



# **News Cities: The Next Generation of Healthy Informed Communities**

A Report of the 2010 Aspen Institute  
Forum on Communications and Society

Richard Adler  
*Rapporteur*



THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

*Communications and Society Program*

Charles M. Firestone  
Executive Director  
Washington, D.C.

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*To purchase additional copies of this report, please contact:*

The Aspen Institute  
Publications Office  
P.O. Box 222  
109 Houghton Lab Lane  
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Phone: (410) 820-5326  
Fax: (410) 827-9174  
E-mail: [publications@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:publications@aspeninstitute.org)

*For all other inquiries, please contact:*

The Aspen Institute  
Communications and Society Program  
One Dupont Circle, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 736-5818  
Fax: (202) 467-0790

Charles M. Firestone  
*Executive Director*

Patricia K. Kelly  
*Assistant Director*

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*This report is written from the perspective of an informed observer at the  
Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society.  
Unless attributed to a particular person, none of the comments or ideas contained  
in this report should be taken as embodying the views or carrying the endorsement  
of any specific participant at the Forum.*

# Foreword

The Forum on Communications and Society is an annual signature event of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program. It brings 40 to 50 top executives, thought leaders and government officials together to address some specific aspect of the confluence of communications and democracy.

In 2007, FOCAS generated the idea of a national commission to address the changing news marketplace from the perspectives of local citizens. Thus was formed the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, a partnership of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, under the co-chairmanship of Theodore B. Olson and Marissa Mayer.

During 2008 and 2009 we also saw the bankruptcy or demise of a number of daily newspapers or their parent papers. For example, Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* and Seattle's *Post-Intelligencer* closed in early 2009, each ending roughly 150 years of publishing. At least 14 newspaper publishers, most notably the Tribune Company, sought bankruptcy protection. Revenues were streaming away from the print media, but the expected savior, online journalism, did not deliver the cash flow that publishers expected. That is, audiences for journalistic organizations vastly increased, but the value to advertisers of those visiting the newspapers' sites was about one-tenth the value of a reader of print media. The cost per thousand rates (CPM) just did not hold up in the latter half of 2008 and into 2009.

Concern for the sustainability of journalism has now reached significant proportions. And because journalism is so closely related to self-governance—that is, the government watchdog function, the citizen-informing function and the personal empowerment function are all essential to a thriving democracy—the survivability of journalism is a national policy issue.

As the Knight Commission's deliberations were coming to a close, the Aspen Institute had the opportunity to address some of the issues inherent in the Commission's orbit but not within its charge. Specifically, while everyone seems to agree that news organizations will

undergo a period of experimentation for business models for sustainable, meaningful, local journalism, what factors can help those in the fray succeed?

The Report details the best and worst of times for the news business. The best, of course, is the expansion of information sources now available online, from user generated content to citizen journalists. Yet journalistic organizations remain significantly challenged in 2010. The economy remains weak, there is a crisis in the credibility of authorities of any sort, including the press, and digital technologies are disrupting the business models of printed news as it has the music, book and video industries. Indeed local democratic institutions themselves are under challenge. Political discourse is severely polarized and there has been a significant decline in civic engagement.

To address these issues in greater detail, the Forum looked specifically at several of the recommendations that the Knight Commission issued the previous fall and made explicit recommendations going forward. The advancement of some of these recommendations came in the form of commissioned white papers including the following categories:

- Strengthening Public Media
- Increasing Transparency and Information Availability
- Providing Universal Broadband Access
- Promoting Digital and Media Literacy
- Expanding Public Engagement

As Adler summarizes in the end, “In a chaotic time, society needs to encourage more experimentation with new models that provide credible information and encourage engagement, locally as well as nationally. It needs to ensure that everyone has access to broadband services that are creating the platform on which our government and our economy increasingly depend. And finally, it needs to make sure that people have the education in the multiple literacies they need to function fully as citizens in the 21st century.”

The insights and resources contained in this report, then, are intended to aid the reader's understanding of how important these issues are to our local communities and our nation's democratic way of life. They are also aimed at encouraging the reader to act in ways to increase the information health of his or her local community. In that regard, we also suggest reading the final report of the Knight Commission, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*, available for free download at <http://www.knightcomm.org>.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, senior sponsor of the 2010 FOCAS, for its strong vision, leadership and financial support of FOCAS and the Communications and Society Program. We also kindly thank Google, the Markle Foundation, Microsoft, NewsCorp, Roll International, craigslist, Inc., Michael Klein and William Dean Singleton as FOCAS sponsors and contributors. We thank Erin Silliman, senior project manager, Communications and Society Program, for editing and producing the materials, overseeing the commissioning of the white papers, and managing the FOCAS conference; Amy Garmer, director of journalism projects; and Tricia Kelly, assistant director, for reviewing, editing and overseeing the production of those white papers and this report.

Thanks also to the great work of Rachel Sterne and Ground Report for streaming the event live on the web for the fourth straight year. This real-time streaming provided the opportunity for international viewership and feedback during the Forum. Archives of the conference proceedings can be viewed online at: <http://aspeninstitute.tv>.

Charles M. Firestone  
Executive Director  
*Communications and Society Program*  
The Aspen Institute  
March 2011



**NEWS CITIES: THE NEXT GENERATION  
OF HEALTHY INFORMED COMMUNITIES**

*Richard Adler*

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## Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age

Even as the magnitude of the digital revolution becomes more evident, its implications remain a matter of intense debate. Stewards of traditional media worry about the values that are being lost or threatened in the transition, while new media enthusiasts prefer to focus on the potential of digital technology not merely to inform citizens about their communities but to empower them to become directly involved in democratic processes. Policymakers often find themselves in the middle, attempting to negotiate between the impulse to let the marketplace freely determine winners and losers and the desire to protect the public interest by mitigating market failures and encouraging socially beneficial trends. All of these forces were represented at the 2010 Forum on Communications and Society (FOCAS) in Aspen.

Helping to shape the agenda for the 2010 Forum was the report, issued in October 2009, of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, a project that itself originated from discussions at an earlier FOCAS meeting. Rather than focusing directly on media, the Commission was tasked with articulating the information needs of the communities in which people live and work, and what impact changes in media are having on these needs. The Commission's report, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*, offered a set of 15 broad policy recommendations intended to ensure maximum availability of information, build citizen capacity to use that information, and encourage public engagement in democratic processes. The purpose of the 2010 FOCAS meeting was to review several of these recommendations and identify strategies for moving them toward implementation. Participants in the meeting included several members of the Knight Commission along with experts and leaders from the worlds of media, academia, business and government.

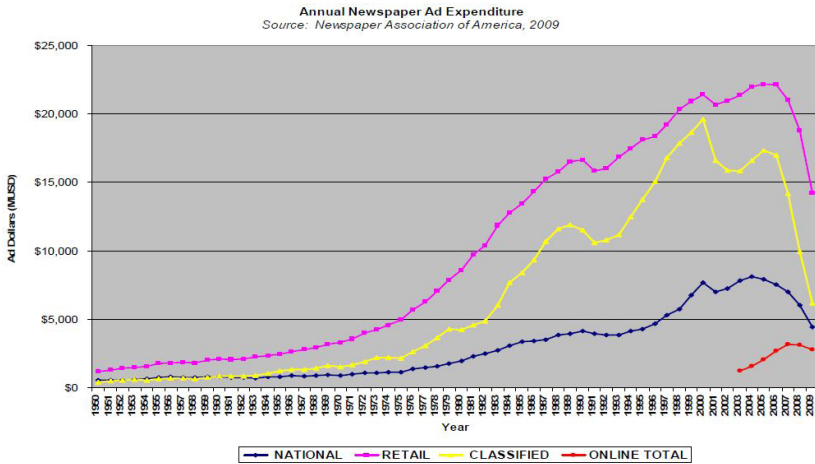
## Another Tough Year

The 2010 Forum started with an overview of the current media landscape that found traditional media, and particularly newspapers—which, according to the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, “still provide the largest share of reportorial journalism in the United States”<sup>1</sup>—experiencing ever deeper losses. At the same time, promising new digital media ventures continue to proliferate, though it is still too early to know which of these innovative models will be sustainable over time or whether any of them will be able to assume the historic role of newspapers in providing the information that citizens need to participate fully in a democratic society.

In summarizing the state of newspapers in 2010, Mark Contreras, senior vice president of newspapers for the E.W. Scripps Company, observed that each year in the industry recently has been so eventful that it has felt like a decade. Much of what has happened has been bad news. For example, the period from 2006 to 2009 was the first time in more than half a century that newspaper advertising revenues fell for four straight years, with the decline accelerating each year (see Figure 1). The year 2009 saw the largest one-year decline, 28.6 percent, bringing total advertising revenues from printed newspapers back to the level of 1984. Although all categories of revenue have declined, the steepest losses have come in classified advertising, which reached its highest point in the year 2000 and has since fallen to less than one-third of that level. The dismal state of the industry is also reflected in the fact that newspaper companies that are responsible for nearly one-fifth of all industry revenues are now owned by lenders. A half dozen major newspaper companies are either in or have recently emerged from bankruptcy.

While revenue from newspapers’ online activities grew from 2000 to 2007, it remains a minor contributor (about 10 percent) to overall industry revenue. One reason for the lackluster performance of newspapers’ online ventures is the wide gap in the returns that newspapers are able to earn from the two types of media: a comparison of Scripps’ printed and online news media shows that the former generates “total revenue per unit” (i.e., print ad revenue plus circulation revenue divided by average daily circulation) of \$507.45, while the latter generates just \$75.38 in total revenue per unit (online ad revenues divided by the average number of unique visitors per day).

**Figure 1: Annual Newspaper Advertising Expenditures, 1960–2009**



Source: [www.naa.org/TrendsandNumbers/Advertising-Expenditures.aspx](http://www.naa.org/TrendsandNumbers/Advertising-Expenditures.aspx)

Why such a large discrepancy? For one thing, newspaper companies are failing to capture a substantial portion of the online revenue that is being generated by the content that they produce. A study conducted over a 30-day period in 2009 found a total of more than 112,000 nearly exact unlicensed copies of newspaper stories on more than 75,000 different sites.<sup>2</sup> In fact, much of this content is generating revenue, but for the unlicensed site hosts rather than the creators of that content. Clearly, it would be beneficial to newspapers to capture a larger portion of this revenue than they currently do.

A second factor depressing newspapers' online revenue (and presumably the revenue of online sites generally) is that "audience metrics are a mess." Estimates of the number of unique visitors to Scripps' online sites for the month of March 2010, ranged from a low of 2.8 million (from Nielsen) to a high of 8.8 million (from Omniture). Obviously, different rating services are using different methodologies to generate their data. According to Contreras, this is an important issue for publishers, citing that broadcasters were not able to increase their advertising revenue substantially until industry-wide standards were agreed to for measuring the size of the television audience.

## Signs of Hope

Despite these obstacles, Contreras pointed to nearly a dozen hopeful trends that suggest that newspapers have begun to move beyond their traditional practices to respond creatively to the new realities they face.

- News sites are adapting to the world of social media by learning to use resources like Facebook and Twitter to raise awareness and drive traffic to their sites.
- News companies are affiliating with national portals, like Yahoo!, to give greater visibility to their news content and provide access to new advertising markets (Yahoo's partnership with the Newspaper Consortium was launched in 2006 with 176 member papers and now has nearly 800 members).
- News exchanges among newspapers have been established in several states (including Florida, Ohio, Washington and Tennessee<sup>3</sup>), allowing members to share stories and lower expenses.
- The Associated Press has created the AP Registry to tag and track its own content as well as member-created content online to assure compliance with terms of use.
- News organizations are making their sites more participatory and interactive by allowing users to create and post their own content and commentary.
- Many newspaper sites are introducing photo galleries that allow users to post their own pictures, producing greater involvement and more time spent on these sites.
- Newspapers are making greater use of stringers to supplement their professional staff and extend coverage to areas that would otherwise go uncovered.
- News aggregators are using geolocation capabilities built in to mobile devices to develop new forms of monetization via localized search.
- Video content is becoming more common on many newspaper sites. Reporters who used to be equipped only with pads and pencils now carry small cameras that allow them to create video reports to supplement their written stories.

- News organizations are rapidly adopting the concept of topic-specific pages that provide easy access to all coverage of a topic or continuing story.
- Databases are now a staple of many newsrooms. In fact, many of the 2010 Pulitzer Prizes and Scripps Howard National Journalism Awards were for reporting that utilized data-based information.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Future of Journalism**

Dean Singleton, chairman and CEO of MediaNews Group, believes that newspaper publishers like himself need to be committed to nothing less than “a total reinvention of what we do.” Like Mark Contreras, Singleton sees both peril and promise in the current competitive landscape. Revenues from his company’s online ventures have been increasing, but not as fast as its print publications have been losing revenues. The problem, he suggested, is not attracting users—newspapers are actually doing a great job in building readership online—but getting paid adequately for what they do: “we don’t have an audience problem; we have a CPM problem.” (CPM, or “cost per thousand” readers or viewers, is the standard way of determining media advertising rates.) Even if newspaper publishers could capture all of the revenue generated by their online content, they are not able to charge advertisers nearly as much for online ads as for print ads. The ratio of print to online ad rates has been as high as 10:1, although it has improved somewhat more recently, in part as a result of publishers getting better at targeting online users in ways that are valuable to advertisers.

**...newspaper  
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of what we do.”**

*Dean Singleton*

According to Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, the newspapers’ traditional revenue model has “collapsed,” and basing their business on selling advertising is simply no longer a viable option. Part of the challenge to newspapers is that there is a fundamental difference in how people interact with news

online and in print: online, people are active “hunter-gatherers” who are using a “lean forward” medium to seek out information of interest to them, versus sitting back and dedicating a significant amount of time to perusing the pre-packaged content of a newspaper that they purchased at a newsstand or received by a paid subscription. In light of the audience’s lower level of commitment to any given online site, the

**Online, people are active “hunter-gatherers” who are using a “lean forward” medium to seek out information.**

*Tom Rosenstiel*

traditional model of display advertising may simply be incompatible with the way in which news is accessed online.

Like Singleton, Rosenstiel is convinced that the practice of journalism needs to be fundamentally re-invented if it is to remain relevant in a digital, hyper-connected world. Publishers need to shift from the 20th century model, in which businesses achieved profitability by creating and exploiting essentially static “stocks of knowledge”

to a 21st century paradigm, in which success is based on participating in and managing dynamic “flows of knowledge.”<sup>5</sup> Another way of describing this transition is as a change from seeing news as a *product* to seeing it as a *service* that can yield multiple products and produce multiple revenue sources.

