



The Knight Commission on the  
Information Needs of Communities in a  
Democracy

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY / MEETING NOTES

The Newseum Washington, DC  
June 24, 2008

*A project of the Aspen Institute and the John S.  
and James L. Knight Foundation*

Knight Commission Meeting Summary, June 24

*[This document represents unofficial minutes of a meeting of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy. Videorecordings of the meeting may be found at [www.knightcomm.org](http://www.knightcomm.org). The views expressed herein are solely the views of the individual speakers, and are not the views of the Commission, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Aspen Institute, or any of their programs.]*

Members Present: Olson (co-chair), boyd, Carroll, Decherd, Hundt, Mooney, Nicely, Iburgüen (ex officio), Isaacson (ex officio).

Staff Present: Shane, Silliman, Durkee

Co-chair Olson convened the meeting at 10 a.m., welcoming his fellow commissioners and the press. He suggested that the commissioners present introduce themselves and briefly offering any opening thoughts on the information needs of local communities in a democracy.

Commissioner Nicely, director of the Nashville Public Library, suggested that public libraries are at the forefront of the information transformation we are currently experiencing and at the forefront of how communities engage with information and technology.

Commissioner Mooney is the executive director of Chicago-area LISC [Local Initiative Support Corporation] which is a non-profit intermediary. Its goals include promoting comprehensive communication involvement in the city of Chicago. Neighborhoods are complex systems and information goes to the heart of how complex systems really work. Mr. Mooney emphasized that how people are engaged in democracy is directly related to communication and organization as well as information and technology. He hopes the Commission will address how people really relate to each other at the grassroots community level and then at how technologies can reinforce these interactions.

Commissioner Hundt urged the Commission to address wireless technologies and to take traditional issues of journalism and explore how these issues are mapped onto and against modern technology.

Commissioner Decherd hopes the Commission will explore the technological challenges facing legacy media as well as to explore how policies regarding technology affect local communities. He is not sure, however, that there are obvious prescriptions about what to do about communities and new technologies. He sees technology as an enabler, as something which doesn't create content

but which moves content around. He asks how Americans receive information in meaningful ways in this internet-centered technology.

Commissioner boyd is a PhD candidate at University of California-Berkeley as well as a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. Her research focuses on how young people engage with new technologies and asks what the implications are of age segregation and how this segregation makes participation in social and civic life difficult for young people, even when access is theoretically the same as adults. Ms. boyd emphasized to the Commission that access alone doesn't get us to where we would like to be and suggests that we need to explore ways in which we can create dialogue between people of different ages and classes.

Commissioner Carroll is former editor of the Los Angeles Times, among other newspapers. Although citizens need information tools to govern themselves, Mr. Carroll is not concerned with the form or media that these tools take. Mr. Carroll emphasized the need for the Commission to look at how people think and how people consume information and how these actions affect citizens' ability to govern themselves.

Walter Isaacson, CEO of the Aspen Institute and commissioner ex officio, spoke of his past work in the new media division of Time Warner. When it was being decided where the Internet was headed in terms of different protocols, it was decided that the web would offer the best set of protocols for the distribution of interactive communication. That is, web browsers were created in order to foster and allow interactivity and this digital revolution is transformative in that it allows for greater interactivity, intercommunication, and community. However, that said, Mr. Isaacson emphasized that the values of good information need to be translated into new media forms. For example, journalists need to continue to be part of this process of information distribution and dissemination. The goal, Mr. Isaacson concludes, is making information work for real people in real places in every aspect of their civic lives.

Following the Commissioners' statements, Peter Shane, executive director of the Commission, offered an introduction to the Commission's work. He said that one of the themes that drives this Commission is the pace of change and its unexpected trajectory. As legal historian Bernard Hibbitts has discussed, with the advent of the Internet, people spoke of its potential in the same way 15<sup>th</sup> C. monks spoke of the potential of the printing press, that is, as merely an agent for helping to sort out the best of legacy media (whether print or illustrated manuscripts).

Shane went on to discuss the Commission's origin, agenda, membership and plan of operation. The Commission is a joint project of two institutions, both dedicated to the public interest: the Aspen Institute's Communications and Society Program and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

This Commission has come together in a moment of anxiety about the health of democratic institutions. With the proliferation of digital networks, many Americans are worried that we are becoming more polarized and isolated instead of more interconnected. For many of us, the richness of our information environment is often seen as more overwhelming than empowering. These new technologies provide us with extraordinary tools to facilitate interconnection; yet the question persists as to whether we are maximizing these tools to serve the needs of communities in the service of democratic vitality and civic progress.

Albert Ibargüen has charged this Commission with three very straightforward questions that are nonetheless enormous in their scope. They are: What are the information needs of American communities in our 21<sup>st</sup> century democracy? Are they being met? If not, what can we do about it? While questions about the relationship of media and society are by no means new, there are two unique aspects of the Commission's mission. First, its focus is not on journalism or even media per se, but on the information needs of local communities in a broad sense. Mr. Ibargüen,

Mr. Isaacson, and Charlie Firestone, the head of the Communications and Society Program at the Aspen Institute, all have emphasized the importance of focusing on information needs from the public's perspective. We are not looking to "save the newspaper" and we are not coming into the project with an agenda about what these information needs are and how they should be met.

