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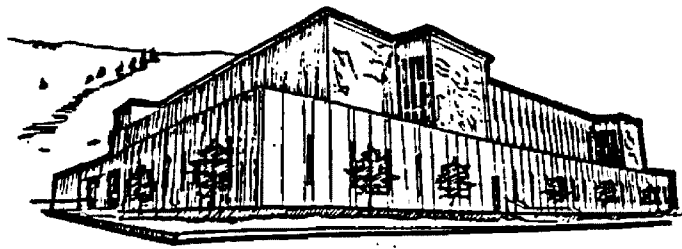
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University of
Montana

**Missoula Community Access Television (MCAT): Enhancing
Access for Nonprofit Organizations**

by

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B. A. Journalism

The Pennsylvania State University, 1972

Presented in partial fulfillment

for the Degree of

Master of Public Administration

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1992

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	iv
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	1
The difficulty of evaluating CATV	3
Purpose of Missoula Community Access Television	6
Problem statement	8
Publicity problems	9
Technical support problems	12
CHAPTER II - DISCUSSION: MCAT 2-year progress report	20
Evaluations by professionals	21
Public awareness	24
Technical support	29
CHAPTER III - OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	37
Expanding awareness	37
Volunteer support for staff	40
ENDNOTES	48
BIBLIOGRAPHY	50

APPENDICES	53
Appendix A - MCAT's purpose	53
Appendix B - Job descriptions for interns	55
GLOSSARY	59

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Problems of a community access television (CATV) station are seen as fitting into three broad categories: publicity about its mission and purpose and expanding public awareness in order to provide citizen access; technical problems requiring professional staffing; and inadequate funding to complete all desired activities.

Lack of clarity of Missoula Community Access Television's (MCAT) role and lack of use by local government and schools are explored. A dearth of precedents for a public organization such as MCAT provide continuing conflict of values between it and City Council.

Solutions proposed rely on utilizing local opportunities including The University of Montana's cooperative education internship program; tighter organization of a volunteer selection, retention, training and recognition program; and seeking additional funding from all levels of government, fundraising, and foundation grants.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This paper evaluates citizen access to Missoula Community Access Television (MCAT) to identify possible barriers to program access and production efficiency, especially in terms of meeting the needs of Missoula's nonprofit organizations. Two areas are investigated: publicity and public awareness and staff support. Solutions are offered to address problems found.

MCAT's publicity and staff technical support are first assessed, alternatives open to MCAT are then analyzed, and finally recommendations are made to resolve problems of access. Chapter II addresses the following questions:

- 1) What do staff members think could or should be changed?
 - 2) How is staff job performance affected by reliance upon a corps of volunteers?
 - 3) How are volunteers recruited, trained, and retained?
 - 4) How could the volunteer program be enhanced to provide better use of existing resources?
 - 5) Could more and better trained staff or college interns fill the need for technical support?
 - 6) How can publicity be enhanced?
- Chapter III discusses possible options and proposes solutions and recommendations based on the above analysis.

Participant observation was the primary means of information gathering. It included interviews, attendance at board and staff meetings, and participation in MCAT training (orientation, beginning editing, studio production, and advanced production workshops) as well as training conducted by other professional organization affiliated with MCAT.¹ All interviews and training occurred at MCAT unless otherwise indicated.

In order to evaluate MCAT in respect to its mandate of access, it was necessary to find exactly how and to whom it provides service. Videotapes produced by MCAT producers were examined for content. Analysis of videotapes showed which groups received air time. Statistics were compiled on who uses MCAT facilities and how often. Data compared how many people who begin a production actually cablecast one. Documents reviewed included MCAT's guidelines, procedures, policies, programming schedules, staff priorities, equipment inventories and rental fees. Individuals and groups interviewed included members of MCAT's fifteen-person Board of Directors, its three staff members, contracted trainers, volunteers, independent producers creating promotions for nonprofit organizations (NPOs), producers currently videotaping or editing, or who have already cablecast their works, and those trained who have not yet produced a video.

Participant observation was made possible by attending producer training at MCAT, producing a video promotion for

Missoula Foodbank, and planning a production of publicity video material for MCAT. Firsthand observation and direct involvement are two strengths of the participant observer technique. Detailed notes taken throughout the process serve to document meetings and interviews with other participants. Direct contact and working relationships were established with key participants, including the paid staff.

Limitations of the participant observer technique include susceptibility to inaccurate or selective data and the tendency to rely on deduction rather than documentation when drawing conclusions. However, the risks were minimized by deliberate efforts to avoid these pitfalls through consulting with co-workers at MCAT and ensuring a diversity of roles and relationships to MCAT among the interviewees. An attempt was made to select from both ends of the spectrum of skilled versus unskilled producer/user. Because of controversy and lack of consensus among the various community elements involved, direct quotes have been used in an attempt at accurate portrayal of viewpoints.

The difficulty of evaluating CATV

Evaluating community access television (CATV) is problematic. CATV cannot be fairly evaluated using standards of either commercial television or the national Corporation for Public Broadcasting, since CATV is qualitatively different than either. Nevertheless, an

assessment must be attempted to determine if the city taxpayers are getting their "money's worth" from MCAT.

Community access TV is like public television in that it does not try to profit by selling products. However, CATV is unlike public television in that access TV promotes experimental, expressive, or advocacy works which frequently lack polish or technical quality.² CATV operates as "do-it-yourself-television" for citizens. The established public broadcasting system spends more money and achieves higher technical production standards but eschews both political advocacy and avant garde works. Furthermore, unlike either commercial or public television, access television has additional goals including social equity and enhancing First Amendment rights to freedom of speech. Although social equity is not always easy to define, providing a citizen forum contributes to equal access.

Evaluating the quality of a citizen forum is challenging not only because of CATV's novelty, but because demarcating the role of access TV has been left to local communities to determine. Thus, methods of evaluating CATV stations are relative to the community served. Therefore, analysis of barriers to access will consider citizens' reactions to the technology of the medium itself as well as evaluations by other professional video producers and the City Council.

MCAT's evaluation by Missoula City Council members

is relevant because the Council finances MCAT.³ Members differ in their appraisals of MCAT. In fact the Council is now trying to define standards for evaluating its community access television station. According to City Councilman and TV Cable Committee Co-chair Bob Hermes, Nielsen ratings found MCAT's viewership was only five households per quarter hour. The Missoulian implied in 1991 that this was unsatisfactory for Missoula's cable viewership of 15,000 households, but Hermes expressed apparent satisfaction. Council Cable TV Committeeman Doug Harrison and other Council members would also like to see a "broader appeal" in programming.⁴

The local news media have given scant coverage, except for The Missoulian, which has been increasingly critical. A second scathing editorial in two years castigated MCAT on grounds chiefly of small viewership; but it also advocated that MCAT's funds be spent "in accord with community priorities [i.e., voted out of general funds each year]." The editorial also chided MCAT for providing individual, but not public benefits, and disparaged some of the 878 local productions MCAT has produced as being "of dubious merit."⁵ The same criticisms might be made of both commercial TV and public network TV. The newspaper lacks a clear definition of what constitutes success for CATV, and this affects public perception.

A lack of consensus among viewers, Council, and MCAT is creating confusion over what MCAT's charter means by independent. The Council apparently is evaluating content, whereas MCAT guides itself by its impartial process, as its charter directs. MCAT's process makes it independent of Council's priorities and biases. The process is first-come, first-served; MCAT does not recruit producers. This is how MCAT interprets its dictate of neutrality.

The City Council wants to give MCAT independence, but also wants it to influence program content. MCAT officials point out that city residents are accountable for content of both individual programs and overall channel content. The Council's desires could be met for broadening program interest while also reaching more viewers and filling available airtime, if the many nonprofit organizations in Missoula each produced only one hour of programming a year.⁶ However, actively motivating a group must be distinguished from merely providing access.

Purpose of Missoula Community Access Television

Community access television originated as a means of compensating citizens for a cable company's monopoly in an area.⁷ The U.S. Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 stipulated that cities may charge fees for granting cable franchises. Under such an arrangement, MCAT began cablecasting in April 1990.⁸

The Missoula City Council funds and oversees MCAT through its Cable Television Committee, but charters MCAT to operate and manage independently.⁹ The original reason for its independence was to "keep politics out of MCAT" (that is, not to make MCAT a servant of city government).¹⁰

According to its charter, MCAT is to be a neutral provider of access to programming, i.e., MCAT may not initiate particular programs. As Executive Director Randal L. (Randy Ammon observed, MCAT's obligation is to be only a conduit of citizen-produced material: "We at MCAT have to be careful about playing programmer."¹¹ MCAT neither produces nor promotes programs, and has no method of establishing priority for any production. For instance, a program of interest to a large interest group, e.g., parents or the elderly, would receive the same priority as one with narrower interest, such as an art or religious program. Ron Wheeler, two-year Chairman of MCAT's Board of Directors, argues that MCAT's job is to "narrowcast" or telecast to narrow segments of the population which might not be represented by other media.¹² Thus, large audiences are not necessary. Instead, diversity is sought so that each narrow segment of viewers can find a niche.