There are other important differences between the old and new media. While newspapers delivered the same information to everyone in their audience, today’s audience is seeking information “in vertical shafts”—content organized around a specific topic that often includes commentary as well as factual information, which may be derived from multiple sources. In this environment, according to *The Washington Post’s* executive editor, Marcus Brauchli, there is a constant fight for “mindshare.” Since readers can find information everywhere, they come and go quickly from different sites, with little sense of loyalty, or even much awareness of where a story actually originated. Moreover, in the online world, a tiny fraction of the overall audience is responsible for consuming the vast majority of page views, which also poses a challenge to the classic advertising model, which is based on the concept of “reach.”

Participants in the world of online publishing readily agree that the dynamics of their business is “180 degrees different than print.”

Salon Media Group's CEO Richard Gingras, a longtime participant in online services, enumerated some of the differences: first, the cost and employment structures of the two industries are very different. Second, audience behavior—and particularly the behavior of the young audience—is “hugely different.” And, finally, the revenue models are different. According to Gingras, it is unrealistic to believe that it will be possible to raise CPMs for online content to anywhere near the levels that print has been able to enjoy. It may be possible to double current CPM rates, but that may be the most that can be achieved. The wisest option for publishers is to accept the reality of lower rates online and “get comfortable with them.” Publishers need to focus on developing new models for what they do rather than trying to find ways to sustain their old models.

### NewsCorp Launches *The Daily*

On February 2, 2011, NewsCorp and Apple jointly announced the launching of *The Daily*, a national news publication created specifically for Apple's iPad.

*The Daily* is published every morning and delivered automatically to subscribers, and it is updated regularly during the day. It has been designed to take advantage of the iPad's capabilities: it is highly graphic and incorporates text, photos, audio, video and animations. News stories may include an interactive database with background information on the topic or incorporate a Twitter feed of real-time comments on the story from readers. Users can customize the publication to include, for example, information about a favorite sports team or local weather forecasts.

A subscription to *The Daily* initially costs \$0.99 per week or \$39.95 per year, purchased and billed through Apple's iPad App Store.

Time will tell whether *The Daily* is mainly a colorful demonstration of the interactive capabilities of digital tablets like the iPad or a credible distinctive journalistic voice.

Note: Less than a week after the launch of *The Daily*, AOL announced that it was acquiring *The Huffington Post* for \$315 million, representing another substantial bet on the continuing value of news content in the digital world.



[Image source: <http://www.uncrate.com/men/gear/ipad/the-daily/>]



Even those who accept the inevitability of change are not necessarily happy about it or sanguine about its consequences. John Carroll, former editor of *The Los Angeles Times*, admitted that he is “sentimental about the death of newspapers,” although he conceded that, in the long run, it does not matter whether or not they survive. What does matter is preserving the ethics of journalism, particularly as they developed during the 20th century around principles such as independence, objectivity and verification.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, current trends are not encouraging for the future of journalism. The overall supply of news with “civic value” is shrinking, which can be seen in the decline in the number of reporters assigned to covering state legislatures across the country. In the state of Washington, for example, the number of print, television and radio journalists covering the legislature fell from 34 in 1993 to 17 in 2007 to just 10 full-time journalists today, despite the fact that the state population increased 25 percent during this period and the state budget nearly doubled.<sup>7</sup> Carroll quoted Clay Shirky, who observed that during revolutions, “the old stuff gets broken faster than the new stuff is put in its place.”<sup>8</sup> Shirky’s pronouncements about the state of journalism and the impact of the Internet were invoked repeatedly during the conference. For example, Michael Fancher, former executive editor of *The Seattle Times*, in arguing that we need to recognize that journalism and printing are not necessarily the same thing, cited Shirky’s dictum that “in order to get out of a crisis, it is necessary to stop thinking of it as a crisis so that you can begin to see new possibilities.”

### **A News Depression or a News Surfeit?**

We are now in the midst of “a news depression that is worse than the economic depression” according to FCC Commissioner Michael Copps. From his perspective, there is something drastically wrong with the state of journalism in the U.S. as symbolized by the fact that the number of foreign reporters based in Washington, D.C. has doubled at the same time that the number of domestic reporters stationed in the capital has fallen by half. Among the factors that have contributed to weakening the state of journalism are bad decisions about consolidation that have led publishers to take on unsustainable levels of debt, and de-regulation

and the abandonment of public interest requirements on broadcasters that have diminished support for socially valuable programming.

We now face a fundamental challenge: How do we ensure the survival of journalism? One urgent need, according to Copps, is to provide a higher level of support for public media—public television and public radio, plus their online activities. In fact, the United States lags far behind many other countries in the funding that it provides for public media. The U.S. federal government provides just \$1.43 per capita annually to support public media, compared to \$27 per capita per year in Canada and \$87 in the U.K. If the U.S. per capita support for public media were just one-tenth of the U.K.’s rate, funding would increase six-fold.

James Glassman, executive director of the George W. Bush Institute, believes that rather than a news depression, we actually have a news surfeit. In the print era, the cost of production provided a formidable barrier to entry to would-be competitors. But today, the cost of distributing news is so low that anyone can do it—and many are doing it. There is no good reason to try to insure the survival of old media. Rather, the question we should be asking is how can we provide an environment where “what comes next can be played out fairly?”

According to Steve Waldman, a senior advisor to the chairman of the FCC, it is possible to have an abundance of news at the same time that we are experiencing a shortage of real journalism. A study done by the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism found that the city of Baltimore currently has 53 different news outlets, but only a few “journalistic entities” that have the resources to generate original news stories.<sup>9</sup> The study found that during a one-week period, 95 percent of the stories containing new information came from “traditional media”—mostly newspapers. It also found that the amount of news being reported by the city’s main newspaper, *The Baltimore Sun*, has been steadily declining. The total number of stories produced by the paper on all topics during the year 2009 was 73 percent lower than the number of stories in 1991. The end result is a proliferation of distribution channels for a diminishing supply of actual news coverage.

Though some may yearn for a return to the golden age of newspapers, there is little likelihood that we will ever go back to the era in which newspapers enjoyed an effective monopoly. In fact, one FOCAS

participant, Paul Sagan, CEO of Akamai, predicted that “the pain of newspapers over the next 10 years will be worse than it has been over the past 10 years.” But if newspapers are fated to play a diminished role in their communities, then the question arises of what might be done to preserve the positive role of journalism. As Aspen Institute Communications and Society fellow Blair Levin put it, if newspapers disappear, there will always be someone who will cover local sports, but who will take on the task of “long-form investigative reporting” that has been the special province of newspapers?

One organization that is dedicated to carrying on this mission is the Center for Investigative Reporting (CIR). Founded in 1977, the independent, nonprofit Center is supported by foundation grants, individual contributions and fees from media that carry stories produced by its reporters (CIR partners with major broadcast and cable news programs, newspapers, magazines and online media). According to CIR executive director Robert Rosenthal, the Center’s stories have reached some 20 million readers. The Center’s newest venture, California Watch, was created in 2009 to pursue important stories of statewide significance that local media may not have the resources to cover on their own. For example, California Watch recently surveyed the state’s 253 hospitals with birthing facilities. The resulting dataset revealed that women who gave birth at for-profit hospitals were significantly more likely to undergo caesarian sections than those at nonprofit hospitals.<sup>10</sup> In addition to distributing the story through newspapers in many California cities, the group posted the story along with a searchable database of survey results on its own website.

An even newer nonprofit news venture in California is The Bay Citizen, which was launched in June 2010 to provide “fact-based, independent reporting on civic and community issues in the San Francisco Bay Area.” Like many recent digital news ventures, The Bay Citizen’s focus is intensely local: its goal is to cover local stories under-reported in other media. It also works with other media to increase its distribution. For example, twice a week, the Bay Area edition of *The New York Times* includes a section devoted to local news of the area that is produced in partnership with The Bay Citizen.

**Serving everyone.** Several FOCAS participants are concerned that as the struggle between old and new media goes on, audiences that have been underserved in the past may be even further disadvantaged. For example, broadcast media play a critical public safety role for residents of tribal lands. When a storm hits, according to Loris Taylor, president of Native Public Media, a local radio station may be the only way to quickly get out a warning about the possibility of flooding. For purposes such as this, news media are a vital “public good” that deserve both private and public support. Sandy Close, founder of New America Media (NAM), pointed to the “silent spaces” that exist in the dominant media when it comes to news and information that is of interest to specific ethnic groups, especially those whose primary language is not English. Vietnamese-Americans, Chinese-Americans, Arab-Americans, as well as Hispanics may not be able to follow news that is not available in their languages, while the news and information that is available to them may not be deep or comprehensive. NAM provides support to ethnic media and works to bring attention to “invisible groups” such as young people, minority groups and immigrants by creating stories based on multi-lingual polls with members of these communities. Finally, Renee Hobbs, founder of the Media Education Lab at Temple University, noted that most media serve the needs of elite groups in the society, such as college graduates, who represent a minority of the U.S. population.

**No one “owns”  
the audience any  
more; they now  
own themselves.**

*Pat Harrison*

While many new media innovations hold promise, others may be a source of concern. Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) president and CEO Patricia de Stacy Harrison is skeptical that “citizen journalists” will provide a satisfactory substitute for trained, professional journalists. If you are ill and need an operation, she asked, would you be comfortable putting yourself in the hands of a citizen surgeon? Would you be willing to accept a “citizen pilot” on your next airline flight? But, Harrison conceded, some changes, whether for good or ill, are probably permanent. The audience that sustained the mass media is gone. No one “owns” the audience any more; they now own themselves.

## **Advancing Recommendations of the Knight Commission**

The remainder of the FOCAS meeting explored five areas that the Knight Commission considered to be critical in maintaining healthy, well-informed local communities: strengthening public media; increasing access to information, especially from government; providing universal access to broadband communications; improving the public's digital and media literacy; and expanding citizen's engagement in civic activities in their communities. Participants also divided up into smaller working groups that developed specific proposals for advancing the Knight Commission's recommendations.

### ***Strengthening Public Media***

Increase support for public service media aimed at meeting community information needs.

—Recommendation 2, *Informing Communities:  
Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*

A major recommendation of the Knight Commission calls for increased support for “public service media” to enable them to provide more local, more diverse and more interactive content. In fact, the challenge of strengthening public media and putting it on a sound financial footing has been a continuing theme of discussions at the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program since it was founded in the early 1970s by Douglass Cater. As a member of the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, Cater played a key role in securing the passage of legislation that provided the first federal funding for public broadcasting and led to the creation of CPB and PBS. Despite many years of efforts to find a secure source of long-term support for public broadcasting, federal funding remains dependent on a process of annual appropriations from Congress.

A strong case can certainly be made for the need for a robust public media, particularly in a time when changing economics are weakening the traditional news gathering institutions, and the most profitable news media are being driven by political polarization, often at the expense of accuracy in reporting. There is evidence from other developed countries, notably Great Britain, that public media can serve as a

valuable moderating force. But this has been less true in this country, where public media has failed to realize its potential.

Public media, through Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR) and American Public Media (APM), are doing an excellent job of providing high-quality national and international news, but have had a negligible presence in local news in almost all communities in this country. Bill Kling, who has had a long career in public broadcasting as president and CEO of APM, asks why, after more than 40 years of national and local investment, public media are still “underperforming” by failing to provide a significant amount of local news.

Kling identifies four serious weaknesses in how public broadcasting is currently organized and supported: structure, governance, leadership and funding. First, a major structural problem is that more than half of all public broadcasting licenses have been granted to educational institutions, most notably universities, for which gathering and reporting news is not a priority. As a result, these institutions have buried their public broadcasting activities “deep within their bureaucracies” where they are languishing. In response to difficult economic challenges, many license holders not in the media business—including libraries and municipalities as well as educational institutions—are refocusing on their core activities and considering whether they should divest themselves of their public broadcasting activities.

The problem of governance is directly related to this first weakness: at least 60 percent of all public radio licensees have no direct governance—that is, no board of directors that is dedicated to overseeing the licensee’s operations. In the case of university licensees, it is typically the institution’s board of trustees or regents who have this responsibility, and it typically represents a tiny part of the institution’s overall activities. Yet strong boards drive strong performance, and if public media are to do better, they need strong boards that are more clearly focused on station operations.

The third weakness is leadership. One of the most important tasks of boards is to attract and support strong leaders. Without a direct governing board seeking or demanding strong leaders, the kind of leadership that is often found at major commercial media companies does not exist in public media.

The final weakness is the system's lack of adequate funding. An analysis done by APM concluded that fundraising efforts by public broadcasters in the country's 25 largest media markets were failing to raise a total of \$410 million in potential funding for "public news" from their communities. This unrealized support would be enough to hire 160 professional reporters in each of these markets, more than enough to make up for losses in journalistic talent in other local media in recent years. In addition, if all stations in these 25 markets did as well as the best performers in the system, the total audience for public media could increase by 100 percent.

Kling warns that time is growing short to strengthen public media before they "drift into irrelevancy." Rather than starting over, it makes more sense to build on what already exists. Fixing what is wrong and providing licensees with the resources to create adequate capacity to cover local news would demonstrate what "a broader vision for public media" could be. An immediate goal could be to improve the quality of local journalism being produced by public media in the four top public media markets—New York, Chicago, Southern California and Minnesota—by raising enough funding to support the hiring of at least 100 reporters and editors in each of these markets.<sup>12</sup>

While this may seem like an audacious goal, it is actually quite modest. A white paper authored by Barbara Cochran, "Rethinking Public Media: More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive,"<sup>13</sup> which also calls for expanding news staffs at local public stations, points out that even the struggling *Akron Beacon Journal* newspaper, which is located in the country's 76th largest media market, still has a news staff of 90.

Paula Kerger, president and CEO of PBS, responded to Kling's analysis by agreeing that governance is a profoundly important issue. Public media in the U.S. are unique in the importance that they place on local connections. Because of this role, stations have an opportunity to act as "community conveners" to encourage greater community engagement. As the head of the major national programming network for public television, Kerger's immediate challenge is to figure out how to leverage the existing system to build new capacity at a scale that will have maximum impact. One way she decides on her priorities is by looking at the programming areas where commercial media are not currently doing an adequate job. In the case of television, areas of obvi-

ous weakness are quality content for children as well as educational and arts programming. Also lacking is a broad diversity of independent voices in the news.

