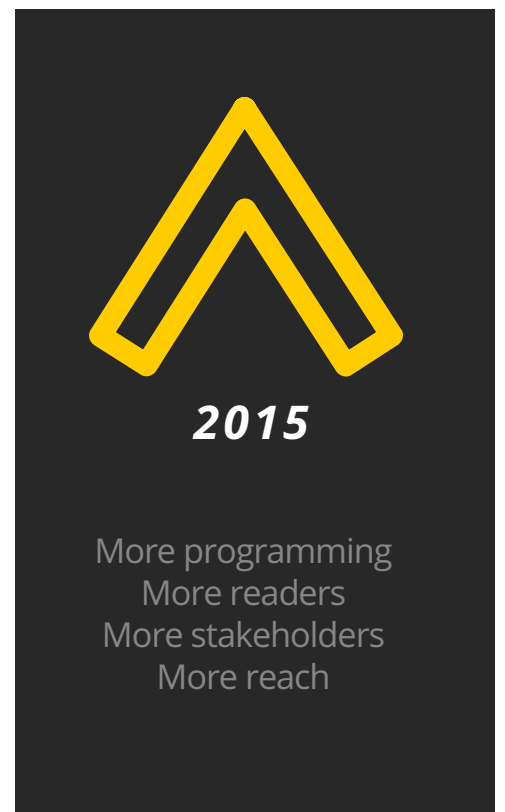


Austin City Council Member Greg Casar chats with Lanier High School students involved in the Monitor in the Classroom program.

All this, even as the Monitor itself saw continuing growth in terms of readership—both paid and free—and depth in terms of reporting. The most visible example of our increased capacity is the “Austin’s Eastern Frontier” series. Produced with our partners at KLRU and KUT, this series examined the impacts of Austin growth on far-flung regions of Travis County—regions that may not be equipped to deal with the sudden population increase.

WHAT'S NEXT?

We begin 2016 with more readers, more programming, more stakeholders (in terms of subscribing members, donors, and sponsors), and a longer reach than ever before. If early fundraising holds, we’ll also be able to upgrade our staffing. This allows us to take on more projects and more coverage. We’ll begin our first successful grant-funded project—and look to do more where that is concerned. We’ll try to get smarter about our delivery of information, and get more focused about how we hold public discussion. And though all this should make that conversation about our identity just a bit easier, this—of course—is not what we are after. We remain resolved to make central Texas a better place. And, really, we’ve only just started.



2015

More programming
More readers
More stakeholders
More reach

The Capital of Texas Media Foundation was formed in 2013 by a group of individuals interested in providing better local media for central Texas. In October of that year, we purchased the then-In Fact Daily and, ever since, the differences between CoTMF and what would become the Austin Monitor have been hard to define. At least until this year. Indeed, for the first time in its existence, CoTMF has branched out into comprehensive projects that exist beyond the Austin Monitor. Make no mistake, the Monitor remains—by far—the entity of focus. But, in order to better fulfill our mission (reminder: to educate and inform the voters of central Texas), CoTMF has begun to expand its efforts in three related, but separate, efforts: recollections, interviews, polls

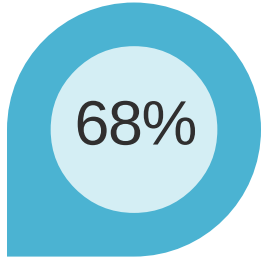
The first is the expansion of our events series. For 2015, the Monitor produced six of its Beers, Brains, and Betterment discussion forums. These included a February interview with Mayor Adler, fresh off his first month in office. Though attendance varied, CoTMF was able to shed light on a series of important issues in an accessible, free, and open to the public setting.

The second is the continued—and expanded to its first full year of existence—Austin Monitor Radio program. Each week, a Monitor representative offers 30 minutes of on-air discussion with a key newsmaker from the Austin region. These discussions ranged from an interview with almost the entire new Austin City Council, to well-received reporter’s roundtables that brought media representatives from the Austin Chronicle, the Monitor, and the Austin American Statesman in to analyze important city issues.

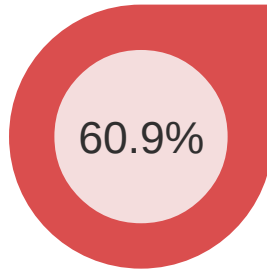
The third saw an innovative pilot project to use Austin Monitor content as supplemental curriculum for two schools: AISD’s Lanier High, and the Austin Achieve charter school. Funded by Google Fiber, the effort brought Monitor access to 113 students, who used our content to make history and government lessons more relevant, and inform participant projects for the Annette Strauss Institute’s “Speak Up! Speak Out!” civics fair.

