

MEETING THE PUBLIC'S INFORMATION NEEDS IN PHILADELPHIA
Annenberg School of Communication
University of Pennsylvania
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Peter Shane, executive director of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, welcomed everyone present to the second of three community forums that the Knight Commission is hosting. Through the hearings, the Commission hopes to enrich its “50,000-foot view” of information needs of local communities with a fairly concrete understanding of how local communities actually engage with information, how people translate information into effective personal and collective decision-making, and what the specific problems are for adequately fulfilling local communities' needs. Even though this and the other two community forums in Silicon Valley and Missoula provide only a glimpse of the complex information flows that comprise each local community, these glimpses are extremely helpful to the Commission's understanding.. Mr. Shane thanked Knight Foundation Program Officer Matt Bergheiser, anthropology grad student Todd Wolfson, and the faculty and graduate students at Annenberg for their help in identifying panelists for today's three roundtables.

Roundtable on Unmet Community Information Needs

Peter Bloom, Executive Director, Juntos: Mr. Bloom is the director of Juntos, an organization working with Mexican immigrant communities in South Philadelphia for the past seven years. When talking about the information needs of immigrant communities, Mr. Bloom remarks that there are a couple of key issues to keep in mind, namely language access issues, which prevent mainstream media from penetrating immigrant communities, and an issue of independent content production, which prevents ethnic media, especially television and the internet, from providing adequate coverage of information important to immigrant communities.

Mr. Bloom warns that these two media worlds are not being successfully bridged and, in light of this deficit, Juntos has started doing work to train people in immigrant communities to use video and new media technologies to get their voices out to mainstream media as well as to create their own media. In closing, Mr. Bloom concludes that citizen journalism is not enough because it does not address the digital divide in immigrant communities and instead suggests the need for community journalism that gives immigrant communities the tools and skills needed to participate in community conversations in a meaningful way.

Nijmie Dzurinko, Executive Director, Philadelphia Student Union: Ms. Dzurinko works with the Philadelphia Student Union to improve the quality of education in Philadelphia public schools. To understand the unmet information needs of local communities, Ms. Dzurinko says, we must understand the conditions of the community that prevent needs from being met: the dropout rate for Philadelphia public schools is 50%, Pennsylvania ranks at the bottom of states in terms of the state's share of education costs; the use of property taxes to fund public schools

creates an inequitable distribution of resources from district to district.

In thinking about unmet information needs, Ms. Dzurinko would broaden the scope to communication in general, saying that “information needs” implies some degree of passivity on the part of the community. Some of the unmet “communication needs” are the lack of public, face-to-face meeting spaces for young people, aggravated by the closing of recreation centers and curfews, and the lack of internet and computer access for young people. It is extremely important, Ms. Dzurinko concludes, for young people in local communities to band together to create their own communication infrastructure.

Don Kimelman, Managing Director, Information Initiatives and the Philadelphia Program, The Pew Charitable Trusts: Even though there are many important ways through which people receive civic information, the most pressing issue at hand for local communities, Mr. Kimelman remarks, is the decline in sophisticated and in-depth coverage of regional issues and institutions by highly skilled professional journalists. With diminished resources, newspapers are doing as well as they can, but not nearly well enough and online journalism is not picking up the slack. While national and international news enjoy a certain amount of redundancy on the internet with the various news aggregation sites, local journalism does not enjoy that kind of redundancy; if a story is not covered, there is no institution to point out the omission. Mr. Kimelman realizes that there are issue-based efforts on the web attempting to pick up the slack from local newspapers, but fears that such an effort cannot be sustained over the long run. The decline of regional news organizations, he concludes, is a community problem, and we all have a stake in the solution.

Janet Ryder, Vice President of Labor Participation, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania: Ms. Ryder began by giving background about how organized labor issues tie into the fabric of community life and mentioned that she was presenting her remarks on behalf of Pat Eiding, the President of the Philadelphia Council of AFL-CIO. Everyday, working Philadelphians return home and search for information on health care, jobs, education and other issues; however, there are no newspapers that cover issues of organized labor and only one radio show that presents information essential to organized labor workers. Outside of labor contract negotiations and approaching labor strikes, organized labor issues are rarely covered and, when they are, such stories are usually sensationalized in the media, thereby putting organized labor issues at a disadvantage when combating economic and political obstacles. Therefore, Ms. Ryder concluded, alternative media and new media are essential for getting everyone's voices, including organized labor workers', heard within a community.