From the beginning, the role of public media has been to provide the kind of content that commercial media failed to provide. As Jeff Smulyan, chairman of Emmis Communications points out, even if commercial broadcasters wanted to provide high-quality informational or cultural programming, that kind of content does not attract a large enough audience to support it. Programming that serves the public interest should be the province of the public sector. As a society, we need to provide publicly supported public media, said Smulyan, in order to fill needs that will otherwise be unmet.

PBS has some important strengths, including a respected brand and national reach, but producing local news is expensive. One solution is to partner with others: PBS's *Frontline* has worked with *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* and the nonprofit investigative reporting organization ProPublica to report on problems with that city's police department. *Frontline* has also collaborated with *The Washington Post* to document the astounding, but largely invisible, growth in the country's "intelligence industry."<sup>14</sup>

**Sources of support.** How might public broadcasting achieve a significant increase in support in a time of fiscal austerity? One possibility suggested by Bill Kling would be for public broadcasters to sell a portion of the spectrum that they control but are not using. There is already a precedent for this: Minnesota Public Radio previously sold a portion of its spectrum to Sprint.

Norman Ornstein, resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, notes that "a tremendous amount of the spectrum is not being used," and selling this excess capacity could produce significant revenue while freeing the spectrum for more productive uses. One way to do this would be through an "overlay auction" that would seek bids for unused portions of the spectrum currently assigned to incumbent licensees, including commercial as well as public broadcasters. Another possible source of revenue for public media would be to charge license holders a fee for their use of the spectrum. The government could, for example, agree to waive all public interest requirements on broadcasters



in return for payment of such fees. In an ideal world, Ornstein noted, the revenue raised from an auction or from spectrum rental fees would be dedicated to establishing an endowment for public media. But if either initiative is pursued by the government, there will undoubtedly be a big fight over what to do with this revenue.

FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski pointed out that one of the recommendations of the National Broadband Plan, released by the commission in 2010, calls for “incentive auctions” that would permit interested parties to bid on unused portions of the spectrum that licensees currently control. According to Genachowski, the FCC is on record supporting this recommendation, which is currently moving through Congress and the executive branch. The Broadband Plan also includes a recommendation that “Congress should consider granting authority to the FCC to impose spectrum fees on license holders.”<sup>15</sup>

Several participants raised concerns about getting the government more involved with funding news. For example, Lawrence Jacobs, senior executive vice president and group general counsel at News Corporation, noted that the BBC had spent £140 million of public money on its website, compared to £100 million invested in all other news sites in the U.K. In effect, the BBC was able to squeeze out potential competitors.

Ernest Wilson, dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at USC and chairman of the board of the CPB, was flattered that an organization as large and powerful as NewsCorp could feel threatened by public broadcasting (particularly in this country). In fact, the government has always played a role in supporting the production and distribution of news in the U.S., going all the way back to the Postal Act of 1792, which established subsidies for mailing rates for newspapers.<sup>16</sup> News media have also benefited financially from the commitment by government to publish public announcements in newspapers and from a variety of tax breaks. In light of these broad subsidies, Wilson suggested, it is disingenuous for any publisher to argue against a neutral government “handout” because it might compromise journalists’ integrity and independence.

The fact is that an erosion in government’s traditional support for media is exacerbating their problems. A recent Annenberg study by Geoffrey Cowan and David Westphal found that federal, state and

local governments collectively spent more than \$1 billion to support commercial news publishers in 2009. However, even as the traditional media have suffered major losses of revenue, government support for these media has been declining sharply, further adding to their travails. Cowan and Westphal explain that “these declines have not been a result of a concerted policy to reduce government subsidies and other financial support for the news business. Rather, they emerged from government funding problems and from the development of technology that paved the way for reduced support.”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the impact of these changes has been substantial. In 1971, according to Cowan and Westphal, publishers actually paid just 25 percent of the cost of mailing newspapers and magazines; by 2006, publishers were paying 89 percent of mailing costs, an increase of more than \$1.5 billion in their postal costs.

**Our spinach moment.** The need for action may be urgent, but in light of the current economic and political climate, there is not likely to be much support in Congress for increasing federal funding for public media. Nonetheless, Josh Silver, president and CEO of Free Press, declared that this is our “spinach moment”—a time to stop debating the value of public media, accept its importance and work to strengthen it. One strategy for building support would be to make clear how little the U.S. government actually spends on public media and how much impact even a modest increase would have: going from the current level of \$1.43 per capita in annual support for public media to even \$10 per capita (compared to the \$80+ per capita in the U.K.) would transform public media.

In her white paper, “Rethinking Public Media,” Barbara Cochran proposes creating a national fund of at least \$100 million, enough to increase the number of reporters working in public media to 1,000—an increase of 50 percent. Cochran also calls for renaming and repositioning the Corporation for Public Broadcasting as the Corporation for Public Media, while the Public Broadcasting Act that provides the basis for federal support should “be overhauled to reflect the reality of digital media,” with an increase in support to help increase the system’s digital capabilities.

To mobilize action, it will be necessary to organize the kind of broad campaign that Fred Friendly led in the 1960s in support of federal funding for public broadcasting. FCC Commissioner Michael Copps

and CPB president Pat Harrison both believe that nothing will happen without strong public support. Copps argued that it is still possible to rally strong support for an issue if the public gets interested. When the FCC was considering a proposal to loosen the limits on how many stations a broadcast entity could own, a grassroots campaign generated more than three million messages to the commission, the great majority of which opposed to the proposal, which motivated the Senate to block the change.

Reed Hundt, former chairman of the FCC and current principal of REH Advisors, agreed that having Congress vote for support for public broadcasting every two years is not a good model and that relying on this process is “a recipe for disaster.” It is time, he argued, to find a new vision for funding public media and suggested that we think about public media the same way that we think about Social Security: the system is working, it’s doing well, but now we need to reform it to make sure that it survives and will continue to meet society’s needs.

Several FOCAS participants offered ideas for what might constitute such a new vision for public media:

- Conor White-Sullivan, founder of Localocracy, proposed that public media recognize that, thanks to new media tools, it is no longer true that the only way to increase the amount of local news coverage is to hire more reporters. As craigslist has shown, it is now possible to do more with less. Rather than thinking about how to pay for more resources, it makes more sense today to leverage digital platforms that make it possible to report the news in new, more cost-effective ways.
- Josh Silver called for a new, broader definition for public media that embraces the new interactive media, as well as stronger firewalls to better insulate public media from political pressures.
- Nicol Turner-Lee, vice president and director of the Media and Technology Institute at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, suggested that the system needs to put more emphasis on promoting “engagement and action” rather than simply providing information, in order to reach a broader, more diverse audience.

**Recommendations for Action.** The Forum working group that focused on the role of public and new media proposed the following:

**Strengthen public media by ensuring that they have governing boards that are independent, community-based and devoted solely to the operations and mandates of that service. Stations that do not have such boards should create them.**

This recommendation underscores Bill Kling’s contention that the key to good performance by public broadcasters is having a strong governance structure. To illustrate how the wrong structure could lead to disregarding community needs, Kling related the story of a university that decided to sell its public broadcasting station to another school after a regent of the university complained that they had very little oversight of the station, which was not doing enough to serve the needs of the school’s students. The needs of the community did not even enter into consideration.

One way to encourage more direct governance of public stations would be for somebody—perhaps the FCC or CPB—to either require or provide incentives for moving to such a structure. Michael Copps noted that former FCC Chairman Kevin Martin had made a modest proposal that all public stations have local advisory boards, but no action has been taken on the proposal to date.

CPB’s Pat Harrison said that she supported the concept of direct governance as a means of strengthening the leadership at local stations. CPB has been promoting best practices in this area and has supported stations developing closer connections to their communities. In May 2010 the corporation committed \$20 million to create a Diversity and Innovation Fund, and is working with stations to make them more responsive to the changing needs of their communities.

A second recommendation from the group focused on finding ways to support new “citizen media:”

**Sustain new and nonprofit media. Explore strategies—including changes in government policy, foundation behavior, partnerships, tax changes or other steps—to encourage the sustainability of new and nonprofit media.**

As citizens become increasingly involved in participating in the journalism they consume, nonprofit news and information entities are becoming an important and growing source of local news and information in many communities. To date, however, few if any business models have emerged that will ensure the sustainability of these new ventures. In addition to increasing support by government and foundations, both public and private media organizations should be encouraged to undertake collaborations with emerging cutting-edge news initiatives in order to create a more robust and innovative media environment in every community.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Increasing Transparency and Information Availability***

Require government at all levels to operate transparently, facilitate easy and low-cost access to public records, and make civic and social data available in standardized formats that support the productive public use of such data.

—Recommendation 4, *Informing Communities:  
Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*

Perhaps the most fundamental assumption of both FOCAS and the Knight Commission is that a healthy democracy depends on citizens having access to information about the actions of their government. One of the crucial roles of the news media has been to ensure that this kind of information is readily available to the public, even when governments may prefer to keep such information hidden.

Government data belong to the public and are the raw ingredients that can create public understanding. But the data must be available. The key to transparency is a commitment not just to making government records available digitally, but to making them available in a standardized form that is easily located and searched by journalists or citizens interested in a particular topic.

Fortunately, the same digital technologies that have weakened the traditional press establishment and its ability to maintain a diligent watch on government actions are also making it easier for government to provide greater public access to its ongoing activities. Once information is in digital form, it is—or should be—relatively easy to aggregate it, search it, distribute it widely and package it in a variety of ways in order to meet the needs of different groups of constituents; in other words, to make the information not only available but useful and actionable. But creating a digitally open government will not happen automatically—it requires deliberate action on the part of government officials.

**Recommendations for Action.** The FOCAS conference recommended:

**Make government transparent**

- **Action should be taken, building on and furthering existing efforts, to ensure that the federal government operates according to the principle that the public should be able to track its actions by making records available in a format that is standardized, timely and searchable, and that can be converted into structured data. And steps should be taken to encourage citizens to make use of that information by creating applications and making them accessible.**
- **All state and local government agencies that receive federal funds should abide by the same principles of transparency.**

Michael Klein, founder and CEO of the Sunlight Foundation, noted that the original impetus for creation of the foundation was a concern about the diminishing resources available to the mainstream media, which threatened to compromise their ability to “keep government honest.” The mission of his nonpartisan foundation has been to respond to this challenge by “redefining ‘public’ information as

meaning ‘online,’ and by creating new tools to enable individuals and communities to better access that information and put it to use.” For example, the foundation’s Open House Project, launched in 2007, is a collaborative effort to study how the U.S. House of Representatives currently uses the Internet for citizen access and to support “attainable reforms” intended to expand access. Poliwidgets is a set of small applications created by the foundation that make it easy to identify Congress members’ top campaign contributors, the earmarks they have requested, their voting record, where their fundraisers are, and other pertinent information.

Klein has been surprised and dismayed by how slow the mainstream media have been in making use of the tools that the foundation has developed, even though they are available for free. Ironically, the traditional media need to catch up with the less experienced citizen journalists who have been more willing to make use of these tools.

Efforts are also underway to encourage greater transparency on the state level. Michael Fancher, former executive editor of *The Seattle Times*, reported that the Washington Coalition for Open Government organized a conference in January 2010 to explore what might be done to advance the recommendations of the Knight Commission in the Northwest. He suggested that the National Freedom of Information Center might convene a meeting that focused on the state of government transparency at all levels. Nicol Turner-Lee has been working on organizing a meeting of city and state chief information officers to discuss implementing standards for citizen access to information.

While increasing the transparency of government is a high priority, there was also interest expressed in doing the same for other institutions of public importance: schools, hospitals, universities, labor unions, corporations.<sup>19</sup> However, the Forum did not arrive at specifics for going the next step, finding that it was better to concentrate on making this work first for governmental institutions.

### ***Providing Universal Broadband Access***

Set ambitious standards for nationwide broadband availability and adopt public policies encouraging consumer demand for broadband services.

—Recommendation 8, *Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*

Of the issues identified by the Knight Commission as critical to the information needs of local communities, none has generated more attention over the past year than the proposal to expand access to broadband communications. The release of the National Broadband Plan by the Federal Communications Commission in March 2010 has ensured that this topic has been the subject of debate and discussion in Washington and beyond (see sidebar: Connecting America). The continuing growth of the Internet may well be part of the problem that is challenging traditional media, but it is inevitably going to be part of the solution of ensuring that residents of local communities have access to the news and information they need to keep democratic processes working properly. Increasingly, access to the Internet requires broadband.

**The continuing growth of the Internet may well be part of the problem that is challenging traditional media, but it is inevitably going to be part of the solution.**

As the digital revolution rolls on, the reach and the importance of the Internet continue to grow. Paul Sagan described the range of industries—banks, airlines, books, music, education, automobiles (a majority of car sales now begin online), as well as news—that are being transformed by the Internet. Increasingly, if you do not have the right kind of connectivity, you will be out of business.



### **Connecting America: The National Broadband Plan**

In 2009, Congress directed the Federal Communications Commission to develop a plan that would ensure that every American had “access to broadband capability” in order to advance “consumer welfare, civic participation, public safety and homeland security, community development, health care delivery and other national purposes.” In March 2010, the 360-page National Broadband Plan was released by the FCC.

The plan begins by noting that broadband adoption has increased rapidly in the U.S., but that approximately 100 million Americans still lack broadband access at home. After an analysis of the current state of broadband, the report offers a series of recommendations to accelerate deployment of broadband:

1. Design policies to ensure robust competition.
2. Ensure efficient allocation and management of assets the government controls or influences, such as spectrum, poles and rights-of-way.
3. Reform current universal service mechanisms to support deployment of broadband and voice in high cost areas, and ensure that low-income Americans can afford broadband.
4. Reform laws, policies, standards and incentives to maximize the benefits of broadband in sectors...such as public education, health care and government operations.

Key recommendations of the report included making 500 megahertz of additional spectrum available for broadband uses over the next decade; setting up a new Connect America Fund to support broadband adoption by re-allocating money from the Universal Service Fund that is currently dedicated mainly to subsidizing voice telephone service, with a goal of providing all Americans with “affordable broadband and voice with at least four megabits per second (Mbps) actual download speeds;” and establishing a National Digital Literacy Corps to train youth and adults in new literacy skills.

The plan also identified several longer-term goals:

- At least 100 million U.S. homes should have affordable access to actual download speeds of at least 100 megabits per second and actual upload speeds of at least 50 Mbps.
- Every American community should have affordable access to at least 1 gigabit per second broadband service to anchor institutions such as schools, hospitals and government buildings.

