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NEWS THAT MATTERS

AN ASSESSMENT OF CHICAGO'S INFORMATION LANDSCAPE

An Advancing Chicago's Information Ecosystem Report

Funded by The Chicago Community Trust, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the McCormick Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Woods Fund of Chicago

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community News Matters project of The Chicago Community Trust conducted surveys and focus groups of the general public, local leaders and low-income residents to assess the level to which critical information needs of democracies are being well-met in the Chicago region and to identify critical information gaps and deficiencies in Chicago's information landscape that may need to be addressed.

The research concluded that the Chicago area's information ecosystem has many strengths:

- An abundant and extraordinarily varied supply of information outlets—including 479 print publications, between 150 and 400 online outlets, 132 radio stations, and 48 television stations, plus assorted other specialty outlets targeted to different locations, groups, races, ethnicities and nationalities, ages, and interests;
- Residents who believe they are generally wellinformed and able to make their views known;
- Widespread but not universal Internet access:
- Libraries that do a good job helping people find information.

But the research identified clear gaps and deficiencies as well. In general, the problems tended to be more with the kind of information people can get about their shared lives together and their civic responsibilities than about the kind of practical information that helps them personally:

- Between 42 percent and 51 percent of residents saw deficiencies in the information they get about candidates and about challenges the region is facing, coverage of issues they care about and of their communities, and of the media's oversight on state and local governments.
- By contrast, only 17 percent to 34 percent were unhappy about the information they get about their jobs, what businesses have for sale, government programs, health issues or emergencies.

The research identified these specific problems:

 Inadequate political information, with half the public saying they often feel they do not know enough about candidates or issues to vote;

- Inadequate media coverage and watchdogging, with almost half of the public faulting the media's performance in covering the issues they care about, covering their communities, and serving as a watchdog on state and local governments;
- A distressed relationship with news, with almost half of the public saying they feel overwhelmed by the amount of information available to them, and more than 40 percent indicating they have a hard time telling what's important in the news and that they don't have the time to keep up with the news;
- Not enough opportunities to hear the views of others, with almost two-thirds saying they wish they could hear more about the views of other people on community issues;
- Significant disparities between groups, with a far higher incidence of unhappiness with media coverage and of difficulty dealing with the news among some groups than others. Those with the greatest problems tended to have less education and income and to live on the south and west sides of the city. There were also other disparities based on race, language and other factors.

The research also honed in on three special areas—the experiences of low-income residents, the experiences of the area's leaders, and information literacy—which are covered in separate chapters within the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not healthy for a society when half the adult populace feels they often do not know enough about the candidates or issues to vote, when half the populace believes that no one is covering the issues they care about or keeping adequate watch on state and local government, and when a region is split between information haves and have-nots. That is the situation in the Chicago area today.

To address the problems identified in the research, there are many steps individuals, foundations, nonprofit organizations and companies can and should take to address the problems identified in the research. The research indicates that these are most important:

- Provide more opportunities for people to learn the views of others on community issues, whether through social media, enhanced letters to the editor, local forums or information exchanges.
- Step up efforts to help citizens become better informed voters by not only increasing the quantity of information about candidates and issues but also by developing new ways to present the information in ways that are more accessible, understandable and interesting to the average citizen.
- Increase oversight of state and local government by the media, citizens and nonprofit watchdog groups.
- 4. Increase the quantity and quality of local reporting, with more "feet on the street" reporting on neighborhood, community-wide, regional and state issues whether by mainstream media, new startups or community-based blogs or newsletters.
- 5. Focus efforts particularly on those least well-served by today's information ecosystem: those with little education or income; those who live in the south and west sides of the city; African Americans and Hispanics; people for whom English is not their preferred language at home; people who do not have access to computers or the Internet; and people who are not very civically engaged.
- 6. Develop new news products and approaches to make the news more compelling for people having a hard time with current offerings. This might include improvements to television news, changes in the display and writing of online or print products, enhanced word of mouth, or expanded use of low-tech methods of information distribution.
- 7. **Improve access to computers and the Internet** for those who are not currently connected.
- 8. **Expand information literacy training**, not only in the schools but at libraries and community centers.
- Step up serious reporting of violence, with not only accurate reporting of incidents of violence, but better follow-up coverage of police response and information to help people protect themselves and their families.
- 10. **Continue serving non-English speakers** with news products in languages other than English, particularly Spanish.

METHODOLOGY

The research was designed and conducted by Rachel Davis Mersey, assistant professor at Northwestern University's Medill School, and Vivian Vahlberg, project director for the Community News Matters Program of The Chicago Community Trust, with assistance from Robert LeBailly of Medill. The findings were based on three research projects in the summer of 2010:

- Public opinion phone survey of demographically representative sampling of 800 Cook County adults, in English and Spanish, by landline and cell phone;
- Online leadership survey of 250 area leaders, from nonprofits, business, government and academia, using the public opinion survey instrument:
- Seven hour-long focus groups three with low-income residents and four with a sampling of area leaders.

INTRODUCTION

BY TERRY MAZANY

The Chicago Community Trust, the Chicago region's community foundation, has become increasingly aware in recent years of the importance of a robust flow of high-quality information, reporting and insight to our community. Through participation in the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation's Community Information Challenge, we have come to realize that in a democracy, high-quality reliable information is essential for a community to function properly. It is a basic community need, important to the health of the community and to the success of all the other programs and issues foundations care about.

We have also realized, as we've looked at the many changes that have taken place in the media land-scape in Chicago in recent years, that the civic sector can no longer take this information for granted. Intense and unprecedented economic challenges are facing and reshaping traditional news organizations, and no clear path has emerged for supporting and sustaining either traditional media or the many innovative new players that have emerged.

So we began in 2008 to explore what we and other civic leaders might do to make sure that citizens in our region continue to get the information they need to live their lives and be engaged citizens. First, we commissioned Community Media Workshop to take a look at the new news landscape. In its 2009 report, *The NEW News: Journalism We Want and Need*, CMW found:

- The quantity of coverage of certain important local issues by the major newspapers has decreased in recent years.
- Nonprofit leaders are concerned that there is less coverage of issues they care about, too little edited information and less sense of shared community. They believe niche subjects are better covered than the big picture, that it's harder to get a balanced diet of news and that it's harder to tell what's important than it used to be.
- Nonetheless, Chicago is abuzz with media innovation and is home to some nationally recognized innovators, in both content and

technology. There are at least 200 Chicagofocused news and information sites—most of them run on a shoestring by one or two people. While many of the new experiments are promising, none have reached the size or scale that it would take to be sustainable long term.

As the next step in our examination, we commissioned this study and three others in 2010, all of which are available at the Community News Matters website, www.communitynewsmatters.org. The others are:

- NEW News 2010: Mapping Chicago's Online News
 Scene, the second annual inventory of the
 Chicago area's online news sites;
- Realizing Potential: What Chicago's Online Innovators Need, which outlines the kinds of help the area's online innovators would value most as they seek to develop new ways to serve Chicago audiences:
- Linking Audiences to News: A Network Analysis of Chicago Websites, which employs cutting-edge network analysis to make clear the roles, relationships and strengths of many of the area's online sites.

Even before publishing this final report in the series, we started acting on our various research findings. This spring, we launched a Local Reporting Awards program to stimulate a burst of reporting by, for and about the area's low-income communities, which News That Matters research determined were least well-served by the current information ecosystem. We gave 31 awards for reporting on a variety of important issues affecting Chicago's low-income areas, from the plight of black men in a recession to the impact of federal health care reform on West and South Side residents. We also incorporated in the program a special emphasis on aggressive linking among and by the sites of program winners, in response to the findings of the *Linking Audiences* report. And, in response to the Realizing Potential report, we're helping a group of independent local news and information websites form an advertising network.

We are grateful to our funding partners in this work:

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- Knight Foundation, which inspired us to start on this voyage with its Community Information
 Challenge initiative which provides grants to help community foundations (including the Trust) find creative ways to keep communities informed;
- McCormick Foundation, which provided general support and enabled us to conduct focus groups with low-income residents and conduct polling in Spanish as needed;
- MacArthur Foundation, which provided general support;
- Woods Fund of Chicago, which underwrote our special research on community organizers and other area leaders; and
- The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, which funded the *Linking Audiences to News* research.

The Trust also thanks Rachel Davis Mersey, Vivian Vahlberg and Robert LeBailly who managed the coordination of the opinion surveys and focus groups, analyzed the results and produced this report.

We hope you find the results to be provocative and inspiring and that you join with us in supporting ways to keep high-quality information flowing in the Chicago region.

Terry Mazany

President and CEO

The Chicago Community Trust

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is four-fold:

- Assess the level to which critical information needs of democracies are being well-met in the Chicago region – both for the general public and for leaders to whom others look for insight and information;
- Identify critical information gaps and deficiencies that may need to be addressed, particularly assessing how the information landscape varies by race, geography, economic status and other factors;
- Develop a barometer of the area's information health which can be repeated in future years to assess progress; and
- Assess how the information needs and experiences of the general public differ from those of leaders.

Attempts to capture the size and nature of a community news ecosystem have until now focused on two issues: resources and satisfaction. While we consider both of these relevant metrics—and elements of each are included in this research—this effort represents one of the first attempts to capture community members' sense of their own information needs and their roles in the news ecosystem. We believe that what makes the ecosystem analogy so applicable here is that information is not only complicated but also comprised of many inter-related parts including creation, dissemination and reception.

To achieve these ends, Braun Research conducted telephone interviews with a demographically representative sample of Cook County adults, age 18 and older. Braun conducted 720 landline interviews via a random-digit dial sample and 80 cellular phone interviews from an Illinois cellular phone sample screened by county, for a total of 800 20-minute interviews. Surveys were conducted in English (91 percent) and in Spanish (9 percent) by telephone from June 14, 2010, through June 26, 2010. The purpose of including cellular phone and Spanish-language interviews was not to garner a separate sample of these groups but to ensure that the overall sample was representative of the Cook County population. The margin of error for the

interviewing is +/- 3.7 percentage points. Interviews were monitored at random by Braun and members of the research team.

The same survey instrument developed for the phone-based public survey (with the addition of a handful of questions) was used to develop a Web-based (SurveyMonkey.com) survey of area leaders – defined as people who either hold leadership positions in area organizations, governments or companies or have significant expertise on matters of public interest. To compile the sample, invitations were sent by e-mail to all grantees of The Chicago Community Trust; current and former Leadership for Greater Chicago fellows; leadership lists of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Metropolitan Planning Council; and subscribers of two influential Community Renewal Society publications (Catalyst and The Chicago Reporter). Responses were received from June 28, 2010, through July 23, 2010. A total of 333 people answered at least one question. All incomplete data were marked as missing in the analysis.

As an important follow-up step with particular groups, in August 2010, seven qualitative focus groups were conducted at Fieldwork Chicago. Four were leadership groups: two groups of leaders of community-based organizations recruited by the Woods Fund of Chicago and two groups with a variety of different types of organizational and opinion leaders recruited by the Woods Fund and The Chicago Community Trust. The opportunity to participate was so well-received that in several cases people brought co-workers along with them to the focus groups. This meant that the smallest leadership focus group had 11 people. The others had 12, 16 and 16 participants. The 55 participants represented a wide range of nonprofits and civic and government groups—at least 44 organizations in total.

Additionally, three focus groups were conducted with participants earning less than \$30,000 in household income annually, defined as low-income according to data from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Of these, 10 participants

were recruited from participants in the first phase quantitative study and 10 additional participants were recruited by Fieldwork. The three groups were smaller than the leaders groups —7, 7 and 6—but represented the city's racial and ethnicity diversity. Of the participants, 9 were Caucasian and Hispanic (4 of them ESL), 5 were Caucasian, 4 were African American, 2 were Asian/Asian American and 1 identified as another race category. All focus groups were audio recorded and professionally transcribed by Fieldwork's auxiliary team. Participants in the low-income groups were compensated \$100 for their time.