Paul Socolar, Editor and Director, The Notebook: Mr. Socolar began by commenting on the reality that there is still a deep seated ambivalence in alternative and mainstream media about the importance of civic engagement. While it is accepted that informed policy decisions are key, it is less accepted that involving the public is a way to make such informed policy decisions – for example, who the next mayor should be, what to do with the city's waterfront, and what should be done about the education system. The Notebook is an example of a non-profit

newspaper that is focused on fostering public awareness about the public school system.

Mr. Socolar concluded by emphasizing that, in order to combat ambivalence towards engaging the public in key decision-making for the community, the media needs to use their influence to challenge leaders who govern without real public input and advocate for the right of public to be involved in making decisions. He recommends that local media move out of being atomistic organizations, competing against each other and towards thinking about collaboration among organizations and towards a more democratic and inter-networked media landscape that share resources and information with each other.

Zack Stalberg, President and CEO, The Committee of Seventy: Mr. Stalberg remarked that, in talking about fostering geographically-defined, democratic communities, there are huge information needs left unmet. It is much easier to find information regarding communities of people who share common interests than it is to identify the issues facing a geographically community as a whole. Without romanticizing the past, Mr. Stalberg mentioned that the fact that the work of professionals and the allocation of resources devoted to the coverage of local government issues really makes a difference in fostering a kind of geographic, democratic community. However, even despite new tools, Mr. Stalberg concludes, media are not doing a good job covering the elections that are being contested.

Mr. Shane said that he hears common themes emerging from the Silicon Valley and Philadelphia forums. One of them is the consequence, when an information system breaks down, that people are excluded and don't see their views represented and woven into the community fabric. Inclusion works at two levels: sub-communities need a sharing of information within their communities but there also has to be bridging across sub-communities. And this bridging, it seems, needs to occur, not only between immigrant communities but also across generations and across social and economic classes. Mr. Shane asked the panel if the bridging between sub-communities in Philadelphia is working and if the bonding within sub-communities is working and if not, what needs to be done to accomplish this.

Mr. Bloom replied that the bonding is not in fact happening and this can be seen by how the different immigrant, youth and labor communities are depicted in the media. In terms of bridging, he continues, the infrastructure exists for this information sharing and for this kind of bridging to occur, but it has not happened. Mr. Kimelman responded that we need to be careful, however, in how much responsibility to give media organizations: sometimes their role is not to heal the wound but simply to report on the wound that already exists.

Mr. Socolar remarks that bridging and bonding are the role of public institutions and the media are part of ensuring that public institutions are robust in cultivating bridging and bonding amid local communities. Media have a role both in continuing to insist that these democratic institutions can be fleshed out in a way that bring people together and in including people's voices in their reporting. Ms. Dzurinko then remarked that media consolidation, the economic realities of how stories are produced and disseminated, and the grassroots efforts of ground

level bridging and bonding are three important levels that need to be addressed in fostering a healthy communication environment. Also, she added that it is important to use media as an organizing tool as well as a way to frame issues that cut across different sub-groups within communities.

Professor Phyllis Kaniss of the Annenberg School asked the panel to take into account the role of local TV news in fulfilling the needs of local communities. Mr. Socolar responded, and Ms. Ryder, Ms. Dzurinko and Mr. Bloom agreed, that most local TV news programs are either regurgitating print media news, at best, or reporting sensationalized or trivial stories. Mr. Shane then asked if local TV news results in an inaccurate portrait of the local community, to which Mr. Bloom responded that yes, it is definitely problematic that the TV news does not go out to report on stories that have real impact on local communities.

Mr. Kimelman said it was important to distinguish between information and journalism. A listing of property taxes on every block is information, while a piece revealing inequities in property tax assessments or comparing property taxes over time is journalism, a distinction with which Mr. Stalberg agreed.

Responding to a question about adult literacy affecting the future of information flow, Mr. Socolar said that, especially in light of falling literacy and the digital divide, having information that is transformative and meaningful to people's lives is part of the challenge for those organizations disseminating information. Ms. Ryder remarked that this problem must be seen as a community-wide problem and not only a problem of literacy: this affects and is affected by public and employee education, income levels, crime and job opportunities. In addition to questions of literacy, Mr. Bloom remarks that his organization also works to gather people in the community and to teach people how to use media tools as well as how to frame stories so that they are relevant and accessible to their communities. Ms. Dzurinko then adds that the problem with free legal and housing clinics is that individuals come with problems and individuals leave with solutions to those problems, but the issues in the community at large which cause the individual problems are not recognized and not addressed. The media, she concludes, needs to work in framing these problems for the community as a whole and acting as an organizing tool.