The report noted that approximately half of its recommendations are intended for the FCC, while the other half are intended for the executive branch and Congress as well as state and local governments.

**U.S. versus the world.** Unfortunately, the U.S. is lagging behind much of the rest of the world in terms of the broadband service available to its citizens. As we move into a world in which “everyone will use the Internet for everything,” this country runs the risk of not being competitive.

In calling for accelerated “nationwide broadband availability,” the Knight Commission had in mind mobile access as well as home access to high-speed Internet service capable of receiving and transmitting high-definition video programming comparable to current cable or satellite HD service. The FCC’s plan calls for universal access to “affordable broadband and voice with at least four Mbps *actual* download speeds,” which is about the level required to receive streaming high definition television programming.

The average Internet user globally already enjoys this level of service, but, according to data compiled by Akamai,<sup>20</sup> the U.S. ranks behind many countries in the world in the quality of service it enjoys. Although the average U.S. user has a connection speed of 5.0 megabits per second (Mbps), the country ranks 12th in the world in average connection speed, lagging behind Romania, Latvia and the Czech Republic (see Figure 2). According to the FCC, seven million U.S. households—about five percent of total households—lack access to a service that

**Figure 2: Average Measured Connection Speed by Country**

Country	Average Mbps
1. South Korea	14.0
2. Hong Kong	9.2
3. Japan	8.5
4. Romania	7.0
5. Netherlands	6.3
6. Latvia	6.0
7. Czech Republic	5.4
8. Switzerland	5.3
9. Taiwan	5.0
10. Denmark	5.0
11. Canada	5.0
<b>12. United States</b>	<b>5.0</b>

Source: *The State of the Internet, 3rd Quarter 2010*, Akamai

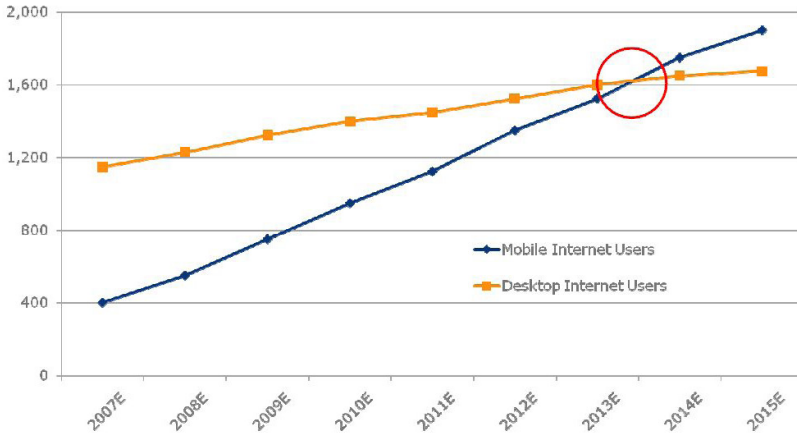
offers at least four Mbps. And the U.S. is 39th in the world in terms of the percentage of connections above two Mbps (at 74 percent).

The U.S. also lags in terms of Internet connection speeds in urban areas, where the highest speed services are typically found. Twenty-nine cities (all located in either South Korea or Japan) have average connection speeds in excess of 10 Mbps, while the highest ranked U.S. city, San Jose, California, has an average speed of 8.3 Mbps, ranking it 57th in the world.

**By the year 2013, the number of wireless connections is projected to surpass the number of wired Internet connections globally.**

There is also a wide disparity in the quality of Internet service in different states across the U.S. The percentage of Internet connections above two Mbps ranges from 98 percent in Delaware to just 46 percent in Iowa. In parts of the U.S., a substantial number of users are still accessing the Internet at slow, dial-up speeds. In the District of Columbia, for example, 6.1 percent of all connections are below 256 Kbps, while in four other states (Missouri, Alaska, Iowa and Georgia), more than four percent of connections are slower than 256 Kbps—speeds that were typical of dial-up modems in the mid-1980s.

A growing challenge for all countries is the emergence of mobile broadband, which is changing the patterns of Internet access in a big way. By the year 2013, the number of wireless connections is projected to surpass the number of wired Internet connections globally (see Figure 3). While the gateway to the Internet for almost everyone was once a desktop PC, access is increasingly coming through a growing constellation of portable devices including laptops, smartphones, netbooks and tablets, which is transforming the way people use the Internet. Instead of a place that you “go to,” the Net is becoming something that is available everywhere and at all times. This shift is also raising a host of new issues. For example, should standards for “net neutrality” be the same or different for wireless vs. wired Internet users?<sup>21</sup>

**Figure 3: Wired vs. Wireless Internet Users, 2007–2015**

Source: Paul Sagan FOCAS PowerPoint presentation, p. 15.

Source: Morgan Stanley

Finally, Sagan suggested that the most meaningful goal for broadband access should not necessarily be framed in terms of universal access at a minimum connection speed. In fact, the FCC’s goal of four Mbps has already been surpassed in many places in the world. A more useful goal might be to provide even faster broadband connection to critical users, including public institutions. An “aspirational” goal for broadband deployment might be to have at least 100 million U.S. households with Internet service of 100 Mbps and actual, dependable download speeds of 50 Mbps.

**The importance of broadband.** Why is broadband access to the Internet important? To illustrate the value of broadband to business, Reed Hundt cited high-resolution video conferencing (exemplified by Cisco’s TelePresence system), which offers the potential to increase the efficiency of business and lower costs by reducing the need for business travel. Another compelling example of the power of broadband is its ability to provide students anywhere in the world with direct access to high-quality (and therefore scarce and expensive) research tools like telescopes, scanning electron microscopes and supercomputer simulation models, allowing students to engage personally in serious scientific research. For example, the Foulkes Telescope Project provides remote

access to two powerful robotic telescopes, one in Hawaii and one in Australia, that science teachers can use with their students to explore the cosmos.<sup>22</sup>

Loris Ann Taylor, executive director of Native Public Media, added that broadband access could bring great benefits to the country's Native American population. Broadband has the potential to improve health via telemedicine, expand access to education via distance learning, improve public safety through more efficient monitoring services and increase employment opportunities through telework. The most important metrics for broadband, Taylor suggested, should not only be access speed but the actual benefits delivered to people.

The real bottleneck in expanding broadband access is what is known as "the last mile"—the technology that connects each individual user to the rest of the Net. This is the weakest link in the chain that consists of three components that provide the infrastructure that links everyone online—the computer (or other digital access device), the "pipe" that carries Internet traffic (which consists of fiber optics and other transmission media plus the routers and switches that ensure that messages get to the right destination) and the last mile. Two of these three components have been improving steadily and rapidly. Thanks to Moore's Law, the basic power of computers has been growing at an annually compounded rate of 60 percent. The capacity of the Internet's pipes has been increasing at a rate of some 30 percent compounded annually. But the capacity of the last mile has been growing at a rate of only five percent per year. The limiting factor, according to Reed Hundt, is not the underlying technology but the ability and the willingness of Internet service providers (ISPs) to invest in the facilities that provide last mile service.

This last mile, which is preventing Americans from using the Internet more efficiently, is not a universal problem; this bottleneck does not exist in places like Japan or Singapore where the government has struck a deal with telecommunications carriers that has allowed them to upgrade their last mile service, at least in those countries' major cities. It has not been possible, so far at least, to strike a similar deal in the U.S.

While this "deal" is not a matter of one, simple, single thing, Hundt suggested that reasonable people should be able to agree to a set of con-

ditions that will allow telecommunications companies to confidently make the additional investment required to enhance their services. But rather than working to reach such an agreement between government and industry, the United States has been caught up in debating whether or not the government (i.e., the Federal Communications Commission) has any jurisdiction over the Internet. While this debate goes on, the U.S. continues to fall further behind other countries.

**How much regulation?** This debate is, according to the FCC's Michael Capps, a curious one. It seems strange to be asking whether or not the United States should have a policy regarding the infrastructure that will play a critical role in determining the country's future prosperity and competitiveness. In fact, this country has always had a policy in areas of vital infrastructure, whether it involves mail service, railroads or interstate highways. And it has always found ways to allow the private sector to work profitably within a policy framework that promotes the public interest. Given this long history, it is simply un-American, Capps asserted, to say that public policy should not be involved in regulating the evolution of the Internet. In fact, the FCC has a statutory obligation to promote the widespread availability of advanced telecommunications services. While some are now arguing that this is the time to get the government out of the business of regulating the Internet, such a development would be a historical aberration.

In some areas, however, the U.S. is leading Internet innovation, a lead that some believe could be jeopardized by excessive or inappropriate regulation. James Glassman noted that in areas such as the development of smartphones, such as Apple's iPhone and Google's Android phones, the U.S. is in the forefront in driving broadband adoption. In an area as dynamic as the Internet, it is difficult to be sure what the right standards should be. Given this uncertainty, it can be more efficient to allow the market place, rather than government regulators, to decide on standards and other key issues.

Those who are skeptical about the wisdom of government intervention also believe that it is easy to misinterpret a statistic like the number of households that currently lack broadband access. The real issue should be the take-up rate for broadband (the percentage of people with access to broadband who actually elect to subscribe). According to a recent study by the Pew Research Center, current broadband penetration is about 66 percent of American households. It is higher among

younger people (75 to 80 percent among 18–49 year olds), and considerably lower among older people (31 percent of those over 65).<sup>23</sup> Also, a 2009 study by Native Public Media found that Native Americans are not only tech savvy but are utilizing digital media and communications technologies at rates that are higher than national norms.<sup>24</sup>

Among those who do not use the Internet, only 20 percent say that their reason for non-use is that the service is too expensive, while just six percent cite lack of access or availability as the main reason they do not go online; a much greater percentage of non-users (48 percent) say that it is simply because what is available online is not relevant to their lives. Finally, the Pew study found that a majority of all respondents indicated that they do not believe that “expanding high speed affordable Internet access” should be an important priority for the federal government. Glassman cautioned that too much government intervention could discourage investors from committing the billions of dollars that will be required to expand the broadband infrastructure.

Tyrone Brown, president of the Media Access Project, noted that the FCC has always been involved with the Internet, at least on the periphery, and investors have historically been willing to invest in infrastructure even though they assumed that it would be regulated in some way. Now, however, some participants see the possibility of creating a totally unregulated environment for telecommunications, which would not be in the public interest but would be highly beneficial to the industry.

According to Josh Silver, the “elephant in the room” in terms of Internet access is the lack of robust competition in broadband. In 97 percent of the country, there are no more than two Internet service providers available. Moreover, telephone companies are scaling back their plans to deploy fiber optic lines for broadband access, raising the possibility that cable companies will enjoy an effective monopoly on providing high speed service to much of the country. Government must make sure that capitalism works. We need to have either robust competition in Internet access or government regulation to guard against the potential abuses of monopolies or near-monopolies.

The principal author of the FCC’s National Broadband Plan, Blair Levin, also an Aspen Institute Communications and Society fellow, acknowledged that the plan did find that cable companies were likely to have a speed advantage in providing Internet access to at least 70 percent of U.S. households. But it is also true that one out of five respon-

dents in the Pew study is now using wireless service for broadband access at home. As even faster 4G wireless services are introduced, more consumers may decide to go wireless for their primary Internet access.

**Setting the right priorities for broadband.** Levin believes that the focus of the discussion of broadband access policy has been in the wrong place. The single most damaging notion that he has heard is that the most important goal of broadband policy should be to provide high-speed, wired access to the Internet to all Americans, including the country's most rural residents. There are three problems with this idea: first, access is not just a matter of wired service. Second, other things than just the speed of access are important. And, third, the main focus of concern should not be on rural households, which is where most subsidies are currently going; they are really a "sideshow" to the main challenge.

At the end of the day, according to Levin, the key target markets for broadband should not be households but information-intensive institutions in both the public and private sectors—schools, hospitals, libraries, research institutions and businesses. In fact, many institutions in the country already enjoy high-speed Internet access, thanks to the Internet2 initiative, a nonprofit consortium founded in 1996 to provide its members (more than 200 universities, research labs and government agencies) with access to advanced networking services. This successful model for aggregating demand could be scaled up to serve other key sectors of society.

Finally, Levin noted that there are areas other than access speed that are relevant to keeping the U.S. competitive in technology use. South Korea, for example, has launched a major initiative to replace its school textbooks with digital e-books.<sup>25</sup> Nothing like this has been undertaken in this country to date. Providing access to broadband is important, but we also need to be careful not to spend all of our time on solving just one problem.

Charlie Firestone, executive director of the Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, observed that for a long time, telecommunications issues were not characterized by left-right politics and asked why this issue has now become politicized. According to Norman Ornstein, virtually every issue now gets divided along partisan lines. As he read the National Telecommunications Plan, he found it hard to see it in terms of ideological issues, but that is what is happen-



ing now. The kind of polarization that leads to a long debate over basic issues like regulatory jurisdiction can be destructive, especially in areas where timing is critical.

Reed Hundt suggested that the best way to make the case for proposals to accelerate broadband deployment is to link them to the larger theme of rebuilding the country in order to put everyone back to work. These proposals should be framed in terms of “backhoes and new jobs” for Americans. In fact, every communications device in use today makes use of a network that was built in the last 15 years and that replaced older, less efficient networks. In the decade from 1997 to 2007, some \$850 billion was invested in network construction, resulting in the creation of two to three million new jobs, almost all of them in the private sector. This investment will not require new Congressional appropriations, just an environment that encourages and supports these network upgrades. By contrast, subsidizing voice services for rural residents does not create any jobs or stimulate any meaningful economic activity. Nor, many argue, does it make sense to continue to spend billions of dollars on subsidizing traditional fixed-line telephone service.

Craiglist founder Craig Newmark added that there are many areas where broadband services can help to solve important human needs. He has been particularly concerned about services for military personnel and veterans. The availability of broadband connections makes it possible for military families to communicate with service members deployed overseas; broadband can help veterans find work.

**Broadband versus broadcast.** Finally, broadcasters sounded a note of caution about assuming that all telecommunications-based services will migrate to a broadband Internet platform. Jeff Smulyan suggested that if the Internet had come along first, then someone discovered broadcasting, broadcasting would have been hailed as revolutionary—an extremely efficient way to distribute broadband content to a large audience. Historically, it has not been end users who have borne the bulk of the cost of broadband media that they use, but rather those who have provided the programming. However, this has begun to change as ISPs have switched to variable pricing schemes in response to the dramatic growth in data traffic (e.g., ATT’s data traffic increased 6,000 percent in three years) mainly brought about by the increasing consumption of rich media like music and video.

