

The Reconstruction of American Journalism

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October 20, 2009

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American journalism is at a transformational moment, in which the era of dominant newspapers and influential network news divisions is rapidly giving way to one in which the gathering and distribution of news is more widely dispersed. As almost everyone knows, the economic foundation of the nation's newspapers, long supported by advertising, is collapsing, and newspapers themselves, which have been the country's chief source of independent reporting, are shrinking—literally. Fewer journalists are reporting less news in fewer pages, and the hegemony that near-monopoly metropolitan newspapers enjoyed during the last third of the twentieth century, even as their primary audience eroded, is ending. Commercial television news, which was long the chief rival of printed newspapers, has also been losing its audience, its advertising revenue, and its reporting resources.

Newspapers and television news are not going to vanish in the foreseeable future, despite frequent predictions of their imminent extinction. But they will play diminished roles in an emerging and still rapidly changing world of digital journalism, in which the means of news reporting are being reinvented, the character of news is being reconstructed, and reporting is being distributed across a greater number and variety of news organizations, new and old. The questions that

this transformation raise are simple enough: What is going to take the place of what is being lost, and can the new array of news media report on our nation and our communities as well as—or better than—journalism has until now? More importantly—and the issue central to this report—what should be done to shape this new landscape, to help assure that the essential elements of independent, original, and credible news reporting are preserved? We believe that choices made now and in the near future will not only have far-reaching effects but, if the choices are sound, significantly beneficial ones.

Some answers are already emerging. The Internet and those seizing its potential have made it possible—and often quite easy—to gather and distribute news more widely in new ways. This is being done not only by surviving newspapers and commercial television, but by start-up online news organizations, nonprofit investigative reporting projects, public broadcasting stations, university-run news services, community news sites with citizen participation, and bloggers. Even government agencies and activist groups are playing a role. Altogether, they are creating a greater variety of independent reporting missions and even different definitions of news.

Reporting is becoming more participatory and collaborative. The ranks of news gatherers now include not only newsroom staffers, but freelancers, university faculty members, students, and citizens armed with smart phones. Financial

support for reporting now comes not only from advertisers and subscribers, but also from foundations, individual philanthropists, academic and government budgets, special interests, and voluntary contributions from readers and viewers. There is now increased competition among the different kinds of news gatherers, but there also is more cooperation, a willingness among news organizations to share resources and reporting with former competitors. That increases the value and impact of the news they produce, and creates new identities for reporting while keeping old, familiar ones alive. “I have seen the future, and it is mutual,” said Alan Rusbridger, editor of Britain’s widely read *Guardian* newspaper and Web site. He sees a collaborative journalism emerging, what he calls a “mutualized newspaper.”

The Internet has made all of this possible, but it also has undermined the traditional marketplace support for American journalism. The Internet’s easily accessible free information and low-cost advertising have loosened the hold of large, near-monopoly news organizations on audiences and advertisers. As this report will explain, credible independent news reporting cannot flourish without news organizations of various kinds, including the print and digital reporting operations of surviving newspapers. But it is unlikely that any but the smallest of these news organizations can be supported primarily by existing online revenue. That is why we will be exploring a variety and mixture of ways to support news

reporting, which must include nonmarket sources like philanthropy and government.

The way news is reported today did not spring from an unbroken tradition. Rather, journalism changed, sometimes dramatically, as the nation changed—its economics (because of the growth of large retailers in major cities), demographics (because of the shifts of population from farms to cities and then to suburbs), and politics (because early on, political parties controlled newspapers and later lost power over them). In the early days of the republic, newspapers did little or no local reporting—in fact, those early newspapers were almost all four-page weeklies, each produced by a single proprietor-printer-editor with a few apprentices and no reporters. They published much more foreign than local news, reprinting stories they happened to see in London papers they received in the mail, much as Web news aggregators do today. What local news they did provide consisted mostly of short items or bits of intelligence brought in by their readers, without verification by the printer.

