



# Mediamarks

2016

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Alex Gilliland and Oliver Kendall searched, read and marked the thousands of media hits that make the 2016 Mediamarks Study. Aaron Eske is the primary writer with data analysis and methodology backup from Alex, Leslie Kerns and Theresa Bugeaud. Varun Rath and Michael King created the design, graphics, and technological magic. Will Valverde, Marjory Garrison and Madeline Stanionis made sure the Study is as engaging as it is informational.

Special thanks also go out to a few leading thinkers who are shaking up the way nonprofits and news organizations measure media impact. Dana Chinn from the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project; Lindsay Green-Barber from the Center for Investigative Reporting; Katharine Wroth from Grist; and Barbara Osborn from Los Angeles County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl's office: Your smart and rad insights over coffees and phone calls shaped this inaugural Study.

Thank you for going down the nonprofit media rabbit hole with us. Now pour a cup of tea, slice some cake, and get ready to grow your media outcomes.

**Keep digging!**



## About M+R

M+R is 100 smart people who help nonprofits achieve real, lasting change. We mobilize supporters, raise money, and move the media, the public, and decision-makers. We only work with clients we believe in. We take risks. We work hard. We're leaders, we're organizers, and we don't stop until we win. [www.mrss.com](http://www.mrss.com)



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**This Study is available for free download at [www.mrmediamarks.com](http://www.mrmediamarks.com).** For more information about the report, please contact M+R at 805-478-8141 or [mediamarks@mrss.com](mailto:mediamarks@mrss.com).

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# Tunnel Vision

Here's the ugly truth those of us who communicate for causes don't want to look at or can't always see: **The work we do often distracts us from the work we should be doing.**

Nonprofits are constantly on the lookout for more: More media hits, new outlets, bigger audiences. And for good reason. But despite our best intentions, a lot of the "more" is a distraction at best; at worst, a waste of time, talent and money.

Media hits that aren't central to your organizational goals are diverting your attention from the outcomes that matter most. And as a result, they may be preventing you from making the deeper impact with the news you need to move your cause forward.

So here's the advice when it comes to earning media: *Develop tunnel vision.* Cut out the distractions. Stop thinking about simply how many hits you're getting, and start thinking what each one does for your cause. Narrow your field of view to what matters, and shut out everything else. It's the only way you'll be able to gain a clearer view of what you need to and can achieve when you come out the other side of your media relations efforts.

We know: Dismissing hundreds of media hits is unusual, and scary, and painful. It's hard. M+R's very first ever Mediamarks Study is here to help. We've tallied the annual media hits of 40 nonprofits from [50 influential news outlets](#) to learn what the standard is for nonprofit media results using this focused approach.

#### **Here's a look at some of our favorite findings:**

- 1. Environmental organizations are the most likely type of organization to be featured in a news story** (11% Prominence Rate vs 7–8% Prominence Rate for other sectors).
- 2. In every sector we studied, January is the quietest month for media hits in influential outlets.** Are all the press secretaries hibernating?
- 3. Some of the largest nonprofits in the world had surprisingly few media hits in 2015.** One of the mega-million dollar organizations we studied had zero results in the media outlets we measured. Meanwhile, others had hundreds of hits and a couple even neared 1,000 results among the select list of outlets. The median number of annual media hits in 2015 across nonprofit sectors in the 50 influential outlets we measured is **93**.

We get to work with amazing nonprofits of all sizes and missions every day, and we understand how precious your nonprofit's resources are. We created this study because we want you to make the most of them. We want to see you use the power of media tunnel vision to make a world of difference to the people, animals, trees, or whatever worthy cause you serve.

If you have feedback, questions or ideas (or if you'd like to join the fun for Mediamarks 2017), we'd love to hear them at [mediamarks@mrss.com](mailto:mediamarks@mrss.com) and [@mrcampaigns](https://twitter.com/mrcampaigns).

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## How to Use This Study

For the past 10 years, the M+R Benchmarks Study has served up the most clear, comprehensive data and analysis of online fundraising, advocacy, and marketing for nonprofits.

We've designed Mediamarks to help nonprofit press shops the same way we designed Benchmarks to help nonprofit digital and fundraising teams. By looking at the data and trends, you can compare your nonprofit's results to your peers and use that knowledge to make changes to the way you approach press and improve the media outcomes that are important to your organization.

### **WARNING**

**Don't take a shot every time you read  
the word "outcome" in this Study.**

You will be drunk on outcomes if you do.

To make Mediamarks, we used a comprehensive Nexis search to pull the 2015 media hits data of 40 nonprofits across four sectors — Environmental, International, Health, and U.S. Poverty — in 50 influential media outlets.

**The nonprofits we measured** in this year's Mediamarks Study are all in the [Chronicle of Philanthropy 400](#) and have annual operating budgets between \$50 million to \$500 million. They were selected at random with half having annual budgets between \$50–\$100 million and half having annual budgets between \$100–\$500 million.