More Reach

Subs and traffic are both up.



Percent increase in readership



Percent increase in paid subscription memberships

GROWTH, CONTINUED

The Austin Monitor—and its success—is central to the mission of the Capital of Texas Media Foundation. It is our most visible function; our most immediate connection with the people of central Texas.

The nonprofit status of CoTMF allows us the luxury to look at Monitor success from the relatively straight metric of reach: How many people are reading? How much content are they reading? Is it more than was read last year?

The answer to that last question is easy: Yes. In comparison, 68% more users stopped by AustinMonitor.com in December 2015 than did in December 2014. In raw numbers, that translates to 22,599 Google Analytics users in December 2015 and 13,444 GA users in December 2014. This figure jumps dramatically when we compare the peak GA user traffic months of July 2015 (46,131) and December 2014 (13,444), to the tune of a whopping 226.54% jump. (For more details, see the charts on the next page.)

A note about these figures: The first redesign of AustinMonitor.com happened in August 2014. This allowed us make business changes that, for the first time, lowered the subscription rate to dollars that may be more affordable to more readers. It also opened a selection of the Monitor for free passage for the first time ever. These facts are no doubt baked into the numbers above.

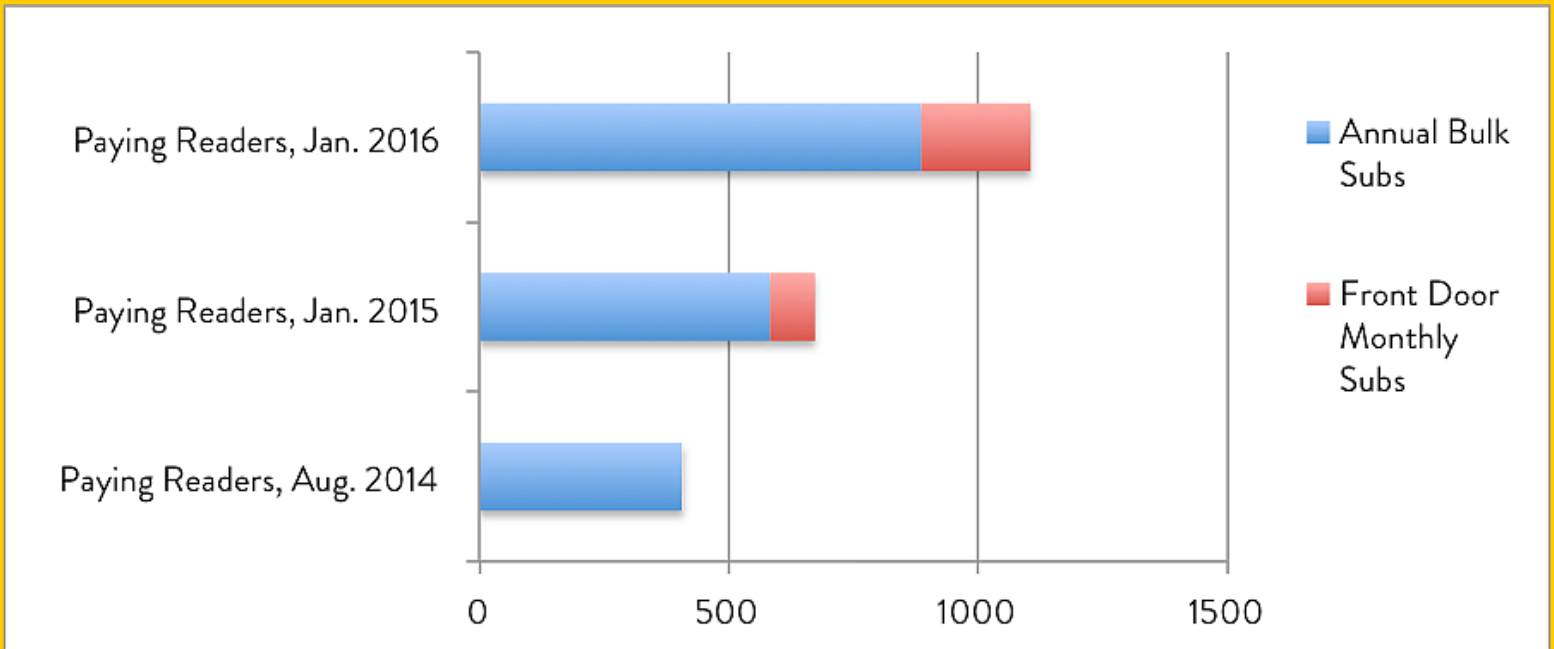
However, a look at the jump in paid readership seems to indicate that these figures have some amount of staying power. Indeed, the 1105 subscribing members that we saw in January 2015 represent a 60.8% increase in the January 2014 count. This is, of course, an indication that—not only are more folks paying for content—but that this figure appears to rise as readership increases. Correlation? Certainly. With a cause? It will take a bit more time to prove. Whatever the case here, we are seeing a clear trend here. And that trend illustrates that, as the Monitor has grown over the past few years, so has our reach. And that means more Austinites are armed with better information about the city they call home.