Bill Kling added that switching from broadcast to Internet delivery for just the broadcasters in the Los Angeles market would increase the cost of distributing their content some 100-fold. He has seen predictions that something like three-quarters of all Internet users would be watching most of TV programming online within a decade. This has enormous economic consequences that need to be taken into account.

The economics of distribution will continue to change, and the most successful business models will continue to evolve. Consumers have demonstrated that they are willing to pay for entertainment—currently, some \$200 per month—and they will decide how they will allocate it. Paul Sagan noted that the cost of online delivery has come down by a factor of 100 in the past 10 years and will certainly continue to decline. However, unlike broadcasting, the Internet will continue to be a variable-cost delivery medium. But there are people today who are making money from streaming video content, and the cost of delivery is already just a relatively small part of their overall costs. It is already cheaper to deliver a movie online than it is to deliver it via the post office. The transition from broadcasting to Internet distribution will be difficult, but it will inevitably work out to the benefit of the consumer.

Jeff Smulyan responded that some entities may be making money streaming audio and video content, but they are few and far between. He remained unconvinced that the distribution of entertainment over the Internet will ever prove to be more efficient than broadcasting, where variable costs are essentially zero.

**Recommendations for Action.** From these discussions and subsequent working groups, the participants recommended the following next steps:

**Reprioritize funding to drive higher bandwidth to key facilities**

- **Increase funding for broadband to strategic institutions**
- **Utilize nonprofit organizations to aggregate demand for broadband**

Blair Levin noted that about 95 percent of U.S. households currently have access to some broadband service. Getting to 100 percent access will take 5 to 10 years, but can be accomplished by re-allocating the money that is already available in the Universal Service Fund.

A bigger, and perhaps more urgent, challenge is to increase the availability of “ultra-high speed broadband”—service of up to one gigabit per second—to key institutions such as schools and universities, research labs, government offices and health care facilities. Institutions such as these typically need high-speed upstream capacity (so they can send as well as receive large amounts of data), which currently is very expensive since the dominant broadband model is based mainly on serving households that typically want to receive more information (including music and video) than they distribute. Rather than focusing on providing a minimal level of broadband service to every U.S. household (including those in remote rural areas that will be costly to reach), a more meaningful goal would be to work on providing every community with ultra-high-speed broadband, in order, initially, to serve key institutions in those communities and eventually upgrade the quality of service for all households.

The FCC’s Michael Copps endorsed the proposal to emphasize higher speed connections to key institutions, noting that schools and research institutions do have different requirements than households, and commercial providers have focused primarily on serving the household market. One way to encourage providers to address the institutional market is to encourage user organizations to create nonprofit organizations, such as the Internet2 consortium, that can aggregate demand among members and act as sophisticated buyers of broadband services.

Another way to encourage the availability of ultra-high-speed broadband would be for the federal government to launch a “Race to the BTOP,” modeled on the Race to the Top initiative at the Department of Education that created a competition among states to receive substantial amounts of federal funding to improve their quality of education. Rather than attempting to impose standards intended to raise the minimal performance of all students, Race to the Top provided an incentive intended to spur creative thinking about how education could be redesigned to improve its effectiveness.

BTOP stands for the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program, an initiative that provided \$4.7 billion to fund three types of programs: projects to expand deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas, projects that enhance the capacity of public computing centers and projects to promote adoption of broadband

among low-income and rural residents. As the National Broadband Plan notes, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, “BTOP was designed as a short-term investment in broadband infrastructure, broadband adoption and job creation.”<sup>26</sup> It also concentrated mainly on expanding access to current broadband services for underserved households and individual citizens. By contrast, a Race to the BTOP would be a longer-term strategic initiative to support the development of cutting-edge broadband services and spur innovation by inviting communities to apply for funds to upgrade the quality, as well as the availability, of broadband services.

### **Lower the costs of accessing rights-of-way**

- **Include conduit for telecommunications in all highway projects**

The second theme of the proposals is to lower the costs of deploying broadband by facilitating access for telecommunications providers to government-controlled rights-of-way. One creative approach to accelerating the deployment of broadband infrastructure is the concept of “Dig Once.” This proposed legislation would require that any federally-funded road or highway project involving excavation must include the installation of conduit that could carry fiber optic cables or other broadband wiring. The rationale for this mandate is the fact that, according to the Federal Highway Administration, it is up to 10 times more expensive to tear up a road just to install a fiber line from scratch than it is to use a conduit that has been installed as part of a road construction or repair project.<sup>27</sup> Norman Ornstein noted that there are already billions of dollars committed to upgrading the country’s sewer systems, including some 1,200 rural sewer systems. A small increment in funding could have a big impact on reducing the overall cost of broadband deployment. Adding conduit for networking to all federal roads would bring broadband to within five miles of 95 percent of the U.S. population.

Such a proposal would benefit private industry as well as contributing to the public good. It would also benefit wireless as well as wired networks. Even wireless networks are “mostly wired” since the economics of a finite spectrum dictate that to reduce their costs, carriers want to minimize the extent of wireless connections and move the signal as quickly as possible to a less expensive, more efficient wired network.

Also, the closer a wireless device is to a wired network, the faster the service is that can be provided to that device. A simple way to enhance access to rights-of-way would be to require governments to maintain a database of road construction projects and give notice of upcoming projects to carriers to give them an opportunity to take advantage of the construction to lay new wires.

### **Transition the Universal Service Fund from subsidizing voice to supporting broadband deployment**

- **Enable communities to self-identify as unserved by higher bandwidth**

There was broad agreement among the FOCAS participants that the money currently being dispersed through the FCC's Universal Service Fund (USF) should be redirected from voice to broadband services. According to the 1996 Telecommunications Act, one of the goals of the fund, which is based on a surcharge on current services, is "to increase

**Today, the USF is mainly being used to subsidize old-fashioned voice telephone service rather than to support the expansion of broadband access.**

access to advanced telecommunications services throughout the Nation." Today, however, the USF is mainly being used to subsidize old-fashioned voice telephone service, particularly in rural areas, rather than to support the expansion of broadband access. By redirecting USF to this latter purpose, no new money will have to be raised.<sup>28</sup>

The current USF was set up in the mid-1990s, at a time when less than a quarter of U.S. households had dial-up Internet access and broadband access was almost non-existent. The fund was therefore focused on providing basic voice and data service to underserved groups such as low-income and rural residents. As the National Broadband Plan notes, "the USF...[was] designed for a telecommunications industry that provided voice service over circuit-switched networks.... A comprehensive reform program is required to shift from primarily supporting voice communications to supporting a broadband platform that enables many applications, including voice."<sup>29</sup>

An updated USF designed to support broadband expansion should focus on funding capital expenses rather than subsidizing operating expenses, as is true at present. And instead of awarding funding on an annual basis, the FCC (which administers the fund) should make lump sum awards for a five- to ten-year period that would accelerate the deployment of broadband infrastructure. Funding would be limited to areas where no viable business case exists for providing broadband without a subsidy.

A re-prioritized USF should allow communities to self-identify their communication needs and then seek funding to fill those needs. Initially, the fund would focus on providing support for communities that currently do not have access to broadband service that provides at least four Mbps downstream and one Mbps upstream. However, the FCC should regularly revisit this criterion and decide whether it should be revised upwards as technology and user needs evolve.

Finally, Blair Levin contended that it does not make economic sense to try and get every household in the U.S. connected to a wired network. Connecting the final one percent of households—mainly those in remote rural areas—would require up to \$14 billion, which is prohibitively expensive. It will be more cost effective to link these households via a satellite connection (which would be considered “the carrier of last resort”).

### ***Promoting Digital Media Literacy***

Integrate digital and media literacy as critical elements for education at all levels through collaboration among federal, state and local education officials.

—Recommendation 6, *Informing Communities:  
Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*

Even if we achieve the goal of universal broadband access for all citizens, and even if the availability of potentially valuable information is vastly increased, it will not matter if citizens are not able to find, evaluate and make use of the information they are theoretically able to access. In fact, as information channels continue to proliferate, Americans are increasingly living in a state of chronic information overload—and technology overload—as an ever-growing number of networks, devices and

applications vie for their attention. Moreover, the new media environment not only offers greatly expanded access to all sorts of content, it invites people to move from being mere passive consumers to becoming active creators of their own content, which they can share with family and friends—or with the world at large. And with greater ability to create and share content comes greater responsibility.

If local communities are to be fully informed, citizens need to be able to navigate through an increasingly complex media environment in order to accomplish both personal and civic goals. This ability is what has been called “digital literacy” or “media literacy.” At FOCAS, participants collectively referred to them, along with other literacies such as news and civic literacies, as “the new literacies.”<sup>30</sup> Though these terms are somewhat abstract, they underlie a wide variety of activities that are part of daily life. As described by Renee Hobbs in a white paper prepared for FOCAS, these activities include the following:

Reading or watching the news; writing a letter to the editor; talking with family, coworkers and friends about current events; commenting on an online news story; contributing to an online community network; calling a local radio talk show host to express an opinion; taking an online poll; searching for information on topics and issues of special interest; evaluating the quality of information; sharing ideas; [and] deliberating and taking action in the community.

According to Hobbs, there is a “clear and rigorous framework” that defines the dimensions of digital and media literacy:

1. *Access* – Finding and sharing appropriate and relevant information, and using media and technology tools well
2. *Analyze/evaluate* – Comprehending messages and using critical thinking to analyze the content of media messages
3. *Create* – Composing or generating new content using creativity and confidence in self-expression
4. *Reflect* – Applying social responsibility and ethical principles to one’s own identity and lived experience, communication behavior and conduct

5. *Act* – Working individually and collaboratively to share knowledge and solve problems, and participating as a member of a community at local, regional, national and international levels<sup>32</sup>

The nation's schools are an obvious place to provide digital and media literacy instruction, and good literacy programs are underway in many schools around the country. But there are some 60,000 school systems in the United States, and they are under great pressure to do a better job teaching basic subjects at the same time that their funding is in jeopardy. There is little support currently available that is explicitly earmarked for this kind of literacy training.<sup>33</sup>

One institution that has become increasingly involved with promoting digital and media literacy is the nation's public libraries. According to Nashville public library director Donna Nicely, libraries find themselves at the center of literacy issues, both in terms of traditional print literacy and the new digital and media literacies. She cited a recent report from the Gates Foundation that documents how libraries are being transformed into "digital hubs" where access to the Internet and other digital resources are becoming increasingly important activities.<sup>34</sup> The report's findings also included the following:

- Access to the Internet has become one of the most popular uses of libraries (used by nearly 50 percent of all library visitors).
- One-quarter of those who go online at libraries have no other access to the Internet.
- Library access to the Internet is particularly important to poor people who depend on libraries for free access.
- Access to technology is an important draw for teenagers: nearly half of all 14- to 18-year-olds used a public library computer during the last year, and one quarter did so once a week or more.
- Library visitors use the Internet for a wide range of purposes: to find work, apply to college, secure government benefits and learn about medical treatments. They also use library computers to connect with family and friends, plan family outings, manage bank accounts, apply for permits, start clubs and read the daily newspaper.



- More than 26-million library patrons used library computers to get government or legal information or to access government services. More than 32-million visitors reported using library computers for educational activities, including doing homework, taking online courses and tests, searching for and applying to educational programs and applying for financial aid.

Libraries have not only become important in providing access to computers and the Internet, they have been increasingly active in teaching people, and especially young people, how to use these tools effectively (see sidebar on YOUmedia at the Chicago Public Library).

Nicol Turner-Lee acknowledged that libraries have been doing a good job of providing literacy training, but educators need to be involved as well. All K–12 students need exposure to new technologies, yet many school-based programs are still teaching old skills for the old economy rather than preparing students for the 21st century.

### **YOUmedia at the Chicago Public Library**

YOUmedia is a 21st century teen learning space located at the Chicago Public Library's downtown Harold Washington Library Center. Established in 2009 with funding from the MacArthur Foundation, YOUmedia provides access to a variety of media tools, including laptop computers, digital video and still cameras, drawing tablets, video and audio editing software, a recording studio, turntables, game systems and programming applications. It offers afterschool workshops in digital music production, graphic design, games and blogging, and the spoken word. Members are also invited to join and participate in YOUmedia's online social network. Many of the programs are led by young mentors from the city's Digital Youth Corps, as well as by staff librarians. After the program's first year of operation, the program will be expanded to three branch libraries. According to Amy Eshelman, the library's assistant commissioner for strategic planning and partnerships, "In the past, teens came in and were consumers of information. What we do is provide mentors that allow them to make, create and do things—to become creative users of media, not just consumers of it."<sup>35</sup>

Training in digital or media literacy is necessary but not sufficient to give people all of the skills they need to be active citizens. Tom Rosenstiel suggested that in addition to digital literacy, we also need news literacy and civic literacy. Conor White-Sullivan added that there is little incentive for an individual to become informed without a direct, personal experience of democracy—as a participant, not merely as an observer. It is not enough just to understand “how a bill becomes law;” people need the opportunity to participate in some form of self-governance.

NPR’s Vivian Schiller cautioned that it is easy to underestimate what kids *do not* know: we tend to assume that as “digital natives” who are growing up with new technologies, young people today have an instinctive understanding of how they work and how to use them. If this is true at all, it is only true to a limited degree. To be fully literate, young people need be taught critical thinking skills that allow them to distinguish between an assertion and verified information and to detect biases that may be implicit rather than explicit.

There are compelling economic arguments for putting greater emphasis on teaching these new literacies. According to USC’s Ernest Wilson, media literacy is, in effect, the new liberal arts. Employers want workers who are media literate and are capable of critical thinking. But even though the subject of literacy seems to spark a lot of passionate discussion, it never seems to translate into a broader public awareness of the issue.

Concern about the need to support digital and media literacy is hardly new. As Charlie Firestone noted, the Aspen Communications and Society Program held a conference that focused on the issue of “media literacy” in 1992, and creating a Digital Literacy Corps has been recommended at virtually every Aspen conference relevant to the topic that he has been at since then. He has not seen much progress in this time. The question now is what is required to move the idea forward?

Renee Hobbs noted that interest in digital literacy has been growing lately. After 20 years of “robust experimentation,” we do not need to start from scratch but rather to learn from what has already happened. There are a lot of disparate activities and programs underway, but there is little sharing among them. In particular, there needs to be more communication across different disciplines and different communi-

ties—schools, libraries, civic groups—that have a stake in expanding literacy skills. Adam Thierer, president of the Progress and Freedom Foundation, agreed that there are many different literacy programs—perhaps too many—and not enough coordination among them. For example, the recent report from a “Blue Ribbon Working Group” on child online safety that he co-chaired included a recommendation for more support for digital literacy.<sup>36</sup> If too many groups attempt to promote the same cause, they can end up competing with each other.