Most of what American newspapers did from the time that the First Amendment was ratified, in 1791, until well into the nineteenth century was to provide an outlet for opinion, often stridently partisan. Newspaper printers owed their livelihoods and loyalties to political parties. Not until the 1820s and 1830s did they begin to hire reporters to gather news actively rather than wait for it to come

to them. By the late nineteenth century, urban newspapers grew more prosperous, ambitious, and powerful. Although some remained staunchly partisan, others began to proclaim their political independence. At the same time, reporters at those papers were often beholden to the whims of owners, who still had strong views of their own and were frequently beholden themselves to advertisers and potential advertisers.

In the first half of the twentieth century, even though earnings at newspapers were able to support a more professional culture of reporters and editors, reporting was often limited by complaisance and deference to politicians and other figures of authority. By the 1960s, though, more journalists at a number of prosperous metropolitan newspapers were showing increasing skepticism about pronouncements from government and other centers of power. What had been, with notable exceptions, a cozy relationship between reporters and officials became more distant and prickly as more reporters worked to hold the powerful accountable. More newspapers began to encourage “accountability reporting” that often comes out of beat coverage and targets those who have power and influence in our lives—not only governmental bodies, but also businesses and educational and cultural institutions. Federal regulatory pressure on broadcasters to take the public service requirements of their licenses seriously also encouraged greater investment in news.

A serious commitment to accountability journalism did not spread universally throughout newspapers or broadcast media, but abundant advertising revenue during the profitable last decades of the century gave the historically large staffs of many urban newspapers an opportunity to significantly increase the quantity and quality of their reporting. An extensive *American Journalism Review* study of the content of ten metropolitan newspapers across the country, for the years 1964–65 and 1998–1999, found that overall the amount of news these papers published doubled—with individual increases ranging from 59 percent in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and 77 percent in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* to 141 percent in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and 144 percent in the *Houston Chronicle*.

Not all of the additional news was aggressive local reporting that, for example, kept a close watch on government. Nor were newspaper readers necessarily twice as well informed in 1999 as they were in 1965; in eight of the ten cities studied, a competing newspaper died during that period.

The concept of news also was changing. The percentage of news categorized in the study as local, national, and international declined from 35 percent to 24 percent, while business news doubled from 7 to 15 percent, sports increased from 16 to 21 percent, and features, from 23 to 26 percent. Because the total amount of space for news had doubled, the sum of local, national, and international news still increased by 25 percent.

Newspapers moved from a preoccupation with government, usually in response to specific events, to a much broader understanding of public life that included not just events, but also patterns and trends, and not just in politics, but also in science, medicine, business, sports, education, religion, culture, and entertainment.

These developments were driven in part by the market. Editors sought to slow the loss of readers turning to broadcast or cable television, or to magazines that appealed to niche audiences. The changes also were driven by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The civil rights movement taught journalists in what had been overwhelmingly white and male newsrooms about minority communities that they hadn't covered well or at all. The women's movement successfully asserted that "the personal is political" and ushered such topics as sexuality, gender equity, birth control, abortion, childhood, and parenthood onto the front page and network newscasts. Environmentalists helped to make scientific and medical questions part of everyday news reporting.

Is that kind of journalism now imperiled by the transformation of the American news media? To put it another way, is independent news reporting a significant public good whose diminution requires urgent attention? Is it an essential component of public information that, as the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy recently put it, "is as vital to

the healthy functioning of communities as clean air, safe streets, good schools and public health?”

Those questions are asked most often in connection with independent reporting’s role in helping to create an informed citizenry in a representative democracy. This is an essential purpose for reporting, along with interpretation, analysis and informed opinion, and advocacy. And news reporting also provides vital information for participation in society and in daily life.

There is no one correct way to provide independent reporting—not just one American way, let alone one democratic way. Much of newspaper journalism in other democracies is still partisan, subsidized by, or closely allied with political parties. That kind of journalism can also serve democracy. But, in the plurality of the American media universe, advocacy journalism is not endangered—it is growing. The expression of publicly disseminated opinion is perhaps Americans’ most exercised First Amendment right, as anyone can see and hear every day on the Internet, cable television, talk radio, and every sort of digital, broadcast, and print media. What is under threat is independent reporting that provides information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge, particularly in the coverage of local affairs.