The project was designed and conducted by Rachel Davis Mersey, assistant professor of journalism at Northwestern University's Medill School, and Vivian Vahlberg, project director for the Community News Matters program of The Chicago Community Trust, with assistance from Robert LeBailly of Medill.

STRENGTHS OF CHICAGO'S INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

Chicago is no information desert. Far from it.

A DIVERSE, VIBRANT LANDSCAPE

In fact, it's more of a lush, vibrant and dynamic information tropical forest, with an incredible variety of different media species. To see just how diverse the landscape is, one need only to peruse <u>2011</u> Getting On Air, Online & Into Print, the Community Media Workshop's annual guide to Chicago-area media. This year's 300-page guide (the 20th) lists more than 900 media outlets: 48 TV stations, 132 radio stations, 153 online outlets, 479 print publications, plus assorted other specialty outlets targeted to different locations, groups, races, ethnicities and nationalities, ages and interests.

As Thom Clark, the workshop's president put it:

"These diverse outlets range in size from the big newspapers and broadcast stations (legacy media) to the many, many mom-and-pop online media outlets and bloggers we've documented the past two years. ... We have all kinds of print publications – from metro dailies to local weeklies to suburban papers and monthly magazines. There's a media outlet or news feed for people of all kinds—from the gay-lesbian press to senior citizen press to college press. Included in the mix are some 230 ethnic news outlets - in English and many other languages - serving not only the large African-American, Latino and Polish populations but also many, many others—from the Filipino to Pakistani and Czech to Greek. There aren't just ethnic papers; there are ethnic radio and TV networks, stations and programs and online sites."

But even this exhaustive guide doesn't capture the full diversity of information sources available to residents of the Chicago area. In the *Linking Audiences to News* report, Rich Gordon of Northwestern University's Medill School and Zachary Johnson of Syndio Social conclude that there are more than 400 websites providing relevant news and information to area residents—including some produced by nonprofit organizations and government agencies.

So there's no shortage of news and information. The question is whether all this information is satisfactorily addressing the needs of people and society. The public opinion survey provides some answers.

FEELING PRETTY WELL-INFORMED

Chicago-area residents surveyed seemed to believe they are well-informed generally and that they get the information they need to form opinions about area problems. Fewer felt informed about their neighborhoods, but the majority of the public still said they get what they need.

How well informed would you say you feel generally?

Agree: 87 percent

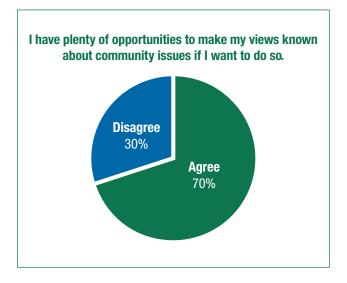
Would you say that you generally get enough good information about issues affecting the Chicago area so that you feel pretty well-informed? *Agree: 79 percent*

Would you say that you generally get enough good information about issues affecting your neighborhood so that you feel pretty well-informed?

Agree: 69 percent

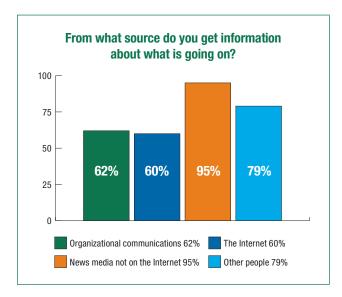
ABLE TO MAKE THEIR VIEWS KNOWN

More than two-thirds of the public said they have plenty of opportunities to make their views known about community issues. Word of mouth plays a significant role in today's media ecosystem.

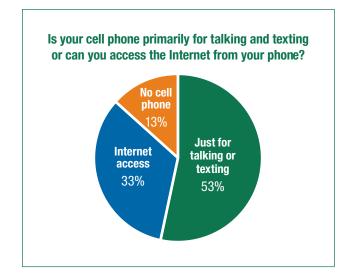


WIDESPREAD BUT NOT UNIVERSAL INTERNET ACCESS

A surprisingly high percentage of the public (84 percent) said they have access to both computer and the Internet when they need it. And 60 percent said they get information about what is going on from the Internet.



Mobile access to information, which is of growing importance because so many new information services are being offered or proposed for mobile devices, was equally as good. Specifically, 86 percent of the public said they have a smart phone or a cellular phone that can also be used for texting.



While these numbers are encouraging, it is important to remember the flip side—that a still substantial percentage of the population doesn't have access to important information technologies. While they

are often forgotten, 17 percent of the public does not have access to the Internet when they need it, and 13 percent of the public does not have a cellular phone.

Our focus groups with low-income participants offered some qualitative insights on the power-lessness felt by individuals who lack access to technology. A woman explained her frustrations: "A lot of places have [e-mail newsletters]...but I don't have a computer, so I have to rely on just going and getting flyers and stuff like that." When people in the group continued to cite online resources, she reasserted herself:

"Not everybody has a computer or Internet accessibility, and some of these people that need the medical care might even be homeless. They might not even have TVs to be able to have that kind of access, so what they need is...to make a magazine or brochure or something totally separate and call it local community news or your community bulletin or something."

The issue of alternative means of access via friends, family, the library or mobile devices surfaced among low-income participants. A woman who rated Chicago as a "fair" place to live explained that she uses the Internet at her daughter's house when she can. "I don't want to be like I don't know what's going on because I don't go online and since everything is online now we have to go online for any information." When asked if lack of access is limiting, she said:

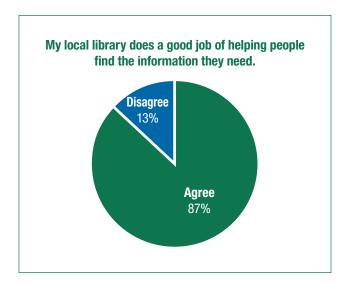
"I feel limited to that because I don't have a computer. That's the only reason, but once I get my own, I'm going to be on there all day long.... I'll get my news or whatever I need to get more online than I will on television."

Often, without access through friends and family, low-income participants become reliant on local libraries.

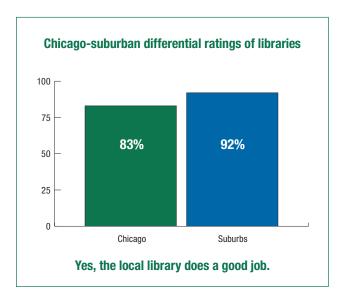
A GOOD JOB BY LIBRARIES HELPING PEOPLE FIND INFORMATION

When asked if their local library does a good job helping people find information they need, 87 percent of the Chicago-area public said yes. This high level of approval was consistent across demographic groups.

The only significant difference between groups regarding libraries is that people living in the suburbs were more likely to have a favorable assessment of their libraries than their city counter-



parts. So while even the worst of the ratings is still quite good—83 percent of Chicagoans said the local library is doing a good job—the city-suburban differential is notable.



One insight on potential reasons for this difference came from an exchange in one low-income focus group. We know that low-income individuals often rely on local libraries for information in general and Internet access specifically. Because the library is often the only available resource for these individuals, when libraries fail to meet their needs, it can be frustrating.

An out-of-work single mother explained:

"They always say do you have access to a computer? Yeah, I can go to the library. But I

can't go to the library because [I cannot prove residency because I live with a relative]. It's like you can get there...but the success of me getting what I need once I get there is a whole 'nother different story."

After hearing her frustration, a gentleman in the group who uses the Internet extensively explained to her what documents she could provide to access her local library, demonstrating the importance of person-to-person communications in finding information.

TROUBLE SPOTS

There are clear gaps in the information ecosystem, particular as it relates to the ability to hear the views of others, political news, community news, watchdog and investigative coverage, and general reporting.

Many people – between 42 and 51 percent – were unhappy with the information they are getting on political topics and issues:

- Information about candidates;
- · Coverage of issues I care about;
- Keeping watch on state and local government;
- · Coverage of my community;
- Information about the challenges we are facing as a region.

By comparison, fewer (between 17 and 34 percent) were unhappy about other types of information, such as:

- Information about their job or profession;
- What local businesses have for sale;
- Practical information about a government program or service;
- Practical information about health issues;
- Emergency information.

In short, people seem more dissatisfied with the information they can get about their shared lives together—their civic lives—than about the kind of personal, practical information that helps them live their private lives.

The survey provides additional, related clues as to what is missing in the information ecosystem, some of which shed light on the political information question.

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the information available to them and their use of it. (Some statements were phrased positively and some negatively, but to facilitate the following comparisons, they were all converted to negative statements. See Appendix II for the original wording.) Their answers are listed in ranked order, with

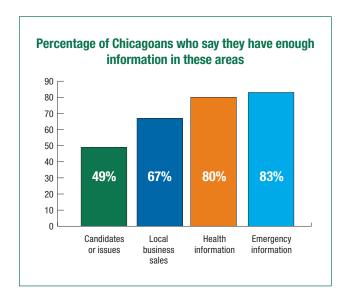
those that resonated most at the top and those that resonated least at the bottom. See Table 1.

To make sense of their responses, let us look at key issues thematically.

POLITICAL INFORMATION

The most definitive evidence of an information gap in the ecosystem relates to political information. Half of the public said they often feel they do not know enough about candidates or issues to vote.

To provide context about this political information gap, consider that people were more likely to feel they can get information about what local business have for sale than they were to say they have enough information about candidates or issues to vote. They were also more likely to feel like they know how to get health information and emergency information.



MEDIA COVERAGE AND WATCHDOGGING

An exceptionally high percentage of the public were critical of the news media's performance on the three survey questions in which they were asked to directly rate the media. Almost half of the public faulted the media's performance in covering issues they care about, covering their communities and serving as a watchdog on state and local government.

TABLE 1: FEELINGS ABOUT INFORMATION	PERCENTAGE OF THE PUBLIC IN AGREEMENT
I often feel like I do not know enough about candidates or issues to vote.	51%
The media does not cover issues I care about very well.	49%
Local media does not do a very good job of keeping watch on state and local government.	48%
I feel overwhelmed with the amount of news and information there is these days.	48%
The schools in my area do not do a good job of teaching people how to tell what news and information they can trust.	45%
Nobody covers what happens in my community very well.	43%
I do not feel like I know very much about the challenges we are facing as a region.	42%
There is so much news these days, I have a hard time telling what is important.	41%
I want to be informed, but I do not have time to keep up with the news.	40%
I do not get enough good information about issues affecting my job, business or profession so that I feel pretty well informed.	34%
I find it hard to find information about what local businesses have for sale.	33%
I do not get enough good information about issues affecting my neighborhood so that I feel pretty well-informed.	31%
When I need practical information about a government program or services, I cannot usually find it.	30%
I find it hard to understand what they are talking about in the news media.	25%
It is harder compared to 10 years ago to find information that helps me make sense of what is going on in the Chicago area.	24%
It is harder compared to 10 years ago to find information I can trust about what is going on in the Chicago area.	24%
I do not get enough good information about the issue or group that I care about [identified by the respondent] so that I feel pretty well-informed.	22%
I do not get enough good information about issues affecting the Chicago area so that I feel pretty well-informed.	21%
I do not know where to turn for good practical information about health issues my family and I might have.	20%
When there is an emergency, like a tornado or blackout, I do not feel I can usually find the information I need to cope with it.	17%
I do not get the kind of information I need to form an opinion about my neighborhood problem [identified by the respondent].	16%
My local library does not do a good job of helping people find the information they need.	13%
I do not feel very well-informed generally.	13%
I do not get the kind of information I need to form an opinion about my Chicago-area problem [identified by the respondent].	12%

The media does not cover issues I care about very well.

Agree: 49 percent

Local media does not do a very good job of keeping watch on state and local government.

Agree: 48 percent

Nobody covers what happens in my community

very well.

Agree: 43 percent

The press' role as watchdog has been widely discussed by news practitioners and academics as essential to a healthy democracy. The press is known as the fourth estate because of its expected independence and willingness to hold the powerful within the government and the courts accountable to the public. But many members of the public said the media are failing in this core purpose.