MCAT cannot choose programs, but it tries to be aware of viewers' interests; MCAT documents all phone calls about programming and complaints about programs of narrow interest. Viewers' comments on programs average

approximately one call per day. However, MCAT has not televised programs explicitly telling viewers about its limited role of authority or citizens' responsibility to determine programming by producing programs themselves. MCAT has provided little publicity about what its charter specifies, or more meaningfully, what it does not specify. The community is accountable for station program content, explained Assistant Director Mary Canty. "MCAT is about local control and community expression. It is the community's duty to define what MCAT is rather than staff's."¹³ Chairman Ron Wheeler believes CATV should be an "electronic soapbox," like radio call-in shows, where many citizens have a voice.¹⁴

Under its charter, MCAT can make no editorial decisions about a program, such as whether it is of professional quality or too "amateurish," or whether it will appeal to a majority of viewers.¹⁵ MCAT has only three criteria for its productions: they may not be commercial, obscene (as judged by community standards), or incite immediate violence.¹⁶

Problem Statement

There are two major barriers to program access and production effectiveness: (1) lack of publicity, (2) adequacy of staff technical support. Each of these are described below. Emphasis is placed on correcting more

immediate problems of awareness or technical support. Lack of sufficient funding is crucial to both other issues, but is discussed here only tangentially, as it is an area which warrants another entire study.

Publicity problems

Because the City of Missoula owns MCAT facilities, community custody of the station presumes equality of access. Overall citizen involvement in MCAT is great: one of every forty-eight Missoulians has taken production training.¹⁷ MCAT's users run the gamut from the arts community, environmentalists and churches to political commentators and advocates.

Yet certain groups may not be getting the message that access is open to them. Problems of equity arise if individuals or groups experience barriers to programming, either because they are unaware of the service, or are not technically proficient in using it. MCAT's publicity affects who learns how to make programs. This evaluation considers publicity as a requisite to access.

As a new organization, MCAT has spent more time training new producers than in outreach to community groups.¹⁸ Demand for services continues to be overwhelming and training has always been first-come, first-served. By April 1992, over 900 persons had been trained to use the Portapak camera equipment in group workshops, over two-

thirds of them within MCAT's first year.¹⁹ Most producers trained represented citizen groups; however, no records have been kept on who represented a group and who came on individual volition. MCAT's original mailing list had 500-600 organizations listed. This list was comprised of groups that had indicated an interest or requested being put on the list.²⁰

MCAT has not yet taken time to conduct outreach or publicity programs to specifically inform Missoula non-profit organizations how they may use the equipment to produce their own programs. However MCAT recently announced it will set up special training for groups which request it.²¹ MCAT's on-air Bulletin Board includes brief public service announcements (PSAs) in the form of printed text scrolling over the screen, informing viewers that equipment and training are available. Although the message is seen visually, it is not explained audibly, as a voice-over reading the script. Repeating the message on the auditory channel would increase its exposure.

MCAT has been the object of press headlines but has not attempted a publicity campaign to influence opinion in its favor. Occasionally a producer puts an announcement in The Missoulian's "Around Town" column, announcing an upcoming telecast of his/her program.

During the monthly TV Cable Committee report to the full Council, City Council allows MCAT only three minutes

for a report. When Council meetings are telecast, three minutes per month does not allow either viewers or Council to hear much about MCAT's operations.

Other MCAT publicity includes the weekly Telecast Schedule, distributed at City Hall, which lists producers and topics, but gives little explanation or critique. The public may visit MCAT during office hours to view programs as they are televised on studio monitors. The public may also view programs in-studio for a week before and a week after the programs are cablecast. Tapes may be borrowed free of charge to city residents to take home overnight; however, tapes are seldom requested.

Viewers who subscribe to TCI cable automatically receive MCAT programs and thus are exposed to the range of groups using MCAT. However, many cable viewers do not receive the MCAT signal because their cable carrier refuses to provide it. In the Rattlesnake area, the SATCOM cable company (Cable Montana) is operating a de facto franchise in defiance of City regulations. SATCOM has not signed a contract with the city, as TCI has done, to pay the franchise fee and carry the public access station. Thus, those cable households have been eliminated from MCAT's range.²²

Sometimes groups are simply overlooked. For example, a live call-in program from Council Chambers on May 6, 1992, sponsored by the Missoula Redevelopment Authority (MRA) was

announced in the weekly Schedule without printing the phone number for viewers to call during the live program. MCAT viewers received the message on their screens about how to call in, but Missoula residents not wired for MCAT could not get the message via TV. Important City issues can not be left to only those hooked into cable. In this case, the City rather than MCAT should be held responsible for publicity; this is another area of confusion which needs definition by the two parties.

Technical support problems

Evaluating access demands a more qualitative method than simply using numerical indicators such as Nielsen ratings or even the percentage of residents trained, to indicate success. Metaphors can be used in a qualitative study to describe aspects of MCAT's purpose. MCAT can be described as a library for equipment which patrons can check out free of charge. But analogy to an interstate highway system may clarify MCAT's larger task of instructing citizens in a new technology. A vast network exists to serve citizens, but the maze requires a vehicle to navigate it, as well as a map. MCAT is providing "cars" to citizens for access to the network, but the maps may need larger print or more detail, or citizens may need "driving lessons."

Staff provides technical support by facilitating in a hands-off manner. MCAT provides camera equipment at no charge to any city resident who has completed its free three-hour orientation and entry-level Portapak camera training class. Upon class completion, prospective producers may sign out and borrow video production equipment overnight. A more advanced, smaller class trains producers on how to use the stationary equipment in-studio. Another class on use of remote equipment has trained people to use the Remote Unit housed at Missoula City Hall.

For editing training, a second basic three-hour class train people in the use of editing equipment. After this class, producers may use Edit Suite 1, less technically complicated than Edit Suite 2. Edit Suite 2 requires another three-hour orientation and advanced training session. However, only the basics are covered in even "advanced" classes. A producer's lack of skill in camera work usually necessitates more editing later. Producers with hours of raw footage vie for access to editing equipment, which is scarcer than camera equipment.

Other disadvantages to overusing editing equipment are that it is more expensive than cameras for MCAT to purchase, more complicated and more easily broken.²³ It would be more economical to avoid unnecessary wear on editing equipment. At present, there is no system of assigning tutors or seasoned volunteers to those needing more help.

Consequently, producers complain of the bottleneck waiting for or using the editing suites.

One barrier to access, therefore, is obtaining training or guidance for amateur producers. Much time and frustration can be involved in producers' self-teaching. Frequently no staff person is on-duty when the Editing Studio is scheduled before 11:00 a.m. or after 5:00 p.m., although office hours have been extended since MCAT opened. In addition, a co-assistant director was hired in 1991 to job-share one forty-hour per week FTE with the assistant director, who was contracted for thirty hours a week during MCAT's first year.

On-duty volunteers are not required to understand editing equipment; their main purpose is clerical, answering the phone and checking out equipment. Sometimes the equipment malfunctions or videotapes are faulty. Tapes are signed out to users for the duration of their production, then re-used. This heavy use, in itself, could account for tape malfunctions.²⁴ Because of the technical nature of the process, it is difficult for the novice to pinpoint the cause of many production problems. Lack of an on-staff engineer means broken equipment is not repaired.²⁵ Technical support includes both functioning equipment and instruction in how to use it.

Staff has been strained in meeting public demand for training so far; demand was about four times greater than

anticipated.²⁶ MCAT's contract with the City mandates only two producer training classes per year. During its first year, however, MCAT held one class per week.²⁷ Unable to continue that pace, MCAT has cut class frequency to one every month or two. Hiring more staff would be helpful, but MCAT is already projecting at least \$12,000 over budget this fiscal year if expenses continue at the current rate. Staff consists of only two paid staff full-time equivalents (FTEs). Any budget deficit will either come out of next year's appropriation, or MCAT must somehow raise money to cover the difference.²⁸ Because most of MCAT's operations are staffed by volunteers now, it would be difficult to cut personnel expenses, the largest budget expenditure.