The second unique aspect of the Commission is its emphasis on communities as geographically and situated clusters of human beings who share, depend on, and maintain governance over some identifiable domain of common resources. The reasons to focus on geographically identifiable communities related by common resources are threefold: first, despite the proliferation of virtual networks, people live in real spaces; second, the representative institutions of democratic governance are organized geographically; and third, the advantages of the internet in gathering information and connecting with issues on a national and even international level has outpaced developments on the local level.

That said, two things about local communities need to be kept in mind. One is that individuals all identify with and participate in multiple communities, some geographically defined, some not, simultaneously. The second is that local communities need more than geographically local information in that the contextual search for truth requires that we see local facts against a larger background than our neighborhood, town or city.

Shane described the purpose of today's meeting as enabling the Commission to set a direction for research and deliberation by considering four key themes: democracy, economics, human behavior, and technology (journalism will be the focus of the second Commission meeting in August). The Commission is also sponsoring three community forums in September and October in Philadelphia, Missoula MT, and Silicon Valley and Commission staff will be working to digest a large volume of written work relevant to the Commission's inquiries.

Shane expressed a personal hope that the Commission can shift our national conversation about media policy away from "the old versus the new" and towards inquiries into how our public, private, and non-profit sectors can work together to create and sustain information systems that enable communities to solve problems, coordinate civic activity, achieve accountability, and promote human interconnection.

#### **10:40 -- Presentation and Discussion: Technology and the Future of Community Information Flow**

Bryan Alexander, Director of Research, National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education. [Nitle.org]

Mr. Alexander works with NITLE to advance liberal education in the digital age and works with small, private liberal arts campuses to help them work with new advances in digital technologies.

Mr. Alexander spoke about Web 2.0, social media, and education in relation to the question of how media changes how we shape and learn about things. Because of limited time, he did not speak about mobile or wireless technologies, Web 3.0, or Web 2.0 storytelling.

The themes Mr. Alexander touched upon included emerging technology and differences in the "how and when" of new technologies (for example, wikis were already being used as business solutions in the late 1990s in Europe), the question of open determinism (i.e. the difference between understanding technology as dictating how we work and interact versus understanding technology as giving us tools to use freely to create our own stories), and pedagogy (that is, how are and how can these new technologies be used in teaching and education).

He mentioned that often we apprehend emerging technologies in a panic/siege mode and suggests

that perhaps we could approach Web 2.0 the way vendors approach gaming and ask, not how these technologies are undermining our current ways of thinking and learning, but how can emerging technologies supplement or affect literacies.

He explained that the Web 2.0 phenomenon can be understood in four different ways: first, approaching Web 2.0 like a design architecture; second, understanding Web 2.0 as an information ideology in that it dictates what information we access and utilize and in what way we access and utilize information; third, as a style (for example, Amazon can use certain Web 2.0 styles or characteristics on a Web 1.0 webpage); fourth, as an additional layer of applications on the web, with Web 2.0 like a roof that sits upon other layers.

Web 2.0 is both enormous (just look at the blogosphere and how it has doubled in size) and it is built upon microcontent (that is, small pieces of content that are created by multiple authors). With this combination of the growth of Web 2.0 pages and microcontent, we are faced with an age of open content that can be accessed without downloading anything and this enables networked conversations and video-sharing among many other things that haven't previously been realized.

"Web 2.0" was a term coined in a 2005 article by Tim O'Reilly [<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>] who modeled this new web age as "legos" in that you can build on top of each other and can follow stories in different, more interactive ways.

These are some characteristic uses of Web 2.0: wiki pages (edit as you go, multiple authors); collaborative writing (i.e. a diverse blogosphere that offers microcontent in reverse chronological order); podcasting; YouTube (Web 2.0 influences rich media and video); videoblogging (which hasn't really taken off yet); social networks (i.e. Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, Zoominfo, Cyworld).

What is happening in this Web 2.0 world is that social objects of all sorts are being added to various subjects and what we find is the social organization of information (for example, tag clouds in which individuals mark things as important and categorized in a certain way; we get a sense of what people are concerned about without actually reading all the information). This kind of classification is known as (in its preliminary stages of research) socioclassification (Star) or folk classification (Van derWal). Such emergence of new classification methods reflects the feeling of information overload many experience in this contemporary age.

In relation to pedagogical concerns, Mr. Alexander spoke about how new technologies are being used for "old" values like journaling and media literacy. He also mentioned that some Web 1.0 applications like Blackboard are helpful teaching tools because they replicate a closed class environment and because they are good for privacy, for protecting copyright, for preventing embarrassment and for focusing the conversation. And he notes that sometimes Web 1.0 systems add 2.0 elements to their applications. However, Mr. Alexander notes, many professors reject Web 1.0 applications and instead bypass the constraints of the academic system by using Web 2.0 applications, like blogs. What can the academy do to best foster the use of emerging technologies in the classrooms? As Michael Wesch of Kansas State said, "Get out of my way."

Mr. Isaacson: What about consolidation and monopolies occurring when, for example, everyone flocks to Facebook or to Wikipedia? There can't be, for example, twenty successful wiki-like encyclopedias. How much loyalty is there? Is there flocking to one space and then to others? What is the stickiness in loyalty in the Web 2.0 world?