A DISTRESSED RELATIONSHIP WITH NEWS

There is also evidence of significant personal distress in dealing with the news. Almost half of the public (48 percent) said they feel overwhelmed by the amount of information available to them. This is certainly not a positive emotion; it has potentially negative consequences.

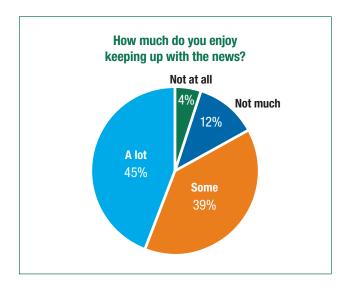
There are other indicators of distress as well:

- 41 percent of the public agreed that "there is so much news these days, I have a hard time telling what is important;"
- 40 percent of the public agreed that "I want to be informed, but I do not have time to keep up with the news;" and

 25 percent of the public agreed that "I find it hard to understand what they are talking about in the news media."

For some people—albeit, a minority—following the news is simply not an enjoyable experience.

Consider that 16 percent of the public said they do not enjoy keeping up with the news much or at all, while only 45 percent said they enjoy it a lot.



Interestingly, there is a significant correlation between those who enjoy keeping up with the news and those who are able to get the information they need in their daily lives.

The concept of information efficacy and the happiness and information scales used in Table 2 will be explained in more detail in a subsequent section.

TABLE 2: MEDIA ENJOYMENT AND INFORMATION EFFICACY						
	Percent of people in this category who say they					
	Are able to navigate the info ecosystem	Are happy with media coverage	Get the informa- tion they need about issues	Get the practical information they need	Get the information they need about area problems	
I enjoy keeping up with the news a lot.	63%*	59%*	75%*	82%	88%*	
I enjoy keeping up with the news some.	58%*	58%*	68%*	78%	86%*	
I do not like keeping up with the news much or not at all.	49%*	50%*	57%*	77%	78%*	

^{*}Statistically significant difference between respondents based on their enjoyment of keeping up with the news to at least the 0.01 level

But for now, note that people who enjoy news were significantly more likely to be able to navigate the information ecosystem successfully, to find the kind of information they need and to be happy with media coverage. Thus when distress with the news shows up as a major problem, we need to take note.

It is encouraging, however, that despite the fact that so many people felt overwhelmed by the news, a very high percentage (more than three-quarters) of the public said they try to keep up with what is going on in the news related to their neighborhoods and to the Chicago area.

Generally, do you keep up with what is going on about your neighborhood problem [identified by the respondent]?

Yes: 78 percent

Generally, do you keep up with what is going on about your Chicago-area problem [identified by the respondent]?

Yes: 85 percent

And remember, despite their negative ratings in so many areas, very few people (only 13 percent) said they do not feel very well-informed generally.

NOT ENOUGH OPPORTUNITIES TO HEAR THE VIEWS OF OTHERS

Most people said they have adequate opportunities to make their views known about community issues, but almost two-thirds of those surveyed said they wish they had more opportunities to learn the views of others.

I have plenty of opportunities to make my views known about community issues if I want to do so. *Agree: 70 percent*

I wish I had more opportunities to learn the views of other people about community issues.

Agree: 64 percent

While this need was expressed by more respondents than any other, the reasons for unhappiness on this point are unclear since the subject seldom came up in focus groups.

SIGNIFICANT DISPARITIES BETWEEN GROUPS

To find out exactly where change may need to happen in the ecosystem, it is worth looking at how different groups of people are faring at getting the information they need in today's world. We purposely asked about a variety of different dimensions of information, in a variety of different ways, to bring out the inherent complexity of the issues involved. But looking at the data question by question, group

by group is mind-numbing and confusing; it is impossible to see the forest for the trees.

One of the best ways to see patterns emerge is to develop aggregate scales, or factors, that provide insight by combining answers to a number of related questions into a score that reflects an underlying belief, behavior or characteristic. To develop these factors, we recoded all the questions to a 0 to 1 scale, reversing the questions as needed to match the "what a high score means" description. Then, using a process called principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation, we developed five factors to use in measuring how well different groups and people are faring in today's information ecosystem. (See Appendix I for a list of the questions which went into development of each factor.)

These factors allow us to assess five key areas:

- 1. Ability to navigate the ecosystem: Are people overwhelmed by too much information? Do they have trouble telling what is important or understanding the news? Do they feel they do not know enough to vote or about the region's challenges? Do they feel they just do not have time to keep up with the news?
- 2. Happiness with media coverage: Do they feel local media does a good job keeping watch on state and local government or covering issues they identify as important? Do they feel like anyone covers what happens in their communities very well? Can they find information about what local businesses have for sale?
- 3. Satisfaction with issue information: Do they feel they get enough information generally—and about issues affecting the Chicago area; their neighborhood; their job, business or profession; and their particular special interests—to feel pretty well-informed?
- 4. **Ability to find practical information**: When they need practical information (about government programs and services, health issues or emergencies), can they usually find it? Do their libraries help them?
- 5. Ability to find problem information: When they hone in on a particular local problem or issue, can they find the kind of information they need to form an opinion?

Viewed together, these factor scores paint a picture of what we call "information efficacy"—the extent to which Chicagoans generally, or different groups of people, can get and are happy with the informa-

tion they feel they need. More importantly, these factor scores enable us to quickly see differences between groups and to assess the relative strength of those differences.

By highlighting any case in which 55 percent or fewer of the respondents in a group received a positive efficacy score, one can quickly and clearly see where the most acute problems are—with the

	Percent of people in each category who						
	Are able to navigate info ecosystem	Are happy with media coverage	Get info they need about issues	Get practical info they need	Get info they need about area problems	Are tech enabled	Are civically engaged
EDUCATION LEVEL							
College grad or more	69%*	63%*	75%*	82%	90%*	96%*	74%*
Trade school /some college	59%*	59%*	69%*	80%	87%*	90%*	72%*
High school grad or less	50%*	51%*	65%*	78%	80%*	69%*	62%*
PLACE OF RESIDENCE							
N & NW suburbs	65%*	69%*	73%*	84%	90%	89%*	69%*
City central & N	63%*	61%*	72%*	81%	83%	88%*	68%*
S & SW suburbs	61%*	52%*	72%*	81%	87%	88%*	71%*
W suburbs	57%*	57%*	68%*	78%	87%	83%*	68%*
City S & W	51%*	50%*	62%*	76%	82%	78%*	69%*
INCOME							
\$50,000 or more	65%*	62%*	73%*	83%	87%	95%*	74%*
\$30,000 to \$50,000	57%*	56%*	69%*	79%	88%	90%*	69%*
Less than \$30,000	52%*	53%*	65%*	78%	83%	71%*	64%*
RACE							
White	60%	60%*	73%*	82%*	87%	86%	69%*
Other/multiracial	59%	60%*	69%*	79%*	89%	82%	63%*
Black	55%	50%*	64%*	77%*	83%	81%	71%*
ETHNICITY							
Not Hispanic	60%*	58%	69%	80%	86%	85%*	71%*
Hispanic	55%*	54%	69%	78%	84%	79%*	62%*
LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HON	ЛЕ						
English	60%*	58%	69%	80%	85%	85%*	71%*
Not English	54%*	53%	69%	78%	87%	77%*	59%

Particularly ill-served categories (those in which no more than 55 percent scored positively on a factor) are highlighted in yellow. *Denotes statistically significant difference within demographic groupings at at least the 0.01 level.

ability to navigate the information ecosystem and happiness with media coverage. See Table 3.

Far fewer people had trouble getting specific kinds of information to meet particular needs; apparently, they have found ways to find information they need and to be as informed as they want to be.

What they were having trouble with is more emotional and experiential than that. Just the process of consuming news seemed to be stressful for many; they were feeling inadequate about their ability to process the information out there and to navigate what for many is a confusing and overwhelming set of offerings. And they were feeling unhappy—again, not with the information out there but with the job the media is doing.

Several groups were definitely having a harder time than others. Approximately half (between 45 percent and 51 percent) of the people in the following groups were not only unable to successfully navigate the information ecosystem but were also unhappy with media coverage:

- People who have not gone beyond high school;
- People who live in the south and west of the city;
- People who make less than \$30,000 a year;
- · African Americans;
- Hispanics;
- People whose preferred language at home is not English.

But what are the controlling factors? A simple regression provides evidence that education and income were, in fact, the strongest predictors of people's ability to navigate the information ecosystem. The more education and the greater income, the stronger one's ability. Geography—living on the south and west sides—was a weaker yet still significant predictor; residents of Chicago's south and west sides had less ability to navigate the information ecosystem. Thus, the most important factors in information efficacy in the Chicago area are:

• Education: No matter which factor we look at, the more education a person has, the more likely they were to be able to get the information they need in today's world. There were stark differences in scores between those with the most education and those with the least. Note that among those with a high-school education or less, only 50 percent were able to navigate the information ecosystem and only 51 percent were happy with media coverage—far below the 69

percent and 63 percent respectively of people with at least a college education.

- Income: As with education, there is a consistent relationship across the board between the level of income and the level of information efficacy; the more people make, the more likely they were to score positively on any of the information efficacy measures.
- **Geography:** There were big differences in information efficacy and satisfaction depending on where people live as well. On all the factors, people in the north and northwest suburbs fared the best of all; they were more likely to have or be able to get the information they need than people in the south and west of the city, who fared the worst. Mirroring what we found in education, only 51 percent of people in the south and west of the city were able to navigate the information ecosystem and only 50 percent were happy with media coverage, compared with 65 percent and 69 percent, respectively, in the north and northwest suburbs. Other areas scored between these two, in no consistent pattern.
- Race: Race is a bit more complicated. Whites were significantly better served than blacks on three factors: issue information, practical information and happiness with media coverage. Scores of respondents of other races and multiracial respondents fell between blacks and whites, but other races and multiracial respondents were tied with whites on happiness with media coverage (with both a good 10 percentage points happier than blacks).

In addition to demographic and geographic variables, there are some psychographic and behavior-related variables that are also relevant.

Those who were having the hardest time—i.e., who were least well-served by the information ecosystem today—are those who:

- Are not technology-enabled (i.e. without access to computers or the Internet when they need it);
- Do not enjoy keeping up with the news;
- Find it harder than it used to be to find information they can trust or that makes sense of things;
- Are not very civically engaged;
- · Have not had Internet-literacy training.

Note in Table 4 the high incidence of problems: Again, about half the people in the categories just listed were having trouble navigating the information ecosystem and were unhappy with media coverage.

TABLE 4: ADDITIONAL FACTORS AND RELATIONSHIPS						
	Percent of people in each category who					
	Are able to navigate the info ecosystem	Are happy with media coverage	Get the information they need about issues	Get the practical information they need	Get the information they need about area problems	
INTERNET-LITERACY TRAINING						
Have had	64%*	61%	74%*	83%	92%*	
Have not had	57%*	55%	67%*	79%	83%*	
ENJOYMENT WITH KEEPING UP WITH NEW	'S					
A lot	63%*	59%*	75%*	82%	88%*	
Some	58%*	58%*	68%*	78%	86%*	
Not much or not at all	49%*	50%*	57%*	77%	78%*	
LEVEL OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT						
Low	56%*	53%*	63%*	77%*	80%*	
High	62%*	61%*	76%*	83%*	91%*	
LEVEL OF TECHNOLOGICAL ADEPTNESS						
Low	45%*	47%*	59%*	75%*	74%*	
High	62%*	59%*	71%*	81%*	88%*	
DIFFICULTY COMPARED TO 10 YEARS AGO	TO FIND INFORMA	ATION THAT CAN B	E TRUSTED			
Easier	62%*	62%*	74%*	82%	90%*	
Harder	54%*	47%*	61%*	77%	79%*	
DIFFICULTY COMPARED TO 10 YEARS AGO TO FIND INFORMATION THAT HELPS MAKE SENSE OF THINGS						
Easier	62%*	62%*	74%*	82%	90%*	
Harder	54%*	47%*	61%*	77%	79%*	

Particularly ill-served categories (those in which no more than 55 percent scored positively on a factor) are highlighted in yellow. *Statistically significant difference within demographic groupings of at least the 0.01 level.