Reporting the news means telling citizens what they would not otherwise know. “It’s so simple it sounds stupid at first, but when you think about it, it is our

fundamental advantage,” says Tim McGuire, former editor of the Minneapolis *Star Tribune*. “We’ve got to tell people stuff they don’t know.”

Reporting is not something to be taken for granted. In the eighteenth century, not only did representative legislatures and assemblies operate largely in secret, but freedom of the press meant—and this was no small thing—freedom for a writer to speak his opinion, even to criticize the government. It did not mean that there was freedom to report. There were no “sunshine laws” then. Even late in the nineteenth century, when American news reporting was well established, European journalists looked askance, particularly at the suspicious practice of interviewing. One French critic lamented disdainfully that the “spirit of inquiry and espionage” in America might be seeping into French journalism.

Independent reporting not only reveals what government or private interests appear to be doing but also what lies behind their actions. This is the watchdog function of the press—reporting that is aggressive and reliable enough to instill fear of public embarrassment, loss of employment, economic sanctions, or even criminal prosecution in those with political and economic power. Watchdog or accountability reporting aims to foil the arrogance of power and self-dealing rather than to advance ideology or policies. It holds government officials accountable to the legal and moral standards of public service and keeps business and professional leaders accountable to society’s expectations of integrity and fairness.

When the *Las Vegas Sun*, winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for public service journalism, decided to find out why there were a disturbingly high number of accidental deaths in local construction projects, it discovered that no local authority was taking responsibility for worksite safety, that an overworked Nevada Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) office was not doing its job properly, and that labor unions were looking the other way. The *Sun*'s work got the attention of city officials, OSHA, and the unions, and during the six months after the series appeared, there was not a single construction death in Las Vegas.

Reporting the news undergirds democracy by explaining complicated events, issues, and processes in clear language. Since 1985, explanatory reporting has had its own Pulitzer Prize category, and explanation and analysis is now part of much news and investigative reporting. It requires expertise and the ability to explain a complex situation to a broad public. It might, for example, illustrate a complicated social phenomenon through the life of a single individual. Explanatory journalism produces what Paul Tash, the editor of the *St. Petersburg Times*, has called the kinds of “stories ... that make me feel smarter—‘Now I get it!’ ”

News reporting draws audiences into their communities. In America, sympathetic exposés of “how the other half lives” go back to the late nineteenth century—to the reporting of people like Jacob Riis about urban slums and, a century later, Nina Bernstein about New York’s foster care system and Alex

Kotlowitz about life in Chicago's public housing. But what we may call "community knowledge reporting" or "social empathy reporting" has proliferated in recent decades. Everyone remembers how the emotionally engaging coverage by newspapers and television of the victims of Hurricane Katrina made more vivid and accessible issues of race, social and economic conditions, and the role of government in people's lives. At its best, this kind of reporting shocks readers, as well as enhances curiosity, empathy, and understanding about life in our communities.

In the age of the Internet, everyone from individual citizens to political operatives can gather information, investigate the powerful, and provide analysis. Even if news organizations were to vanish en masse, information, investigation, analysis, and community knowledge would not disappear. But something else would be lost, and we would be reminded that there is a need not just for information, but for news judgment oriented to a public agenda and a general audience. We would be reminded that there is a need not just for news but for newsrooms. Something is gained when news reporting, analysis, and investigation are pursued collaboratively by stable organizations that can facilitate regular reporting by experienced journalists, support them with money, logistics, and legal services, and present their work to a large public. Institutional authority or weight often guarantees that the work of newsrooms won't easily be ignored.

The challenge is to turn the current moment of transformation into a reconstruction of American journalism, enabling independent reporting to emerge enlivened and enlarged from the decline of long-dominant news media. It may not be essential to save or promote any particular news medium, including printed newspapers. What is paramount is preserving independent, original, credible reporting, whether or not it is popular or profitable, and regardless of the medium in which it appears.

Accountability journalism, particularly local accountability journalism, is especially threatened by the economic troubles that have diminished so many newspapers. The shrinking of metropolitan dailies has had a ripple effect because so much of the news that people find, whether on television or radio or on the Internet, still originates with newspaper reporting. And newspapers are the source of most local news reporting, which is why it is even more endangered than national, international, or investigative reporting that might be provided by other sources.