(Caveat #1 – We know that nonprofits with significantly smaller budgets can make a mighty impact with media and we hope to include them in future studies. )

**The media outlets selected** in this year's Mediamarks Study are all influential because of their audience size or audience type (e.g. policymakers and their staff). They are outlets we regularly pitch for nonprofit brand and advocacy efforts. Many of the outlets also appear on [Nate Silver's list of publications](#) that make media waves, and as you know, Nate knows things. For instance, the future.

(Caveat #2 – We know there are other online and regional outlets that matter. We also know how daunting it can be to make sense of too many media hits at once, so although the outlets on this list may shift in the future as their influence comes and goes, we will never measure more than 50 and neither should you.)

*You can see the full list of [media outlets](#) included in Mediamarks at the end of the Study.*

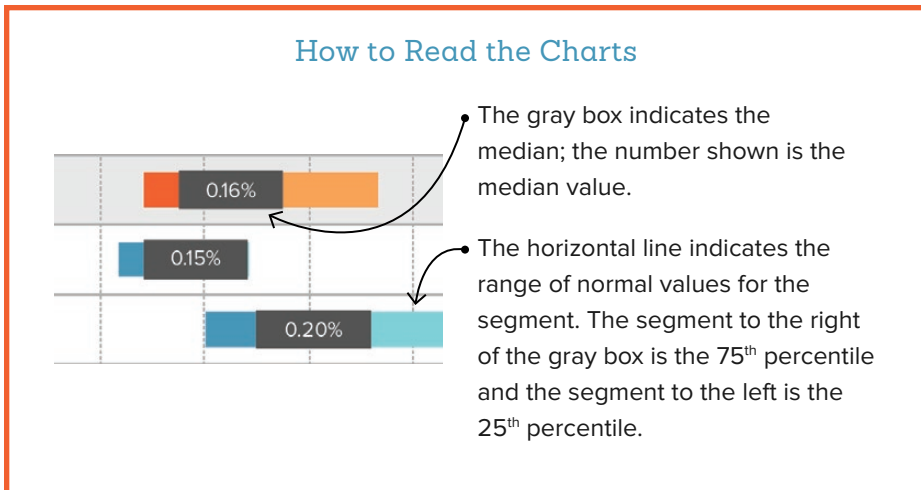
**These are the factors and metrics waiting for you in Mediamarks:**

- Total Annual Hits by Sector
- Type of Media Hits by Sector
- Media Coverage by Month & Sector
- Media Coverage by Month for All 40 Organizations (Anonymous)
- Prominence in Media Coverage by Sector
- Outcomes of Media Coverage by Sector: Advocacy, Awareness, Fundraising

Don't get too hung up yet on whether your numbers are normal, it's important to note that every organization's press shop has different strengths at different times — charismatic leaders, of-the-moment issues, unforgettable personal stories, hard-hitting data or science. So think about your organization's goals and past metrics when you consider how your results measure up.

And pay special attention to the results for your sector — these are your closest peers. If your Health organization has fewer feature stories than most other Health organizations, then perhaps it's time to rethink your expert positioning approach. Or if most other Environmental organizations are having a heyday in online news and you're mainly getting newspaper hits, then you probably have room to get more hits with a new set of reporters.

Before we get into the good stuff, here is an important tip about how to read and interpret the charts:



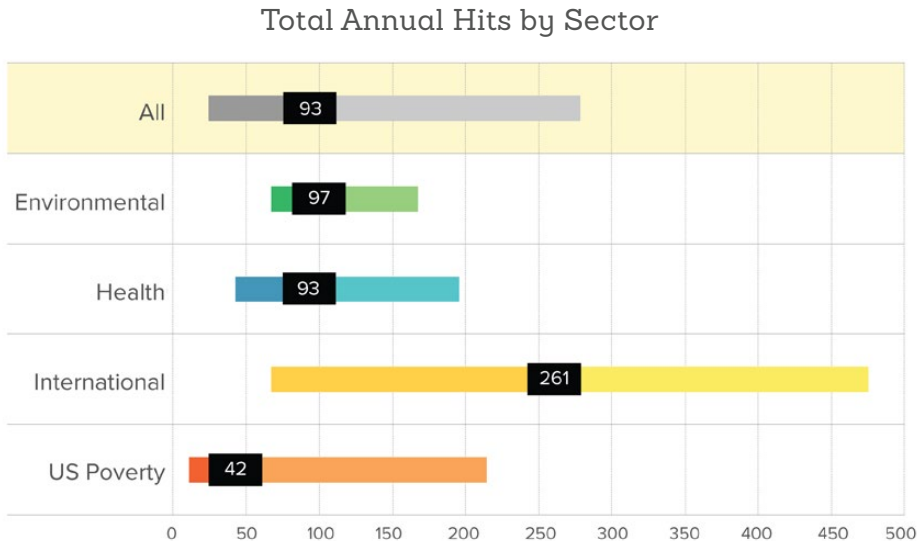


A perspective view down a long, narrow tunnel. The walls are covered in colorful graffiti, including letters like 'ab' and various abstract designs. The floor is dark and uneven, with some debris. A series of arched openings, possibly door frames or structural supports, recede into the distance, creating a strong sense of depth. The lighting is somewhat dim, with brighter areas where the graffiti is more visible.