Mr. Alexander: This is really the next question that needs to be addressed by people in the field. While there is flocking to Facebook or Wikipedia, this flocking is by no means universal.

Mobility mitigates against consolidation (for example, an RSS that is just too geeky to go mainstream). It is possible for me personally to be monopolized (that is, to have my attention monopolized) but the sites themselves will not be monopolized because of their intense mobility, layering, editing and microcontent. The question that needs to be addressed that speaks to this concern of monopoly and consolidation is who owns the content on these open-source networks.

Ms. Boyd: Also, social media are actually quite fragmented even though we as individuals usually don't see it because we interact with a self-selected group (for example, my close-knit group of college friends and our collective interests). Furthermore, the groups that we interact with are constantly changing as individuals are trying to flee from predators and those in power (i.e. parents, bosses, etc.). Also, in response to the question of consolidation and monopoly surrounding Wikipedia, there are already alternatives to the normative, dominant sphere, even in Web 2.0, for example, in China where Wikipedia is banned.

11:15 -- Michael Wood-Lewis, President and Co-founder of Vermont-based Front Porch Forum [<http://frontporchforum.com/>]

Even though individuals have an unprecedented opportunity to use the internet to access information generally, when we look at the local level, the situation is very different; for example, finding things out about your city council or PTA can be difficult. Mr. Wood-Lewis found personally that it was hard to get involved at the local level because of both a lack of information and a lack of knowing neighbors. Mr. Wood-Lewis cited Robert Putnam's work to link the relation of civic engagement with information needs and noted that, if you help people solve the problem of civic engagement, people will actively seek local information that relates to community needs.

Mr. Wood-Lewis started an online neighborhood forum in 2000 with the assumption that people are just busy, not un-neighborly or indifferent, and he wanted to create a forum that allowed for civic interaction in a busy world (interactions from borrowing tools and finding jobs to rallying for a sick neighbor or house fire victims).

In 2008, there are an amazing 10,000 subscribers across 130 online neighborhood forums covering the entire metro area of Burlington, VT . One-third of Burlington households participate.

The success of these forums is from grass-roots, neighbor-telling-neighbor word-of-mouth. While people want to go where their friends are (e.g., Facebook), they also want to discover what is going on in their neighborhood. The goals are helping neighbors connect and foster the sense of community. This is achieved through a number of small design decisions, such as using e-mailed newsletters in which people's full names and street names are visible with every message.

This turns Web 2.0 on its head, almost, but it is important to use email vs. cutting edge tools, because 90% of people use email while only 15% use blogs and other emergent technologies. The goal of these online community forums is to reach the largest and most diverse demographic in the community (old, young, poor, etc.). Furthermore, there is increased trust in this format because there is no anonymity . Real face-to-face conversation and action among neighbors flow from the dialogues started on the community forum emails.

Mr. Isaacson: Could a local government or Burlington's newspaper do better than Front Porch Forum?

Mr. Wood-Lewis answer: No. There is not enough trust and there is too much baggage attached to those institutions for them to be successful in the same way. And this is not a job -- convening and moderating neighborhood conversation -- that local government or newspapers have

traditionally taken on.

Question: What about running local democracy, like "fix my road" -- is the forum successful in those circumstances?

Mr. Wood-Lewis: Yes, absolutely. Hundreds of local public officials subscribe to Front Porch Forum because that is where their constituents are delving into all sorts of municipal issues... speeding and traffic calming, drug dealing and graffiti, proposed big box stores, stormwater policy debate and on and on. Moving from being strangers in a community to neighbors may be all that is needed to get people more engaged. For example, attendance at civic meetings are up across the board because of the Front Porch Forum service, not just because the meetings are better advertised through FPF but because neighbors have been discussing via FPF the very issues that the public meetings are called to address... Front Porch Forum provides people a running start to getting involved in local democracy. Civic engagement, Mr. Wood-Lewis asserts, is a necessary element of, if not a precursor to, getting information out to people.

Mr. Shane: Going back to the story about connection versus fragmentation: are people going to flock to that online local forum that merely reinforces their parochial beliefs and concerns (for example, has this happened liberal arts campuses)?

Mr. Alexander: Yes and no. You can look at these new technologies as creating a sort of echo-chamber effect; however, as we see in book purchasing habits on, say, Amazon, because the technology is so deep you might have a flocking effect on one topic but not on others and you may also have overlapping communities. In other words, you will have flocking, but you will also have breaks in the echo chamber.

Mr. Ibargüen: When thinking about Putnam's new work on religion, I was wondering about the role of local churches in relation to trust.

Ms. Boyd: Churches have adopted new media technologies tremendously well.

Mr. Alexander: Looking at the PEW survey that came out this week, it shows that one individual can have many intense affiliations that compete in many ways.

Mr. Hundt: Why is Front Porch Forum a for-profit company? Will this result in someone buying the company and adding value in a different way?

Mr. Wood-Lewis: The for-profit model offers a better shot at long-term sustainability of the service and our mission of building community; it is a successful business model in many ways.