At the same time, digital technology—joined by innovation and entrepreneurial energy—is opening up new possibilities for reporting. Journalists can research much more widely, update their work repeatedly, follow it up more thoroughly, verify it more easily, compare it with that of competitors, and have it enriched and fact-checked by readers. “Shoe leather” reporting and “feet on the street” are often

still essential, but there are extraordinary opportunities for reporting today because journalists can find so much information on the Internet.

Los Angeles Times reporters Bettina Boxall and Julie Cart won the 2009 Pulitzer Prize for explanatory reporting by using both the Internet and in-person reporting to analyze why the number and intensity of wildfires has increased in California. They found good sources among U.S. Forest Service retirees by typing “Forest Service” and “retired” into a Google search and then interviewing the people whose names came up. “The Internet is a great aid,” Boxall says. “You stumble across documents and sources that you didn’t even know existed and, with a few keystrokes, they are rolling off your computer printer. It has made basic research faster, easier, and richer. But it can’t displace interviews, being there, or narrative.”

Consumers of news have more fresh reporting at their fingertips and the ability to participate in reportorial journalism more readily than ever before. They and reporters can share information, expertise, and perspectives in direct contacts and through digital communities. Multimedia reporting and presentation by news organizations—through blogs, social networks, podcasts, videos, and interactive graphics—can increase audience engagement and knowledge.

Taking advantage of these opportunities requires finding ways to help new kinds of reporting grow and prosper while existing media adapt to new roles. Of all

the traditional kinds of news organizations, none are faced with greater challenges than newspapers, with their expensive legacies of large news staffs, printing presses, and door-to-door delivery. Because most American newspapers have produced the bulk of original reporting and are locally based, independent local reporting is the kind of news gathering most at risk.

These are the issues that this report—based on dozens of interviews, visits to news organizations across the country, and numerous recent studies and conferences on the future of news—will explore and that will lead to its recommendations.

What Is Happening to Independent News Reporting by Newspapers?

Metropolitan newspaper readership began its long decline during the television era and the movement of urban populations to the suburbs. As significant amounts of national and retail advertising shifted to television, newspapers became more dependent on classified advertising. Then, with the advent of multichannel cable television and the largest wave of non-English-speaking immigration in nearly a century, audiences for news became fragmented. Ownership of newspapers and television stations became increasingly concentrated in publicly traded corporations that were determined to maintain large profit margins and correspondingly high stock prices.

The stewardship of newspapers by publicly traded corporations was as mixed as that of family-controlled papers, and research has not established firm conclusions about their relative impact on quality journalism. Examples abound of both inept family ownership and successful dedication to public service journalism, as well as of corporate ownership primarily pursuing profits or making more resources available for news coverage, sometimes simultaneously. At some newspapers, motivation and performance varied considerably over the years with changes in corporate management or as younger generations succeeded to running family-owned papers.

Quarterly earnings increasingly became the preoccupation of some large newspaper chain owners and managers who were far removed from their companies' newsrooms and the communities they covered. To maintain earnings whenever advertising revenues fell, as they did during a recession, some owners began to cut costs aggressively. They started to reverse some of their previous increases in reporting staffs and the space devoted to news. Afternoon newspapers in remaining multi-paper cities were in most cases merged with morning papers or shut down. In many cities, by the turn of the century—even before Web sites noticeably competed for readers or Craigslist attracted large amounts of classified advertising—newspapers already were doing less news reporting.

The Internet revolution helped to accelerate the decline in print readership, and newspapers responded by offering their content for free on their new Web sites. In hindsight, this may appear to have been a business mistake, but the motivation at the time was to attract new audiences and advertising for content on the Internet, where most other information was already free. At first, few newspapers took advantage of the Web's full potential. There was little inclination to use video, sound, or interactive graphics, or to find ways to change news reporting or the relationship between journalists and their audiences.