Peter Levine, director of the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement at Tufts University, confirmed that improving the quality of literacy instruction will not necessarily require the creation of new tools or a new pedagogy. In many cases, these resources already exist, but they are not widely used. In fact, there is already a good deal of activity in the schools: virtually 100 percent of schools include some media literacy skills in the standards for teaching English. But even if the schools did a superb job of teaching new literacies, society cannot rely on them alone to create a fully literate population when one-third of all students drop out before graduating from high school.

Responding that we need to start someplace, Michael Copps suggested beginning by focusing on developing a digital and media literacy curriculum for K–12 students. What is needed is a “central convenor”—which could be the White House, the Department of Education, the FCC, or the Aspen Institute—to bring all of the parties together to review what has already been accomplished and what needs to be done. The goal would be to create a model curriculum that could be put online and made freely available to all schools.

**Recommendations for Action.** Considering these and other arguments, the Forum recommended several strategies for expanding the capacity of individuals to use information effectively through programs in digital and media literacy (DML):

**Expanding capacity to teach new literacies**

- **Organize a leadership conference for “new literacies”**
- **Create an online DML best practices database**
- **Support interdisciplinary teacher education programs in DML**

- **Develop formal partnerships between libraries and public media to support a “DML Corps”**
- **Develop a position paper on the viability of e-text-books**

The logical first step in this area is to convene the key players who are already involved with teaching the new literacies—digital, media, news, and information—in the schools and elsewhere. It would also be important to include people involved with teaching “traditional” literacy: reading is, after all, still fundamental. An online database would be very useful for sharing ideas and information about what is already working in literacy instruction. Video documentation could provide a powerful and relatively inexpensive way to document and share effective teaching techniques.

If digital literacy is to be integrated in the school curriculum, a critical target audience will be the nation’s 3.5 million K–12 teachers. The average age of these teachers is 51, and, on average, they will teach for at least another decade. Many in this cohort may not be conversant with new media and will need retraining if they are to be effective in teaching digital literacy skills. Experience has shown that the best way to teach these skills is not through formal instruction, but by engaging young people in working collaboratively—“elbow to elbow”—in a workshop mode with peers and mentors in projects using media to create their own content.

### ***Expanding Public Engagement***

Empower all citizens to participate actively in community self-governance, including local “community summits” to address community affairs and pursue common goals.

–Recommendation 13, *Informing Communities:  
Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age*

One of the key premises of the Knight Commission is that “to pursue their true interests, people need to be engaged with information and with each other.” But evidence is mounting that Americans are disaffected from both the information available to them and the communi-

ties in which they live. A 2010 Gallup survey found that only about one-quarter of Americans have confidence in newspaper and television news.<sup>37</sup> The survey also found that confidence is at near record lows for many other institutions, including Congress, with the military being about the only institution left in which the public still has confidence.

One result of the proliferation of information sources has been the disappearance of what Norman Ornstein described as “the public square”—a place where people can come together as citizens and share a common set of facts, even while they disagree about the best course of action. As the media audience has fragmented, many people have come to believe all sorts of things that are simply untrue: a significant number of people in this country are convinced that Barack Obama was born outside the United States, for example, which undermines the legitimacy of his office and erodes the sense of unity among Americans. Ornstein argued that we need to re-establish some kind of public square, even though it will not be “the public square of his childhood” that was populated by respected icons and trusted figures. But we still need a resource that is widely trusted, where facts are verified and where deliberation and engagement remain important social goals.

The best place to start in recreating a public square, according to Ornstein, is with public media. They are the only national media resource that has the capacity for and an established track record of providing trusted information and a platform for deliberation. But if public broadcasting is to play an expanded role, it will need additional resources. Where might they come from? One possible source suggested by Ornstein would be from a deal that frees commercial broadcasters from all remaining public interest obligations in return for payment of an annual rental fee for the spectrum that they use. The money generated by this fee could be used to establish a public/private foundation dedicated to advancing the public interest by supporting the development of public media to serve as an electronic public square.

Michael Copps agreed with Ornstein’s analysis of the problem, but disagreed with his proposed solution. The fundamental use for the spectrum should be to provide services that broadly serve the public interest requirements, Copps argued. Therefore it does not make sense to free broadcasters from their public interest responsibilities. There has already been a diminishment in what is expected from commercial broadcasters: the Fairness Doctrine has been eliminated along with

licensing reviews. Copps also expressed discomfort with the notion of a single source for “facts” that everyone will be willing to accept. A better approach would be for the FCC to restore public interest responsibilities for broadcasters by making them a real requirement for getting and keeping a license. What is needed is a licensing system with public interest guidelines that are appropriate to the 21st century.

Adam Thierer raised a different set of objections to Ornstein’s proposal, which he described as “a reparations policy for the original sin of the government’s give-away of the spectrum” to broadcasters. In fact, we no longer do this: spectrum is now allocated by auctions, which generate billions of dollars in revenue for the government. Trying to recapture the value of spectrum that was given to broadcasters decades ago is “an exercise in futility...a tax that effectively transfers money from what may be a dying media platform to its competitors.”<sup>38</sup> The reality is that the financial status of broadcasters today, who are facing an increasing number of competitors, is not very good. In fact, some broadcasters are considering becoming pure cable channels, which would free them of obligations related to their use of the airwaves.<sup>39</sup>

Jeff Smulyan expanded on this point, noting that the spectrum that was originally given by the government to broadcasters has, in many instances, been sold and re-sold to new operators. Since many broadcasters today have paid for the spectrum they use, it would not be fair to begin charging them “rent” on it. Broadcasters are in the business of giving the public what it wants, which may not be the kind of content that “is good for them.” What the public decides is in its interest may be different from what is socially important or what “experts” deem to be in the public interest. If there are real needs that are not being met, they should be subsidized.

A practical problem with imposing a spectrum rental fee is deciding how the money from such a fee would be used. In this age of media proliferation, there is not a single public square, and the prospects for re-establishing one are dim. The good news is that a thousand flowers are blooming in the way of local hubs and public squares, a number of which have been funded by the John S. and James L. Knight

**The best place to start in recreating a public square is with public media.**

*Norm Ornstein*

Foundation. This is not a moment to try to pick a single candidate that would have some sort of monopoly on public discourse, but rather a time to encourage more experimentation, more diversity. The issues we should be addressing should focus on questions like what rules should be set for such efforts, e.g., should we require the identity of participants in online forums to be authenticated?

Several participants involved with new media raised concerns about the relevance of broadcasting and the difficulty of making judgments about what types of media should be subsidized. Salon Media Group's Richard Gingras agreed that we are in a period of great ferment, which makes it difficult to make decisions about major policy initiatives. In fact, the media environment "is changing exponentially every year," and the rate of change will not decline in the near future. The whole

**...the media culture has shifted...people are no longer content with being a passive audience.**

*David Cohn*

world of social networks did not exist a few years ago but is having major impact in many unexpected ways: currently, some eight to ten percent of all of Salon's traffic now comes from Facebook. We need more input from people who are creating these new media models. We need to be careful not to base our proposals on biases shaped by prior experience and old models.

If the goal is to increase public engagement in civic life and political activities, this may have little to do with broadcasters' public interest requirements. David Cohn, founder and director of Spot.U.S., pointed out that the media culture has shifted, so that people are no longer content with being a passive audience but are interested in becoming actively involved. Millions of people are blogging and tweeting and creating and sharing YouTube videos. By figuring out how to incorporate these new forms in their programs, broadcasters can participate in creating change, not just ignoring or resisting it. Policy is important in shaping media behavior, but so is culture.

Conor White-Sullivan agreed that broadcasting is an essentially passive medium that is unlikely, by itself, to lead to meaningful civic engagement. The best opportunity lies with interactive media that serve as platforms for local action. Localocracy, which White-Sullivan found-

ed in 2008 and is now operating in four communities in Massachusetts, provides an online town hall forum that allows citizens to learn about and debate issues of concern in their communities. Each week, a local issue is featured and residents are invited to take a stand and argue for their position. Only registered voters who use their own names are allowed to participate in order to assure accountability.

In a time of rapid digital innovation, we should not overlook opportunities to couple the old and new media. In Massachusetts, a broadcaster who televises town meetings has added a “crawl” at the bottom of the screen that displays comments posted on Localocracy by residents watching the telecast.

**It would be  
unfortunate if the  
only true national  
town square left is  
the Super Bowl.**

*Norm Ornstein*

Renee Hobbs pointed out that broadcast programming can, in fact have a positive impact on behavior. After an episode of *Happy Days* in which Fonzi got a library card, libraries across the country reported a big spike in young people coming in to get their own cards. In fact, many entertainment shows, from *Law and Order* and *The Daily Show* to *Oprah*, are regularly addressing social issues and helping to shape public opinion.

Conceding that it is not likely or desirable to try to establish a single public square, Norman Ornstein continued to support the development of local town squares across the country that would be run by or have a heavy involvement of local media. A national foundation that was created to support greater engagement might fund initiatives like these, but it might also provide funding to a national news channel or to a commercial entertainment program if it demonstrated a clear contribution to the public interest. It would be unfortunate if the only true national town square left—the one “place” that brings a substantial portion of the American population together—is the Super Bowl.

In making recommendations in this area, some Forum participants articulated their rationale for action: first, it is clear that civic engagement has broadly declined in this country, with real costs for the quality of government and the fabric of community life. Without the active involvement of citizens, government can be dominated by the perspective of bureaucrats or come under the sway of special interests.



Increasing engagement can empower individuals, improve the quality of community life and can also contribute to social and technical innovation, thereby helping to keep the country competitive internationally. And although the growth of technology may have had a negative impact on engagement, new digital technologies also offer new opportunities for promoting more active citizen involvement in solving local problems.

### Will the Revolution be Tweeted?

In an essay in the October 4, 2010, issue of *The New Yorker*, Malcolm (The *Tipping Point*) Gladwell challenged the belief that social media are serving as powerful agents of social change.<sup>40</sup> Citing the example of the sit-ins in the south in the 1960s that helped to end segregation, Gladwell argued that effective social movements are led by hierarchically organized groups of people with close personal connections. By contrast, online social networks like Facebook and Twitter are collections of loosely connected people with weak personal ties to one another. If anything, these networks tend to promote an illusion of social activism by making it easy for people to demonstrate support for a cause without the need for any real commitment or social action—a phenomenon that has been described as “slacktivism.”

Predictably, Gladwell’s piece provoked a strong reaction from the blogosphere. Several responders pointed to the critical role that social media played in the Obama presidential campaign and in the rise of the Tea Party and cited examples of large-scale protests that were organized via social media in countries like Bulgaria, Columbia, Iran and Egypt (which one activist in Cairo described as “Revolution 2.0”). In fact, a number of authoritarian governments have been so concerned about the potential impact of new media that they have cracked down on online activists and attempted to limit access to the Internet.

One blogger, Maria Popova, argued that the definition of activism itself needs to be revised in the Internet age: “In the Civil Rights era, boundaries were often about access to public space as a designator of status and equality—back versus front of the bus, sit-down tables versus lunch counter. In the digital era, boundaries frequently pertain to one’s access to information. But just as our notion of public space has evolved to encompass digital space and the data it contains, our definition of activism should be modified to incorporate efforts to protect speech and provide access in this new public realm. To negate the power of the social web as a mechanism of this kind of activism is to deny the evolution of the social planes on which justice and injustice play out.”<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the proposals to address these issues were based on a set of “core principles” intended to balance the rapidly changing social and technological conditions in the U.S. with the country’s enduring democratic values. The proposals are based on (1) a commitment to striving for inclusion and diversity, (2) the creation of broad coalitions of participants within communities, and (3) respect for finding local solutions to local problems, driven by local voices.

**Recommendations for Action.** The working group presented three proposals:

**Promote civic communications education for youth**

- **What: Support development of civic communications curricula based on digital and media literacy**
- **How: Convene participants to inventory existing curricula and initiatives (K–12; out-of-school youth; community college), identify common elements and missing components, create curriculum guidelines and an action plan for implementation**
- **Who: FCC or White House**

This proposal bears obvious similarities to the proposal that focused on “expanding capacity.” Rather than focusing just on digital or media literacy, this proposal adds the dimension of civic involvement that media can facilitate.

Both proposals recognize that there is a good deal of activity already underway, but with relatively little coordination or public awareness of its importance. As Peter Levine observed, the “thousand flowers” that are blooming now tend to view each other as competitors more than as collaborators. Moreover, these disparate programs lack the leadership that is required to galvanize a broader, more cohesive movement.

Because the field is still inchoate, it would be useful to start with a smaller organizing meeting that would allow participants to begin to get to know each other and develop an agenda for action. This type of gathering could be followed by a larger, more public meeting that would lend urgency and visibility to the movement. Ideally, such a meeting would be convened by the White House, but the Federal Communications Commission, working with other agencies like the Department of Education, could also take the lead in this area.

### **Create a program to support Community Connectors**

- **What:** Recruit young people ages 16–24 (especially non-college), to promote use of digital technologies in their communities
- **How:** Train and deploy young people to build community digital media capacity, link to high school’s community service requirement, service model for out of school youth, and encourage further education and support career development
- **Who:** The Corporation for National and Community Service should devote 10 percent of its funds to this activity

The basic concept behind this proposal is to recruit and train a cadre of young people who can help nonprofit organizations and grassroots groups in their communities make better use of new technologies. In developing the proposal, the working group intentionally chose not to call it a “corps” because of the connotations that this term has involving college-educated young people in service in a “disadvantaged” community. By contrast, “Community Connectors” would be made up of a broad cross section of youth aged 16–24, with a special effort made to recruit those who have dropped out of pursuing formal education, including students who may not have graduated high school or received a GED.

Expressing her conviction that “young people will respond” to this concept, Donna Nicely proposed that libraries would be good homes for such an effort. In fact, if a program like this existed now, Nicely would be ready to “put its members to work tomorrow.” In addition to local libraries, a project like this should be supported by national organizations such as the American Library Association and the Urban Libraries Council. Renee Hobbs also suggested that on the post-secondary level, this project would be a natural one for a partnership between a university’s school of education and school of communication.