Mr. Mooney: What Front Porch Forum has created is an organizing tool and its success has been as an organizing tool. For example, in Chicago there are self-generating portals and self-organizing tools that are supplemented by old time tools. Someone coming in from the top-down will threaten the efficiency of tools as an organizing tool on the neighborhood level. The distinction between if the organizing tools are created by the community and if they are top-down is crucial to the success and efficiency of the communication.

Mr. Wood-Lewis: Authenticity and accountability are important to the success of Front Porch Forum. Front Porch Forum's barrier to entry is not a fee (it's free to neighbors) but full disclosure and accountability; that is, your full name, street, and email must be provided. This fosters a degree of local authenticity that many other institutions may not be able to establish.

Mr. Carroll: Local newspapers have wanted to give people information about themselves. How do you reach these people at the level of their neighborhood? It seems that the combination of the

technology, of being of the neighborhood, and of having credibility is crucial to the success of Front Porch Forum.

Mr. Alexander: If you look at political blogs, they often link to one another but they also link to the "enemy" (i.e. a liberal blog linking to Fox news).

Mr. Wood-Lewis: As we work to expand Front Porch Forum to other communities, we must have a genuine local connection for the model to continue to be successful, for both our economic and "community" bottom lines.

At one point, Mr. Wood-Lewis tried to scan and distribute local news articles that he thought members of the community would like to have disseminated to them via the online forum, but people responded by saying "Who are you? We want to talk amongst ourselves. We don't want you telling us what we need to know."

The service has genuinely knitted together real, situated, community networks. The networks fostered by the service are essential for creating real-space networks through which information can flow independent of the internet/online forum.

Furthermore, the forums not only allow individuals and officials alike to broadcast their concerns, but they also, and more importantly, allow officials to listen in on neighborhoods conversations and really get a feel for what the local concerns and needs are.

#### Noon – **Statement by Alberto Ibargüen**

Why did the Knight Foundation want to do this commission? The Knight Foundation is committed to delivering news and information that communities need and want and the delivery of news and information that communities need and want is no longer in concert with the needs of the democracy. We need to figure out how to turn the world wide web on its head and learn how to use new technologies to better serve the needs of democracy. The dearth of local information today is a huge issue that is dangerous to our community health.

Our goals for this Commission are to find ways to use digital technologies to deliver local news and information to local, geographically defined communities and to assist public authorities to create and define commercial and universal access and looking at ways to bridge the digital divide (both age and socio-economic divides). Without digital know-how and access in today's age is to be a second-class citizen.

The Knight Foundation works also to match dollar-for-dollar projects that community groups and organizations start to meet the needs of local communities. We are not giving an agenda of how these needs should be served, but giving solely on the condition that they are working to meet the information needs of their local communities.

The Knight Foundation is also involved with the Carnegie Foundation in the Carnegie-Knight initiative that is working with journalism schools to teach journalists the values of the contextual search for truth in a digital age.

What Mr. Ibargüen would like to see happen through this Commission is to articulate the needs of local communities in a democracy, to take a snapshot of where we are at the moment, not to look for business models to come out of this but to encourage public policy initiatives that will foster projects that will enable these needs to be met.

12:40 -- **Keynote, Democracy and the Changing Media Landscape, Vincent Price (Associate Provost and Professor of Communication and Political Science at University of Pennsylvania)**

Mr. Price's goal for this keynote was to try to raise a couple of large questions that we should think about alongside the very practical and technological questions that have been raised so far in this meeting.

This revolution in communication will foster engagement with large virtual publics and will essentially replace the mechanical and arbitrary organization of information with modes of organization that are large-scale, voluntarily chosen and fast changing.

Mr. Price framed his talk along three main lines:

- 1) The technologies and conditions are new, but the questions are not.
- 2) Democratic discourse is complex, multi-faceted and challenging to maintain and the conditions to produce democratic technologies are precarious.
- 3) The democratic effects of ICTs are content dependent and by no means certain.

The media landscape has changed drastically in the past several decades. The advent of cable, satellite TV and other ICTs has drastically changed the news-information landscape. However, while news consumption has become more and more fractured and fragmented as a result, news consumption as a whole has not decreased. For example, print newspaper circulation has declined but news-reading has not ended, just the ways in which the news is consumed has changed.

A distinction needs to be made between the news landscape and the entertainment media landscape. We are faced with infotainment and "soft" news that bleeds into the news landscape. We also have interactive media (such as social networking, blogosphere, and mobile technologies) shaping and drastically changing both of these landscapes. Young people are getting political information from these interactive media sources, and these interactive technologies are now allowing people to engage with information whenever they want and wherever they want.

The demography of news consumption has changed drastically: the newspaper-reading audience is an older audience and young people are turning to online news and social networking for news. The reconfiguration of news consumption along these age lines is new and hasn't yet been sorted out.

In addition to breaks along age-lines, there are also distinctions in audiences for news consumption along levels and kinds of knowledge (political knowledge, etc.) and along partisan lines.

And finally, there are drastic changes in trust in this new media landscape, changes which are marked by declining trends of trust in consumption of new media.