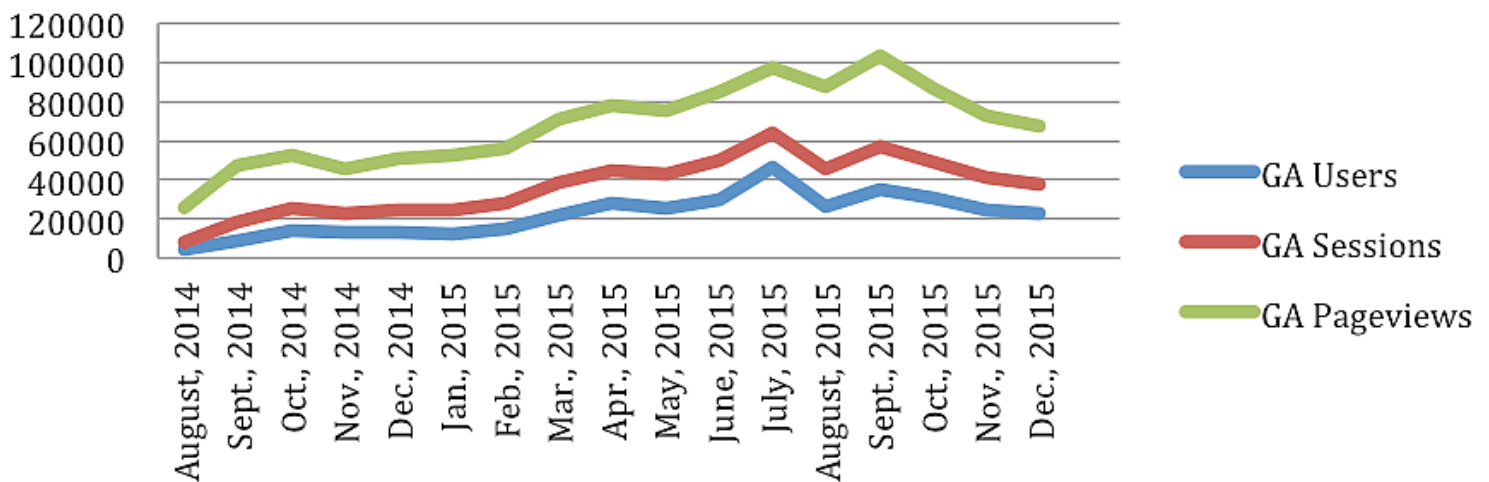
2015

In addition to a rise in individual GA User lists, the Monitor also saw a 34.33% increase in general page views.

Readership in two charts



AustinMonitor.com Traffic



Top Five 2015 Monitor Stories, by traffic

"Committee votes no on barbecue smoke ordinance"

"Solar prices keep dropping, says Austin Energy"

"Zimmerman rejects briefing by climate scientist"

"City may fix five most dangerous intersections"

"Zucker report released despite staff objections"

I-Media-cy

Austin Monitor media partnerships bring better information to a wider audience



Austin Mayor Steve Adler records one of his Austin Monitor Radio appearances

RADIO, RADIO

As part of its mission to engage and inform central Texans, CoTMF began producing a weekly radio program in mid-2015. Called "Austin Monitor Radio," and themed a broadcast arm of the publication, the program saw its first full year of operation in 2015.

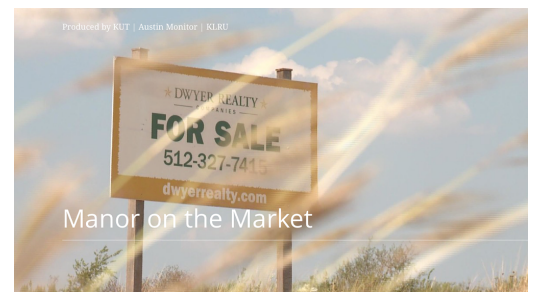
And full it was. All told, Monitor Radio was broadcast 52 times—once a week—from January through December of 2015. Highlights included multiple appearances from Austin Mayor Steve Adler, interviews with nearly every one of Adler's Council colleagues, an on-air debate about whether Travis County taxpayers should approve a bond package that would fund the construction of a new County Civil and Family Courthouse, and other issues of importance for the citizens of central Texas.