Following a lunch break, Mr. Shane convened the **Panel on Challenges to Mainstream Media**, and introduced as its moderator **Phyllis Kaniss, who is Executive Director of the American Academy of Political and Social Science and a member of the Anneberg faculty**. Professor. Kaniss introduced the panel as discussing the challenges facing the mainstream media and their effect on the public's information needs. She related her own background in covering the mainstream press and its efforts to cover the Philadelphia region and to provide the public with information needed to make decisions, remarking that she has often served as a critic of local media. However, she continued, such criticisms in this current landscape of new media seem almost quaint and she offers the following recommendations to the Commission.

First of all, she recommends urging news organizations not to move towards sensation and trivia while clinging to their same old way of doing business and to urge them to not use the same old information sources, the same old techniques while others are learning how to disseminate information in radically new and more effective ways. Secondly, she recommends urging other institutions, including national foundations, local versions of ProPublica and universities, concerned about the importance of quality journalism to our democracy, to consider stepping in and supporting the kind of local, investigative and in-depth reporting that citizens need but that is increasingly being discarded because of market forces.

Ms. Kaniss then concluded, in response to the question "what information does the public need?" that she does not believe that the public lacks the stomach for news about government when, and this "when" is crucial, they understand how these government affairs affect them. The news that is being lost is regional news, news that cuts across city and suburbs, news about the city government, and national and international news in which there is relevance to a local audience.

Josh Cornfield, City Editor, Metro Philadelphia: Mr. Cornfield maintains that the fundamentals of news-gathering are strong with more than enough people available to provide communities with the information they need. However, he proposes, we need to start rethinking how to cover the news and how to come to grips with shrinking resources in an expanding technological landscape that makes a wealth of information available to those willing to seek it out. He continues that the problem goes beyond rethinking what news is being produced to include considerations of citizens' time constraints in seeking out news and information. Therefore, news organizations must be a comprehensive and accessible resource to give the public the vital information they want and need and organizations like the Knight Commission should focus their resources on making information accessible to lower-income and lower-educated citizens, both through providing internet access and getting citizens excited about the news.

Mr. Cornfield concluded by describing some of the challenges facing Metro Philadelphia. He stated that his organization focuses on being a newspaper of interest, not of record, for the dominant demographic of Philadelphia and, in doing so, they are not covering all the information needed by all citizens in Philadelphia. The question his news organization faces is whether to expand its coverage or remain a niche morning read for a particular demographic.

Dave Davies, Senior Writer, Philadelphia Daily News: Mr. Davies began by asking the question, What kind of information do we need to make our democracy better? Even with the torrent of information and facts available on the internet, what Mr. Davies thinks is missing are people who have the independence, time, skills and experience to analyze that data and draw inferences from it that are meaningful, that is to say, journalists. He then expresses the hope, in this economically difficult environment for newspapers, that private foundations get into the business of funding and sustaining local reporting. He is not, however, saying that some exciting collaborations aren't already happening, for example the collaboration between William

Penn, WHYY and the Daily News, PlanPhilly. However, he emphasizes, the work being done by these new collaborations and organizations needs to find its way into the local newspapers.

Mr. Davies concludes by expressing his belief that there is an advantage to having an authoritative voice that is often lost in national newspapers, mostly because there is just so much information and so many people covering the same things. Local papers have the ability to pack a punch, to have an authoritative voice about local politics, and to build up expertise with new technological tools. Mr. Davies encourages the Commission to look for ways for foundations and other means to support these investigative and journalistic efforts at a local level.

Susan Phillips, Reporter, WHYY, Inc.: In thinking about what information citizens need, Ms. Phillips identifies three areas that could help improve the day to day lives of Philadelphians: race, crime and local government. Ms. Phillips, who has lived her entire life in Philadelphia, notes that race underscores much of the tensions in the city and what, on the surface, may look like peaceful integration actually divides communities and neighborhoods. As a reporter, she remarks, she wants to contribute to people's understandings of race and the race dynamics of the city by doing researched and thoughtful pieces on the subject.