With this changing media landscape come changing democratic hopes, which Mr. Price distinguishes along four lines. First, there is watch-dogging. There are new kinds of citizen-led journalism and citizen-level surveillance that were once in the hands of mass media and are now in the hands of the citizens. This should, according to Mr. Price, have democratizing effects. Second, people are talking about politics. The new media landscape is allowing people to have more and more channels of communication with a decreased anxiety about people who "don't look the same as us." Third, on the level of organization, these new technologies act as powerful tools for organizing, and not just disseminating, information. And finally, in this new media landscape there is improved interaction with the government. Perhaps, Mr. Price offers, such improved interaction could lead to improvement in the delivery of government services for citizens and maybe even improve accountability? But again, Mr. Price emphasizes, the democratizing effects of none of these changes in the new media landscape are guaranteed.

Democratic discourse is a form of collective decision-making with a great deal of investment in

and importance of talking. There is both elite/mass discourse (that is, elites as decision-makers) which is vertical discourse and there is interactivity among citizens which is horizontal discourse. Both of these directions of discourse are needed for healthy democratic discourse.

If we want to think about collective decision-making, we have to think about decision-making in the following ways:

- 1) eliciting goals and values -- what do people really want out of this decision?
- 2) developing options
- 3) estimating consequences
- 4) evaluating options
- 5) making the decision

and with the following actors:

- 1) political leaders
- 2) technical experts
- 3) advocacy groups
- 4) reporters and editors
- 5) attentive publics and consumers of information
- 6) mass audiences

To achieve collective, democratic decision-making we must try to get everyone involved in a critical, meaningful, and robust way in as many of the decision-making steps as possible.

The questions, if you put these these actors and decision-making steps in a matrix are: what are the roles of all/any of these actors in the process of decision-making? and how do these various actors link together in the decision-making process?

Often, Mr. Price reminds us, it is easy to overlook the role of advocacy groups which are effective links between public interests with elites and political leaders. When we need specialized information in making a decision, we consult experts. When we are evaluating options, political leaders look to the mass audiences who have not really been involved in the political process up to this point in the decision-making process. Perhaps, Mr. Price offers, new technologies can change the way we talk and connect to larger audiences and can help foster a link between mass audiences and political leaders.

What are the functions of media? Mr. Price offers two functions: one, surveillance in the public interest (this surveillance can be conducted inside or outside the government and the success of this surveillance requires knowledgeable citizens); and two, facilitation of debate and public opinion, especially at the local level (although traditional media has usually failed on this level).

What are criticisms of media? Mr. Price rehearsed two main criticisms: one, that corporate and state-friendly news gravitates towards elite perspectives and lose moorings with the mass public; and two, that we have yoked our media system to giving our advertisers the sustained attention of the mass public and that this impulse and the impulse to engage in debate are often at odds.

Could surveillance in the public interest and facilitation of debate and public opinion lead to civic revitalization? Are we going to maintain a media system, improve a media system, or have a media system that moves in a not so great direction? These are questions that need to be kept in mind when investigating the changing media landscape.

Understanding change in this new media environment is extremely difficult for the following reasons:

1) ICTs and their effects are moving targets: they are marked by open field experimental applications; the nature of adopters and uses changes over time (that is, technologies do not have merely one use and their uses, while starting as a digitized version of an analog phenomenon, for example email, may come to have other functions); these effects are difficult to disentangle from other effects (that is, what produced the beneficial outcome in a community, technology or city hall?); and effects are not constant over the course of diffusion within and among the population (that is, none of these new ICTs have the same penetration effect as the telephone).

2) Complex systems are difficult to observe: what can I do with this technology that I couldn't have done before and how can we measure change, not only in how things are done, but also in what things can be done as well as change in who does things and with whom?

3) There is a range of possible transformations: systemic adjustments (i.e. advocacy and fundraising); changes in the demography of who pays attention; and changes in interactions.

In conclusion, Mr. Price raises some underlying issues to keep in mind when investigating the changing media landscape. First of all, this concept we call the public has always been virtual. Second, the question of who we give our attention to is an open question. Who controls public agendas? Is there a flourishing of openings and opportunities to control the local agenda? Can such openings be utilized to foster democratic discourse? And finally, we need to balance the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies of our media systems and we especially need centripetal mechanisms that will allow communities to interact with each other.

C.H. Cooley's 1909 quote about how communication revolutions affect democracy shows that these questions are not new questions.

Ms. Boyd: How do we rethink ideas and ideals of trust on a local level? When determining the trustworthiness of a source, it is an individual problem when anyone else chooses information and trusts information. That is, there are a lot of different ways in which people navigate new communication environments. We need to monitor this trust, we need to navigate trust in different ways with different media and we need to realize that there will be different values for the individual which determine and influence who and how this individual trusts. There is, it seems, a minimal level of trust and verifiability of information that is necessary for democratic communication.

Mr. Decherd: Trust is declining in absolute terms and in relative terms. The total number of people consuming news information is consistent but where they get their information from and how they get it is changing and fragmenting. We need to understand and stress the role of editors as well as journalists especially in relation to trust and how people understand, accept, and digest information.

Without a kind of intermediary force in communities, Mr. Decherd continues, he is unsure how the public can address important community issues. It is a grave mistake, he claims, to put this all in the context of what the networks have had to deal with in the last five years. This is not about the newsroom of the New York Times; this is about the vitality of local newspapers and information and the services these newspapers provide to local communities that cannot be offered up otherwise.