Along with publicity, technical support is pivotal to citizen access to local TV. The next chapter expands on these two areas.

ENDNOTES

1. For example, training recently sponsored by the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers (NFLCP). This voluntary group of CATV stations and independent producers' purpose is to share ideas and experience. The September 9, 1991 NFLCP conference in Missoula for CATV operators in the Northwest was sponsored by MCAT, a member station.

2. The medium of CATV was mandated by the FCC in 1972. The Supreme Court in 1979 reversed that ruling. Providing access was no longer required, but cable companies volunteered to provide community access to cities in exchange for local franchises.

3. The City of Missoula budgets \$100,000 per year to MCAT from the City's fee of five percent of Tele-Communications Inc. (TCI's) gross profits. TCI is one of two cable companies serving the Missoula area. City Council has stipulated that a cable company must agree to a fee used to provide a community access station in order to be granted franchise and right-of-way to lay cable. TCI was required to provide twelve miles of cable and one quarter of a million dollars worth of equipment to MCAT. In addition, MCAT receives use of one channel and \$100,000 per year of the 5% of TCI's gross profits. This means all households which have a TCI hook-up receive MCAT, approximately 15,000 residences.

4. The Missoulian, "MCAT Calls Its First Year A Success," March 31, 1991. At the rate of 20 households per hour or 500 households per day, in a year every household would have viewed only one hour of MCAT. Councilman Harrison interprets this figure as indicating narrow interest in MCAT.

5. "Let's Count the Viewers, Before Getting More Money MCAT Should Explain Why," The Missoulian, June 8, 1992, A:4. Note that the editorial erroneously stated that MCAT funds are taken from a fee "added to bills of cable customers." The bind is that the FCC lets the 5 percent fee be skimmed off cable profits, but lets cable companies pass the fee on to consumers. This is the crux of the whole controversy over deregulation of cable TV rates.

6. Mary Canty, MCAT Assistant Director, interview, April 20, 1991.

7. Under Public Law 98-549, Section 611 (the 1984 U.S. Cable Communications Policy Act or Cable Reorganization Act) the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)'s Effective Competition Rule defines a cable company as a monopoly if it lacks competition from at least six other companies. Where a cable monopoly exists, the city is authorized to charge a franchise fee in exchange for allowing cable to be laid along city right-of-way. One way these fees have been used is to provide alternative programming via community access television. Cable companies are natural monopolies because only one cable company can profitably run a cable to a location.

8. Technically, a cable program is cablecast, not broadcast, since the signal goes through not air, but cable.

9. See Appendix A for the text. The Agreement change in 1994 when MCAT's five-year charter expires. The charter negotiated between a city government and its local CATV station may vary greatly from one city to another. For example, Billings earmarks funds received from its cable provider for street repair. None of the funds are used to purchase video equipment or advisory assistance for citizens to use in producing cable programs. At the other extreme, some CATV stations are set up as divisions of the city government and their city governing boards fund the station to do specific tasks. For example, Spokane contracts with its CATV station to produce public information programs such as specials on local parks and recreation programs.

10. Doug Harrison, City Council Cable TV Committee member, interview April 23, 1992. But in practice, Doug Harrison states, "people tend to stay on the MCAT Board indefinitely." His implication is that the Board members develop power by staying on. He implies they become entrenched, thus reducing the City's influence over them. Mr. Harrison would like to see more "variety" and turnover of Board members. Harrison betrays ignorance of the purpose of CATV and MCAT's contract when he muses, "I wonder if it's the City's job to make sure MCAT represents diverse interests. Maybe it should appeal to more broad-based community ideas."

11. Randy Ammon, MCAT Executive Director, interview November 7, 1991. MCAT has been criticized for its hands-off approach to programming, yet Ammon believes that citizens do not understand its purpose. Ammon was hired partly because he had 15 years' experience with CATV and had dealt with challenges to Constitutional First Amendment freedoms.

12. MCAT Board Chair Ron Wheeler, interview in The Missoulian, "Soap Box TV," April 20, 1990, E-4:1. Ammon echoes this sentiment, "We're not censors at MCAT." The issue of MCAT creating, sponsoring, or favoring a program is important because MCAT is forbidden from performing any of these actions.

13. Mary Canty, op. cit.

14. The Missoulian, op. cit., April 20, 1990. "MCAT is democracy in action," Mr. Wheeler told The Missoulian.

15. "Audience share" is a moot point at present because MCAT's time allotted exceeds available programs to be cablecast. According to Mary Candy, "If every producer organization did one program per month, it would fill up the programming time available."

16. MCAT Producer's Handbook 1990. According to Wheeler, MCAT's liberalism would permit telecasting of hate speech, if a local producer chose to submit such material. So far, no one has attempted to do so.

17. Randy Ammon, MCAT Second Year Annual Report, May 13, 1992.

18. "MCAT Calls Its First Year A Success," The Missoulian, March 31, 1991.

19. MCAT Statistics Sheet March 1992.

20. Randy Ammon, MCAT Office discussion, April 24, 1992. Ammon says a needs assessment was done before MCAT was inaugurated to determine which groups could benefit from community access TV. However, "the document has been misplaced," he said. The findings had been used as rationale for securing the Agreement with Council that created MCAT. The original mailing list apparently reflected findings of the needs assessment. MCAT produced a mass mailing right after it opened in 1990, to solicit volunteers for producer training. In 1992, MCAT mailed notices of advanced production workshops to producers who had already been through Orientation and Portapak training. The demand for training is now so great that new producers are not solicited for training and mailings are not required to fill classes.

21. Randy Ammon, MCAT's Second Anniversary Party, live broadcast June 4, 1992.

22. Problems between the City Council Cable TV Committee and SATCOM (which owns and operates Cable Montana) are

beyond the scope of this paper. However, a resolution of those problems would both provide more funding for Missoula's CATV station and would put the station's signal in 7,400 more homes.

Some groups are left out for reasons beyond MCAT's control. Many potential viewers lack awareness of MCAT because they do not subscribe to cable and thus do not receive MCAT's signal. Only sixty percent of the houses in Missoula are on cable. Besides TCI, three other companies run cable in Missoula; none of them offer a "basic" or lower tier package at a lesser rate. The Cable Act of 1984 effectively removed all federal cable rate regulation. Many lower income people are kept out by the City's lack of rate regulation.

23. Will Wood interview, May 1, 1992. Mr. Wood explained that like many would-be producers, he has not found the extra time to edit his tape footage. Editing is extremely time consuming, and many MCAT volunteers give up on finishing their work.

24. Lori Hudak, MCAT co-Assistant Director, interview, April 21, 1992. Equipment has been found to be faulty, for example, the video monitor in Editing Suite 1, which becomes distorted after several hours' use. MCAT recently paid an engineer \$500 to re-wire editing equipment which had malfunctioned since being installed hastily by a video equipment company just before it went out of business.

25. Temi Rose interview, April, 13, 1992. MCAT hires Ms. Rose on contract to train people in studio production.

26. All staff and Board members agreed on this point. Ammon interview, op. cit. Wheeler interview, op. cit. Staff persons interviewed also agreed on the need for more staff. Canty interview, op. cit. Ammon interview, ibid. Ron Wheeler interview, ibid.

27. "MCAT Calls Its First Year A Success," The Missoulian, March 31, 1991.

28. Will Wood interview, op. cit. MCAT has since made plans to ask City Council for an increased appropriation, based on a service area enlarged by city annexations.

CHAPTER II - DISCUSSION

MCAT two year progress report

Trying to be a neutral agent in respect to programming may be misunderstood by viewers or by government officials who fund MCAT.¹ For example, viewers wrongly perceive the purpose of MCAT as being like commercial TV when they call in and want MCAT to "cover an event or story." MCAT does not produce programs, cover news, nor recommend that callers contact particular producers to request such coverage, although MCAT staff does post such requests on a studio bulletin board. (Most producers are not at MCAT every day, and chances are they may not see the bulletin board.)

MCAT's daily average cablecasting time is six and one-half hours, 27% of available time on its dedicated channel (channel 7). Most programming (56%) is locally produced.² The League of Women Voters is one of only two secular group that provide regular programming to MCAT. "Labor Vision," a monthly live call-in, continued after a successful pilot program in January 1992. The only other group sponsoring a regular program is a church offering "Open Door Baptist." All other regular locally produced programs are produced by individuals, including "Planet Waves," produced by Paul Harte, which has run weekly for several months; "Raw

Footage" by Athol Frumpley; and "Beer Talk," a program on home brewing by Neal Leathers and Brad Robinson.³ MCAT has been fortunate that its producers have created original works with appeal to a divergent, if not broad, audience.