# Digging into Data



# Total Annual Hits




Get under your desk because this is the big one. This chart shows how many media hits nonprofits from each sector that we analyzed received in 2015 in the 50 influential news outlets we tracked:



Remember earlier when we said that to find meaning in media results, “how many” is the wrong thing to ask? We mean it. So let’s look beyond the numbers in the black box and look for answers to why some sectors had more hits than others last year.

## Headlines!

- 1. 100ish hits is middle of the road in 2015.** Looking at all 40 organizations, groups got about 100 media hits in the outlets we measured. That’s about 8 major media hits a month or 2 a week at a steady pace. 
- 2. Daaaang International!** There’s no denying that 2015 was a big year for International news and, therefore, organizations. The Syrian refugee crisis and earthquake in Nepal were major and lasting stories. With all the crises, disasters and other newsmaking events happening in the world, reporters also call on experts from International orgs more often than experts from US Poverty orgs. That may explain why International orgs had 6x more media hits than US Poverty orgs and about 3x more media hits than Environmental and Health orgs in 2015. 

3. **Environmental and International hits are more diverse.** Compared to Health groups that have very tight topics, Environmental and International organizations can comment on a wide range of news. For example, an enviro group can talk with reporters about climate change, fishing, wolves, air pollution, etc. Meanwhile, an Alzheimer's group can talk about Alzheimer's. 
4. **Health hits are as predictable as a heartbeat.** Reports are king for Health groups. Sometimes they're reports that the organization produces. Many times they're reports that government agencies produce that organizations jump on. Who doesn't love a press piggyback ride? It's worth noting that this isn't a criticism. It's a trend of what health reporters tend to cover and Health groups are wise to make reports part of their media strategy. 
5. **US Poverty groups have more work to do.** US Poverty groups are lagging behind other sectors in national media coverage and they have some work to do to be seen and heard as an influential force, in the news that achieves media outcomes. 

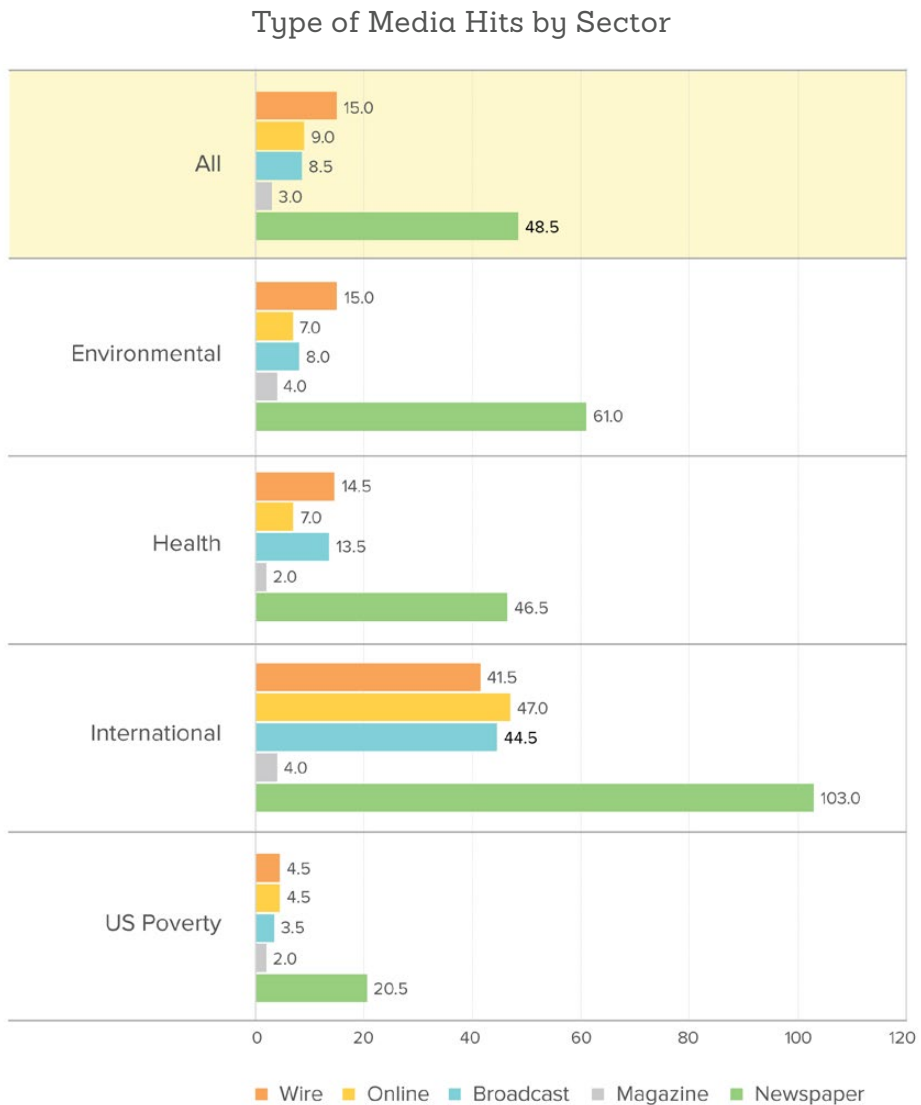
## Editors Note

1. **These results are medians (not means/averages).** This metrics method should remove the effect of outliers that had unusual spikes of media activity last year.
2. **The *Des Moines Register* is not in here.** There are a couple of regional outlets like *Boston Globe* and *Chicago Tribune* among the 50 influential media outlets we monitored. Had we included more smaller newspapers and local broadcast stations, Health and US Poverty numbers may look very different because of organizational structure (i.e., affiliate model) and the local impact of their missions.