Mr. Decherd suggested that he would offer up more trust than most people believe exists and warned that no one knows how today's youth will be able to produce sound community decisions without the role of local legacy media.

Mr. Price: If we look at Markus Prior's work, we can see that free consumer choice changes the

audience demographics but does not result in the overall decline of news consumption. Some of the control goes to the consumers in deciding how and when to consume news information. However, these are not new concepts; they are just being re-asked and re-answered in the new information age. When exploring the shifts in demographics, we must look at both life-cycle effects (that is, when people shift to a different medium because it appeals to people at different times in their lives) and cohort effects (that is, when each new generation exhibits a new search pattern).

Ms. Nicely: For the public, this question of truth is an essential element. Where can we go for truth? Where can we go to get truth?

Mr. Decherd: Not only truth, but also knowing how information, news and media are organized and knowing the point of view from which this happens. Mr. Decherd has an admitted bias towards legacy media and to the emergence of a web-equivalent world that works with truth and establishing trust and especially with knowing how information is organized and how it is chosen for distribution. The emergence of such a world is essential, he concludes, for the near future of journalism.

The Dallas Morning News, for example, will start releasing a daily, free 24-page digest that will summarize the main news points and will be distributed to even those who do not subscribe to the daily newspaper. There is an appetite for this form of news distribution; we just have to find ways to fulfill those needs.

**1:45 -- Economic Sustainability and the Future of Media:** What are the business plan challenges to information institutions?

Barbara Cohen, President and Founder of Kannon Consulting:

Ms. Cohen made three main points regarding the economic pressures facing legacy media:

1) Core news is a break-even business. That is, there need to be other business models, like advertising support, to support and sustain core journalistic missions because news-making and research are costly endeavors.

2) Pressures of newspaper advertising are not new, but this is the perfect storm. Nonetheless, newspapers can regain some advertising in the current environment. There is a trend towards "selling together" in which we are seeing more local newspapers and major markets working together.

What are the revenue forces newspapers are facing? According to the NAA Business Analysis and Research Department (2008) and the Inland Press Association (2007) studies, 20% of revenues come from circulation, 37% come from retail (currently we have the nationalization of major retail which does not bode well for local media; however there is a turn back towards local concerns even from national chains; for example, advertising winter coats in Chicago but not Phoenix), 25% come from classified (newspapers took too long to change their pricing schemas; for example, Craigslist took over a lot of previously paid classifieds), 12% come from national, and 6% from online.

3) New business models are emerging and we are seeing newspapers that are reforming to deflect costs, to better meet consumer needs, and to best convey information and advertising messages. Circulation is a big problem in reforming the current business model.

On the revenue side we see some innovation but not as much innovation as on the production/cost side. The different business models being formed are not "free newspapers" but

"pay for click models," "pay for transactions," and "helping advertisers get more ROI." Ms. Cohen would like to see more innovation on the revenue side in order to successfully respond to the challenge of how these businesses will survive.

Ms. Cohen identifies three drivers to watch:

1) User control: Where do users choose to go (i.e. comics versus international news)? In order to compete in today's media/information market, firms need to provide information that is entertaining, insightful, etc.. The quality of news information will increase as the users have more control and choices and competition to get these consumers' attention increases.

2) Advertiser frustration: How do advertisers reach who they want to meet?

3) Local may not be local: There may be national origins of local information (for example, national advertising on the local level).

Mr. Carroll: Newspapers used to have great pricing power in their ads and could jack up the advertising rates at their whim. Ads are the lowest form of commodity and they are being priced as such; there is, in other words, a loss of pricing power. With this loss of pricing power, how will newspapers be able to maintain their investigative functions?

Ms. Cohen: Readership is not declining at the same rate as the advertising decline. The European model, for example, is the exact opposite of the American model in terms of revenue (i.e. most European newspapers get most of their revenues from consumer costs instead of advertising costs while most American newspapers are the opposite). What needs to be figured out is a way for newspapers to operate under 15% (instead of 20%) margins. As the newsrooms and the business sides start to work together, Ms. Cohen concludes, we will be able to better meet the needs of local communities.

2:25 -- Jeffery Stevenson, Managing Partner and Co-Chief Executive Officer, Veronis Suhler Stevenson

"Putting Media into Perspective within the Overall U.S. Economy in 2007"

Trends 2007:

- information is distributed in multiple forms of media; the communication sector is the fifth largest growing sector;
- the trend towards increased consumption of media will continue as we become more information based (and less manufacturing based);
- advertising is the slowest growing category in the communications sector and the trend is tending towards the consumer paying for the information they are receiving, partly because information is becoming more specialized;
- communications' spending is highly fragmented and advertising accounts for only a quarter of this spending;
- advertising is struggling to keep up with GDP and it is local advertising that is struggling and bringing down advertising's performance as a whole;
- new media advertising is increasing;
- more and more usage of consumption of media is controlled by consumer-choice; consumers are multi-tasking, are skipping advertisements, etc. and this is making it difficult for brand marketers and agencies to prove advertising effectiveness;
- content and distribution are both contributing to what counts as media, which is different from the case thirty years ago in which there were only nine media choices,

many of which did not carry significant advertising (such as books, movies, and music);

- consumers are now using media more and more outside the home which is a huge shift in where people are consuming media (i.e. not only home, but also car, work, and other places);
- because information is becoming more and more specialized, consumers are increasingly paying for their own information sources and so this shift will cause there to be more consumer paid-for information and less advertiser-supported information;
- time spent consuming media -- that is, counting the internet -- has increased and is expected to continue to increase and advertisers are expected to follow this move towards digital media consumption;
- local media continues to use traditional advertising, however, local media could drive internet and mobile advertising in the future;
- traditional media businesses are stepping up their ability to disseminate their information online and the dollars will follow the traffic online to both online versions of news sources and to social network sites (however, this often seen as "trading analog dollars for digital dimes").