MANY PATHS TO INFORMATION

In today's world, there is no one all-purpose source for information. As is apparent from the chart below, people in the Chicago area rely on different sources of information for different purposes (and, of course, different types of people have different information patterns).

When it comes to getting news about the Chicago area, newspapers and magazines (35 percent) and television (33 percent) were the dominant sources, with radio (11 percent) and online (11 percent) also important.

For news about their neighborhoods, more rely on newspapers and magazines than any other source (44 percent), but the second most important source (19 percent) is other people—what people pick up by word of mouth or from neighbors or community gatherings. Television (13 percent) and online (9 percent) were much less important.

For news about their jobs or professions, online media is tops (31 percent), beating out specialized media (such as newsletters and professional or academic journals) at 17 percent, or newspapers and magazines at 15 percent.

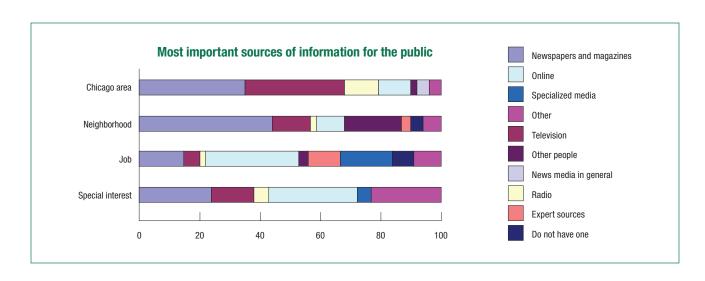
Finally, for news about their special interests, no one source dominates; the list is as varied as their interests. The biggest categories were online media at 29 percent; newspapers and magazines at 24 percent; and television at 14 percent. A notable 23 percent of responses were in the "other category."

DOES TYPE OF INFORMATION SOURCE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

We analyzed whether the way people prefer to get information has any relationship to their information efficacy.

In general, people whose most important source for news is either the Internet or the non-Internet-based news media (particularly newspapers and magazines) were happier with the ecosystem and the information they get than those who favor relying on information from other people or organizations they trust. And people whose most important source of information is television generally have lower efficacy scores than those who rely on the Internet or newspapers.

We cannot make any assumption about causation: We do not know whether people who are more able to get information gravitate to the Internet and the media or whether using the Internet and the media makes them more able to get information than people who rely on other sources. We only know there is a relationship between the two. We do know, however, that those who regularly use the Internet tend to be wealthier and better educated, so there are likely a number of variables at play here.



A SPECIAL LOOK

LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS

Residents earning less than \$30,000 a year differ significantly from other income groups in several ways, according to their responses to the public survey, and this deserves particular attention.

THEY DON'T FEEL AS WELL-INFORMED.

Low-income residents scored lower on a whole series of questions assessing how well-informed they feel, particularly on whether they feel informed enough about issues relating to their job or profession (an 18-point spread; 50 percent of low-income residents versus 68 percent of those earning more) and challenges facing the region (also an 18-point spread, 45 percent versus 63 percent). Also, fewer believed they get enough information to be able to form an opinion about problems in their neighborhoods (76 percent versus 83 percent) although it should be noted that even so, three quarters believed they do get enough information. More low-income residents felt they don't know enough to vote (54 percent versus 49 percent). Fewer said other people look to them for information (39 percent versus 50 percent).

MORE HAVE TROUBLE NAVIGATING THE INFORMATION WORLD.

More said they would love to keep up, but do not have time (47 percent to 37 percent); that there is so much news that it is hard to tell what is important (48 percent versus 38 percent); and that they have a hard time understanding the news (30 percent versus 24 percent).

THEY ARE UNHAPPIER WITH COVERAGE OF THEIR COMMUNITIES.

There was a big difference in the response to the statement that nobody covers my community very well (49 percent agree versus 38 percent).

THEY ARE LESS ENGAGED CIVICALLY.

They scored lower on every measure of civic engagement tested: going to community events, volunteering, being registered to vote and voting. For example, 70 percent of low-income respondents said they voted in the last election versus 86 percent of others.

THEY ARE LESS EMPOWERED TECHNOLOGICALLY.

Fewer have Internet access (69 percent versus 93 percent) or computer access when they need it (71 percent to 93 percent).

Comments in focus groups with low-income residents gave context to these numbers:

- Low-income participants gave the impression
 that it would not take a lot to make a big
 difference in their lives in terms of media and
 information flow. For many on the community
 level, there is really a news desert right now. If
 someone were to gather information on housing,
 jobs, politics, schools and community
 development as well as just basic information
 about events, agencies, etc., and find the right
 platform for getting it out to people, that would
 be a huge step forward.
- For a group with very low household income, the participants gave a surprising amount of thought to media, news and information needs. They have little money – few have computers at home – but they cared and were articulate about it.
- Their dominant source of information is local television although numerous people mentioned tapping into a variety of other media too—from radio to mainstream and community newspapers. On the local level, they seemed to hear things, see brochures and postings on bulletin boards, and access other information that helps them know what is going on around them.
- A few were even what one would call "news junkies" or "news seekers." For example, one African-American male in his mid-50s from the South Side said he has a blog, listens to numerous radio stations, watches *Democracy Now*, reads the *Chicago Defender*, *Windy City Times* and other blogs. And a Puerto Rican mom said she has the television on a lot during the day and watches the news and is aware of the stations' schedules and strengths of each.
- The agencies that are critical in their lives do not seem to be adequately reaching them with information they need. And while libraries got high marks in the survey for making information available, for the particularly down and out, getting a library card was not that easy.

When it came to getting the information people need to live their lives and be good citizens, residents of the south and west sides of Chicago seemed to be having a particularly hard time. As noted in Table 3, half the adults on the south and west sides were not able to successfully navigate the information ecosystem and half were unhappy with media coverage—a higher percentage than any other area. And compared to the rest of the public, more residents of the south and west sides:

- Wished they had more opportunities to learn the views of other people about community issues (73 percent versus 64 percent);
- Believed no one covers what happens in their communities very well (55 percent versus 43 percent);
- Felt they do not get enough good information about issues affecting their neighborhoods so that they feel well-informed (44 percent versus 31 percent); and
- Felt they do not get the kind of information about a specific neighborhood problem they identified as important to form an opinion about it (24 percent versus 16 percent).

When it came to specific neighborhood problems, one particular issue stood out: crime and lack of safety. Unhappiness with news coverage of this important problem bubbled up over and over again in focus group discussions, particularly with low-income participants but also in leadership focus groups with community organizers who work in distressed areas.

In a poignant exchange about the imbalance between the fluff and substance of news, participants said they would prefer less coverage of Chelsea Clinton's wedding, for example, (which was big in the news the week of the focus groups)—"who made her dress and that she wore two different dresses"—and much more coverage of the violence in their neighborhoods.

Concern about violence and coverage of violence was such a driver of conversation among low-income participants that it surfaced in all three focus groups. In one focus group of seven low-income people, almost everyone knew someone lost to street violence and one woman had lost three of her six children that way.

In one exchange, a Latino woman who is active as a volunteer complained: "Whoever said that you hear about it when someone dies? You don't hear about what can we do to fix this problem or that the community's trying to work toward this. You don't hear the progression, the steps [it takes] to take to cure it."

Two Hispanic women said that Spanish-language media in Chicago often does a better job than English-language television in Chicago of fleshing out the full story about violence—of covering not only that a shooting occurred and focusing on grieving relatives, but of learning more about the person who was shot, what were the circumstances, what efforts are being made to solve the crime or to deal with violence. Often, though, what people wanted was just the ability to get basic information quickly: the who, what, when, where, why and how.

In the absence of satisfying media coverage, participants said they rely on word of mouth. However, a 39-year-old Latina who rated Chicago as a "fair" place to live admitted it is flawed system. "I think it's all about intimidation....It's like everyone's scared to make a move or call because if your face is on there, they'll come for you. One way or another, they'll come for your family. It's intimidation. That's why they don't cover a lot of things when it comes to gangs."

Other participants pointed to their desire to know about violence as a way to protect themselves. "Should I be walking around after 10:00?" asks a white female local business owner. Describing her neighborhood, she says, "You see [gangs] all over the place. I hear—I saw that something happened, blood all over the corner, but I really can't get a good feel about the crime statistics." A white woman who has been in Chicago for 40 years said she believes the media doesn't cover violence well because "the media thinks the more we know, the more freaked out we're going to get."

One local community organizer complained:

"Recently a policeman was killed on the South Side. The news media, everybody else blew it up with a \$100,000 reward, so on and so forth. But down the street from my church, four kids that got killed in the last three weeks, I haven't heard a thing about them anywhere in the news. Pastors get together holding a press conference talking about 'Stop the violence.' Only time the media come out is when the mayor comes to that press conference. Mayor doesn't come to that press conference, no media coverage. It's crazy that—forgive for saying this, this way—a Caucasian kid gets killed, and you got rewards, media coverage, up and down the wazoo. Like 10 black kids get killed, 12 Hispanic kids get killed."

And while community leaders have strong interpersonal networks of information and often cited e-mails from others as the way they learn new things, both community leaders and the public wanted more opportunities to learn the views of others.

A SPECIAL LOOK

LEADERS

One of the questions explored by this study is whether there are key differences between the information needs and habits of the public and its leaders. If there are, it is possible that a healthy information ecosystem in today's world should provide one set of information sources tailored to the needs of leaders and a different set tailored to the needs of the public.

We considered this question vital for two reasons:

- Leaders are an important information source for the public, which makes it doubly important that their information needs are met. In the 1940s, sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld introduced a concept called two-step flow theory. It posits that people do not all get information in the same way but that ideas flow from the mass media to opinion leaders and from opinion leaders to the public, hence the two-step flow. Researchers have since questioned this idea, pointing out that social media is now providing more opportunities for participants, but we still sense that elites may vary from the public in some important ways regarding news and information.
- · Tailoring information to the needs of different groups is now far easier than it used to be. When the mass media was the primary vehicle for distribution of information, what newspapers, television and radio reported had to serve multiple needs; it just wasn't economic to print or broadcast a bunch of specialty news products to meet the needs of different audiences. That all changed with the Internet, which eliminated or greatly reduced the costs of distributing news and information. One no longer needs an expensive printing press, a fleet of delivery trucks or a broadcast tower to get information to people. Thus, we are not limited to one-size-fits all solutions. We can serve different needs - if we can identify them and find ways to pay for them.

It is important to understand that the purpose of evaluating differences among these groups is not to suggest that the respondents' positions or roles are determinants of their media use—although we will explore some possible causal explanations—but to pinpoint information behaviors and beliefs so that

opportunities for new news and information channels and products may emerge.

This research suggests that leaders are indeed substantially different from the public in their interests and characteristics, and in their information needs, preferences and patterns—and, importantly, that they are already relying on very different information sources than the public.

INTERESTS

First, they have different interests. When asked to identify what issue or group is of special interest to them, more than 10 percent of leaders said they pay particular attention to education issues, which did not even rank among the top five for the public. Although not all respondents identified a particular interest or group, among those who did there were noticeable differences between community leaders and the public.

TABLE 5: TOP FIVE ISSUES OR GROUPS OF SPECIAL INTEREST					
COMMUNITY LEADERS	PUBLIC				
Education	Politics and government				
Poverty-related issues	Religion and church				
African-American community	Community and neighborhood happenings				
Politics and government	Race and ethnicity				
The arts	Employment and economic issues				

One way leaders and the public are the same is this: If they have a special interest or group they pay attention to, they are pretty satisfied with the information they are getting. Of those who said they have a special interest or group they follow, three quarters of both leaders and the public said they felt they were getting enough good information about that topic so they felt pretty well informed about it. The big difference is that far more leaders report paying attention to a special

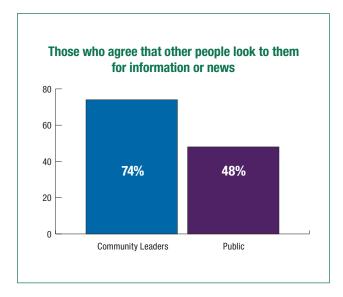
interest; 73 percent of leaders said they pay attention to a particular issue or group, compared to only 32 percent of the public.

