According to Vane, the research yielded three principal sets of findings. The first, called the "best image of the show," the second, what stations executives are looking for, and third, what viewers are looking for.

As to "general environment," Vane said the typical PM viewer is female, better educated and comes from a dual-income, two-career household. In larger markets, Vane said, "viewers are looking for information, principally, and then they want something that is wholesome, exciting and relaxing. In smaller markets, the emphasis is on wholesome fare. Sometimes first, then relaxation. That was an interesting finding that we had not expected."

Vane said the research found the audience wants to be informed on a day-to-day basis what to expect on PM, and that audiences are very responsive to promotion for particular segments, "which means that any participating station, in order to maximize the audience, must look at the show in a very specific way, as opposed to a generic "watch PM because it's always entertaining."

On viewer attitudes, Vane said the research showed what one might expect: viewers like the "local orientation" of PM and consider it "their show," no matter which city they live in. And general managers, he said, believe PM is "good for the station's image and that it fulfills their obligation for local programming in access time."

And those findings may reinforce what general managers and program directors believed all along, Vane said part of the reason for the research was to "chart the course correctly for the future." As Group W sees it, a large part of that course involves giving participating stations a bigger financial hand in producing local segments and promoting PM in their local markets.

Therefore, part of the $1.2 million will go towards boosting by 48% the amount of money Group W grants to stations that wish to produce PM in their markets of national interest for the cooperative but are unable to because of travel expenses or other financial reasons. Group W is also increasing its co-op advertising budget with stations, according to Bob George, vice president and national executive producer for PM Magazine. During each sweep period, he said, Group W shares the cost of 20 TV Guide advertisements with PM stations. And to give more prominence to the show, Group W is asking stations to make use of the size of their sweep advertisements and to help foot the higher bill. Also, another consulting producer will be added, bringing the number to five, to coordinate with stations. The money involved in the renovations is budgeted for the 1984-85 season.

Station executives in the PM cooperative, however, tend to identify that the "national office"—as the PM headquarters in San Francisco is called—is more flexible in the stories it will accept for the national reel than it once was. George agrees with this assessment. "What we've done is settle on a format of varied lengths because there is no one perfect length for any story," George said. Previously, all stories submitted for consideration to the national reel had to be six-and-a-half minutes.

George said Group W is also holding regional production workshops where producers and program directors from PM stations from around the country come to learn about production techniques and to exchange ideas. And the addition of an extra consulting producer, George pointed out, will cut the number of stations to which each consulting producer is assigned down to 10 each.

Several station executives believe even if PM shows significant national ratings erosion in the Nielsen and Arbitron books during the next several weeks, stations begin to drop the show, Group W will keep it on its own stations because of its well-known commitment to local programming. But, George states, PM, perhaps more than any other syndicated show, is only worth the support a station is willing to give it. "We really believe the strength of the show is local, and in fact, the research bore that out," he said. "If the local news runs into a problem, you can't cancel it. You have to do it. The show is really a local magazine show, which this is. The fact that the Group W stations are totally committed to the show I think also speaks to the fact that it's going to be around for awhile."