MCAT's neutrality has caused it to be both criticized and praised. City Council's Doug Harrison has been a vocal Cable TV Committee member regarding MCAT. He expressed the same guarded optimism which The Missoulian reported in 1991. "MCAT is moving along, and [should not be judged prematurely because it] still has time to go [before its contract expires]. It [MCAT] is doing what it needs to do; it just needs more time."⁴

Evaluations by professionals

Viewers form opinions of MCAT based on what they see; public officials may form opinions based on demands of constituents. By contrast, professionals in CATV and broadcasting may judge MCAT by what it has attempted, as well as what it has actually achieved. According to Dave Wilson, Director of the University of Montana Telecommunications Center:

MCAT is a learning lab and has made a gargantuan effort to do everything. However, community access TV will always be spotty--there will be peaks and troughs. You can't force volunteers to make programs. They do it at their own pace. But if people were paid, MCAT would not be as open as it is. It allows the inexperienced to come in.

Public network-linked stations get more money, but CATV is more responsive at the local level.⁵

Wilson contrasted local stations like MCAT, which "just turn over the airwaves to the public," to public TV with a larger budget attached to Congressional "strings." Wilson has been involved with telecasting several special programs on MCAT live from The University of Montana (UM) Performing Arts/Radio and TV Building.⁶ "No local station can do everything on its own, but MCAT tries to, and should be credited for that," he said. He explained that public TV has a network to help stations, but CATV stations are on their own. CATV can perform vital functions which the existing public TV network cannot or will not.

McCarthy Coyle, founder of MCAT's mentor organization, Montanans for Quality Television (MQTV), agrees that community television is crucial, especially in a state as geographically remote and spread out as Montana.⁷ MCAT is also useful to public advocacy in exchanging programming with sister stations belonging to the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers (NFLCP).

Pete Talbot, who has served as a panel member for MCAT advanced production workshops, concludes that MCAT is evolving and developing:

MCAT is a model of a community access station for the Northwest. The process of defining and verbalizing standards for itself will clarify MCAT's direction as it moves out of its infancy and into maturity. MCAT's main mission so far has been training. Now its role may change to one of

creating more professionalism in producers and in its own image.⁸

However, Talbot, who produces video professionally, wishes MCAT had more of an "elite" or better trained group of producers:

If I were managing MCAT, I'd start cutting back on getting the masses involved and focus on a smaller core of quality producers to produce more polished programming. I think MCAT has done an excellent job of getting a huge number of people from very different backgrounds involved in CATV. Now it's time to concentrate on those who show some dedication to the art, the equipment, and the staff. Certainly, MCAT should continue to initiate people to CATV, but at a much slower rate. MCAT should concentrate on producing unique, quality programming befitting, the evolution of the facility and its producers.⁹

Liz Gupton, a professional video/film producer, agrees that MCAT's training has been excellent, but sees an opposite viewpoint regarding "elitism" at MCAT:

It seems like the same people are making [similar] productions -- almost like it's a private setup. People who should be taking advantage of training are not being reached by ads in the paper. Perhaps the Chamber of Commerce could be involved in reaching groups so MCAT productions could have some fresh blood and rotate the opportunity to use the equipment.¹⁰

For example, MCAT's open-to-the-public workshops are not being used by neighborhood citizens' groups or grass roots organizations like Montana People's Action or Low Income Coalition. Although MCAT's purpose encourages diversity, "the politically disenfranchised have not used MCAT as I had thought they would," said MCAT Chair Wheeler.¹¹ MCAT has approached tribal members of the

Salish-Kootenai Confederation to produce Native American programming, so far without tangible results.

MCAT may have work to do in "affirmative action" toward minorities, but its existence alone provides an arena for minority voices. According to Nancy Maxson, President of the League of Women Voters, the public sphere becomes a reality in "free spaces" where citizens may discuss issues and witness government in action. MCAT has empowered an "electronic open space" for Missoula and these open spaces are in the public interest.¹²

Public Awareness

Access television was created to provide three types of access: public, governmental, and educational. MCAT's publicity was studied with respect to these categories. City Council and local school districts are, respectively, the local governmental and educational users of the facility. Since MCAT is funded through City Council, public relations with this entity is important.

Awareness: City Council and schools

Joan Christopherson, a member of MCAT's Board of Directors since its inception, comments that:

City Council has serious misperceptions about how MCAT operates. It's a measure of our low key publicity that the [four] awards won by MCAT producers in the 1992 International Wildlife Film Festival have not attracted much notice in

Missoula. MCAT is a model of community access for the Northwest, but is ignored at home.¹³

MCAT needs to publicize exactly how and why it is different. Stations like MCAT, funded by the 5% franchise fee, are relatively new; MCAT is only two years old. The public has become accustomed to having public TV produced by committees and boards. "[With the new medium of CATV] the public must now create its own programming. People need to get used to a new technology form; we need to help them."¹⁴

City Council members have different perceptions about MCAT. City Cable Committee Chair Bob Hermes has voiced support for MCAT's appeal to a narrow viewership.¹⁵ Former Councilman Larry McLaughlin, however, questioned the effectiveness of MCAT: "What good is it if people don't watch it?". By contrast, Councilman Bob Luceno judged that MCAT had "exceeded norms set for it" and that "citizens are interested" in MCAT.

"Part of MCAT's job is to educate about its purpose," stated Ron Wheeler, a teacher at Hellgate High School. It's unfortunate that MCAT is in an adversarial role with the 'powers that be'," he said.¹⁶ He added, "City Council needs to take a large role in MCAT." To date, the Council has not accepted MCAT's invitation to tour the television studio, which is two blocks away from City Hall.

Although televising Council meetings is an expensive proposition for the City, Councilman Harrison praises the

live Council telecasts made possible by MCAT: "I don't know if you can put a price on telecasting Council."¹⁷

Council's presence on television is democracy in action to many, Harrison believes. But he criticizes that role in the next breath:

MCAT is radical programming, outside the mainstream. The amount of money [MCAT receives] is a limited resource. A lot of folks would like to see documentary programming. One thing I'd like to see is a lot of government things (productions) explaining what's going on in different areas of city government.¹⁸

Councilman Harrison added he would like to see an appeal to wider community interests, for instance, telecasting high school plays, sports, etc. However, he did not discuss the mechanics (e.g., funding or responsibility) of achieving this broadened appeal.

The fact that MCAT is instrumental in carrying Council telecasts is good publicity in itself. It is ironic that some expect MCAT to have high Nielsen ratings. Council telecasts, lengthy and replete with procedural delays, compete with commercial networks in prime time. Nielsen ratings purport to measure the entertainment value of a program. Perhaps only a small number of citizens are watching Council meetings, but viewer popularity does not adequately measure the value of the telecast. To the narrow segment who watch MCAT, it may be greatly worthwhile.

The city is "just beginning to realize what use can be made of MCAT," for instance, airing of the PSA Bulletin

Board announcements used by the Fire Department and Health Department. "MCAT's live call-in capability has not been developed. If it is developed, it would really draw the audiences; it would show people that MCAT exists for them."¹⁹ Another use of MCAT could be using the PSA Bulletin Board to announce meeting agendas for committees, so citizens may be alerted to issues of interest. Council Committee meetings are not now televised. Televising them would require the city to invest in equipment and staff, or to contract producers to cover them.

Schools must learn to take advantage of their potential link to MCAT, such as the 24-hour live "Life Appreciation Festival" carried from Hellgate High School in 1991, a first of its kind. Another 24-hour live program was carried from MCAT's studio in May 1992, again using high school volunteers. Several high school teachers have also used MCAT facilities to allow their classes to create videos. MCAT Assistant Director Canty told the TV audience she would like to see Missoula schools hire an MCAT liaison or coordinator to enhance their use of the station.²⁰

Public awareness and the news media

MCAT's mailings have consisted of an initial announcement of its opening and two mailings of posters advertising advanced training. MCAT's green logo with the MCAT cat is distinctive, and is used on all letterhead and

equipment, creating a public image of MCAT as a professional organization. All productions telecast on MCAT are required to credit MCAT for use of equipment and facilities.