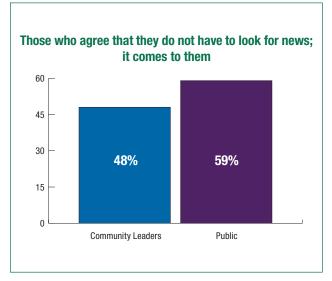
Not surprisingly, leaders were significantly more likely than the public to say that other people look to them to keep them informed or explain things in the news. This reinforces Lazarsfeld's two-step flow idea.

the public to identify the Chicago area as an excellent place to live. Of leaders, 42 percent rated the Chicago area as an excellent place to live, versus only 22 percent of the public.

INFORMATION ACCESS AND DIET

There are significant differences in the ways leaders get information. Leaders tend to be more active seekers of news.

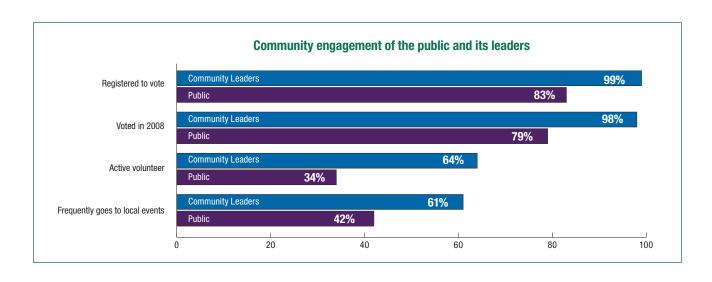




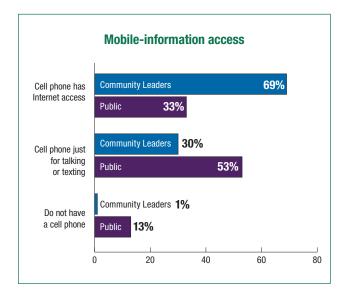
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

As further evidence of Lazarsfeld's conceptualization, leaders seemed to be more connected to their communities than the public at large. They were more likely to be registered to vote, to have voted in the last presidential election, to volunteer and to attend local events. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that leaders were significantly more likely than

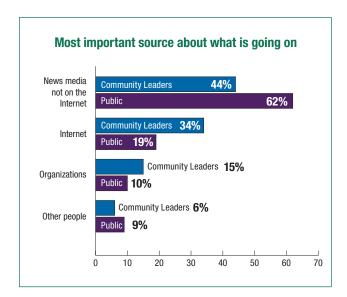
Part of the difference is that leaders have better access to the full array of information services available online and on cell phones than does the public. All leaders reported having access to both a computer and the Internet when they need it, compared to 84 percent of the public and a smaller percentage of low-income residents. And leaders were significantly more likely to have cell phones



and to be able to access the Internet from them, making them more able to take advantage of all the many new information services being offered or proposed for cell phones.



While the non-Internet news media were still seen as the most important source of information by more leaders and members of the public than any other source, more leaders now rely on the Internet as their major source of information and fewer rely most heavily on the media than was the case with the public. The Internet has clearly gained ground more quickly among leaders, with more than a third of leaders now saying the Internet is their most important source of information.



SPECIAL INFORMATION SOURCES

Robust discussion in the focus groups made clear that community leaders now rely heavily on a quite varied mix of specialized sources to get the information they need—some of which have not been around long. These sources are particularly important to them because these leaders work at a high level with information; they want a lot of information about a lot of topics and they want both granularity and perspective.

Yes, leaders still consume mass media (although few leaders in the focus groups said they actually watch local television and many said they don't read the newspaper every day, but see newspaper articles that are brought to their attention). But when asked to talk about how they get information every day, they each described using a network of largely Internet-based information sources that give them specific and often quite well-reported and analyzed information about things important to them. In most cases, this information just appears on their radar screens online, with organizations and people who share similar interests sending them updates, round-ups, alerts, digests, expert analyses and articles of interest every day via e-mail, blogs, Facebook, Twitter feeds and highly curated listservs and newsletters.

In focus groups, several sources of information now available on the Internet (some of them new to the ecosystem) came up repeatedly as valued sources for leaders:

- Capitol Fax (http://thecapitolfaxblog.com/), a forpay service covering state government issues;
- Progress Illinois (http://www.progressillinois. com/), a daily roundup of stories of interest to progressives, hosted by the Service Employees Union International;
- Catalyst (http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/), a publication of the Community Renewal Society that covers education issues;
- (less frequently) The Chicago Reporter (http://www.chicagoreporter.com), also a publication of the Community Renewal Society, which covers issues through the lenses of race and poverty.

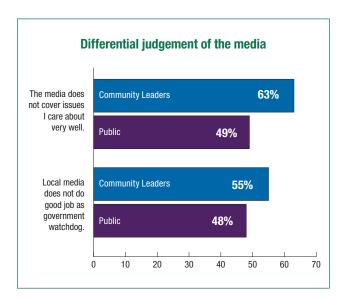
All these special information sources were not as widely used or cited by the general public.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THE INFORMATION

Community leaders and the public also expressed different information standards. This is not a revelation—some people are happy with hot dogs, others with foie gras—but this is one of the first

times there has been evidence that such relationships exist with media.

What is most notable about all the differences between community leaders and the public is on how many questions Chicago's leaders were significantly more negative than was the public about media coverage and about other offerings of Chicago's information ecosphere.



Also, more leaders said they do not get enough good information so that they feel well-informed about issues affecting their neighborhood or the Chicago area in general:

Neighborhood issues: 54 percent of leaders agreed, versus 31 percent of the public;

Chicago issues: 28 percent of leaders agreed, versus 21 percent of the public.

They were also significantly more likely to perceive negative changes in the information ecosystem. A higher percentage of leaders said that compared to 10 years ago, it has gotten harder:

- To find trustworthy info about what is going on in the Chicago area: 42 percent of leaders agreed, versus 24 percent of the public;
- To find information that makes sense of things in the Chicago area: 39 percent of leaders agreed, versus 24 percent of the public.

Additionally—and particularly surprising given their higher levels of education and connectedness—they were more likely than the general public to say they cannot easily find practical information about a government program or service when they need it. Forty percent said they cannot, versus 30

percent of the public. Leaders were also more likely (39 percent versus 30 percent) to say they don't have adequate opportunities to make their views known.

It might seem odd that leaders were more unhappy or negative than the public on all these measures given that they are more connected politically and technologically, rely more on the Internet with its wealth of available information, and have higher levels of education and income, which are related to information efficacy. But leaders in the focus groups did not find this surprising at all.

First, they made clear it is not a case of the public getting the information it needs but leaders not getting the information they need. They said they personally manage to receive a quite robust flow of information tailored to their own needs.

Instead, they said their greater negativity is reflective of several things:

- Leaders pay more attention to the entire media marketplace and to systemic issues, whereas the public is more focused on immediate needs and the offerings in front of them. Leaders spot trends, so, like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, they notice problems before others do.
- Leaders spend more time with information and pay more attention to the quality and availability of information because it's critical to their livelihoods.
- Leaders have the expertise and "insider" status to be able to independently assess what is not being covered or is being miscovered.
- Leaders also know how hard it is to get important issues to surface into the public's consciousness because they have tried and have frequently been frustrated.

Finally, a few more differences of note:

- Leaders were savvier in their evaluation of Internet information, as we will see in more detail in a later section on information literacy.
- More of them enjoyed keeping up with the news (69 percent enjoy it a lot, versus only 45 percent of the public).
- Fewer leaders report having a hard time telling what is important in the news (31 percent versus 41 percent).
- Fewer leaders said they have a hard time understanding what they are talking about in the news media (6 percent versus 25 percent).

LEADERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to capturing leaders' perspectives of the Chicago information ecosystem, we also asked them, in light of their elite status, what they would change about Chicago's information landscape. Here are their suggestions:

Help nonprofits communicate better

Many representatives of nonprofit groups and community organizations urged foundations to fund communications expertise at nonprofits.

They said they have expertise about major issues affecting the region, but they find it very hard to get the word out, to get the area's newspapers and television stations to seriously cover the issues they care about, and to get the public to become aware of and pay attention to key problems. They said they have neither the time nor the expertise to do it themselves. But several said that when they have actually hired communications staff or consultants to work with them, it has made a big difference.

Partner with media organizations to get ethnic issues out

"I think it would be helpful if we can plan...strategically how to work with major media so that the ethnic issues can...reach the media, be it newspaper or be it TV....

If the Chicago Tribune and the Chicago Sun-Times went out of business tomorrow morning, it would be a minor inconvenience....The New York Times or the Los Angeles Times would expand to a Chicago section, and we would get that newspaper.

And if what I'm saying is true, then shame on the *Chicago Tribune* and shame on the *Chicago Sun-Times* for not realizing that they have got to report differently the news and that they've got to create partners with [community organizations]."

Report on our communities, neighborhood by neighborhood

Local newspapers "need to have folks focus on good, balanced stories that can bring about a positive awareness among all the Chicago folks. And that would give the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Chicago Tribune* an identity that can be separate from the New York Times which came down here and spent five days doing a story with us on the housing foreclosures. When I saw this, I said, '*Chicago Tribune* and *Chicago Sun-Times* have never spent five days with our community.'"

"You take up the section in the *Tribune* of Chicagoland and it's all negative and doesn't have anything to do about...what I would like to read about. So it would be nice if it just had something by neighborhood, what's going on."

Report on what is possible

"I think the best news...shows people what's possible. And it's not just about putting a positive spin on everything, 'cause things are really hard and a lot of really hard stuff is coming down on a lot of communities we care about a lot...so we don't want to BS people about that, but to sort of help them see how things could shift....

I think we have to sort of take it to the next step for it to really be constructive. And I think people would be interested in that because they're tired of just knowing what's wrong. The city government, for instance. They wanna know...what could be possible, what could be different."

Develop alternative channels

"I do see the lack of media as an opportunity in low-income communities, especially, but almost everywhere. Because there's such a vacuum, there's nobody working against us in the way that media often does. And it's sort of hard for me to imagine big media without imagining it to be run by the people who are running things.

So I think in some ways, if we are able to get the resources to do the work, that gives you a pretty wide opening. People are curious about why things are the way they are and open to developing a common language and a common understanding about that. And you can get that through e-mail to a certain group, and you can get it through block meetings and door-to-door and newspapers and newsletters to another group."

Resuscitate neighborhood newspapers

"I think it is going to be very important that we try to bring back our neighborhood newspapers—our favorite newspapers where a lot of information was disseminated in print. Those sources are drying up."

Focus on kids

"I was just reading that in France, there's a newspaper that's big that is targeted towards kids in school....A good many copies are provided free to kids in school....It's not increasing circulation (for the) dailies, but it is creating readers. They're targeting their stories, in-depth stories about news issues, towards...three different populations of

students, beginning with middle school and on up to high school. I think that's fascinating."

Make it entertaining

"If you look at like 'Super Nanny' or 'The Biggest Loser,' they're taking...healthy living and parenting tips and making it entertaining. And so I do think there are opportunities for creative people [to do the same for news]. You can make broccoli [or the news] taste good."

Educate leaders about the media

"We do need to provide funding for smaller-capacity organizations to be able to educate leaders on the direction of media and how to pick and choose and what makes good media."

Teach kids how to read critically

"I think that kids are not learning to read the papers. They are not being taught—and my kids go to good schools, the quote 'good schools'—and they're not told, 'You need to read the Sunday paper. You need to look at this or that.' They're not taught...how to look critically at the news. We're not training our consumers."