As a result, although the readership of newspaper Web sites grew rapidly, much of the growth turned out to be illusory—just momentary and occasional visits from people drawn to the sites through links from the rapidly growing number of Web aggregators, search engines, and blogs. The initial surge in traffic helped to create a tantalizing but brief boomlet in advertising on newspaper Web sites. But the new-found Web site revenue leveled off and fell far short of making up for the rapid declines in revenue for print advertising.

The economics of newspapers deteriorated rapidly. Profits fell precipitously, despite repeated rounds of deep cost cutting. Some newspapers began losing money, and the depressed earnings of many others were not enough to service the debt that their owners had run up while continuing to buy new properties. The Tribune chain of newspapers, which stretched from the *Los Angeles Times* and the

Chicago Tribune to *Newsday*, the *Baltimore Sun*, and the *Orlando Sentinel*, went into bankruptcy. So did several smaller chains and individually owned newspapers in large cities such as Minneapolis and Philadelphia. In Denver, Seattle, and Tucson—still two-newspaper towns in 2008—long-standing metropolitan dailies stopped printing newspapers. Denver's *Rocky Mountain News* went out of business, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* shut down its print operations to move online with a skeleton staff, and all that remains of Gannett's *Tucson Citizen* is a collection of online community blogs. More than one hundred daily papers eliminated print publication on Saturdays or other days each week. The *Detroit News* and *Free Press* reduced home-delivery publication to only Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays.

In just a few years' time, many newspapers cut their reporting staffs by half and significantly reduced their news coverage. The *Baltimore Sun*'s newsroom shrank to about 150 journalists from more than 400; the *Philadelphia Inquirer*'s to about 300 from 600; the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*'s to 240 from 400; the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s to about 200 from 500; and the *Los Angeles Times*' to less than 600 journalists from more than 1,100. Overall, according to various studies, the number of newspaper editorial employees, which had grown from about 40,000 in 1971 to more than 60,000 in 1992, had fallen back to around 40,000 in 2009.

In most cities, fewer newspaper journalists were reporting on city halls, schools, social welfare, life in the suburbs, local business, culture, the arts, science, or the environment, and fewer were assigned to investigative reporting. Most large newspapers eliminated foreign correspondents and many of their correspondents in Washington. The number of newspaper reporters covering state capitals full-time fell from 524 in 2003 to 355 at the beginning of 2009, according to an annual survey by the *American Journalism Review*. A large share of newspaper reporting of government, economic activity, and quality of life simply disappeared.

Will This Contraction Continue Until Newspapers and Their News Reporting No Longer Exist?

Not all newspapers are at risk. Many of those less battered by the economic downturn are situated in smaller cities and towns where there is no newspaper competition, no locally based television station, and, as is the case for now in many communities, no Craigslist. Those papers' reporting staffs, which never grew very large, remain about the same size they have been for years, and they still concentrate on local news. A number of them have sought to limit the loss of paid circulation and advertising in their print papers by charging nonsubscribers for access to most of their Web content. They are scattered across the country from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Bend, Oregon, to Lawrence, Kansas, and Little Rock, Arkansas, to Schenectady, New York, and Newport, Rhode Island. Although

they have not attracted many paid Web-only subscribers, their publishers say they have so far protected much of their print circulation and advertising.

Larger newspapers are now seriously looking into ways to seek payment for at least some of the news they put online. Their publishers have been discussing various proposals from Internet entrepreneurs, including improved technologies for digital subscriptions, “micropayments” (on the model of online digital music purchases, such as through the “iTunes” store) to read individual news stories, single-click mechanisms for readers to make voluntary payments to news organizations after seeing stories they particularly like, and business-to-business arrangements enabling newspapers to share in the ad revenue from other sites that republish their content. Whether “information wants to be free” on the Internet has become a highly charged, contentious issue, somewhat out of proportion to how much money may be at stake or its potential impact on news reporting.

Only a few large newspapers are already charging for digital news of special interest. Both the *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times* sell subscriptions for access to in-depth business and financial news and information on their Web sites. The *Journal* also has decided to charge for its content on mobile devices like BlackBerrys and iPhones. The *Journal* claims more than a million paid digital subscribers, while *Financial Times* reports about 120,000. The *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* sells subscriptions to avid Green Bay Packers football fans for its separate

Packer Insider site. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* offers paid “membership” to a niche Web site of exclusive staff blogs, videos, chats, and social networking. A few other such experiments have been abandoned, most prominently the *New York Times*’ TimesSelect, the subscriber-only Web site for its opinion columns and archives that was shut down in 2007 because it did not establish a sizable audience.