Regarding crime in Philadelphia, Ms. Phillips remarks that an average of one person per day is murdered by gun violence, but these are people that most Philadelphians and most of her listeners do not know. Most of the deaths she covers are told through recycled sound bites and do not contribute to solutions to the underlying problems. One week during the holidays, however, Ms. Phillips was able to create five portraits of murder victims and while this is meaningful, it is not enough.

And finally, turning to coverage of local government, Ms. Phillips remarked that, as a reporter, she covers elections and the use of taxpayers' dollars, which provide citizens with useful information on who to vote for. However, she comments, journalists are competing against campaign advertisements and this is a significant obstacle for the journalists' watchdog role.

Ms. Phillips concludes that while the ideal is producing local reporting that carries some intellectual weight, the reality is governed by resources, time constraints and the bottom line which is, for her, is creating two one minute and ten second newscasts per day for top of the hour, local radio news. Although there are a lot of resources for independent producers to do public radio, there are not a lot of resources available to fund investigative reporting or local general assignment. And finally, regarding foundation support, Ms. Phillips remarks that while there is a tendency for foundations to get excited about specific topics, such as science, health or the arts, they are less likely to fund general, local investigative reporting and features regarding race, crime, labor and local governments.

Chris Satullo, Columnist and Director of Civic Engagement, The Philadelphia Inquirer: Mr. Satullo began by dispelling the myth that CNN was what killed newspapers and instead

explained that, while newspapers had to give up some of the franchise of national and international news to cable news, the newspapers were still doing great in the 1990s and into the early 2000s. But now, Mr. Satullo concedes, newspapers are in trouble because the old business model has collapsed due to the Internet and other technological innovations.

Besides the economic changes, the Inquirer newsroom went wrong, Mr. Satullo explains, because it focused on the wrong relationship with the people they serve and was missing the idea of service. They were thinking, as reporters, of writer-to-audience relationships and, as editors and executives, of business-to-customer relationships. These frameworks, Mr. Satullo remarked, were the wrong mental frameworks; the right framework is the citizen-to-citizen relationship, with citizens, albeit citizens with special skills and training, offering services to fellow citizens. Journalists need to get back to the notion that they are serving people who really need help living their lives and that they are serving a democratic republic that needs help sustaining itself. And, within a citizen-to-citizen framework, the Inquirer and news organizations in general need to ask citizens what they need from news organizations to make their lives better. This is not a focus group, Mr. Satullo insists; this is a discussion with citizens to find out what they need and to help them engage, at a productive level, with what is going on with their government.

Wendy Warren, Vice President and Editor, Philly.com: Ms. Warren began by focusing on the structure of how the information delivery systems in this country work today, how they're changing and where they're going to end up. Today, she observes, we are at a moment of peril for the traditional ways information and news is delivered, from newspapers to local TV to cable news and even non-profit organizations. These large information delivery systems, from newspapers to publicly funded radio, have not realized that they are in a dangerous position of being upside down in terms of supply and demand. There's too much news, she painfully admits, and the funding for media organizations is faltering.

In terms of the future, we are moving towards an environment where there will be fewer media companies and they will operate much more like movie studios operate now with a large corps of independent journalists as freelancers. The question is, what will these studio-like structures produce: stories to make money or stories to shape and inform citizens' views on their world. Ms. Warren continues that we are also heading towards a place in which print is no longer delivered to the home because as people become more electronically connected the need for print will dwindle. Ms. Warren then concluded by asking the question of what happens to local news in this future model, saying that while foundations are important, this may not be a sustainable model.

Professor Kaniss asked the panel how new media can let us do local news in different ways and whether we are taking advantage of this now and whether we could take more advantage of it. She also asked about the emergence of hyperlocalism as a way to cover local regions with smaller staffs. Ms. Warren responded by saying that, while we're all waiting for hyperlocal news--that is, very small areas covered by larger media organizations such as the Washington

Post--to work, it has not yet done so. Instead of providing, basically, a hyperlocal blog for a community, Ms. Warren continues, large organizations should instead network with local organizations that are already doing investigative work on a very local level.

Mr. Satullo added that, even in crowd-sourcing, the journalist still has the role of editor who frames the question intelligently and interprets the data received back from the crowd. New media tools, he continued, are helpful for finding local information and identifying the local information that is important for the community, especially if a relationship with the crowd, in this case local citizens, has already been formed. Mr. Satullo also remarked that, in this age of linking and layering, one can get more information and a more complete picture of what is going on, but one has to go about it in a different way. Therefore, not only is there the question of linking and new media tools, but news organizations also have to address new ways of writing for this new media environment. And finally, people do not want to read something that makes them feel overwhelmed and ineffective and so news organizations have to do something that makes readers feel efficacious, and part of that is making a human being available, through Q and A for example, to answer questions that citizens have.