A SPECIAL LOOK

INFORMATION LITERACY

The Internet has revolutionized information in so many ways, making it possible to access an astoundingly broad array of information at a moment's notice, day or night. At the request of the McCormick Foundation, we asked several questions regarding Internet literacy.

To assess attitudes toward information on the Internet, respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with several statements. See Table 6.

Thus, while a high percentage of the public and its leaders realized they should check the source and nature of information on the Internet—a good sign of their information literacy—their responses to other statements showed that a significant portion of the public is more trusting of information on the Internet than they should be.

Almost half of the public believes that "most online information is accurate unless [they] have a reason not to believe it." And lower, but still sizable, percentages of the public also believe that "online information is always verified before it is posted" and that "you can always trust the first items that come up in a Google search." Community leaders were more attuned to the fact that neither of these statements is true. (There is no filter or monitor that makes sure that only truthful information goes on

the Internet; people can post both information and misinformation without restriction. And many factors go into search engine rankings, none of which guarantee that items will be displayed in order of truthfulness.)

In recent years, many different kinds of information literacy programs have been developed and offered to help people assess the veracity of information, particularly information online. Most people — 55 percent of the public — think the schools do a pretty good job of teaching information literacy. Leaders were more dubious; only 21 percent agreed.

But the data show that less than a third of all members of the public and its leaders have ever had either formal or informal training in how to tell whether Internet information is accurate or reliable.

Does such training make a difference? This research strongly suggests that it does. On all six measures of "information efficacy," more people who have had Internet literacy training were able to get the information they feel they need in today's land-scape than those who have not. See Table 7.

Thus, people who have had Internet training were significantly more likely to say they can navigate the information ecosystem, get information about issues and get information about area problems.

TABLE 6: ATTITUDES TOWARD INTERNET INFORMATION					
	Percent who agree				
	Public	Leaders			
You need to check the source and nature of the information on the Internet to know whether you should believe it or not.	88%	97%			
Most online information is accurate unless I have a reason not to believe it.	45%	26%			
Online information is always verified before it is posted.	21%	1%			
You can always trust the first items that come up in the Google search.	18%	2%			

TABLE 7: IMPACT OF INTERNET LITERACY TRAINING						
	Percent of people in each category who					
	Are able to navigate info ecosystem	Are happy with media coverage	Get info they need about issues	Get practical info they need	Get info they need about area problems	Are tech enabled
I have had training in how to tell whether information on the Internet is accurate and reliable	64%*	61%	74%*	83%	92%*	97%*
I have not had training in how to tell whether information on the Internet is accurate and reliable	57%*	55%	67%*	79%	83%*	79%*

^{*}Statistically significant difference at least to the 0.01-level between those who have had Internet information and those who have not.

They also were more technologically engaged, which is to be expected.

While we cannot conclude that the training was the cause of these differences, we know that there is a positive relationship between Internet literacy training and information efficacy.

Thus, people who have had Internet training were significantly more likely to say they can navigate the information ecosystem, get information about issues and get information about area problems. They were also more technologically engaged.

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COMMENTARY

A TIME OF TRANSITION

BY MARK HALLETT

A critical component missing from the steady stream of data on the state of news organizations is what this all means for the end-user: the public. We see figures on how newsroom jobs have shrunk 30 percent since 2000, circulation for top news magazines fell 9 percent in 2010, and newspaper advertising revenues fell 6 percent in 2010, after plummeting 26 percent in 2009. But what does this all actually mean in the lives of everyday Americans?

More importantly what does this mean for lowincome people, whose neighborhoods were never particularly well covered? And how do changes to the local ecosystem affect the news diets of the Chicago area's private and public sector leaders, who depend on information to do their jobs well?

The focus groups conducted for this report provided a rare glimpse into just these questions, shedding light on how a diverse group of leaders and low-income residents of Chicago get their news, what issues matter most to them, to what degree they've become media-makers themselves and a host of related questions.

TODAY'S NEWS "DIET:" NO ONE SIZE FITS ALL

What emerged is that leaders and everyday Chicagoans have complex news "diets." For some, their diet consists of a large morning meal, say AOL News or CNN, with occasional late-afternoon snacks of visits to favorite blogs. For others, the diet consists of different kinds of light meals throughout the day, like going to a large supermarket, then a health food store, farmer's market and street vendors. They navigate a variety of breaking news sites, radio updates, Twitter and blog postings, maybe even black radio and Spanish-language television, too. Some are strictly-speaking consumers, bystanders in the news flow; others like very much to weigh in and be part of the process. No two people out of the 75 that participated in the Trust's seven focus groups had exactly the same "diet."

LEADERS: THE GOOD OL' DAYS WERE NOT THAT GREAT BUT...

The leaders came from youth centers, housing coalitions, ethnic community groups, community development corporations, faith-based organiza-

tions, foundations, government agencies, companies, public schools and universities. They were a diverse group, with backgrounds ranging from organizing to the arts to journalism. And their skills with media consumption as well as media-making varied widely.

As a group, they were acutely aware of how information has changed in recent years. "I've been in the neighborhood for 35 years, and I remember even maybe 25 years ago you would see the newspaper stands and you would see all kinds of folks—even the folks with the bottle in the back pocket—going and getting a paper," one leader said.

But more than harking back to a "golden age," they were critical of whether mainstream outlets are keeping up with changes: "I believe they're still using that old paradigm of 'We're the news. We're the newspapers. You'll read what we put in it.' And what people are saying now is, 'You know what? I can find out what I need to know without reading your newspapers.' I believe newspapers will either understand that or they will perish."

They complained that news coverage tends to reinforce stereotypes, such as the Mexican illegal running across the border, that reporters come to an event that seems to have no grasp of what is actually happening and that there's an "ocean" of stories in Humboldt Park and Little Village that they miss on a daily basis. Criticism ranged from the profit motives of news organizations to their lack of diversity and resulting lack of empathy for certain communities.

As critical as most were, all seemed aware of the shrinking downtown metro newsroom. And some at least recognized that downtown metro news outlets are still where the most readers go on a daily basis. One activist described doing extensive research for a blog item he posted. A *Chicago Tribune* reporter saw it and carried out an even more extensive investigative project, which led to a front-page story with more impact. That dynamic, though, is a tenuous one.

"Right now the major media outlets—*Tribune*, *Sun-Times*—they're relevant. Their circulation is

decreasing and who knows what their relevancy will be 10 years? But right now, they are."

But some find a lot of their experience outside the radar of mainstream media. One leader of an immigrant group said his group's issues never appear in the papers. "You know, we're essentially invisible," he said.

Most have begun to harness media-making and social media to their causes, sometimes even bypassing traditional media altogether. "We just ignore them," said the leader of a citywide project, adding that his group can get 1,500 people to events at a neighborhood church without pushing the message in area media outlets simply by harnessing social media.

"We cannot depend upon media to be our allies in the struggles that we're in, unfortunately," he said.

News seemed of great concern to all the nonprofit leaders. Credible information, not surprisingly, is a critical ingredient of community organizing. One participant said she asks every job candidate what news sources they rely on. "I get a feel for who they are by how they get their news," she explained.

Some also had a soft spot for community and ethnic media, from black radio that hosts discussions of real, on-the-ground issues the community is facing to Hispanic media outlets that cover not only the local issues but also bring news from the motherland.

Leaders also seemed aware that their own news needs tend to focus on problem-solving and are different from the average person's. In challenging times, most people are focus on their own day-today housing, employment and education challenges.

YEARNING FOR A STEADY, USEFUL FLOW OF INFORMATION

Participants in the low-income focus groups hailed from across the city. They included a grandmother, a mold-maker, several unemployed people stringing together odd jobs to make ends meet, a nanny, a waitress, a graphic designer, a dental student and an administrative assistant.

The moderator struggled to get one group to focus on media; it took nearly a half hour before they stopped discussing violence in their lives. One woman had lost three sons to violence. Another had seen two people shot to death, one in her own front yard. A third had lost her 15-year-old daughter to suicide and later dealt with media scrutiny.

For many, television news plays a prominent role, but they resent its "fickle" nature and the negative attention its stories tend to highlight in their communities. One said that TV news covers violence because it is exciting. No, said another, it's because it is "macabre."

They also were upset that so much broadcast coverage focuses on celebrity. "I get pissed off when I turn on the news," one said. "I just want to throw something at the screen. I just want to jump in there and shake people."

The range of media diets among the low-income focus groups varied more than for the leaders. While one described her primary news sources as a friend, her church and her car radio, another was a digital powerhouse, accessing multiple broadcast, print and online sites while also blogging, tweeting and commenting regularly on news sites.

Several participants, caretakers for older friends and family members, were profoundly concerned about the loneliness the elderly experience and their lack of access to information. One participant described the segregation and isolation of some Chicago communities and yearned for media that would help bridge different communities.

"As many diverse cultures as we have, the city itself seems to be set up where we are segregated. We have a lot of common concerns...when do you actually get a chance to stop and have some understanding of everybody, if everybody is telling you don't, don't, don't, don't....I really feel like it (the media) does not—it's not a tool to help the community."

Like other city residents who had lived elsewhere — Arizona; Aurora, Ill.; Michigan — this resident had experienced a more inviting environment elsewhere and seemed to yearn for it. When she lived in a Chicago suburb, she explained, a neighbor had insisted on driving her to a voting station to make sure she participated, without ever asking her how she planned to vote. The experience of engaging with a friendly neighbor was clearly a meaningful one — and something she doesn't experience frequently in the city.

In some cases, access to the Internet was an issue. One person had a cell phone but gave it up after losing her job. Another had no home computer and learned the hard way that getting a library card isn't always easy. Another enjoyed access to the Associated Press when she was studying journalism as an undergrad, but no longer. Occasionally, local

aldermanic offices provided them worthwhile information. But overall, the government agencies most important in these peoples' lives fell short in providing much useful, practical information.

WHAT'S NEEDED: BETTER NEWS AND BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF NEWS

Both leaders and low-income residents seemed to agree that while the volume of available news has increased, the flow of high-quality, useful news has not. They both had lots of opinions about how to improve the news ecosystem in Chicago. A common refrain was that more positive stories need to be told about low-income communities and the change agents living in them – and yet people in both groups also agreed on the need for hard-hitting stories and analysis of deep-rooted issues and their causes.

A clear message was that no news outlet should pretend it's the only game in town anymore: In today's world, there is a need for curating discussions and "brokering" many diverse voices. While leaders emphasized the need for investigative reporting and long-form journalism, low-income residents stressed the need for sustained, helpful information about resources to help improve their lives. Be it through radio, bulletin boards in local stores, newsletters or other platforms, they clearly want more "glue" in their lives.

It's a tall order.

Another critical theme emerged: It's not all about improving the work done by journalists. An equally strong need is for news consumers to better understand how to navigate the changing ecosystem, which one leader described as having moved from being a tic-tac-toe board to 3D chess in a short time.

The news, another said, has become an "insider's game," where you have to have the time and skill to navigate what is important.

Sometimes that's tough. As one nonprofit leader put it, "It's easier to get information today, [but] harder to filter out misinformation. Maybe one site analogy that would be useful here is Wikipedia. I mean, it's just this overwhelming trove of data, some of which is good, some of which is in constant revision."

Another added, "I think you could take steps to fix the media...but if we don't stimulate consumer awareness and demand, you know, it's not gonna work in the long term. I think if we can stimulate curiosity, the market will respond."

The only way to learn to vet quality on the web, one nonleader "news junkie" said, is simply by reading a lot. You begin to notice trends and patterns, and from that can discern what information doesn't seem credible.

ONE POSITIVE: PEOPLE ARE ASKING THE BIG QUESTION

Perhaps the most promising discussion to emerge in both sets of focus groups was around the purpose of journalism itself.

One leader summarized: "No one really says, 'What's the purpose of communication?' And I think that's where we have to start. Why do we want to communicate with somebody? What is the purpose? If it's not to empower people, then I don't see the point. For me, communication is empowering."