One entrepreneurial venture, Journalism Online, claims that publishers of hundreds of daily and weekly newspapers have signed letters of intent to explore its strategy for enabling online readers to buy digital news from many publications through a single password-protected Web site. A Silicon Valley start-up named Attributor has developed technology to “fingerprint” each news organization’s digital content to determine where it shows up on other Web sites and what advertising is being sold with it. Attributor offered to negotiate with Internet advertising networks to share that revenue with publishers who join its Fair Syndication Consortium. A number of large newspaper publishers agreed to have their digital news content tagged to see what happens to it on the Web.

The Associated Press, the national and international news service owned as a membership cooperative by about 1,400 American newspapers, recently announced a strategy for tracking news produced by AP and its members through the Internet and then seeking payment for it. This came at a time when AP was facing a revolt by financially stressed member newspapers that threatens AP’s

revenue from their dues and fees, which help pay for its reporting. “We and our members need to protect our news content from misappropriation,” said CEO Tom Curley. “We want to get content to audiences, but we also want to protect our rights and get paid to produce the content.”

Entrepreneurs have proposed ways in which news consumers could allow their reading habits on the Internet to be monitored so that news organizations could offer highly targeted groups of readers to advertisers at high prices. Google is offering publishers some ways to use its search engine to seek payment for their digital news. But given the Internet’s culture of relatively free access to an infinite amount of information, no one knows whether any of these approaches would work or could substantially increase their resources for news reporting, much less lead to new economic models for journalism.

There have been suggestions that philanthropists or foundations could buy and run newspapers as endowed institutions, as though they were museums. It would take an endowment of billions of dollars to produce enough investment income to run a single sizable newspaper, much less large numbers of papers in communities across the country. A *New York Times* Op-Ed contributor estimated that a \$5 billion endowment could finance a \$200 million newsroom for the *Times*, which would not account for any other costs, including printing and delivering papers.

U.S. Senator Ben Cardin of Maryland has introduced legislation to allow newspapers to become nonprofits for educational purposes under section 501(c)(3) of the tax code, similar to charities and educational and cultural nonprofits. Philanthropic contributions to them would be tax-deductible. But the bill, which has not moved anywhere in Congress, does not address how a newspaper losing money, especially one saddled with significant debt or other liabilities, could be converted into a viable nonprofit.

For all this, many newspapers are still profitable, not counting some of their owners' overhanging debt, which may be resolved through ongoing bankruptcy reorganizations and ownership changes. And many newspapers are extensively restructuring themselves to integrate their print and digital operations, creating truly multimedia news organizations in ways that should produce both more cost savings and more engaging journalism.

Some newsrooms are being rebuilt around universal news desks that direct the distribution of both print and digital reporting. The rhythms of reporting and publishing are being reset for midday peak periods for digital news readership rather than just evening print deadlines for morning papers. Television studios and multimedia centers in larger newsrooms are enabling journalists to distribute their reporting in print and on television, podcasts, and the Internet all in the same day.

A growing number of newspapers also are supplementing their reduced resources for news reporting by collaborating with other newspapers, new kinds of news organizations, and their own readers. Two former rivals in Florida, the *Miami Herald* and the *St. Petersburg Times*, now jointly cover the state capital in Tallahassee, while the *Herald*, the *Palm Beach Post*, and the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel* of Fort Lauderdale, all separately owned, share their local news reporting. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* cooperate on coverage of Pennsylvania. Five newspapers—the New York *Daily News*, the *Buffalo News*, and the Albany *Times Union* in New York, and the Newark *Star-Ledger* and the Bergen County *Record* in New Jersey—collaborate in a Northeast Consortium for coverage of those states. Newspapers similarly share reporting in Maine, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Texas.