Mr. Shane: With ubiquitous computing and mobile technologies, will these new technologies be purely advertising or be information-based as well?

Mr. Stevenson: New media technology people need to think of ways to monetize their information and their technologies in new ways. They need to find a way to make information available to users in every and any place and they need to not limit themselves to a business model that connects certain kinds of information with certain kinds of media.

Mr. Firestone: What about consumers not wanting to pay for online newspaper access?

Mr. Stevenson: We are seeing consumer spending for information or entertainment via the internet (this is different from music and other products). What will ultimately happen, however, is that as more and more information is available, the consumer will be able to choose between two business models: either advertising-based or consumer-based.

### 3:15 -- **Connecting People with Information**

Jon Wilkins, McKinsey and Co.. Current Trends in Digital Media Consumer Behavior

News consumption straddles different categories of media and but there is an intrinsic separation and segmentation of news consumption based on shared attitudes and profiles of the individuals in question:

- The uninvolved;
- headliners (too busy and not interested enough);
- people who skim a few sources (30% total);
- traditionalists (care about news, don't like online; 17%);
- news lovers (positive view towards news, more online, are mirror image of digital cynics, and share youth demographic of digital cynics; 15%);
- digital cynics (Colbert Report watchers, 18%);
- citizen readers (10%). [McKinsey Media and Entertainment News survey 2008]

In general, internet consumption is drastically higher for news lovers and digital cynics (which reflects an age bracket as well as certain attitudes) while print media are more important for traditionalists and citizen readers.

Profile of the online news consumer: 1) preference for aggregated news  
2) multiple daily visits  
3) need for immediacy and ease of access  
4) extensive use of "search" to find news

When consumers turn online for their news, they go to major online sites such as AOL news, Google news, Yahoo news and this trend represents a new model of news consumption that arose explicitly because of new media technologies.

Furthermore, consumers are visiting up to 16 news brands per week and most express a strong desire to go to multiple sources. Why is there a preference for multiple sources? A couple of reasons, one of which is that people select distribution platforms that are easiest to access and are the most up-to-date. That is, consumers select news brands based on ease-of-use more than on content quality. This is a drastically different consumer mindset when it comes to news consumption that the traditional "I want to get this kind of information." The lesson here is that, to be successful as an online news site in a new media age, you have to worry about IT, site style, ease of use, etc. because quality is a secondary reason for consumers to choose one site over another.

Ms. Nicely: But isn't this a problem that quality is a secondary concern?

Ms. Boyd: Usually in these cases, consumers assume a certain standard of quality in the options they are deciding between (for example, Yahoo and Google news sources are viewed by consumers as having comparable trustworthiness and accuracy; the quality of the site will determine site traffic more than the quality of the news which is usually from similar sources anyway).

Mr. Wilkins: Yes, what Ms. Boyd says is correct. Furthermore, half of consumers use search engines to find more information on news stories of their own personal interests while fewer are interested in "breaking news" according to major news sites. That is to say, consumers are more interested in checking their favorite sites relating to their personal preferences than in consuming "breaking news" or news of "objective" importance, from major news sources.

Finally, there is a rising importance of blogs for fostering deep discussion of the news that is relevant to particular consumers and consumer groups.

Mr. Decherd: It is important to realize that most Americans, of all the different segments of news consumers identified in the research shown by Mr. Wilkins, presently get their news and information from TV (both networks and local television).

3:50 -- Beverley R. Wheeler, Executive Director, District of Columbia State Board of Education

"Welcome to Washington DC." This means many things to many different groups of people. Washington DC is divided into four quadrants, eight wards and 123 named neighborhoods. We are a city of haves and have-nots, the only homogeneity we have is that we pay federal bills and have no votes in Congress. Former Mayor Williams created the Neighborhood Action Program so that people could relate to each other on the level of neighborhoods as well as so the government could address the needs of local neighborhoods. If the government was going to successfully engage citizens on anything that would have to be on the citizen level and they would have to listen to what the residents wanted and needed and plan accordingly in those neighborhoods.

Citizens' Summits were organized in the different neighborhoods and wards that were ensured to be a representative group of residents and which were organized and documented meticulously to give decision-makers immediate access to community needs (immediate as opposed to mediated or through letter writing). The Strategic Neighborhood Action Plan (SNAP) ensured that the

Citizens' Summits were representative of the local communities and their needs and would foster trust, communication, and collaboration between the residents and the decision-makers.

Ms. Wheeler emphasized that the City wanted people to know that they and their voices were being reflected back through the policies that emerged out of the summits; it was important for the residents to see where money was going.