Another talked about why we don't need more fluff, but information that actually helps inspire us and moves us forward. As one low-income resident explained, "I think that's what the whole thing is about. We want this new thing, this new media, to just get to the point. Just tell me what this is and how it's going to affect me."

"We're all in the same place at the same time," another resident said. "Whether you're 80, 35 or 24, we should all have some input and we all should be trying to find solutions."

Especially because, as one nonprofit leader put it: "Democracy is gridlocked and people don't feel their voice matters anymore."

These focus groups provided a wealth of insights to the McCormick Foundation's Journalism Program. We fund investigative news and specialized training for journalists, but we've also stepped up support for ethnic and community journalism. We're also supporting initiatives that engage young people in their own media-making and learning to be more discerning consumers of news. The focus groups told us that while the needs in journalism and in the information ecosystem are vast, at least we're on track with the work we're supporting. We hope that others will also learn from this valuable glimpse into the views of Chicagoans.

Mark Hallett is senior journalism program officer at the McCormick Foundation.

COMMENTARY

PLANTING SEEDS

BY LAURA WASHINGTON

We live in a communications desert.

How so, you, say? Our 24/7 news cycle delivers information by the millisecond, to our doors, ears, laptops and cell phones.

Every day we are barraged with millions of words, bytes, video clips, e-mails and tweets via dozens of daily and local newspapers, hundreds of digitized TV channels, a crowded radio dial, a packed blogosphere, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Yahoo.

Yet, we heard in the focus groups that were conducted for this research that Chicago-area residents and leaders thirst for information with context and quality. One South Side community organizer declared that she is living in a "communications desert." Vital information is not reaching the residents of neighborhoods like Englewood, Chatham and North Lawndale. "We keep talking about the bad stuff," she argued. "We don't talk about what's good that's going on out in the communities."

Many others echoed her call. Despite the unprecedented array of news and information options, the "bad stuff" prevails. People are parched for news they can use—and trust. The more local, the better.

The focus group participants represented a broad swath of the Chicago metro area, diverse by race, ethnicity, income, gender, geography and sexual orientation. Some were community activists who work with Chicago residents to advocate for affordable housing, school reform, jobs and racial justice. Others came from policy groups, foundations and the civic arena. Low-income "regular folk" weighed in as well. All were eager to share their sharp critiques and engaging ideas.

The mainstream media has lost their trust (if they ever had it). Most participants read Chicago's daily newspapers, at least occasionally, but find little in the newsprint that resonates with their lives.

A West Side healthcare activist wistfully recalled the good old days. "I remember, even maybe 25 years ago, you would see the newspaper stands and you would see all kinds of folks—even the folks with the bottle in the back pocket—going and getting a paper," she said. "You see them going through the paper, and they hang on to the paper. So the paper, the information was something that was valuable."

And now? "Who wants to pick up something every day and it's talking about another child got shot 22 times?" she exclaimed. "Or all the kids [who] are dropping out of school?"

Daily newspapers are losing boatloads of readers because their stories have lost relevance. "Access to the news has become a real insider's game," opined a public relations professional who works in philanthropy.

The good old days when Walter Cronkite would reassure and inform are gone forever. If the network-owned television outlets want to know why their coveted ratings are plummeting, just ask this crowd. They scorned local TV news as superficial, celebrity-driven and bloody. "The news got so bad, the media, that I turned off the news," said a grandmother from the city's North Side. "It was upsetting me because of all the violence and everything."

An administrator at a civic group said she cannot watch the 10 o'clock news. It gives her nightmares.

Ouch. The feedback pains this writer. I am a journal-ist-turned-philanthropist who has worked for more than three decades in newspapers, TV, radio and alternative media. I have toiled with many colleagues who still battle for investigative and watchdog reporting and advocate for the little guy. Chicago newsrooms still enjoy a plethora of talented and caring reporters who doggedly fight for meaty stories. Big city newspapers still reach decision-makers and set agendas. Still, the news media is stymied by dwindling resources, a bottom-line mentality and an obsolete business model.

The focus group participants acknowledged those realities. Still, they maintained, many in the mainstream media peddle despair, not hope, problems, not solutions.

As digital-savvy kids would say, it's TMI. Too much information. The Internet is exploding with data, information and opinion, but it falls short on substance. The information options are so overwhelming, people simply opt out.

So where do Chicagoans turn for news and information in the communications desert? There are some oases among the tumbleweeds. Focus group participants said they go local—and niche. They singled out alternative publications like the *Chicago Reader* as well as African-American and community-based newsweeklies, like the *Chicago Defender* and *North Lawndale News*. Spanish TV and radio were go-tos, along with Chicago Public Radio and CAN-TV.

Community organizers and policy advocates patronize two political, issue-oriented websites: *Capitol Fax* and *Progress Illinois*. There was also broad agreement that the social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter are the future.

Get back to the basics, the regular folks told us. They crave neighborhood news in simple formats: more community newspapers, church newsletters, bulletin boards. People are scrambling in these hard times of economic depression, rampant budget deficits and pernicious crime. Chicagoans want practical information about jobs, education, public safety and healthcare.

For me, the thorniest question is buried deep beneath the desert floor. In 2010, Chicago is a majority-minority city, the stomping grounds of America's first black president. The media mouthpieces chatter that the Age of Obama has ushered us into a postracial society.

Really?

Does race still matter? Respondents argued the gnarly racial stereotypes and barriers are still with us and are reflected in our media coverage. A community organizer said that when reporters come looking for people who are suffering in the foreclosure crisis, they want "that nice, clean white family," she said, "because it's perceived if you're poor, if you're Hispanic – you're illegal, first of all. If you're black...it was your fault."

Little wonder. In urban Chicago, most news decision-makers are still white males. They have little connection, empathy or knowledge of the communities they purport to cover. Reporters parachute into black and Latino neighborhoods to cover

violent crime and community conflict. They are eager to interview the vagrant on the corner with the rag on his head but ignore the hardworking real estate entrepreneur.

It's bad news or no news at all.

One organizer noted, "I find so many African Americans living in the same geographical area [who] don't know what somebody else is doing three blocks over because there is no news." The media is missing in action and "it's really hard to get information out that's relevant about the African-American community."

It was the people of color who talked most openly about race. One focus group facilitator admitted she was loathe to bring it up in her session. It's understandable. Race makes us squirm. Race and racism are messy. There are no easy answers. Yet every urban challenge and issue has a racial component. The news media must reflect the community, not just kow-tow to the elites.

So what seeds do we plant in the communications desert?

- **Elevate race**: Find information sources that can broker honest conversations about race and racism. Expose racial barriers and develop strategies to knock them down.
- **Up with hope**: Support news coverage and information that emphasizes the possibilities instead of the failures.
- **Collaborate**: Partner with the willing news media who value community stories that unify people in common causes, rather divide them through fear.
- Go local: Develop and support both digital and traditional information models that are created by and for people of color, from the neighborhood shopper to the church bulletin to the community blog.
- Go viral: Encourage the use of social media in organizing campaigns.

Then watch the garden grow.

Laura Washington is a columnist, political analyst and professor. At the time this research was conducted, she was president of the Woods Fund of Chicago.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is not healthy for a society when half the adult populace feels they often do not know enough about the candidates or issues to vote, when half the populace believes that no one is covering the issues they care about or keeping adequate watch on state and local government, and when a region is split between information haves and have-nots.

But that is the situation in the Chicago information ecosystem today. Fortunately, just as the problems are many, so are the opportunities for action. In today's world, there are many steps that individuals, foundations, nonprofit organizations and companies can take to make things better—from devising new information products for those who are overwhelmed and confused by the current offerings to supporting expanded reporting on key issues and neglected neighborhoods to beefing up information literacy training in schools to developing ways for people to share their thoughts on key issues.

In this report, we have tried not only to identify problems but also to prioritize them—to use the survey data to determine which are the biggest, most important and most pressing.

Here are the priorities that emerged from the survey findings and focus groups:

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE TO LEARN THE VIEWS OF OTHERS ON COMMUNITY ISSUES

Online social media obviously offers real opportunities to satisfy this need. But more traditional options — from in-person gatherings to enhanced letters to the editor — are possible, too. While leaders have strong interpersonal networks of information and often cite e-mails from others and formal groups as the way they learn new things, both leaders and the public want more opportunities to learn the views of others. Organizations should consider investing in well-organized, well-publicized local forums. Churches and community centers remain important places for information exchange because they work at a neighborhood level. Their efforts could be expanded.

STEP UP EFFORTS TO HELP CITIZENS BECOME BETTER INFORMED VOTERS

The fact that half of the public and leaders feel they often do not know enough to vote is troubling from a democratic perspective and suggests one of the most important focuses of future investment must be to make sure that citizens get more, better and more satisfying information about candidates and issues.

INCREASE OVERSIGHT OF STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Half of those surveyed agreed that local media does not do a good job of keeping watch on state and local governments. But the options for action need not be limited to media; there is a role as well for nonprofit watchdogs as well. We have seen examples of nonprofit efforts such as the Center for Public Integrity working on the national level and Better Government Association on the local level.

INCREASE THE QUANTITY AND QUALITY OF LOCAL REPORTING

That, of course, is a tall order and a broad prescription. But people have noticed that with downsizing in traditional media, there are fewer feet on the street reporting things and fewer neighborhood newspapers. They do not think there is enough reporting going on, particularly of what is happening in their local communities and their neighborhoods. This coverage might be provided in a variety of different ways, from mainstream media, news startups, community-based bloggers or nonprofit organizations. One full or part-time reporter in a neighborhood could make a meaningful difference in community life.

FOCUS EFFORTS PARTICULARLY ON THOSE LEAST WELL-SERVED BY TODAY'S INFORMATION ECOSYSTEM

- Those with little education or income;
- Those who live in the south and west sides of the city;
- African Americans and Hispanics;
- People for whom English is not their preferred language at home;

- People who do not have access to computers or the Internet;
- People who are not very civically engaged.

DEVELOP NEW NEWS PRODUCTS AND APPROACHES THAT MAKE THE NEWS MORE COMPELLING FOR PEOPLE HAVING A HARD TIME WITH CURRENT OFFERINGS

There is a crying need for innovation in ways of presenting news and information so that people who are not already "into the news" can absorb it — and even find it enjoyable. Far too many people — a good half of the population and even larger percentages of low-income and low-education residents – find following the news and staying informed too daunting. Just as people have developed new news products for the elite – specialized sites, blogs and newsletters that provide them with the highly detailed and sophisticated information they need — there needs to be significant effort given to developing products that connect with those least well-served today. These products should focus on the audience's need to streamline and simplify.

Part of the solution might well be improvements to television news, the dominant news source for many of those who feel ill served. Television news remains a mainstay because much of the public remains passive in their news consumption habits. The television is on while they are cooking dinner, helping kids with homework or getting ready in the morning.

Part might be in changes in the display and writing of online or print products, such as that suggested by research with young people and other "light users" of news products by Media Management Center at Northwestern University and the Newspaper Association of America Foundation (http://www.naafoundation.org/Research/Foundation/Youth-Content/Teens-Know-What-They-Want-From-Online-News.aspx).

Low-income focus group participants also expressed interest in low-tech approaches, such as enhanced word of mouth or newsletters, flyers and bulletin boards by neighborhood-based organizations such as churches and community centers to reach those not reached by other means.

The point is to find ways to get relevant and understandable news that matters in the hands of people who need it.

IMPROVE ACCESS TO COMPUTERS AND THE INTERNET

With each year that passes, those that cannot take advantage of information resources online are missing out on more and more information. However, it is clear that access is not enough. Education must accompany access efforts.

EXPAND INFORMATION LITERACY TRAINING

Internet literacy training appears to make a real difference in the ability of people to find what they need in this information-saturated world. Building upon what schools are already doing is a good idea. But just offering information literacy training in the schools will miss those who are already the most underserved in the ecosystem, those with a high school degree or less. In our research, 29 percent of respondents were high school graduates and 10 percent had not completed high school. To ensure that this swath of the population is not ignored, it would be advisable to also offer trainings at public libraries and community centers, particularly in areas with large populations of adults with a high school degree or less.