Print publicity has consisted of printing the weekly telecast schedule in The Missoulian's Friday edition Entertainer Section. The Missoulian, Missoula's only local daily newspaper, has both reproached and acclaimed MCAT. It published three feature stories with photos in MCAT's first year. In 1991, it printed two feature articles, an acerbic editorial, and a letter to the editor rebutting the editorial. The most recent coverage, June 4, 1992 was not unfavorable-- a feature story with photos and a related article discussing the cable franchise - lost viewership question.²¹ MCAT has trained 917 Missoulians in workshops as of May 1992, and thus should not be evaluated based only on viewership; yet The Missoulian's major criticism was low Nielsen ratings. It presumed limited viewers, and argued that the money could be spent elsewhere.²² Low viewership need not be equated with low interest. Other goals have been met. Two percent of Missoula citizens (1 in 48) have been trained in video skills with MCAT functioning as a lab in which to experiment. The goal of professional TV is not students learning, but rather using skilled professionals to achieve technical polish. Student amateurs should not be expected to keep pace with CBS, NBC, ABC, CNN or PBS.²³

In sum, MCAT's self-initiated publicity may have been erratic at first, but public awareness has increased. MCAT has received media attention as a new organization and as a member of a completely novel class of entities. MCAT might take the bull by the horns in trying to "manage" impressions created by press publicity. Publicity is as necessary to public access as performing the technical tasks of running a TV station. However, publicity creates demands for services and training, which only increase staff workload; this intractable dilemma cannot be resolved without exploring new avenues of volunteer staffing or increased funding.

Technical support

MCAT staff exhibit a variety of professional credentials (all have degrees and/or experience in television) and professional demeanor -- producers find staffers to be uniformly friendly and as helpful as their time allows. This ethos creates good publicity for MCAT. However, staff can only work with the resources at hand. Editing suites are a bottleneck area in the MCAT studio; editing time to produce one half-hour program could easily take 10 hours. Editing is so time consuming that many producers never finish a production.²⁴

MCAT's editing equipment was found to have problems in wiring soon after installation, but the installer had gone

out of business, leaving MCAT no recourse but to hire someone to repair it.²⁵ The character generator, or titler machine, had been malfunctioning for at least a year. MCAT paid approximately \$500 to have an engineer re-wire editing equipment in 1992. Staff say they expect to have problems with "cheap" equipment. Independent producer Temi Rose believes MCAT really needs at least a half-time engineer: "If something breaks, there's no one to fix it."²⁶

An example of an embarrassing equipment malfunction was the live call-in May 6, 1992 by Missoula Redevelopment Authority (MRA) on Non-Motorized Transportation Planning, produced by Temi Rose. The wiring of phone lines in City Council chambers had not been done professionally. The first caller's voice was so distorted on the air that no more live calls were heard on the telecast. Only two more people called, but because the TV audience could not hear the phone caller, questions had to be repeated into the studio microphones. Listeners at home were discouraged from calling after the first distortion. In this case, the responsibility rested on MRA to hire adequate technical help. If MCAT had an engineer on staff or on contract, clients could contract the engineer to prevent humiliations like this. However, MCAT must have an increase in funding to keep an engineer on staff.

"MCAT's biggest limitation is quality engineering," maintains independent producer Pete Talbot, who also manages

his own video production company. He discussed the shortage of engineering help available to MCAT:

"There is a dearth of good electrical engineers in Western Montana, and they cost a lot to hire. A full time engineer would cost about \$30,000 a year. Still, it would be nice to have someone [at MCAT] who could spend a fair amount of time on maintenance, trouble-shooting, gear upgrades, and on wiring equipment. If you want reliable crew, you must pay them.²⁷

Another related problem is having staff perform lower-level tasks. Long-time MCAT Board member Joan Christopherson said, "Mary Canty (MCAT Co-Assistant Director) functions as an Office Manger, which is a waste."²⁸ All staff members agreed that more staff are needed and would be hired if funds were available. Most often mentioned are an office manager and an engineer.

Staff support is diluted by large classes. Orientation and Portapak training classes are large groups of twenty or more. More aggressive students may seize the equipment during the practicum portion of class, leaving the shy student without a chance for hands-on practice. With more staff time, smaller classes could grant more individual attention and more chance for all to use the equipment. Since funds this year do not permit hiring, other options will be explored here.

Volunteer coordination

"We don't really have a volunteer program. We just ad lib," said Lori Hudak, MCAT's newest staff and co-Assistant Director. She explained, "Volunteer help is directly dependent on who walks in the door."²⁹ Volunteers are more likely than paid staff to cancel their promised assistance when an organization is counting on them. "Sometimes volunteers can be a bigger pain than they're worth," asserted Nancy Maxson, who coordinates grants for the Montana Committee for the Humanities. As president of the League of Women voters, Maxson pays local producers to cover Council meetings. "Having a paid office manager who can serve as MCAT's volunteer coordinator might help in recruiting and organizing volunteers," she said.³⁰ Volunteers need to know they are useful. When staff members are too busy to assign work, volunteers stop coming in.

Funding and use of resources

Staff technical support of producers has been as strong as possible, considering the circumstances. Staff members have dealt well with heavy demands on their time, but have not attempted to mitigate the demand by charging a token fee or asking for donation of volunteer time in return for training or equipment loan.

MCAT is constrained from hiring more paid staff by its budget. It is likewise stymied from fundraising by a clause in MCAT's Charter, which forbids commercial activity. Staff

construes that clause to include on-air fundraising. But without more funds, MCAT must continue to rely on volunteers. MCAT devotees would like to serve unpaid; however, most local professional video trainers for MCAT, such as Roman Kuczer and Temi Rose, command payment for their services. "We make our living this way; we can't afford to do it all for free," said Rose.³¹ Sometimes important jobs will be left unfilled because volunteers have not been found who can or will commit to them, and contract help cannot be paid.

To conclude, MCAT is fulfilling its Charter in respect to its neutral position toward video content and neutral treatment of sponsoring groups or producers of programs. It allows citizens access to First Amendment expression. No explicit discrimination bars anyone from MCAT facilities; facilities are a bit cramped but conveniently located in the center of town near adequate parking. MCAT is physically accessible; it shares housing with several other NPOs in the old Missoulain building, which has a handicapped accessible ramp. MCAT is faithful to its purpose: steps have been taken to continually enlarge access. Possible additional alternatives open to MCAT in meeting its mandates are explored in Chapter III.

ENDNOTES

1. Ron Wheeler, interview April 9, 1992. Wheeler said that "the passive role that MCAT is taking may cause it to appear dependent or reactive [in not taking leadership to determine program content]."
2. MCAT Statistics Sheet, March 1992. The balance of programming is imported, and must be sponsored by a local resident.
3. Alan Pearson, interview, April 30, 1992.
4. Doug Harrison, interview, April 23, 1992.
5. Dave Wilson, interview, April 20, 1992.
6. The University of Montana has two of only ten sites "hard-wired" to telecast live from a remote site using MCAT equipment and cablecasting facilities. The other nine sites are the UM Urey lecture hall, Missoula City Council Chambers, Missoula City/County Library, the three local high schools (Sentinel, Hellgate and Big Sky), School District 1 (elementary), the Missoula Vocational Technical School, and Missoula County Court).
7. McCarthy Coyle, interview, March 10, 1992. Mr. Coyle has been a crusader for Montana public TV. His article, "MT TV," The Missoula Independent, Vol 11 No. 8, April 24-30, 1992 asserts that public TV in Montana is not really representing the public unless it reaches out to the local community stations in some manner:
The public is being excluded from bureaucrats' picture of Montana's public TV, and Montana's corporate connections are under scrutiny as small towns seize the gauntlet and challenge universities to open up the channels.
Coyle asks, "Where is the public in Montana TV?".
8. Pete Talbot, interview, April 10, 1992.
9. Ibid.
10. Liz Gupton, phone interview, May 5, 1992.
11. Wheeler, op. cit.

12. Nancy Maxson, interview, April 30, 1992. Missoulians have shown great seriousness about another such electronic open space -- MACS, or Missoula Area Conferencing System, an active computer network with conferences discussing many civic matters.

13. Joan Christopherson, interview, April 10, 1992.

14. Dave Wilson, op. cit. The question of using quantitative ratings, such as Nielsen ratings used in commercial television, to evaluate public television begs for an answer in the form of a qualitative evaluation, believes Dave Wilson of UM. He questions whether Nielsen ratings really measure which broadcasts the community finds worthwhile. In Public TV, even when ratings are not used, someone makes editorial decisions about what gets televised. Subtle forms of censorship ensure a broad appeal, but minority views may be lost.

15. "MCAT Calls Its First Year A Success," The Missoulian, Don Baty, March 31, 1991.