Mr. Cornfield then added that tagging and interlinking news sources online is promising and also adds that while funding for hyperlocal projects does not look possible, collaborations among news organizations seem like a good prospect for the future.

When it comes to new business models, Ms. Phillips stated that, while everyone is talking about the internet and new media, 200,000 people listen to Morning Edition in this region. Radio bridges the digital divide and is in a position to do good, local reporting, even when talking about the failing business model of mainstream media. When newspapers and even online sites are looking for readers, Ms. Phillips concludes, radio is an untapped resource for getting people the information they need and want with minimal effort and searching on their part, for example during their commute to work.

Mr. Shane asked the panel their thoughts on the following: first, he wondered if radio and cell phones could be used more effectively for disseminating news from print sources, and second, does the panel think the private market will ever provide sufficient funding for investigative reporting.

Ms. Warren remarked that Mr. Shane is asking about "bundling" in which print media used to fund local reporting, which doesn't sell, with revenues from sports, which does. She says that they don't "bundle" on the internet, but that maybe they can. However, she admits, what is worrisome in what Mr. Shane just described is that we can't fill the gap because we have too much news. The response to this, Ms. Warren concludes, is for journalists to start freelancing in order to keep journalism alive. And finally, Ms. Warren says, journalism is no longer in a "push" position and instead must make sure that citizens "pull" news that they need and this can be accomplished, partly, by changing the way that media organizations cover and disseminate investigative and other important local news.

Mr. Davies asked about the possibility for local advertising revenue on internet news sites to which Ms. Warren replied that, yes, this is a possibility but news organizations have to raise the online ad prices. She emphasized that the notion that internet ad prices have to be at the low cost they are today is a lie and media organizations must fight against this false assumption.

Following a break, Mr. Shane introduced the third panel of the day, a **Roundtable on Alternative Media:**

Matt Golas, Managing Editor, PlanPhilly: Mr. Golas remarked that even though the metro dailies are no longer covering local news to the degree that news needs to be covered, new media offers alternatives to fill those gaps. PlanPhilly is a foundation-funded, project-based journalism site covering design and planning issues in Philadelphia which uses full-time and citizen journalists to cover specific beats on infrastructure, development, zoning reform, preservation, etc. that are not covered by mainstream media. One of the major goals, as stated in the foundation grant from William Penn, was to increase transparency in the decision-making of local government. And, Mr. Golas adds, while he did not go into this project thinking he was going into a news business, it turned out that specific, in-depth, online journalism was the best way to keep citizens informed about these issues.

Gustavo Martinez, Reporter, Al Día: Mr. Martinez began by remarking that one of the challenges facing Al Dia, the biggest Spanish weekly in the region, is understanding that their readership is diverse, that the communities they are serving are not just a single group of “Latinos,” but Mexicans, Dominicans, Colombians and others, and that they must provide their readers with the most relevant news, including local news and news from their home countries. Mr. Martinez remarks that Al Dia is often not treated by the subjects they cover as professional as other news organizations and even as other bloggers, even though they are the key journalistic outlet for Al Dia’s readers. While there is a large Spanish-speaking radio presence in Philadelphia, there is not so much a news presence. This is starting to change, but a great need persists for minority voices to be heard increasingly in both the mainstream and alternative media.

Beth McConnell, Executive Director, Media and Democracy Coalition: Ms. McConnell focused her remarks on public access television saying that public access television, which is noncommercial and is produced by and for the community, can be a vital component of a city's media landscape. It can encourage dialogue and can report on issues that either aren't covered by or don't fit into mainstream media. Unfortunately, Ms. McConnell mentions, Philadelphia has long been denied a public access station because of the current franchise agreement with the cable companies, but a channel will be up and running in 2009. The new channel can give Philadelphians access to new skills and new technologies they were previously lacking and opportunities to discuss issues left uncovered by mainstream media. Her hope, Ms. McConnell continued, is that the public access channel will become fully integrated in the alternative media landscape so that publications like Al Dia, radio stations, journalists and activists can gain

access to free or low cost tools, technology and platforms to create and distribute their work. She further hopes that a public access center can be a place where residents can have access to computers and the internet.