STEP UP SERIOUS REPORTING OF VIOLENCE

Even in these turbulent economic times, crime and safety dominate the public's agenda. People in the Chicago area want more realistic and honest coverage of violence. They want accurate reporting – not only of incidents of violence, but better follow-up coverage of police response and information to help them protect themselves and their families. Larger media organizations might concentrate on trend stories related to crime with the aim to impact public policy (perhaps with interesting presentation techniques such as those seen here: http://dougmccune.com/blog/2010/06/05/ if-san-francisco-crime-was-elevation/). There needs to be more attention not only to situational crime coverage but also to community-specific issues of development, drugs, gangs and education.

CONTINUE SERVING NON-ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language remains a clear barrier in the information ecosystem. Among the most underserved are those who do not speak English at home and prefer non-English language news; the majority of those individuals speak Spanish. So there is a clear, continuing role for news products in languages other than English, particularly Spanish-language. It is reasonable to consider investing in growth in this area online as more than 75 percent of the most underserved do have Internet access.

APPENDIX I

COMPONENTS OF INFORMATION FACTOR SCORES

Answers to the following questions formed the basis for the seven different factor scores used in this report. All questions were recoded to a 0 to 1 scale, reversing the questions as needed to match the "what a high score means" description. Then, using a process called principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation, we developed five factors to use in measuring how well different groups and people are faring in today's information ecosystem. We developed two additional scores to reflect whether respondents are able to access information resources online and whether they are civically engaged in their communities.

FACTOR NAME AND VARIABLES	FACTOR LOADING	WHAT A HIGH SCORE MEANS
ABILITY TO NAVIGATE MEDIA		
I feel overwhelmed with the amount of news and information there is these days.	0.651	
There is so much news these days, I have a hard time telling what is important.	0.641	
I want to be informed, but I do not have time to keep up with the news.	0.611	Very able to navigate media
I often feel like I do not know enough about candidates or issues to vote.	0.56	modia
I do not feel like I know very much about the challenges we're facing as a region.	0.547	
I find it hard to understand what they are talking about in the news media.	0.512	
ISSUE INFORMATION		
Would you say that you generally get enough good information about ISSUES AFFECTING THE CHICAGO AREA so that you feel pretty well-informed?	0.694	
Do you get enough good information about ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD so that you feel pretty well-informed?	0.69	
Would you say you get enough good information about this issue or group so that you feel pretty well-informed?	0.6	Well-informed generally
Do you get enough good information about ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR JOB, BUSINESS OR PROFESSION so that you feel pretty well-informed?	0.588	
How well-informed would you say you feel GENERALLY? Do you feel well-informed, adequately informed or not very well-informed?	0.398	

FACTOR NAME AND VARIABLES	FACTOR LOADING	WHAT A HIGH SCORE MEANS		
PRACTICAL INFORMATION				
When there is an emergency, like a tornado or a blackout, I feel I can usually find the information I need in order to cope with it.	0.697			
My local library does a good job of helping people find information they need.	0.614	Can find practical		
When I need practical information about a government program or service, I can usually find it pretty easily.	0.498	information		
I feel like I know where to turn for good practical information about health issues my family and I might have.	0.484			
PROBLEM INFORMATION				
Do you feel like you get the kind of information you need to form an opinion about your Chicago-area problem?	0.753	Can get information about Chicago and		
Do you feel like you get the kind of information you need to form an opinion about your neighborhood problem?	0.744	neighborhood problems		
MEDIA COVERAGE ADEQUACY				
Local media does not do a very good job of keeping watch on state and local government.	0.681			
Nobody covers what happens in my community very well.	0.574	Believes media coverage is good		
The media doesn't cover issues I care about very well.	0.567			
I find it hard to find information about what local businesses have for sale.	0.518			

APPENDIX II

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

NOTE: The following survey was administered by telephone to a sampling of Cook County residents and online to a sampling of Chicago-area leaders.

- Overall, how would you rate the Chicago area as a place to live? Would you say it is excellent, good, fair or poor?
- · About how long have you lived in the Chicago area?
- What is your ZIP code?
- I am going to ask you a series of questions. I'd like you to tell me whether you agree or disagree with each statement. [RANDOMIZE ORDER]
 - ~ Other people look to me to keep them informed or explain things in the news.
 - When I need practical information about a government program or service, I can usually find it pretty easily.
 - ~ I often feel like I don't know enough about candidates or issues to vote.
 - ~ The media doesn't cover issues I care about very well.
 - ~ I have plenty of opportunities to make my views known about community issues if I want to.
 - ~ I wish I had more opportunities to learn the views of other people about community issues.
 - ~ People in my community or neighborhood generally have good access to the Internet.
 - ~ I feel like I know how to tell whether something I read or hear is true or not.
 - The schools in my area do a good job of teaching people how to tell what news and information they can trust.
 - ~ I feel overwhelmed with the amount of news and information there is these days.
 - ~ I find it hard to find information about what local businesses have for sale.
 - ~ I don't have to look for news; it comes to me.
 - ~ My local library does a good job of helping people find information they need.
 - ~ Local media doesn't do a very good job of keeping watch on state and local government.
 - ~ There's so much news these days, I have a hard time telling what's important.
 - ~ I find it hard to understand what they're talking about in the news media.
 - I feel like I know where to turn for good practical information about health issues my family and I might have.
 - When there's an emergency, like a tornado or a blackout, I feel I can usually find the information I need in order to cope with it.
 - I don't feel like I know very much about the challenges we're facing as a region.
 - ~ I want to be informed, but I don't have time to keep up with the news.
 - ~ Nobody covers what happens in my community very well.
- These days many people find it hard to keep up with the news and feel informed. How well-informed would you say you feel GENERALLY? Do you feel well-informed, adequately informed or not very well-informed?
- Now, I'd like you to think now about where you get your information about what's going on in your neighborhood and in the Chicago area. Do get information about what's going on from:
 - ~ The Internet? (yes, no)
 - ~ The news media that's not on the Internet, such as newspapers, radio, television and magazines? (yes, no)
 - ~ Other people? (yes, no)
 - ~ Communications from organizations you trust, like churches, unions, community or business groups? (yes, no)

- Which one of these is your most important source about what's going on?
 - ~ The news media?
 - ~ Other people?
 - ~ Communications from organizations you trust?
 - ~ The Internet?
- Would you say that you generally get enough good information about ISSUES AFFECTING THE CHICAGO AREA so that you feel pretty well-informed? (yes, no)
- Do you get enough good information about ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD so that you feel pretty well-informed? (yes, no)
- Do you get enough good information about ISSUES AFFECTING YOUR JOB, BUSINESS OR PROFESSION so that you feel pretty well-informed? (yes, no)
- Many people like to pay attention to news about a particular issue or group they identify strongly with—for example, news about their race, ethnicity, background or orientation, or news about a special interest or hobby. Do you have any special issue or group like this that you pay particular attention to? (yes, no)
- (If yes): What issue or group is it that you pay particular attention to?
- Would you say you get enough good information about this issue or group so that you feel pretty well-informed? (yes, no)
- · What would you say is your most important media source for news about this issue or group?
- What would you say is your most important media source for news about the CHICAGO AREA?
- · What would you say is your most important media source for news about your NEIGHBORHOOD?
- What would you say is your most important media source for news related to your JOB OR PROFESSION?
- Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about topics you're interested in. Off the top of your head, what do you think is one of the biggest problems facing your NEIGHBORHOOD?
- Generally, do you keep up with what's going on about that problem? (yes, no)
- We're interested in how you keep up. What's your most important source of information about (the neighborhood problem respondent identified]?
- Thinking about all the information that's available to you—from friends, from the media, from trusted organizations and from the Internet—do you feel like you get the kind of information you need to form an opinion about [the neighborhood problem respondent identified]? (yes, no)
- (If no): What kind of information do you wish to know about this problem?
- Off the top of your head, what do you think is one of the biggest problems facing THE CHICAGO AREA?
- Generally, do you keep up with what's going on about that problem? (yes, no)
- What's your most important source of information about [the city problem respondent identified]?
- Thinking about all the information that's available to you—from friends, from the media, from trusted organizations and from the Internet—do you feel like you get the kind of information you need to form an opinion about [the city problem respondent identified]? (yes, no)
- (If no): What kind of information do you wish you about this problem?
- · How much do you enjoy keeping up with the news?
 - ~ A lot
 - ~ Some
 - Not much
 - ~ Not at all

- Now I'm going to ask you some questions about whether you've seen a change in news and information in the last 10 years. Do you think it is easier today, harder today or about the same as it was 10 years ago to find information you can TRUST about important things going on in the Chicago area?
 - ~ Easier
 - ~ Harder
 - ~ About the same
- Do you think it is easier today, harder today or about the same as it was 10 years ago to find information that helps you MAKE SENSE of what's going on in the Chicago area?
 - ~ Easier
 - ~ Harder
 - ~ About the same
- If you have a cell phone, is it primarily for talking and texting or can you access the Internet from your phone?
 - ~ Just for talking or texting
 - ~ Can also access the Internet
 - ~ Don't have a cell phone
- Do you have good ways to find out how to get involved in your community if you want to? (yes, no)
- Do you have access to a computer when you need it? (yes, no)
- Do you have access to the Internet when you need it? (yes, no)
- Have you ever had any formal or informal training in how to tell whether information on the Internet is accurate and reliable? (yes, no)
- Now I'd like you to think about all the information that's available on the Internet. Would you say the following statements about information online are true or false? Please respond by saying true or false.
 - Online information is always verified before it is posted.
 - ~ Most online information is accurate unless I have a reason not to believe it.
 - ~ You can always trust the first items that comes up in a Google search.
 - ~ You need to check the source and nature of the information on the Internet to know whether you should believe it or not.
 - ~ You cannot trust any information online.

Thank you. We're almost done. I just have a few more questions about you and your community.

- These days, many people are so busy that they can't find time to register to vote, or move around so often they don't get a chance to re-register. Are you NOW registered to vote in your precinct or election district? (yes, no)
- Did you vote in the 2008 presidential election between Barack Obama and John McCain? (yes, no)
- Are you active as a volunteer in your community? (yes, no)
- Do you frequently go to local community events? (yes, no)

Now, we're almost done. All we have left are a few more questions so that we can describe the people who took part in our study.

- What is your gender?
- In what year were you born?
- What is the last grade that you completed in school?
- Are you yourself of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent, such as Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban or some other Spanish background?

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- Which one of the following describes your race? If you consider yourself multiracial, you can select as many as apply.
 - ~ White
 - ~ Black or African American
 - ~ Asian or Asian American
 - ~ Or some other race
- · What language do you usually speak at home?
 - ~ English
 - ~ Spanish
 - ~ Polish
 - ~ Another language [SPECIFY]
- (If other than English): Which language is your preferred language for reading the news?
 - ~ Spanish
 - ~ Polish
 - ~ Another language [SPECIFY]
- Are you currently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed or have you never been married?
- Are there any children under the age of 18 currently living in your household?
- Which of the following labels best describes your household:
 - ~ Professional or business class
 - ~ Middle class
 - ~ Working class
 - ~ A struggling family or household
- Last year, that is in 2009, what was your total family income from all sources before taxes? Just stop me when I get to the right category.
 - ~ Less than \$10,000
 - ~ \$10,000 to under \$20,000
 - ~ \$20,000 to under \$30,000
 - ~ \$30,000 to under \$40,000
 - ~ \$40,000 to under \$50,000
 - ~ \$50,000 to under \$75,000
 - ~ \$75,000 to under \$100,000
 - ~ \$100,000 to under \$150,000
 - ~ \$150,000 or more

NOTE: The online leaders' survey included two questions asking for information about the leaders' area of expertise. It also included the following question.

• Do you think the public is better informed, less well-informed, about as informed as they always have been about the issues that are most important to you and your organization?





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