16. Ron Wheeler, op. cit.

17. Harrison, op. cit. In televising its weekly Council meetings, the City has spent about \$10,000 for three cameras permanently installed in Council Chambers. In addition, the Council contracts with the League of Women Voters and pays about \$16 per hour for personnel to have Council meetings cablecast. The League receives funds and then subcontracts with two local producers to televise meetings live (and tape them for viewing again later in the week). "The League is basically just a pass-through," Maxson said. Since the League originally sponsored Council broadcasts over KUFM radio until a few years ago, Maxson believes the City approached the League again because it was a logical extension of work the League had already done.

Lori Hudak was contracted as an independent producer, not as an MCAT employee, to produce Council telecasts. John Fletcher was recruited to co-produce for the League contract by Council because he was "the only member of the audience at Council meetings."

18. Harrison, *ibid.*

19. McCarthy Coyle, op. cit.

20. Mary Canty, MCAT's 2nd Anniversary Party, televised live June 4, 1992.

21. "MCAT's Back for Seconds-- Public Access TV Toasts Year No. 2," The Missoulian, June 4, 1992, B:1,4. The companion

piece was "Cable System Bows to MCAT, Agrees to Switch off the Signal," *ibid.* The SATCOM Cable Co. (Cable Montana), had been carrying some of MCAT's programs on cable for two weeks sans Agreement; this was an attempted "end run" around the City's demands for SATCOM to agree to pay franchise fees and carry the access channel uncensored.

22. Source of statistics: MCAT Second Annual Report. These statistics rebut "MCAT Must Earn Its Keep," The Missoulian, April 5, 1991. The thesis of this editorial was that "public access TV is competing with other community interests." This editorial made Hermes sound critical but in fact he has verbally supported MCAT at Council Meetings. Hermes works for KPAX-TV, Missoula, and is in a better position to understand the mechanics of MCAT than most of Council. One must question professional criticism from a news source which competes for local dollars from citizens. Most newspapers in Montana are owned by a single corporation, Lee Enterprises, providing little competition or diversity in news sources. MCAT could threaten profits of news and entertainment media.

23. Roman Kuczer, interview April 28, 1992. Mr. Kuczer uses MCAT facilities to create promotions for local nonprofit organizations.

24. Will Wood, former Council Cable TV Committee member, phone interview May 1, 1992.

25. Lori Hudak, MCAT co-Assistant Director, interview April 21, 1992.

26. Temi Rose interview, April 13, 1992.

27. Pete Talbot, *op. cit.*

28. Rose, *op. cit.*

29. Joan Christopherson, interview April 10, 1992.

30. Hudak, *op. cit.*

31. Maxson, *op. cit.*

CHAPTER III

OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Alternatives and suggestions offered below are grouped into three main areas: (1) expanding public access to better meet MCAT's mandate and (2) attracting volunteers to help staff deal with the resulting increased demand for training by NPOs. Mentioned briefly is the related issue of limited funding, which necessitates a coordinated volunteer effort; better use of existing resources is urged.

Expanding awareness and access

MCAT could do more promotion of local productions. For example, it could ask each producer to do a "trailer," a short preview or synopsis to be shown several times before the program airs; this will increase viewer awareness and interest in programs. Awareness and publicity among underserved groups will expand access. A call to The Missoulian will suffice to put an ad in the Local Events column.

MCAT has started using an index file to list producers wanting to make specific types of programs and seeking a crew, and a companion file for volunteers willing to be crew

members. However, very few producers or crew have registered their names in the file. Perhaps viewer requests could also be posted so a match-up could be effected between viewer requests, willing producers and possible crew. The requests could be posted on the PSA Bulletin Board for a larger audience. The PSA Board could be used much more dynamically, without taking up a lot more of staff time.

MCAT could give more publicity to Council meetings by noting them on the PSA Bulletin Board. Other possibilities include expansion of coverage of City Council proceedings to include committee meetings and more panel discussions in the studio (for example, programs like Mayor Kemmis' weekly talk show which ran in 1991). City Council should accept MCAT's invitation for a tour of the studio. Possibly all members could be invited to physically tour the facilities, to increase understanding of what MCAT has to work with.

More use of The University of Montana Telecom Center could expand coverage of live specials such as the Ralph Nader Conference and the International Choral Festival which were cablecast on MCAT.

MCAT staff should seek more guidance from MCAT's Board of Directors as to how they would like to expand public access while staying within the contracted budget. Like staff, the Board has been preoccupied with organizing and initiating structure in this new agency. Now that the groundwork has been laid for two years, longer term planning

may be undertaken. Every successful program produces publicity for the station. Live productions like Council coverage could serve as a model to create a trend in televising events of civic interest. Both the City and MCAT could pursue this type of production.³²

The City should hire an Information Officer-liaison with MCAT to enhance access for all types of community groups. A City Video Liaison position could coordinate production of events like Council committee meetings. This coverage would give citizens more accountability from their elected leaders. Hiring could be done in conjunction with the local schools, or interns could be used regularly for an unfunded professional position. MCAT's potential value to the City and schools can not be tapped without an infusion of paid staff work or free professional service. Fees from TCI may not be increased, but the City should obtain new Agreements for franchise fees from the other three cable companies which now pay nothing; the increase may fund an increase in MCAT's budget.

MCAT should also use a wider range of media to increase public awareness of its existence and to publicize programs. CATV in general needs to promote itself in the press.³³ Educating the press corps makes it easier to educate the public. Following the lead of more politically minded organizations, MCAT could create news releases for reporters

and editors who make use of "canned" public relations material.

MCAT should take a more proactive role with the community. Opinions and viewpoints on both publicity and staff support abound, depending on one's reference point to MCAT. However, MCAT's performance has not been systematically documented to date. Some type of internal or external evaluation could be a reference point for future direction. A community survey should be conducted to determine who watches MCAT, what they like or dislike, what they would like to see telecast on MCAT, whether they are using MCAT to produce programs, and if not, whether any barriers can be removed.³⁴ Word of mouth and mailing from an original mailing list have been the primary means of informing NPOs how to become involved in producing programs for cablecasting. One result is possible overuse by a limited number of agents, possibly favoring the formation of cliques, thus access may not be equal for all groups. MCAT could have workshops just for NPOs rather than catering to individuals; each of the many NPO groups represents many citizens.

Volunteer support for staff

Freeing staff to provide more training and consultation with nonprofit groups would be a way to expand access. Short of new funding sources, MCAT will need to continue

relying on volunteers. Volunteer time is a valuable resource and should be organized for maximum return. If each of the nine hundred volunteers trained so far had each donated one hour, MCAT would have had approximately 11 weeks of free staff help per year. Therefore, volunteers should be recruited and efforts made to retain trained volunteers.

MCAT should hire a professional personnel consultant or approach a volunteer coordinators from another agency for ideas on attracting, retaining, and utilizing volunteers. A few hours brainstorming Missoula Children's Theater or the League of Women Voters would be profitable; both groups rely on civic minded volunteers for their existence. MCAT should compile "thumbnail sketch" position descriptions or work assignments, so volunteers would have specific tasks and could be scheduled for specific jobs. Procedures should be written into a Manual so volunteers know what to do; this will both free staff and assure volunteers they are staying on-task. Any of these tasks might also be performed by interns, as outlined in Appendix B.

Volunteers work for recognition and the social reward of working with others. MCAT might very cheaply establish a volunteer recognition program as an incentive to those donating time. For example, tokens such as pins, T-shirts, mugs or other remembrances may motivate volunteers to feel more like team members and ensure continuity of service.

Of course, lack of continuity with volunteers can defeat efficiency. Scheduling veteran with new volunteers can help newcomers' efficiency and "learning the ropes" of the organization. Also, planning a big project where several volunteers can routinely work together may generate more volunteer interest than small, repetitive tasks done in isolation. Using this type of "barnraising" enthusiasm turns work into a more social event, and can help retention of a coterie of dedicated volunteers.

MCAT's limited staff could be supplemented by several interns each semester from The University of Montana to help plan and implement publicity, coordinate volunteers, fundraise, or other work. A video class at the local vocational-technical school might serve as a means to recruit and train volunteer help. Organizing and coordinating is another area where university interns can help. Appendix B lists job descriptions for a number of intern positions. MCAT mentor McCarthy Coyle believes a student in any major could do a video program on his or her own subject area.³⁵

Interns could be used consistently to complete many projects, at no cost to MCAT. Many interns volunteer without pay, motivated by the reward of receiving elective college credits or experience which may help them later find a job. MCAT's only limitation in "hiring" unpaid interns

is its own ability to provide direction or supervision to them.