# Type of Media Hits

Now you know how many media hits to expect and why. Let's look at what types of media hits organizations are getting according to our Nexis search of 50 influential news outlets of all types.



# Headlines!

- 1. Newspapers are not yesterday's news.** They still matter in a big way for organizations seeking influence or positioning through national media coverage. Although many people are now reading newspapers on their phones, daily newspaper outlets included nonprofits in their coverage in a big way in 2015. Looking at the median number of stories including nonprofits, the main newspapers in America had nearly 6x more stories than the main broadcast news shows and 16x more stories than the nation's main magazines. 
- 2. Your suspicions are correct — Magazine hits are rare.** Across the sectors we analyzed, organizations received a median of 3 Magazine hits in 2015. One main reason for this could be that the Magazines we studied come out 12 times a year so there is less space and chance for stories about your nonprofit. Thinking beyond the numbers though, pitching magazines and building relationships with reporters at the important ones takes a long time and Magazine articles can take a lot of work by nonprofit press people even after a reporter bites. Magazine stories tend to go deeper, so the details and stories you need to provide to Magazine reporters must also be much greater. The editorial direction and content for Magazines is also very different from other types of outlets. Magazine stories are less about breaking news and more about what's happening behind the news. For these reasons, it's not so surprising that more frequent and instantly gratifying Newspaper hits trump Mags. 
- 3. The 15% Wire.** The trio of Environmental, Health, and International sectors all saw proportionally 15% of their media hits from the Wire (AP, Reuters, etc) in 2015. The proportion of US Poverty hits from the Wire was slightly lower at 10%. 



# Editors Note

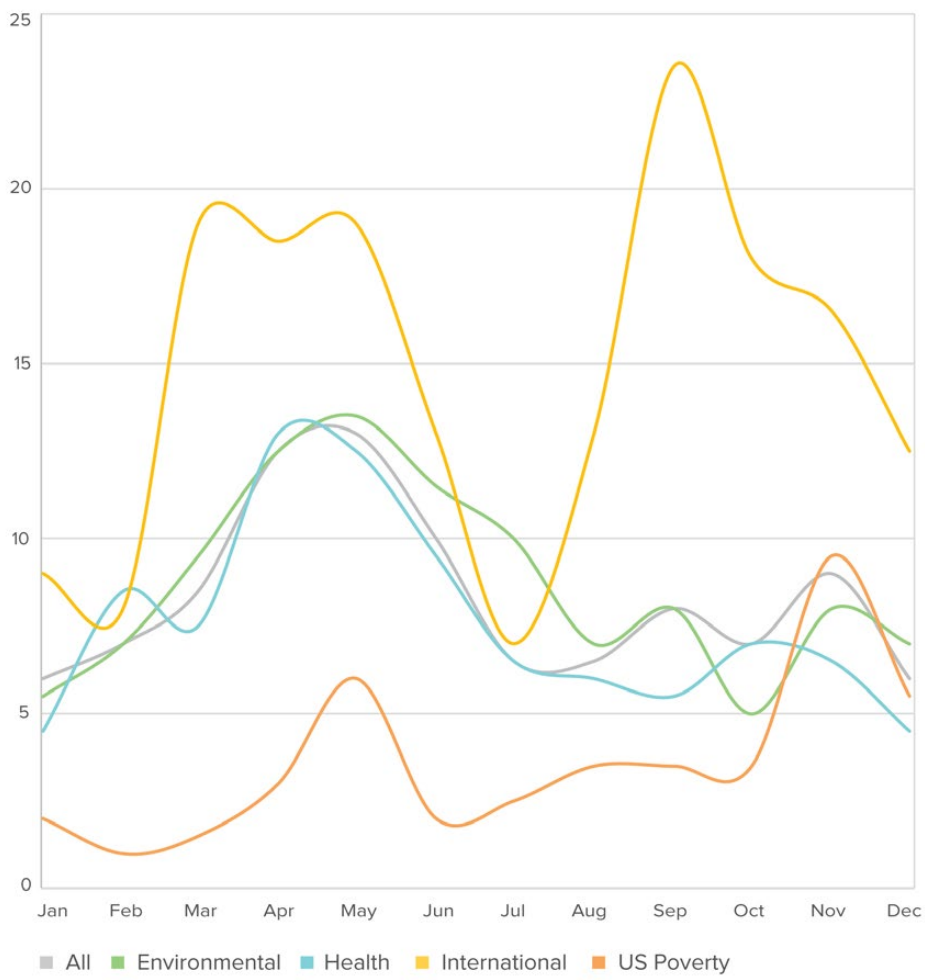
- 1. Online results are slightly deflated in Mediamarks 2016.** Media monitoring for some of our favorite and influential Online outlets (Vox, VICE, BuzzFeed) is not available and/or reliable enough for our standards yet. Although we did include hits from sites like Salon, Slate, CNNMoney.com and Mashable, we know there are other Online news hits that matter that this year's Study unfortunately had to miss. Hopefully media monitoring technology will catch up with journalism technology next year.
- 2. Wire stories count only once in Mediamarks.** We can assume that the AP and Reuters hits in our study were reprinted in dozens or hundreds of other outlets. To remove the redundancy, we simplified the measurement and only count Wire stories once.