Though Austin radio boasts a host of outlets that carry news and talk content—including that which belongs to NPR affiliate and Monitor City Hall reporting partner KUT—There is currently no similar service in the Austin region. In addition to broadcast—which happens each Wednesday at 2pm—the Monitor archives its radio programming as podcasts on its website. This extends our radio reach of about 3,000 weekly, to another roughly 2,000 daily AustinMonitor.com visitors.

OTHER SOURCES

Meanwhile, the Monitor and its partners at both KUT and KXAN continued, and expanded, their existing partnerships. These brought Monitor publisher Mike Kanin to KUT and KXAN studios for live spots each Friday, a move that further extended the Monitor's work to bring issues of local focus to a broader audience. As noted above, KUT is the Austin area's NPR affiliate. KXAN is the leading local news channel in the region.

KUT and the Monitor pushed their relationship even further with a co-reported series that looked at the impact of the growth of the City of Austin on further-flung regions of Travis County. The project, called "Austin's Eastern Frontier," used the City of Manor to go deeper into what happens when communities are pushed to the geographic fringes of an urban area—and whether the geographic fringes are equipped to handle the sudden influx.



A still from the Austin's Eastern Frontier series, co-produced by the Monitor, KUT, and KLRU

Community Impact

CoTMF brings discussion to the public.



COTMF EVENTS

Even as CoTMF reaches more and more people via its online Monitor platform, it still remains focused on ways it can reach deeper into the community. Central to this portion of our efforts is our ongoing series of in-person events.

Removed from local election season, our 2015 focus was squarely on six free and open-to-the-public discussion forums we call “Beers, Brains, and Betterment” (BBB) and our annual year-capping wonkfest called “CitySummit” We also tried our hand at two less-policy-intensive, more informal events: Our first annual fundraiser and a trivia night.

We started the year with an in-person, one-on-one interview of Mayor Steve Adler during a February BBB. Though bad weather dampened turnout, but about 65 people turned out for a chance to hear the new Mayor’s observations. The event was covered by the Statesman.

The events continued throughout 2015, with turnout peaking at a July discussion of the economics of Imagine Austin.

For our 2015 CitySummit, we—along with our partners at the LBJ School of Public Affairs and KUT—drilled into questions surrounding the suburbanization of poverty in the region. As with last year’s event, CitySummit was geared more toward community members who are deep into policy, and interested in pursuing lingering and difficult questions. Feedback here continued to illustrate the impact of the event, with one attendee suggesting that the afternoon was among the more informative he’d seen.

Still—even with the success of existing programming—CoTMF continues to explore alternate ways of better engaging the community we serve. These included a fundraiser designed not just to...raise funds, but also general awareness and understanding about who we are and what we do.

To do it, we engaged with members of the Austin Facial Hair Club. These folks, not traditionally involved in politics, were able to help us reach into portions of the community similarly politically isolated. Meanwhile, a slightly less successful trivia night had former Council Member Bill Spelman pitching trivia questions to a small gathering of wonks. Look for CoTMF to continue to experiment with alternate outreach formats as it moves forward with its 2016 plans.

Learning experience

With the help of Google Fiber, CoTMF extends the Monitor into the classroom

In fall 2015, Google Fiber agreed to support a pilot version of the Capital of Texas Media Foundation's Monitor in the Classroom project. This effort is conceived as a way to inspire young future voters to participate in civic activity. In so doing, it is also an attempt to help local educators make existing subject material more relevant to students via Austin Monitor reporting.

Initial plans were to have Monitor publisher Mike Kanin produce lesson plans and a basic set of metrics with which to measure the impact of the program. Initial interest, however, moved us forward quickly, and without much in the way of either. Still, the program demonstrated significant potential as a core set of teachers adopted Monitor in the Classroom tools. Their efforts, those of the Monitor, and the first collaborative explorations produced supplemented learning experiences; opportunities that wouldn't have been available to students without Monitor involvement, including a class trip to present a traffic solution to an Austin City Council Member, an award-winning civics fair prize, a broader understanding of U.S. history through local reporting, and a trip to present a traffic proposal to the full Austin City Council.

All that happened in just four months. Additional plans call for the production of a "This American Life"-style radio program that will examine the perceptions of Lanier High School students against the backdrop of a fight at a school basketball game, further classroom material supplementation, and our first try at teaching math via current events. Beyond that, CoTMF hopes to expand Monitor in the Classroom into a full-scale effort available across the AISD system. To support this effort, we'll look to a class at Travis High, where state testing should demonstrate the efficacy of the program.



Impact Summary

Fall Semester, 2015

Students Served.....	113
Participating Schools.....	2
Participating Classrooms.....	3
Monitor Classroom Visits...	10
Electeds reached.....	11