MCAT staff have expressed interest in suggestions for a better volunteer training program such as a training manual to guide volunteer staff. An intern has been contracted to provide a training video to accompany basic orientation given by staff prior to the Portapak training. These projects should be implemented as soon as time allows. Staff have also shown interest in having an intern or other volunteer produce a short video outlining how nonprofits or others may get involved in production. This type of public service message could be cablecast, or a speakers' bureau could give presentations to various community groups using the video.

MCAT should create a video for the initial hour of "boilerplate" presented at producer orientation. Orientation consists of about one hour of standard information staff reiterates from MCAT's Producer Handbook. Volunteers could give the lecture first, show the video, then staff could come in to take questions. Use of videos to orient new volunteers could likewise save staff time. Saving staff from these more mundane tasks allows more time for advanced training or higher level tasks which time does not now allow for.

With more staff time, smaller classes could grant more individual attention and greater chance for all students to

use equipment. When staff support is diluted by large classes, more aggressive students may seize the equipment during the practicum portion of the class, leaving shyer students without a chance for hands-on learning. Having classes actually complete a project as a group during class time would give students a chance to focus on creating a product together, rather than competing for the cameras.

Afterword: Better use of existing resources

MCAT's might supplement its limited financial means through untapped resources including the possibility of forming a producer- or user- cooperative. Members could pledge to volunteer an hour or two a year in lieu of a membership fee. It is reasonable to ask producers, who are using very expensive equipment gratis, to pay something back. Lower income people may choose to donate time, while nonprofit groups with discretionary budgets might prefer to pay a fee. The cost to an organization to produce commercially made video material is estimated at approximately \$1000 per half minute.³⁶ Renting commercial TV studio facilities for production is even more costly. If nonprofit groups can use MCAT to produce promotional videos, they are saving quite a bit of money. Producers who make their livelihood contracting to promote nonprofits would be willing to pay for the services with money or time. Not

asking for some return of money or time encourages professionals to reap private profits on publicly owned equipment.

Membership fees do require money-handling and concerns of accountability, security, and the perception of symbolic barriers. According to Nancy Maxson, "Asking people to pay a fee, no matter how small, creates a symbolic barrier that may limit access."³⁷ However, other community access stations use per capita membership fees. But while fees might be a barrier to access, lack of fees alone will not ensure equal access, as inconsistent publicity and lack of public awareness also limit entry. Conversely, charging a fee of donated time seems fair weighed against the monetary benefit of borrowing overnight a camera worth \$1000, at no cost to the producer. Allowing each consumer of MCAT services to contribute something in return would mean having greater resources to serve the continuously expanding service population.

A successful fundraising technique used at other stations has been selling "Station Supporter Coupons," redeemable for discounts on goods and services from local retailers, merchants, ski lifts, etc. Buying these coupon cards would be entirely optional for MCAT volunteers. The cards would avoid the "symbolic barrier" while still raising money from those who could afford to donate.

As an alternative to per-capita fees, MCAT might adopt a two-tier fee policy on equipment: it could continue to check out basic equipment at no cost but could purchase better equipment for rental. MCAT charges producers for equipment retroactively if the production later is used commercially. Even so, producers who use MCAT professionally still realize a profit. Producers who want better equipment are usually shooting professionally and most likely will be willing to pay for it, while amateurs need only basic equipment.³⁸

MCAT should continue to take advantage of Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs which provide short-term on-the-job trainees to public agencies at no charge to the employer. When MCAT's summer JTPA Work Experience student departs, it should attempt to fill that position year-round.

Arbitration with the City is possible under MCAT's contract. The current contract must be renegotiated in 1994. MCAT could attempt to negotiate for a larger budget at that time. (MCAT has already asked for an increase to cover the present budget deficit.) When MCAT's contract with the City of Missoula is renegotiated in 1994, perhaps the clause forbidding fundraisers could also be challenged or changed.

CATV stations must continue to explore all available alternate funding sources such as grants, in case of future

funding cutoffs.³⁹ A significant area for consideration is the very future of CATV funding; access funding cannot be taken for granted. CATV cannot assume indefinite funding from cable franchises, because the cable industry has been fighting franchise fees since their inception. Missoula citizens have shown they will support public radio, Children's Theater and many other nonprofit organizations. Local, state and national sources should be explored for grants and other funding methods, if it becomes necessary to operate without present funding from franchise fees.

In any case, MCAT should stay within its allotted budget until it can be supplemented. Equipment spending cuts are preferable to cutting back on hours of staff now on-board.

ENDNOTES

1. Alan Mathews, interview May 1, 1992. City employee Alan Mathews has created three programs on Missoula historic preservation through MCAT; he lends these videotapes out to schools. Mathews would like to see the City pay someone to produce this type of program.

Cable Committee member Will Wood would also like to see the City sponsor programming. He said the Missoula Office of Community Development (OCD) could use a video library on procedures like the permitting process; a video could simplify educating citizens on procedures to follow in getting building permits. The educational use of videos could be aided by UM interns at City Hall. The new technology of community access has the potential of benefitting everyone involved if handled creatively and cooperatively.

2. Tom Taylor, AgeWise, A Case Study. (Portland, OR: AgeWise Publishing, 1989, p. 47). In the clamor for attention of television viewers, public access is an extremely insignificant, weak voice, the author claims. Getting even a short mention in the commercial, mass media (the daily newspaper and TV) produces a greater response than a "big" story in limited circulation news or public access promotion. Personal contact, word of mouth, and personal networking are sufficient in our mass communications environment, the study said: "To ignore promotion through media hampers effectiveness of even the best of productions.

AgeWise won the Media Award for Community Programming from the Retirement National Research Foundation in Chicago. This senior volunteer program was a locally produced series on community access TV in Portland. The program adopted a magazine format to inform senior citizens of areas of interest.

3. Such a survey is planned by the new MCAT Board of Directors Planning Committee, chaired by Jim Harris (who coordinates volunteers for the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), Missoula). Volunteers will be needed to complete the study, as no funds or paid staff are available to the project.

4. McCarthy Coyle, interview March 10, 1992. The University of Montana Co-operative Education Internship program is a progressive service willing to reach out to employers. Employers need only fill out a simple one-page

request form outlining the type of work they need help with, and the type of intern they seek.

5. Professional producers Roman Kuczer and Pete Talbot both calculated this amount. Pete Talbot, interview April 10, 1992. Roman Kuczer, interview, April 28, 1992.

6. Nancy Maxson, interview April 30, 1992.

7. Roman Kuczer, interview April 28, 1992.

8. NFLCP, Cable Access Advocacy Handbook. (Washington, D.C.: NFLCP, 1988). A complete study should be done on funding and fundraising. Why should MCAT not be able to hold a fundraiser on its own channel, such as Missoula's KUFM Radio does? How would a local station enlist community support if it became necessary to raise funding locally. MCAT could mirror KUFM's use of volunteers and hold fundraisers like KUFM's. Perhaps MCAT's definition of the "non-commercial" clause in its contract is too strict; City Council may be willing to re-negotiate this point in 1994, when the charter is reviewed.

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Maxson, Nancy. President, League of Women Voters, April 30, 1992.

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APPENDIX A

Articles of Incorporation

Missoula Community Access Television Inc., August 22, 1988.

Article II - Purpose

The purposes for which the Corporation has been created are:

- A. To promote community use of and public access to cable communications in the Missoula area, including but not limited to public, educational, and governmental access needs appertaining to dedicated public access channels;
- B. To regulate, control, manage, and supervise public access television, dedicated public access channels, and any other channels and services of which the Corporation holds the right to exercise such regulation, control, management and supervision;
- C. To advise the Missoula City Council on matters pertaining to public access, dedicated public access channels, and other matters, services, facilities, or equipment placed under the control and supervision of the Corporation by cable communications operators;
- D. To act exclusively for civic purposes as a non-profit Corporation with its activities conducted so that no part whatever of its profits, earnings, dividends, assets, balances, or holdings inures to the benefit of any individual, collections or associations of individuals, or other corporations whether public or private, except as provided by these Articles of Incorporation, and so that all funds obtained are used exclusively to further the purposes for which the Corporation was formed;
- E. To promote the common good and general welfare of the community and its members;
- F. To promote the dissemination of information and the exchange of views, ideas, and opinions within the community in a manner consonant with The Constitution and all amendments thereto of the United States of America, to the Articles of the Montana State Constitution, as well as with the laws of the United States, the State of Montana, and the Municipal Ordinances of the City of Missoula, and in

accordance with the ideals of a free and democratic republic;

G. To own, manage, supervise, and maintain equipment and facilities; to hire and supervise personnel; to raise funds earmarked exclusively for its own operation; and to engage, though not for profit, in any lawful activity for which corporations may be organized under the laws of the State of Montana.