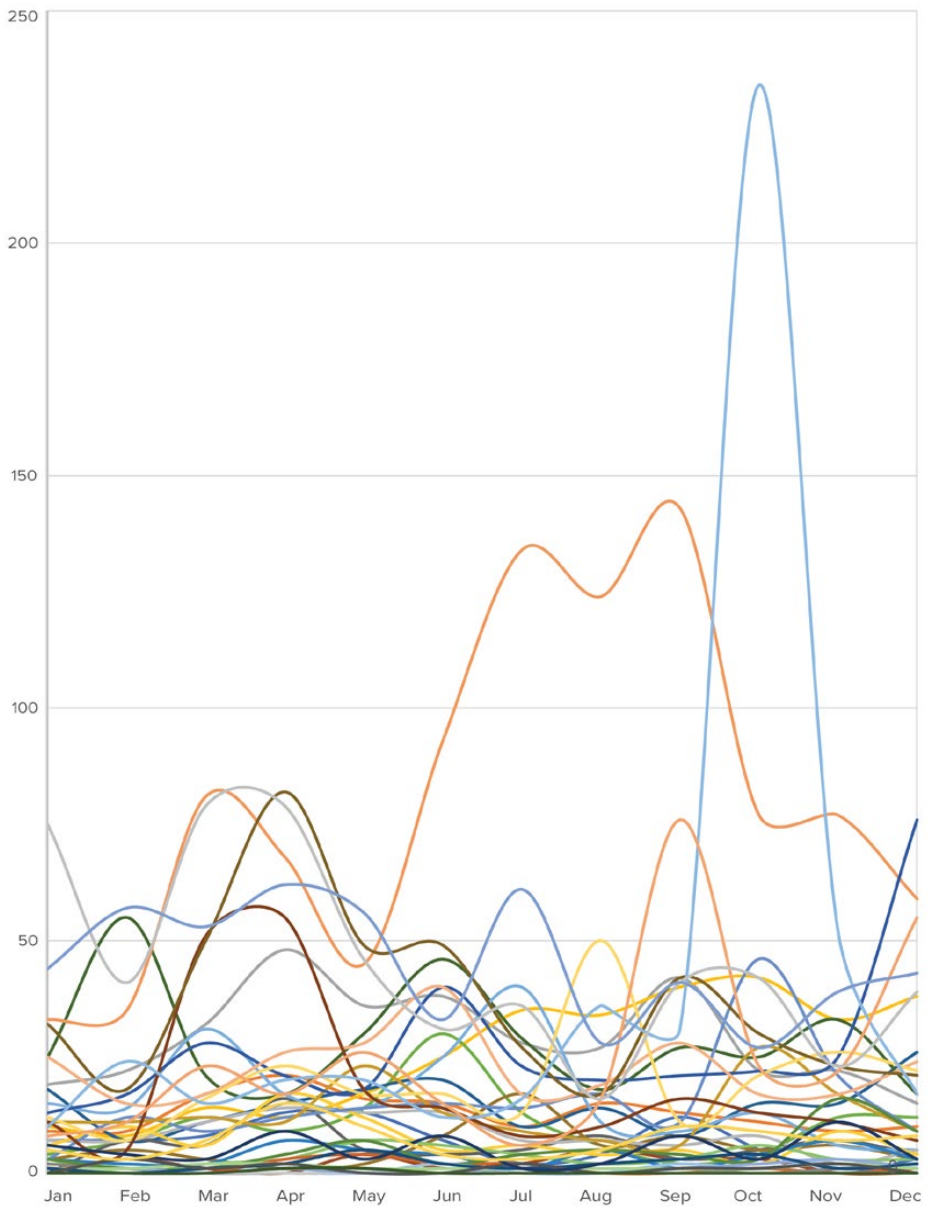
# Media Coverage by Month

WARNING — these next charts are hypnotizing. The first shows the median media coverage by month and sector. The second shows the variety of media tempos that individual (and anonymized) organizations carried out through the year.