Several participants raised a concern about the possibility that such a program would be viewed as favoring a liberal agenda (i.e., as being seen as a tool to promote “community organizing”), which would be likely to trigger partisan opposition. For such a project to succeed, it would need to be based and framed in nonpolitical terms. One way to do this would be to describe it as a jobs program that would give young people new skills that would enhance their employability. Jake Oliver, publisher and CEO of the *Afro-American* newspaper, suggested that the initiative could be depoliticized by linking it to broader civic groups such as the YMCA or the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts. Craig Newmark added that the program could be designed to accommodate returning veterans and could include work in cybersecurity.

**Establish a national competition for local civic engagement initiatives**

- **What: Create a competition to fund new initiatives to address critical community problems**
- **How: Fund efforts to create online/offline initiatives that engage local community members in problem solving, require participation of multiple institutions, and support emergence of community-focused social entrepreneurs**
- **Who: Funding from public-private partnerships**

How can a national movement be encouraged around local initiatives? One way to do this would be to establish a national competition for local projects that expand local participation and improve local decision making. The Knight Foundation has been a pioneer in creating this kind of competition, both on its own and in partnership with other groups:

- The Knight News Challenge is now in its fifth annual cycle that is providing \$5 million a year for “innovative ideas that develop platforms, tools and services to inform and transform community news, conversations and information distribution and visualization.”

- The Foundation's Community Information Challenge is offering matching funds to local community foundations that are willing to invest in projects that "meet a local information need." Alberto Ibargüen, president of the Knight Foundation, noted that in addition to a positive response from local foundations, private media companies have expressed interest in participating as partners in the challenge.
- The Knight Foundation is partnering with the FCC to create an "Apps for Inclusion" competition that will award \$100,000 for new "tools that will make it easier for citizens to receive [government] services through mobile and online applications."
- Code for America (whose supporters include the Knight Foundation and the Sunlight Foundation) offers stipended fellowships for programmers interested in working with local governments to develop new web-based applications that reduce administrative costs, increase transparency and encourage greater citizen engagement.

Conor White-Sullivan noted that his company, Localocracy, was initially funded through prizes awarded in business plan competitions. He noted that contests with deadlines are an effective means for stimulating creative thinking. The biggest challenge in competitions of this sort is to get beyond those who are already activated and feel empowered to reach those who otherwise would not be engaged.

## Conclusion

Charlie Firestone concluded the conference by observing that times are tough in a number of ways: the economy remains weak; politics remain highly polarized; there is a crisis in the credibility of social institutions, including the press; there has been a significant decline in civic engagement; and technological change continues to challenge the viability of traditional media. Yet some things are still true: information is still essential to a democracy, and government transparency and robust journalism remain vital for gaining access to that information. In a chaotic time, society needs to encourage more experimentation with new models that provide credible information and encourage engagement, locally as well as nationally. It needs to ensure that everyone has access to broadband services that are creating the platform on which the government and the economy increasingly depend. And finally, it needs to make sure that people have the education in the multiple literacies they need to function fully as citizens in the 21st century.

*The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, with funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, commissioned a series of eight white papers to explore the needs identified by the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy and to recommend specific action plans. See <http://www.knightcomm.org> for the papers and join the national conversation on twitter at #knightcomm.*

## Notes

1. Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism. 2010. "State of the News Media 2010." [www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2010/](http://www.stateofthemediamedia.org/2010/)
2. Fair Syndication Consortium. 2009. "How U.S. Newspaper Content Is Reused and Monetized Online." Research brief. [www.fairsyndication.org/guidelines/USNewspaperContentReuseStudy.pdf](http://www.fairsyndication.org/guidelines/USNewspaperContentReuseStudy.pdf). This study found that more than three-quarters of the revenue from this unlicensed content comes from two online ad networks—Google's, accounting for 59 percent of total monetization, and Yahoo's, accounting for 19 percent.
3. In Tennessee, for example, the state's four largest newspapers have joined together to create The Tennessee Newspaper Network in order to share content and collaborate on covering big stories like the state's 2010 gubernatorial campaign. [www.jacklail.com/blog/archives/2009/12/tennessee-newspaper-network-ta.html](http://www.jacklail.com/blog/archives/2009/12/tennessee-newspaper-network-ta.html)
4. For example, the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for local reporting awarded to Raquel Rutledge of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* for a series of stories about fraud and abuse in a child-care program for low-wage working parents, which included analysis of state records that revealed millions of dollars in overpayments to bogus child-care providers ([www.pulitzer.org/citation/2010-Local-Reporting](http://www.pulitzer.org/citation/2010-Local-Reporting)). Charles Duhigg of the *New York Times* won a Scripps Howard National Journalism Award for environmental reporting for his coverage of potential health problems with drinking water based on compiling and analyzing millions of records from local water systems and regulators around the country ([www.scripps.com/foundation/news/releases/10march12.html](http://www.scripps.com/foundation/news/releases/10march12.html)).
5. For an analysis of the implications of this distinction, see John Hagel III and John Seely Brown, *The Power of Pull: How Small Moves, Smartly Made, Can Set Big Things in Motion* (Basic Books, 2010). Their thinking is also reflected in the Aspen Roundtable on Talent Development. See, for example, Richard Adler, "Leveraging the Talent-Driven Organization" (Aspen Institute, 2010). [www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/leveraging-talent-driven-organization](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/leveraging-talent-driven-organization)
6. Several FOCAS participants cited the important study "The Principle of Journalism" by Tom Rosenstiel and Bill Kovach of the Pew Project on Excellence. There are nine key principles, derived after four years of research and dialog with journalists:
  1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth
  2. Its first loyalty is to citizens
  3. Its essence is a discipline of verification
  4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover
  5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power
  6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise
  7. It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant
  8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional
  9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience

See [www.journalism.org/resources/principles](http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles)
7. Andrew Garber, "Legislature Starts with a Lot Fewer Journalists," *Seattle Times*, December 19, 2008. [http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2008537903\\_presscorps19m0.html](http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2008537903_presscorps19m0.html)
8. Clay Shirky, "Newspapers and Thinking the Unthinkable," (blog) March 13, 2009. [www.shirky.com/weblog/2009/03/newspapers-and-thinking-the-unthinkable](http://www.shirky.com/weblog/2009/03/newspapers-and-thinking-the-unthinkable)

9. Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism. 2010. "How News Happens: A Study of the News Ecosystem of One American City," [www.journalism.org/analysis\\_report/how\\_news\\_happens](http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/how_news_happens). The study did find two stories that originated with new media: one story was communicated directly to the public by the Police Department's Twitter feed, and another story, about government plans to put listening devices on city buses, was initially reported by a local blogger then picked up by a newspaper reporter.
10. Nathanael Johnson, "For-Profit Hospitals Performing More C-sections," *California Watch*, September 11, 2010. <http://californiawatch.org/health-and-welfare/profit-hospitals-performing-more-c-sections-4069>
11. The main page for Bay Area news on the *New York Times* website carries a notice that The Bay Citizen is providing this news to the *Times*. The announcement also states that "Under its agreement with the *Times*, The Bay Citizen has pledged that its newsroom will be strictly independent, nonpartisan and apolitical. Donors and board members can have no influence over news decisions, which must be made solely by news professionals."
12. Kling noted that the public broadcasters in these four markets have relatively strong news departments (compared to other licensees) and are already working together to create "centers of excellence" that will demonstrate the full potential of public media.
13. Barbara Cochran, "Rethinking Public Media: More Local, More Inclusive, More Interactive." The Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, December 2010. [www.knight-comm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Rethinking\\_Public\\_Media.pdf](http://www.knight-comm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Rethinking_Public_Media.pdf)
14. See Dave Walker, "PBS 'Frontline' Teams With ProPublica and The Times-Picayune for NOPD probe," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, August 24, 2010. [www.nola.com/tv/index.ssf/2010/08/pbs\\_frontline\\_teams\\_with\\_propu.html](http://www.nola.com/tv/index.ssf/2010/08/pbs_frontline_teams_with_propu.html); and "Top Secret America," *Washington Post* video, 7:25. July 18, 2010. <http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/frontline-video>
15. Federal Communications Commission. *Connecting America: National Broadband Plan*, 2010, page 75. <http://download.broadband.gov/plan/national-broadband-plan.pdf>
16. For the classic account of the early days of media in this country and the role of the federal government in their development, see Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communication* (Basic Books, 2005).
17. Geoffrey Cowan and David Westphal, *Public Policy and Funding the News*, Annenberg School for Communication, Center on Communication Leadership & Policy Research, January 28, 2010. <http://communicationleadership.usc.edu/pubs/Funding%20the%20News.pdf>. The authors argue that new media are also benefiting from government subsidies of several kinds: "Internet entrepreneurs have benefited from the huge federal investment in creating the Internet and are about to benefit from billions in the stimulus package that will be spent on broadband. By extending high-speed Internet to consumers who do not yet have it, the government will be helping consumers migrate online at the expense of conventional print and broadcast outlets. In addition, new-media entrepreneurs, including many bloggers and news providers, benefit from the Internet Tax Moratorium, a federal law that, according to some estimates, reduces taxes by \$3 billion a year."



18. One example of how this might happen is a pledge by Comcast to establish partnerships between news nonprofits and at least five local NBC television stations as part of Comcast's acquisition of NBC Universal. These arrangements are being modeled after a partnership already established between KNSD, the NBC-owned station in San Diego, and [voiceof-sandiego.org](http://voiceof-sandiego.org). See Brian Stelter, "Nonprofit News May Thrive in Comcast Takeover," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2010. [www.nytimes.com/2010/12/31/business/media/31comcast.html?scp=4&sq=comcast&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/31/business/media/31comcast.html?scp=4&sq=comcast&st=cse)
19. A number of initiatives have attempted to use access to information to make the notoriously inefficient health marketplace operate more competitively. For example, in late 2010, the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services launched a new site that provides online access to basic information about physicians, including their education, the languages they speak and whether they are board certified ([www.medicare.gov/find-a-doctor/provider-search.aspx](http://www.medicare.gov/find-a-doctor/provider-search.aspx)). CalHospitalCompar.org is a website, funded by the California HealthCare Foundation, that provides ratings of a majority of hospitals in the state on factors such as the quality of clinical care, patient safety, and patient experience ([www.calhospitalcompare.org](http://www.calhospitalcompare.org)).
20. Sagan's company, Akamai, provides Internet management services that involve continuous measurement of the state of the network. The statistics quoted in this section are based on "billions of datapoints" from the company's ongoing monitoring as reported in its quarterly *The State of the Internet*. [www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet](http://www.akamai.com/stateoftheinternet)
21. The FCC issued its long-awaited net neutrality rules in December, 2010. Among other things, the rules do differentiate between wired and wireless Internet services. See Report and Order, In the Matter of Preserving the Open Internet Broadband Industry Practices, FCC, December 21, 2010. [http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/FCC-10-201A1.doc](http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-10-201A1.doc)
22. For a description of this and other similar Internet-based educational resources, see John Seely Brown and Richard Adler, "Minds on Fire: Open Education, the Long Tail and Learning 2.0," *EDUCAUSE Review*, vol. 43, no. 1 (January/February 2008): 16–32. [www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Review/EDUCAUSEReviewMagazineVolume43/MindsonFireOpenEducationtheLon/162420](http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Review/EDUCAUSEReviewMagazineVolume43/MindsonFireOpenEducationtheLon/162420)
23. Aaron Smith, "Home Broadband 2010." Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, August 11, 2010. <http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2010/Home%20broadband%202010.pdf>
24. Traci L. Morris and Sascha D. Meinrath, "New Media, Technology and Internet Use in Indian Country: Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses." New America Foundation, November 19, 2009. [www.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/New\\_Media\\_Technology\\_and\\_Internet\\_Use\\_in\\_Indian\\_Country.pdf](http://www.newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/New_Media_Technology_and_Internet_Use_in_Indian_Country.pdf)
25. Jeff Young, "What South Korean Schoolchildren Can Teach Colleges About E-Textbooks," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 21, 2010. [http://chronicle.com/blogPost/What-South-Korean/27085/?sid=at&utm\\_source=at&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/blogPost/What-South-Korean/27085/?sid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en)
26. "BTOP Progress Assessment," Appendix A, *Connecting America: The National Broadband Plan*, Federal Communications Commission, March 2010. The first round of BTOP grants were announced in February 2010, and the second and final round of grants were announced in September 2010. See Amy Garmer, "Final BTOP Grants Announced; Total of 233 Projects Share Nearly \$4 Billion," [www.knightcomm.org](http://www.knightcomm.org), September 28, 2010.

27. "Broadband Rollout to the Last Mile," Rep. Anna Eshoo website. [http://eshoo.house.gov/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=821:broadband-deployment&catid=42:technology-a-innovation&Itemid=100026](http://eshoo.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=821:broadband-deployment&catid=42:technology-a-innovation&Itemid=100026)
28. In February, 2011, the Federal Communications Commission adopted a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that called for redirecting the subsidies for rural telephony to provide support for rural broadband. The NPRM called for phasing out the existing Universal Service Fund and replacing it with a new Connect American Fund "to help make 21st Century broadband available and affordable to rural communities." FCC Proposes Modernizing and Streamlining Universal Service, February 8, 2011. [http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs\\_public/attachmatch/DOC-304522A1.doc](http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DOC-304522A1.doc)
29. "Universal Service," *Connecting America: The National Broadband Plan*, 140–141.
30. The terms "digital literacy" and "media literacy" are broadly synonymous but not identical in meaning. Digital literacy tends to put more emphasis on the ability to understand and effectively use digital tools such as computers and computer applications and the Internet. Media literacy, a somewhat older term, was initially intended to describe the understanding of mass media but has been broadened more recently to include interactive media.
31. Renee Hobbs, "Digital and Media Literacy: A Plan of Action." Aspen Institute Communications and Society Program, 2010. [www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Digital\\_and\\_Media\\_Literacy\\_A\\_Plan\\_of\\_Action.pdf](http://www.knightcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Digital_and_Media_Literacy_A_Plan_of_Action.pdf)
32. Hobbs notes that "these five dimensions have been widely accepted by major professional associations, including the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, to name just a few."