Request and response is very important for identifying the information needs of local communities and ensuring that community residents' express those needs -- if you aren't going to take citizens' suggestions into consideration, don't ask them. Do not engage the public if you are not going to listen to them. You need to start your inquiries into where community members' needs really are (like garbage pickup) and you need to get residents to work together as well as get residents to meet the policy makers half-way on certain issues. If you let the citizens know that you are listening to them, that you are working with them, and that this is where the money is going which is causing it not to go into their particular needs, more collaboration and trust is cultivated and more community needs are ultimately met.

The Neighborhood Action Program also created an information college at George Washington University to provide residents with the needs and tools to be able to effect change on the local and community levels. This wasn't organized by ward because the City wanted to be sure that people interacted across wards and realize that their local needs were shared by others.

#### **4:15 -- Closing Remarks**

Mr. Shane: The new forms of journalistic practice will be reviewed at the meeting in Aspen in August. What else do people want? Are there areas of information that have not been probed that need to be?

Mr. Firestone: FOCAS, after the second Commission meeting, in August will address civic engagement, local citizenship and media, and global citizenship and media.

Mr. Shane: At this moment, I am putting together a preliminary report to at least try and identify what the information needs of local communities are and organize our thinking about how to take a "snapshot" of whether those needs are being met.

Mr. Mooney: Most of the discussion today was around those who are already engaged in and who are most likely to be engaged in new information technologies and news consumption. But we need to spend some time thinking about those who are not engaged, either because of access, training, or inclination.

Mr. Issacson: Yes; these new information technologies could take 70% of the population to new information highs while leaving 30% at an all-time low. How can we prevent this?

Ms. Boyd: What is the difference between information needs and information providers? We need to consider not only what are the different needs that we talking about but also who are the very different and varied information providers besides new media and newspapers (for example, churches)? [Mr. Mooney agrees with this suggestion.]

Mr. Hundt: TV is still the most dominant way that the public gets news. How can we take something about this technology stuff and map it across cost and access? Mr. Hundt would like to hear more about the politics and policy of "search" (both search engines and twitter, etc.) and how "search" highly threatens "protocols." This is something that we didn't get into today but it is absolutely critical to address this and attempt to solve it through policy initiatives.

But, Mr. Hundt continues, he is a little confused about the problem we are trying to solve.

Mr. Shane: We cannot take for granted that the revenue crisis for legacy media is an information crisis for the rest of the population. The crises facing the population are failures for civic coordination and obvious break-downs in communication flows, like Katrina for example. There are civic participation pieces and civic connectedness pieces that need to be identified as part of this question of local community information needs. Is it true that we are "bowling alone" as Putnam says and if so can we solve this problem through identifying and fulfilling information needs? For example, one community need may be not missing opportunities when they arise. This need is hard, if not impossible, to spot. How do we map information flow onto this?

The question is not "what can we do to save legacy media," but "what will meet needs for civic coordination, problem-solving, accountability, and connectedness?" If these are not happening, are they not happening because of failures in media, because of failures in information flow, from other failures of social institutions?

Mr. Decherd: We are trying to solve an age-old problem and the internet is giving us an opportunity to solve problems and to meet needs that haven't previously been able to have been met. While there is the assumption that legacy media should be serving the needs of communities for interaction, etc., legacy media does not have the model available to do such things. The Internet as an enabler allows various groups to think about questions in new ways. He hopes that pragmatic discussions can lead to plausible solutions about news and media organizations meeting the public needs.

He agrees with Mr. Hundt's question about search.

Also, content is very important and we need to look at the following: 1) What are the assumptions we want to make about adoption and adoption rights with regard to internet technology information and news; 2) Who are the players that are influencing this set of assumptions; 3) What are these players' resources and commitment to find news information and community content? It's one thing to know all the resources and not do anything about them, but it's another for people not to know about the resources; 4) What are the roles of local news and media in addressing the disaster needs that national newspapers couldn't print?

Mr. Ibargüen: After Katrina, the residents in harm's way, who didn't have any electricity or access to electronic media, had to rely on newspapers to find out information about what was going on.

Mr. Carroll: What parts of the country aren't getting what they need? Can we find a map that depicts this? There are great geographic gaps in the country that are suffering, for example communities in Los Angeles and the Appalachian counties of Kentucky. Can we identify gaps in the spaces of information flows and the needs of local communities?

Ms. Boyd: Yes, but the idea of an informed citizenry has changed as has the way we can measure and the way we can see new forms of engagement that can be explored. Not only do we need to look at what content is being disseminated and what communities aren't being addressed, but we also need to look at how people are engaging with information and how people want to engage with information in different ways. What is media's role in the networked environment that is no longer broadcast driven?

Mr. Ibargüen: Not only do we need to change the media the media system, we need to change ways of civic engagement.

Ms. Nicely: New technologies will change what people think about what constitutes civic engagement, and these new technologies will give people new tools to fulfill their civic duties.

Mr. Carroll: Universities used to be a big connector of people in rural areas. However, in this information age, perhaps universities could play a broader role in facilitating conversation in better and more far-reaching ways. Perhaps the universities might like that renewed sense of engaging in civic duties.

Shane thanked everyone for their time and insight. Olson adjourned the meeting at 5 p.m.