Media Coverage by Month & Sector



Media Coverage for All 40 Organizations by Month  
(Anonymous)



# Headlines!

- 1. 'Tis the season.** US Poverty organizations reach peak national media coverage in November and then descend in December. Their December numbers are still higher than the first 10 months of the year. Looking across sectors, it's surprising to see every sector we analyzed decline in December news coverage during a month when nonprofit development teams are hustling for end-of-year fundraising. 
- 2. January hibernation.** At the start of the year, it takes most organizations a month or two to warm up their press engines. Is this a symptom of too many holiday parties getting in the way of New Year press planning? Or is January just a no-good time for nonprofits to break through in the news? Our press teams bantered back-and-forth about why news coverage is significantly lower in January and February and never could reach an answer based on evidence. So our best Girls Scout advice to you is to be prepared and make a sturdy January press strategy before you go on vacation at the end of the year. There's a gap there your organization may be able to fill. 
- 3. Nepal and Syria.** The two largest international stories of the year (the Nepal earthquake in the spring and the Syrian refugee crisis in the fall) are clear to see in the International line. Without those extreme news moments, news coverage for International organizations is more in line with Health and Environmental organizations. 
- 4. Turtle bumps are better than rabbit jumps.** With the exception of two outliers when we look at the 40 organizations independently, we see the organizations that had the most media results in a year are the ones that secured media hits all year long. They may take a one month on, one month off approach or be steady the whole year through. Numerically speaking, a sustainable press strategy is what counts in the end more than media spikes. When it comes to reaching organizational outcomes, we've found a sustainable strategy is what counts in the end too. 

# Prominence in Media Coverage (AKA percentage of media coverage that is featured)

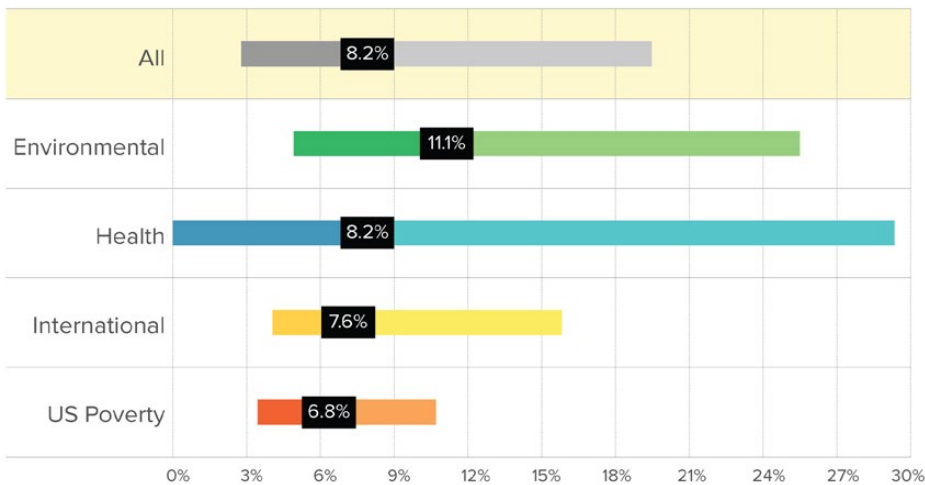
One of the most important measurements when determining the impact of media is how prominent an organization is in a news article or broadcast segment.

We read through every media result the 40 organizations received in 2015 to decide if the organization was “featured” or merely “mentioned” in the story.

To be “featured” the organization or something the organization was doing was the reason for the story’s existence. Featured hits were often about a nonprofit’s program on-the-ground or a new report they were releasing. Featured hits also usually named the organization in the headline or opening paragraphs of the story.





On the other hand, stories marked as “mentioned” usually involved the organization being a source or providing a quote for a broader story that a reporter was writing.

Prominence in Media Coverage by Sector





## Headlines!

- 1. You don't always have to be the star.** Across all sectors we analyzed, fewer than 1-in-10 news stories featured an organization. The overall Prominence Ratio (# Feature Hits / # Total Hits) for the organizations in the Study is 8.15%. That may strike you as low. It feels right to us and underscores how few opportunities there actually are to secure a feature story. 
- 2. Putting the mensch in mentions.** There's a ton of value and honor when an organization is mentioned and not featured in a news story. Commenting on new medical research or the situation on the ground in India or New Orleans can be a big boost to your organizational press outcomes (Advocacy, Awareness, Fundraising). Yes, feature stories are great. But take some advice from T-Boz: Don't skip your chance to be mentioned in a story because you're too busy chasing waterfalls. 
- 3. Environmental orgs lead the Prominence pack.** Maybe it's because they can push out news about a range of topics. Maybe it's because climate change was finally hot in 2015. Or maybe it's because they are investing more energy in swinging for the feature hits. Whatever it is, the Enviro groups we studied win the Prominence MVP trophy this year for their 11.14% Prominence Ratio. 
- 4. Carol of the bells.** Wow there are a lot of national feature stories about holiday bell-ringers. Fun fact for your next holiday soirée. Plus, something for your nonprofit press shop to keep in mind as you're aiming for your feature story. You have to take an honest and creative look at what makes your org newsworthy this year (or year after year). 

## Editors Note

- 1. US Poverty regional disadvantage.** Similar to the findings in the total media hits section, US Poverty would likely have higher Prominence rates if this Study included more regional news outlets. Calling all US Poverty groups: You have an opportunity to raise up your regional stories to a national audience. You have personal stories and compelling data about the communities you serve that the national media should report on (and in our experience is thirsty to report on).