A somewhat different list of components of digital literacy was offered at the 2008 FOCAS conference by Idit Caperton, founder of the World Wide Workshop Foundation. Her list included six "contemporary abilities" that young people need today:

  1. The ability to search online for information
  2. The ability to come up with original ideas and express them online
  3. The ability to develop a project in a wiki-based environment
  4. The ability to publish and distribute ideas
  5. The ability to interact socially online and to use socially-based learning
  6. The ability to understand what is good and bad online.
33. According to Hobbs, the U.S. Department of Education's 2010 technology plan recommends that "21st century competencies and expertise such as critical thinking, complex problem solving, collaboration, and multimedia communication should be woven into all content areas." And Senator Jay Rockefeller (D-WV) has introduced a bill, the 21st Century Skills Incentive Fund Act, that would provide \$100 million in matching federal funds to support information and media literacy instruction.
34. Samantha Becker and others, "Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries." Institute of Museum and Library Services. [www.imls.gov/pdf/OpportunityForAll.pdf](http://www.imls.gov/pdf/OpportunityForAll.pdf)

35. Josh Karp, "YOUmedia Program Builds on Success at Downtown Library, Expands to Underserved Chicago Neighborhoods," MacArthur Foundation Spotlight, September 16, 2010. [http://spotlight.macfound.org/btr/entry/youmedia\\_program\\_builds\\_success\\_downtown\\_library\\_expands\\_underserved\\_chicago](http://spotlight.macfound.org/btr/entry/youmedia_program_builds_success_downtown_library_expands_underserved_chicago)
36. "Point Smart, Click Safe: Task Force Recommendations for Best Practices for Child Online Safety," July, 2009. [www.pointsmartreport.org](http://www.pointsmartreport.org)
37. Gallup. "In U.S., Confidence in Newspapers, TV News Remains a Rarity," Gallup poll, August 13, 2010. [www.gallup.com/poll/142133/confidence-newspapers-news-remains-rarity.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/poll/142133/confidence-newspapers-news-remains-rarity.aspx)
38. For a longer version of this argument, see Adam Thierer, "The *Wrong Way* to Reinvent Media, Part 2: Broadcast Spectrum Taxes to Subsidize Public Media," The Progress and Freedom Foundation, Progress on Point, Volume 17, Issue 2, March 2010. [www.pff.org/issues-pubs/pops/2010/pop17.2-wrong\\_way\\_part\\_2.pdf](http://www.pff.org/issues-pubs/pops/2010/pop17.2-wrong_way_part_2.pdf)
39. In 2009, for example, CBS President Leslie Moonves was quoted as saying switching his network to cable is "a very interesting proposition." Jon Fine, "Why Broadcast Networks Can't Just Turn Cable," *Bloomberg Business Week*, May 21, 2009. [www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/09\\_22/b4133076651151.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/09_22/b4133076651151.htm)
40. Malcolm Gladwell, "Small Change: The Revolution will not be Tweeted," *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010. [www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell)
41. Maria Popova, "Malcolm Gladwell Is #Wrong," *Change Observer* (blog), October 6, 2010. <http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/entry.html?entry=19008>

# APPENDIX



## Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society

### *News Cities: The Next Generation of Healthy Informed Communities*

Aspen, Colorado · August 15-18, 2010

#### Participants

**Richard Adler**

Research Associate  
Institute for the Future, and  
President  
People & Technology

**Marcus Brauchli**

Executive Editor  
*The Washington Post*

**Tyrone Brown**

President  
Media Access Project

**John Carroll**

Former Editor  
*Los Angeles Times*

**Sandy Close**

Executive Editor and Director  
New America Media

**Barbara Cochran**

Curtis B. Hurley Chair in Public  
Affairs Journalism  
University of Missouri School of  
Journalism

**David Cohn**

Founder and Director  
Spot.U.S

**Mark Contreras**

Senior Vice President,  
Newspapers  
The E.W. Scripps Company

**Michael Copps**

Commissioner  
Federal Communications  
Commission

**Michael Fancher**

Former Executive Editor  
*The Seattle Times*

**Charles M. Firestone**

Executive Director  
Communications and Society  
Program  
The Aspen Institute

**Lisa Frazier**

Founder, President, and Chief  
Executive Officer  
The Bay Citizen

Note: Titles and affiliations are as of the date of the conference.

**Hilda Garcia**

Vice President  
Multi-platform Content and  
Information  
ImpreMedia

**Julius Genachowski**

Chairman  
Federal Communications  
Commission

**Richard Gingras**

Chief Executive Officer  
Salon Media Group

**James K. Glassman**

Executive Director  
George W. Bush Institute

**Patricia Harrison**

President and Chief Executive  
Officer  
Corporation for Public  
Broadcasting

**Renee Hobbs**

Professor  
Media Education Lab  
Department of Broadcasting,  
Telecommunications, and  
Mass Media  
Temple University School of  
Communications and Theater

**Reed Hundt**

Chief Executive Officer, Coalition  
for Green Capital and  
Principal, REH Advisors

**Alberto Ibargüen**

President  
John S. and James L. Knight  
Foundation

**Walter Isaacson**

President and Chief Executive  
Officer  
The Aspen Institute

**Lawrence A. Jacobs**

Senior Executive Vice President  
and Group General Counsel  
News Corporation

**Paula Kerger**

President and Chief Executive  
Officer  
Public Broadcasting Service

**Michael Klein**

Chairman and Chief Executive  
Officer  
Sunlight Foundation

**Bill Kling**

President and Chief Executive  
Officer  
American Public Media

**Blair Levin**

Communications and Society  
Fellow  
The Aspen Institute

**Peter Levine**

Director, Center for Information  
and Research on Civic Learning  
and Engagement, and  
Research Director, Tufts  
University's Jonathan Tisch  
College of Citizenship and  
Public Service

**Caroline Little**

Chief Executive Officer  
Guardian News & Media, U.S.

**Craig Newmark**

Founder and Customer Service  
Representative  
craigslist

**Donna Nicely**

Director  
Nashville Public Library

**John Oliver, Jr.**

Publisher and Chief Executive  
Officer  
*Afro-American* Newspaper

**Norman J. Ornstein**

Resident Scholar  
American Enterprise Institute

**Tom Rosenstiel**

Director  
Pew Research Center's Project for  
Excellence in Journalism

**Robert Rosenthal**

Executive Director  
Center for Investigative  
Reporting

**Tom Rubin**

Chief Counsel for Intellectual  
Property Strategy  
Microsoft

**Paul Sagan**

Chief Executive Officer  
Akamai Technologies

**Vivian Schiller**

President and Chief Executive  
Officer  
National Public Radio

**Josh Silver**

President and Chief Executive  
Officer  
Free Press

**William Dean Singleton**

Chairman and Chief Executive  
Officer  
MediaNews Group

**Jeff Smulyan**

Chairman of the Board  
EMMIS Communications

**Paul Steiger**

Chief Executive Officer and  
Editor-in-Chief  
ProPublica

**Loris Ann Taylor**

Executive Director  
Native Public Media

**Adam Thierer**

President  
The Progress and Freedom  
Foundation, and  
Director  
Center for Digital Media  
Freedom

**Nicol Turner-Lee**

Vice President and Director  
Media and Technology Institute  
Joint Center for Political and  
Economic Studies

**Stefaan Verhulst**

Chief of Research  
Markle Foundation

**Steven Waldman**

Senior Advisor to the Chairman  
Federal Communications  
Commission

**Conor White-Sullivan**

Chief Executive Officer  
Localocracy

**Ernest J. Wilson III**

Walter Annenberg Chair in  
Communication and Dean  
Annenberg School for  
Communication  
University of Southern California

**Staff:****Sarah Eppheimer**

Senior Project Manager  
Communications and Society  
Program  
The Aspen Institute

**Amy Garmer**

Director of Journalism Projects  
Communications and Society  
Program  
The Aspen Institute

**Peter Keefer**

Communications Manager and  
Web Producer  
Communications and Society  
Program  
The Aspen Institute

**Erin Silliman**

Senior Project Manager  
Communications and Society  
Program  
The Aspen Institute

**Kiahna Williams**

Senior Project Manager  
Communications and Society  
Program  
The Aspen Institute



## About the Author

**Richard Adler** is a research associate at the Institute for the Future, Palo Alto. He is also president of People & Technology, a consulting firm located in Silicon Valley. His research and writing focuses on the impact of new technologies on fields including business, education, health care and aging.

Richard is the author of reports from several previous FOCAS conferences, including *Media and Democracy* (2009); *Media and Values: Issues of Content, Community and Intellectual Property* (with Drew Clark and Kathleen Wallman, 2008) and *Next Generation Media: The Global Shift* (2007). Other recent Aspen Institute reports that he has written include *Solving the Dilbert Paradox* (2011); *Leveraging the Talent-Driven Firm* (2010); *Talent Reframed* (2009); *m-Powering India: Mobile Communications for Inclusive Growth* (2008); and *Minds on Fire: Enhancing India's Knowledge Workforce* (2007). In addition, he is the author of *Healthcare Unplugged: The Evolving Role of Wireless Technology* (California HealthCare Foundation, 2007) and co-editor, with BJ Fogg, of *Texting 4 Health* (Stanford Captology Media, 2009).

Richard is fellow of the World Demographic Association and serves on a number of local and national boards. He holds a BA from Harvard, an MA from the University of California at Berkeley, and an MBA from the McLaren School of Business at the University of San Francisco.

## Previous Publications from the Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society

*Of the Press: Models for Transforming American Journalism* (2009)

Michael R. Fancher, rapporteur.

*Of the Press* takes a closer look at ways to save American journalism and local democratic governance in our current financial crisis. With the many technological and behavioral changes taking place, news organizations face shrinking audiences and declining advertising revenue. *Of the Press* offers four areas to improve: transforming public service journalism; rebuilding public trust in journalism and journalistic organizations; promoting research; and pushing experimentation and collaboration. 60 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-521-8, \$12.00.

*Media and Democracy* (2008)

Richard P. Adler, rapporteur.

*Media and Democracy* explores the role of media in enhancing social capital, civic engagement and democratic involvement. In addition to examining the state of newspapers and journalism against the backdrop of the 2008 presidential election, the report discusses proposed projects for harnessing media to spur civic and global engagement. Among the ideas being implemented are the Online Peace Corps, Groundswell and the American Dialogue Initiative, as well as ongoing work by the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, which stemmed from the 2007 FOCAS. 58 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-503-X, \$12.00.

*Media and Values: Issues of Content, Community and Intellectual Property* (2007)

Richard P. Adler, Drew Clark, Kathleen Wallman, rapporteurs.

This report examines how the new media paradigm intersects issues of content values, intellectual property, and local community. Framing the discussions from FOCAS 2007, *Media and Values* looks at topics such as offensive content, fair use, new business models, intellectual

property, local media, and the future of democracy. The report also offers constructive suggestions for resolving several of the more contentious challenges that have accompanied developments in new media. 90 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-488-2, \$12.00.

*Next-Generation Media: The Global Shift* (2006)

Richard P. Adler, rapporteur.

This report examines the growth of the Internet and its effect on a rapidly changing area: the impact of new media on politics, business, society, culture, and governments the world over. The report also sheds light on how traditional media will need to adapt to face the competition of the next-generation media. 76 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-469-6, \$12.00.

*Soft Power, Hard Issues* (2005)

Shanthi Kalathil, rapporteur.

In this compilation of two reports, the author explores the growing importance of soft power by looking at two crucial areas of international tension: the U.S. role in the Middle East and Sino-American relations. The role of information and communications technologies in American public diplomacy in the Middle East and American's relations with China is a central theme in the reports. 70 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-447-5, \$12.00.

*Opening the Realm: The Role of Communications in Negotiating the Tension of Values in Globalization* (2004)

Michael Suman, rapporteur.

This report addresses how communications media and information technologies can be used to ameliorate or exacerbate the tensions among the values of peace, prosperity, and good governance or among the forces of security, capitalism, and democracy. That is, can the media help a society gain the simultaneous benefit of all three values or forces? How does one prioritize how the media go about doing that in a free society? What is the role of the new media, which has so much promise to involve the individual in new ways? 51 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-432-7, \$12.00.

*Media Convergence, Diversity and Democracy* (2003)

Neil Shister, rapporteur.

In the summer of 2002, chief executive level leaders from the public and private sectors met at the Aspen Institute to address the underlying role of media in a democratic society and policies that may improve the ability of citizens to exercise their roles as informed sovereigns in that society. This publication, authored by journalist Neil Shister, examines the concern of many over the shrinking electorate in American elections and the possible role the mass media play in that trend, the debate over whether consolidation in old and new media raises “democratic” as opposed to antitrust concerns, and opportunities for new media to enable citizens to communicate—both in terms of gaining new information and exchanging their own opinions with others. He also addresses the concern that new media will become bottlenecked rather than continue the open architecture of the Internet. 56 pages, ISBN: 0-89843-374-6, \$12.00.

*In Search of the Public Interest in the New Media Environment* (2001)

David Bollier, rapporteur.

This report examines public interest and the role of the marketplace in redefining this concept with respect to educational and cultural content. It suggests options for funding public interest content when all media are moving toward digital transmission. The publication also includes afterthoughts from an international perspective by British historian Asa Briggs. 61 pages, ISBN Paper: 0-89843-333-9, \$12.00.

# About the Communications and Society Program

*[www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s)*

The Communications and Society Program is an active venue for global leaders and experts to exchange new insights on the societal impact of digital technology and network communications. The Program also creates a multi-disciplinary space in the communications policy making world where veteran and emerging decision makers can explore new concepts, find personal growth, and develop new networks for the betterment of society.

The Program's projects fall into one or more of three categories: communications and media policy, digital technologies and democratic values, and network technology and social change. Ongoing activities of the Communications and Society Program include annual roundtables on journalism and society (e.g., journalism and national security), communications policy in a converged world (e.g., the future of international digital economy), the impact of advances in information technology (e.g., "when push comes to pull"), and serving the information needs of communities. For the past three years, the Program has taken a deeper look at community information needs through the work of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, a project of the Aspen Institute and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. The Program also convenes the Aspen Institute Forum on Communications and Society, in which chief executive-level leaders of business, government and the non-profit sector examine issues relating to the changing media and technology environment.

Most conferences utilize the signature Aspen Institute seminar format: approximately 25 leaders from a variety of disciplines and perspectives engage in roundtable dialogue, moderated with the objective of driving the agenda to specific conclusions and recommendations.

Conference reports and other materials are distributed to key policymakers and opinion leaders within the United States and around the world. They are also available to the public at large through the World Wide Web, *[www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s](http://www.aspeninstitute.org/c&s)*.

The Program's executive director is Charles M. Firestone, who has served in that capacity since 1989, and has also served as executive vice president of the Aspen Institute. He is a communications attorney and law professor, formerly director of the UCLA Communications Law Program, first president of the Los Angeles Board of Telecommunications Commissioners, and an appellate attorney for the U.S. Federal Communications Commission.