APPENDIX B

Possible Internship Projects

1. Business/marketing

Business or marketing majors could do promotion of MCAT to get the business community to donate money to underwrite purchase of programming from PBS or other public sources. Campus clubs such as the Entrepreneurship Club might perform similar services if they were contacted.

2. Business/Accounting

A student interested in statistics or accounting could compile the monthly Statistics Sheet MCAT uses to keep track of use of the facilities, or any special statistical study desired.

3. Communications

Communications students could assist in organizational development, such as the new Planning Committee effort at MCAT. A Speakers Bureau could be staffed with interns who could attend meetings of civic groups to discuss MCAT, or who could perhaps perform lobbyist work with City Council.

4. Communications, Advertising, Public Relations

Students in these areas could host a conference for statewide agents in the field of telecommunications, such as KUFM Radio, Montana State University's public television station, representatives from other CATV stations in Montana, etc., for sharing of ideas.

5. Computer Science

A Computer Science major could help MCAT hook up to the Missoula Area Conferencing System (MACS), so that it could cablecast the material now viewed only by MACS subscribers.

(Viewers of MCAT would be able to view, but not to participate in the discussion on the computer network).

6. Creative Writing

A pilot TV show could be a project for creative writing students. Perhaps one would present a workshop in Scriptwriting for the benefit of MCAT producers. The workshop could be videotaped and cablecast for viewers.

7. Education

Education majors could serve as liaison with local school districts in cablecasting school board meetings or preparing programs for use in the schools.

8. English as a Second Language - Literacy

The Missoula area has immigrants from Russia, Tibet, Cambodia, and other countries. An intern could prepare or assist with English lessons to be telecast.

9. Human Resource Management

MCAT could use help managing the many volunteers who need to have their time structured before they get bored and quit. Someone interested in personnel classification could write up thumbnail sketch "job descriptions" for various projects, and file them on index cards. Staff could prioritize these different job descriptions for use when volunteers are on hand.

Human resource students could also do time and motion studies to analyze the workload at MCAT. How many phone calls must staff respond to per day? How many visitors come through? How many times, and when and where are staff interrupted at other tasks? This data would aid in determining how possibly more office help is needed.

A student from Human Resources or another area could compile a Training Manual for MCAT volunteers. Another intern could serve as a Trainer for presentation of routine material, such as contained in this Manual. Routine information could be presented in the form of a video for trainees. MCAT's basic producer Orientation/Portapak training could likewise use a video to present routine material, with staff taking questions afterward. This would save staff time.

10. Information and Media Services (IMS)

An intern from Humanities (or any other major) could sort the works on video stocked by University of Montana's Instructional Media Services (IMS) to determine which ones are in the public domain; these could be aired on MCAT as a means of filling up more of available programming time.

A corollary project could be to subject-index the list of videos at IMS. This subject index could be cross referenced with the card catalog in University of Montana's (UM's) Mansfield Library. Videos are presently indexed only by title and catalog number. Thus, a student seeking a video on women's suffrage, for example, could look in the card catalog. This subject index could enhance making of documentary or other works to be shown on MCAT. Possibly an Education student seeking Library certification could do this task.

11. Journalism

A journalism student could be charged with a publicity project such as a photo essay on MCAT producers for the local newspaper. A weekly or monthly news program could evaluate national or state news, or focus on local news. Perhaps this news evaluation could be done using high school students, in conjunction with a Journalism class.

12. Political Science, Government, Public Administration

Students in Political Science, Public Administration or government studies could attend weekly City Council meetings to represent MCAT's views and interests. Frequently no MCAT staff attends, due to their time constraints. City Council allows MCAT a three minute report period at Cable Committee meetings. Perhaps this intern could help compile or present these reports.

Interns could also prepare programming on local issues and debates such as the county's planned investigation of an ordinance to ban nude dancing, the recent pesticide warning Initiative in the 1991 election, the Rattlesnake Greenway debate, the city-sewer expansion plans, etc.

A Town Meeting on Television could be created using the Missoula Area Conferencing System (MACS), a computer network that invites citizen participation.

13. Radio-Television (R-TV)

An intern who is technically trained or skilled, such as a Radio-Television (R-TV) major could help MCAT set up a timer-capability for cablecasting. At present, a volunteer must be in the studio to put programming out. A timed-cablecast system would allow greater programming on weekends when staff are off duty.

An R-TV person could get more experience in a week at MCAT than in a month at school, believes Randy Ammon, because of more access to expensive equipment. Unfortunately, R-TV students sometimes reject the training session MCAT requires for equipment use or loan, believing their training on similar equipment in the R-TV Department should suffice.

Since only a portion of the programming produced by R-TV students is usable on public television, MCAT could cablecast much or all of it, thus both giving exposure to budding producers and filling up program hours.

14. Survey and planning studies

MCAT's new Planning Committee could use help on its planned Internal/External survey. Viewers are to be quizzed on their likes/dislikes and preferences. Marketing, communications or social studies majors could help.

A student could survey University of Montana professors on their knowledge of MCAT's existence. Publicity could be directed at an effort to show how MCAT can be useful in producing video material for class instruction.

15. Vocational-Technical School Interns

Vocational-technical school interns in areas such as office management might help plan and implement an office volunteer training program.

This list is far from exhaustive, but is tendered as a spur to the imagination of possibilities for both university students and MCAT. It is possible that a mature high school student could perform some type of internship, also. Some high schools have distributive education or work study programs of this type.

GLOSSARY

Access, or PEG (public, educational and government) access -

Public access is equal opportunity for all residents and community organizations to produce television programs for distribution on designated cable channels.

Educational access is the opportunity for educational institutions to distribute informational, instructional and educational programs on designated cable channels.

Government access is the opportunity for various levels of government to distribute meetings and informational programs on designated cable channels.

Basic Tier - the least expensive package of channels offered by a cable operator. The 1984 Cable Act allows cable operators to set basic tier rates in markets with "effective competition"; previously, cities were allowed to regulate basic rates based on the concept that one tier of services should be economically available to all residents. The FCC's definition of effective competition is very broad and has virtually ended all rate regulation. Rates have been deregulated in 98% of cable system subscribers.

Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 (The Cable Act or The Cable Reorganization Act) - A law enacted by the U.S. Congress which defines the rights of cities, cable operators and interested community groups. The law affirms the franchising process in which cities maintain regulatory authority in most areas in exchange for cable operator use of public rights of way and utility pole attachments. The Act establishes the rights of cable operators to select commercial services and set basic tier rates; it establishes a formal process for franchise renewal and franchise modification, and states that PEG access services and funding are not subject to the franchise modification process.

Cablecast - Televised by means of wire cable, as opposed to a broadcast signal televised through the airwaves.

C.A.T.V. - Community Access Television. See "access".

Contract - MCAT's Agreement with the City of Missoula to provide administrative services for cablecasting video material.

Effective competition - An FCC ruling that cable markets receiving three "grade B" broadcast signals have sufficient competition to warrant deregulation of basic tier rates. A "grade B" broadcast signal can be received from cities up to 100 miles away, and as a result may be poor. This FCC ruling deregulated basic tier rates affecting approximately 98% of cable subscribers.

F.C.C. - Federal Communication Commission, the federal agency which regulates broadcast television and cable television.

First Amendment - "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Franchise fee - a percentage payment of gross receipts made by the cable operator to the city in return for use of city rights of way and utility poles. The Cable Act affirms the right of cities to collect a 5% franchise fee.

MQTV - Montanans for Quality Television. A video production company and access advocate in the public interest founded by McCarthy Coyle, which served as the vehicle for founding MCAT.

Monopoly - No competition in the marketplace. Cable television is a natural monopoly since it is economically impossible for more than one cable company to serve a particular area. Cities have the right to regulate this monopoly in order to protect the interests of their citizens.

N.F.L.C.P. - National Federation of Local Cable Programmers, a nationwide nonprofit membership organization, which promotes the development of local programming on cable TV and provides information about national cable issues. The purpose of the NFLCP is to increase freedom of expression, diversity of ideas, and community communication through cable television. MCAT is a member of the NFLCP.

portapak - MCAT's portable video camera equipment; field equipment, as opposed to stationary studio equipment. Four Portapaks are available.

SATCOM - The cable company which operates in Missoula's Rattlesnake area, currently without a franchise agreement.

T.C.I. - Tele-Communications, Inc., Missoula's largest cable company, whose franchise fee funds MCAT operations.