# Outcomes of Media Coverage

As we come to the end, let's look around at the outcomes and impact of all these nonprofit media hits. There are 3 common types of outcomes that we used to categorize press hits:

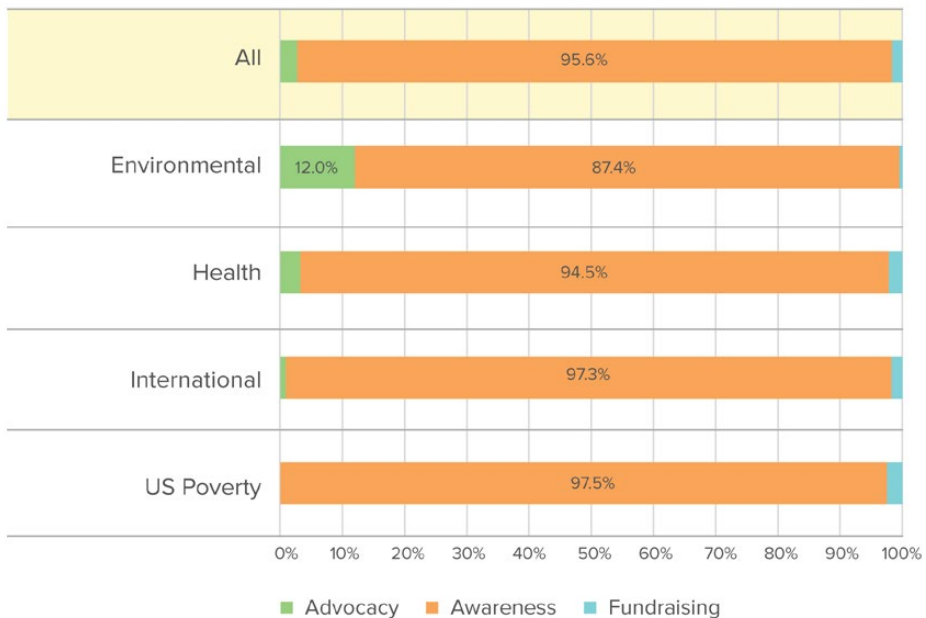
**Advocacy:** A news story that shines a light on an organization's call to action or cause that is aimed at changing a governmental, corporate, or individual's position or policy.

**Awareness:** A news story that raises the public's (or a segment of the public's) awareness of an organizational brand, spokesperson, program or cause.




**Fundraising:** A news story that directly connects to an organization's fundraising effort or goals. Usually these are about a benefit or disaster support.

By raising awareness of your issue or brand there's of course a good chance that your Awareness press hits are also aiding your Advocacy and Fundraising outcomes. But without behind-the-scenes access to nonprofit communications plans, we can't say for certain. So to avoid the murky metrics, we played by the rules and sorted the clips using the definitions above.

Outcomes of Media Coverage by Sector



## Headlines!

- 1. Don't be afraid to make the ask.** Nonprofit fundraisers are trained to always make the direct ask. You won't get what you want if you don't ask for it. Judging by the low low low Advocacy and Fundraising media outcomes, nonprofit press secretaries may need the same ask training. Looking at the Outcomes chart, we see a big opportunity for organizations to take an extra messaging step when talking with reporters. When you have their attention and are talking about your issue and programs, if there is an action or change you seek from a policymaker or corporation or donor – then do the world a favor and ask for it. Don't expect the reporter who is writing a news or trends piece to connect the Advocacy or Fundraising dots in the end because statistically, we see that they won't. 
- 2. About 1-in-10 Environmental hits has an Advocacy media outcome.** It's encouraging to see that one sector did frequently cross the bridge from Awareness to Advocacy. 
- 3. About 1-in-40 US Poverty hits has a Fundraising media outcome.** This year's Study can be harsh at times on US Poverty organizations so we're happy to shine a light on their comparable success at getting press coverage that ties back to fundraising and donation drives. 

## Editors Note

- 1. Advocacy double-take.** Yes, we were surprised at every sector's low Advocacy rates but we couldn't believe US Poverty sector's median of zero Advocacy hits during a year when inequality and the minimum wage made so many headlines. So we double-checked and read through all the US Poverty articles again looking for examples of organizations calling for change. While we were at it, we went ahead and even re-read the Health clips looking for more examples of orgs calling for appropriations for medical research and International clips looking for more examples of orgs pushing the UN or USAID to take action. The low Advocacy numbers are accurate.



A photograph of a long, arched trellis structure covered in dense foliage, primarily green with some yellowing leaves, suggesting autumn. The trellis forms a tunnel-like path leading towards a distant, ornate archway. The ground is covered in fallen leaves. The text "The Light at the End" is overlaid in white serif font in the center of the image.

# The Light at the End



The goal of your nonprofit media relations is not to fill up a fat happy clip book at the end of the year to pass around at your board meeting. There are many other measures that mean more than totals. Pay attention to the placements that matter most to your cause and organization and see how other groups are doing in them. That's how you get a clearer view of where you need to focus.

Here are six questions to ask yourself and your teams as you look back to compare your results with the Mediamarks and look forward to the impact you will make with your media this year:

1. Which outlets are in your tunnel — and which aren't?
2. What type of media do the most and least of our hits come from?
3. When in the year are there gaps in our media coverage?
4. What is our organization's Prominence Ratio?
5. What is the ratio of our Advocacy, Awareness and Fundraising hits?
6. Are we asking loud or clear enough for the change or action we seek?