Another powerful alternative community-based medium Ms. McConnell described is low-power FM radio. LPFM stations are community operated and owned, report on hyperlocal issues over a one to two mile radius, and provide news, reports on cultural events, religious news, etc. tailored to very small audiences who may not fit into mainstream media. And finally, she emphasized, low-power FM and public access stations are innovative, they are the community, programs are aired on a first come basis, and there is very little gatekeeping. Ms. McConnell concluded by remarking that community needs will not be met until there are multiple community media outlets that are well-funded, well-utilized, and that complement the traditional mainstream outlets.

Irv Randolph, Managing Editor, Philadelphia Tribune: The goal of the more than 200 African American newspapers that exist today, Mr. Randolph remarked, is to allow minority voices to be heard. Mr. Randolph's newspaper provides African Americans with health, education and political information that is directly relevant to their communities but that is not covered in the mainstream media. The newspaper's goal is to provide local and national news with an African American perspective as well as to provide a more accurate and balanced view of African Americans in Philadelphia. Finally, online resources allow more stories to be posted addressing concerns of African Americans and for greater interaction with the community.

Bruce Schimmel, Founder & Editor Emeritus, Philadelphia City Paper: Mr. Schimmel emphasized that digital divide is not only a problem of access or even of new media literacy, but of literacy in general. He proposes that illiteracy is the schism from which most other divides in Philadelphia spring. As a newspaperman trying to reach as many citizens as possible, he believes that the climbing illiteracy rate is a significant cause for the decline in newspaper readership. He posed the question, what can be done to disseminate knowledge and promote understanding and to remake a divided city into a single, informed community?

Mr. Schimmel believes that the best of all possible worlds would involve everyone in reading newspapers, in reality, the best medium for universal outreach is radio. It is “cheap and deep,” is made of words and is therefore a precursor to literacy in a way that television, which is made of pictures, is not. Unfortunately, as public funds dried up, local radio programming has had to expand its reach to the suburbs and even to other states. City coverage was compromised. The good news, however, is that local radio news, which is necessary to provide cohesive, community coverage, is on the rise in various forms, like podcasts, and collaborations, like commercial-community partnerships, are emerging.

Dan Urevick-Ackelsberg, Founder, Young Philly Politics: In explaining Philadelphians' lack of access even to their own election returns, Mr. Ackelsberg showed how important it is for there be the a venue for revealing the inefficiency of public policies and practices, without

necessarily being tied to traditional norms of journalistic objectivity. His site, for example, which does not purport to be journalism, was able to point out, however one-sidedly, that imposing password protections for accessing public election returns is "stupid." By filing a complaint and asking for a list of those who had the 150 passwords actually distributed by the city, and also by taking the story to the Daily News, Mr. Ackelsberg was able to get his message out to a broader public. And finally, in partnering with HallPass, constantly requesting more and more passwords and emphasizing the ridiculousness of this practice, he was able to get the "stupid" rule overturned.

Linn Washington, Co-Director, Multimedia Urban Reporting Lab (MURL): Mr. Washington began by describing the paradoxical landscape of today's media and communities as involving more information choices than ever paired with an increasingly uninformed citizenry, a situation which is, he emphasizes, fundamentally bad for democracy. MURL combats this situation by both preparing graduates to enter the convergent media landscape of print, broadcast and new media and also reporting on under-served and marginalized communities with an emphasis on story-telling. However, Mr. Washington reminds us, bottom-up journalism is not divergent from mainstream media values or standard ethics codes, and telling uncomfortable or unpopular stories is part of the mission of journalism as a whole.

Mr. Washington concluded by emphasizing that more needs to be done about the constitutional mission of journalism--both its role of informing the electorate and its watchdog role over government to ensure that government works for all the people and not only the few--and also more needs to be done make the citizenry more aware of the paramount importance of the first amendment to our democracy.

Todd Wolfson, Founder, Media Mobilizing Project: Mr. Wolfson began by quoting Antonio Negri who wrote that "whereas communication is current and alive, information is inert and imprisonment" and Paul Schrag, of MIT Media Lab, who writes that the real value in new media lies "less in the information it carries and more in the communities it creates." These arguments, Mr. Wolfson claimed, point to the game-changing effect of new technologies in creating knowledge and asking about the differences between information that is created individually versus collectively-created knowledge. Understanding these shifts from information to communication, from individual to collective knowledge, is key to future policy and to meeting the needs of democratic communities in a digital age. Such a shift requires understanding information and communication, not as flowing from the one to the many but from the many to the many in endless iterations.

The Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) is based on the belief that we have entered a new participatory age in which citizens take part in the media production process. However, there are inequities in this new age and the MMP works to address these from the ground up by giving citizens the tools they need to describe the struggles and needs of their everyday lives. MMP also uses media to bring different individuals and communities together to show that their struggles are not unique. In terms of policy, Mr. Wolfson sees a comprehensive

broadband strategy as essential for communication access and for citizens to exercise their full sets of rights in this information age.

During the final discussion, panelists were asked about impact of their various media on the communities they serve, if alternate means of story-telling effectively bridge gaps between divergent communities, how to move away from the advertising model for alternative media, and the possibilities for alternative media, in conjunction with mainstream media and on its own, to foster community solidarity and community dialogue on the citizen-to-citizen level.

Mr. Shane asked the panelists their thoughts on how their various media, information and communication initiatives shape communities and people's sense of identity and also on what he saw as the multi-tasked nature of many of the panelist's media and news organizations, from journalism to organizing to activism to education. Mr. Randolph responded that, because so many of the issues that are important to the African American community are interconnected, journalism has to work in various ways and at a variety levels to make sure these issues are covered in a way that is informative and accessible to the African American community. Ms. McConnell added that public access is different from YouTube in that it is a physical meeting place of different content-producers that actually fosters local community and acts as a community center as well as providing the community with relevant information. And Mr. Martinez remarked that it is often difficult to bridge communities because of some initial distrust between different communities; yet bridging that distrust is often necessary for information and news stories to be produced and have an effect.

Responding to a question wondering if there is a difference in motivation between mainstream and alternative media and if there is failure at the structural level which results in information and access gaps, Mr. Schimmel emphasized that community radio, which gave him his start in journalism, is a medium that still connects to and can be accessed by the community it serves. As long as media outlets are close to the community and audience, either through specific spaces like community media centers or through community alliances, Mr. Schimmel offered, community media are doing well. Mr. Martinez added that Al Dia is seen by Spanish-speaking as the mainstream and Mr. Randolph remarked that many of his readers feel that they actually own the newspaper and often express their views if they dislike some of the coverage.

Mr. Golas mentioned that there is often a difference between how institutions view media and how the communities they serve view media. Often communities are moving away from mainstream, branded media. In regard to his own organization, Mr. Golas acknowledged that PlanPhilly's website needs to be made more interactive and accessible for community voices to be expressed. Mr. Wolfson added that the commercial model is fine, but we need to rethink this model as the default setting for media organizations because this one-to-many model creates particular ways of consuming information that do not take advantage of the potential for producing and consuming knowledge to actually create communities across various divides.

In terms of measuring impact, Mr. Schimmel remarked that page views are not an accurate way

of measuring impact and Ms. McConnell seconded this by asking if five people who, say, see a council meeting on a public access channel and then take action on an issue because of that viewing actually have more impact than American Idol's five million viewers. Mr. Ackelsberg added that his site gives people as much room as they want to express views that aren't necessarily heard normally and that such opportunities' impact is often difficult to measure.

And finally, in responding the problem of certain communities not getting the coverage they need and not having their voices heard, Mr. Washington asserted that consistency in the supply of stories for these communities, as well as coverage more generally, is essential in ensuring that their information and communication needs are met. Furthermore, stories that are covered have to be connected to other stories, on the national and local levels, and to other issues that affect the under-served communities. Mr. Martinez added that story-telling is often an effective way for communities that may not know a lot about each other to foster dialogue and communication between these communities, thereby bridging some of the divides within minority communities as well as between minority and majority communities. Mr. Wolfson then remarked, along the same lines, that the promise of new and old media as story-telling and communication mechanisms is for many different ethnic groups -- whose voices are not otherwise heard -- to frame their own stories and to tell their stories to each other, thereby fostering connectedness between communities on the ground level.

Mr. Randolph concluded by saying that while the advocacy and education potentials for media is great, the watchdog role of media must not be overlooked and the ability for the media to ask the tough questions is essential to maintaining media's role, not as public relations platform, but as a means of holding authority accountable, especially regarding major policy decisions. If this role is compromised, Mr. Randolph asserted, newspapers will continue to lose our readers.