If you work at an organization that we monitored for this year's Mediamarks Study and want to see your numbers close-up, we'd love to geek out and look at charts through the microscope with you. Email [mediamarks@mrss.com](mailto:mediamarks@mrss.com) and we'll set up a time to chat.





# Appendix

# Glossary of Terms

**Antelope Canyon:** Located on Navajo land, Antelope Canyon is a geological wonder whose tunneling paths continue to be formed by flash floods.

**Broadcast:** A news story that appears on television or radio. Even though some Broadcast hits air again on affiliate stations, we only count a Broadcast story once.

**Carpal Tunnel:** More than 3 million Americans suffer from this pain and tingling in the hand each year. Stretch your wrists each day to prevent carpal tunnel by holding the palms of your hands together in front of your chest and then sliding them downward.

**Chunnel:** Also known as the Channel Tunnel, this 31.4-mile, partially underwater tunnel links Folkestone, Kent, in the United Kingdom, with Coquelles, Pas-de-Calais, in northern France.

**Environmental Organizations:** Nonprofits focused on conserving the Earth and saving us from the perils of climate change that have annual budgets between \$50 million to \$500 million.

**Featured:** An organization is considered “Featured” in a news story if the story quotes someone from the organization or spotlights an organization’s programs and/or advocacy work.

**Fushimi Inari-taisha:** A millennium old shrine in Japan that features a 4 kilometer tunneled stretch of bright orange torii pillars.

**Health Organizations:** Nonprofits focused on disease and wellness that have annual budgets between \$50 million to \$500 million.

**International Organizations:** Nonprofits focused on global poverty and development that have annual budgets between \$50 million to \$500 million.

**Magazine:** An old-fashioned object made out of tree pulp that is usually published less frequently than Newspapers. Again, a “Magazine” media hit likely appeared online but we only count it once and label it “Magazine.”

**Media Coverage:** The news articles and broadcast segments that mention or feature organizations. It's usually expressed as a number in a given amount of time like a month or year.

**Media Impact:** The difference that a news article or broadcast segment makes in the real world.

**Median:** The middle value in a range of values. (Note: "Median" is not the same as "Mean," which would be the average.)

**M+R Benchmarks Study:** A decade-strong annual study that details digital advocacy and fundraising trends among nonprofits. Occasionally it is in 3D.

**Nate Silver:** A baseball-loving political junkie statistical fortune-teller who founded [fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com), which is currently licensed by ESPN and used to live on [NYTimes.com](http://NYTimes.com).

**Newspaper:** A media hit is categorized as 'Newspaper' in Mediamarks if it appeared in the classic print version of the outlet. Because it's 2016, the media hit also likely appeared online. But we only count it once and label it "Newspaper." Also, an old-fashioned object made out of tree pulp that inspired the classic Christian Bale film *Newsies*.

**Nexis:** An online research service that collects the media hits of most major U.S. and global news publications.

**Online:** A news story that only appears online. There are a few outlets like CNN.com, New York Times Blogs, and Washington Post Blogs in our search that distinguish between their Online and Newspaper/Broadcast pieces. These media hits are marked as Online.

**Outcomes – Advocacy:** When a news story shines a light on an organization's call to action or cause that is aimed at changing a governmental, corporate, or individual's position or policy.

**Outcomes – Awareness:** When a news story raises the public's (or a segment of the public's) awareness of an organizational brand, spokesperson, program or cause.



**Outcomes – Fundraising:** When a news story is directly tied to the fundraising effort of an organization. This is often seen after natural disasters but also during key fundraising moments of the calendar year.

**Prominence Ratio:** The degree that an organization is featured in a news article or broadcast segment. An organization's number of Featured media hits divided by its total number of media hits. The median Prominence Ratio for organizations in Mediamarks 2016 is 8.15%

**Tunnel Top:** A bar on top of the Stockton Street tunnel a few blocks away from M+R's San Francisco office that serves fresh watermelon gimlets and has a stage for trombone bands.

**US Poverty Organizations:** Nonprofits focused on domestic poverty, hunger, and inequality that have annual budgets between \$50 million to \$500 million.

**Washington, DC Metro:** The brutalist designed public transit system serving the nation's capitol has 50 miles of underground tunnel tracks. See also: Fireballs, 2016.

**Wire:** A news story that is distributed and published at many media outlets at once. Even though many Wire media hits appear syndicated in hundreds of outlets, we only count a Wire story once.

## News outlets included in the 2016 Mediamarks Study:



Bloomberg

The Boston Globe

CBS NEWS

Chicago Tribune

THE CHRISTIAN  
SCIENCE MONITOR



COSMOPOLITAN



Forbes



GLAMOUR



Los Angeles Times

Mashable

THE MCCLATCHY COMPANY

Mother Jones



National Journal



NBC NEWS

NEW REPUBLIC

The New York Times

THE NEW YORKER

Newsweek



POLITICO



SCIENTIFIC  
AMERICAN

Slate



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The Washington Post