In the most extensive collaboration, Ohio's eight largest newspapers—the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, the Akron *Beacon Journal*, the Canton *Repository*, the Columbus *Dispatch*, the Cincinnati *Enquirer*, the Dayton *Daily News*, the Toledo *Blade*, and the Youngstown *Vindicator*—have formed the Ohio News Organization. They share state, business, sports, arts, and entertainment news reporting, various kinds of features, editorials, photographs, and graphics. Editors consult on which newsrooms will cover specific subjects and breaking news. The newspapers work independently and competitively on enterprise and investigative

reporting, to which their editors say they can each now devote more of their smaller number of reporters. “It makes the highest and best use of our people, and we can focus more on enterprise reporting,” said *Columbus Dispatch* editor Ben Marrison.

The *Star-Ledger* in Newark has created a separate community news service that hired three dozen younger, lower-paid journalists to report from surrounding New Jersey towns. The *Seattle Times* has agreed to share news Web site links and some reporting with what editor David Boardman calls Seattle’s “most respected neighborhood blogs,” to which residents contribute news to be edited by professional journalists. After the competing *Post-Intelligencer* shut down print publication in the spring of 2009, the *Times* gained many former *Post-Intelligencer* readers, increasing its circulation from 200,000 to 280,000. Citing this response to what he believed was a “public sense of loss,” Boardman said, “I feel more optimistic and confident now. I think, across the country, we are witnessing a public awakening to the potential demise of professional journalism and what that would mean for our democracy.”

As newspapers sharply reduce their staffs and news reporting to cut costs and survive, they also reduce their value to their readers and communities. At the same time, they are disgorging thousands of trained journalists who are now available to start and staff new kinds of local news organizations, primarily on the Internet.

This sets the stage for a future for local news reporting in which the remaining economically viable newspapers—with much smaller staffs, revenues, and profits—will try to do many things at once: publish in print and digitally, seek new ways to attract audiences and advertisers, invent new products and revenue streams, and find new partners to help them produce high-quality news at lower cost. They will do all of this in competition—and in collaboration—with the new, primarily online, news organizations that are able to thrive.

Why Can't Television and Radio Make Up for the Loss of Reporting by Newspapers?

Some local television stations sometimes produce exemplary local and regional reporting, as demonstrated by the winners of the 2009 Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia University Award. A two-year investigation by WTVT, a Fox affiliate in Tampa, of criminal justice in nearby Hardee County led to the release of a truck driver wrongfully imprisoned for vehicular manslaughter. WFAA in Dallas, an ABC affiliate that has won more than a dozen national awards, received a special citation for three notable investigative reports in a single year. In 2008, duPont Awards for local television journalism went to KHOU in Houston for its six-minute report on laws in some Texas counties that allow prosecutors to keep pretrial evidence from the defense, to KMOV in St. Louis for a dozen stories

examining chronic problems in the East St. Louis schools, and to KNOE in Monroe, Louisiana, for a four-month investigation into post-Katrina looting by members of the Louisiana National Guard.

Still, even in their best years, most commercial television stations had far fewer news reporters than the local newspapers with which they competed. A 1999 study of fifty-nine local news stations in nineteen cities found that 90 percent of all their stories reported on accidents, crimes, and scheduled or staged events.

In recent years, with their ratings and ad revenues in rapid decline and their once extravagant profit margins imperiled, many local television stations have made further cuts in already small news staffs, forcing out more experienced higher paid reporters and often-overpaid anchors. The relatively few stories they report themselves are recycled on their morning, evening, and late night news shows.

The number of television stations producing local news of their own is steadily shrinking. Some stations, such as KDNL, the ABC affiliate in St. Louis, and WYOU, serving Scranton and Wilkes-Barre in Pennsylvania, have dropped local news altogether. At 205 stations around the country, their newscasts are now produced by others station in the same cities, according to Robert Papper, chairman of Hofstra University's journalism department, who conducts national studies of local television news.

In Los Angeles, for example, the news seen on television station KCAL is produced by KCBS in a collaboration called NewsCentral. Philadelphia's NBC affiliate, WCAU, furnishes the news for WPHL. In Miami, the CBS affiliate, WFOR, provides the news broadcast on WBFS. Kansas City's NBC affiliate, KSHB, produces news for station KMCI. Richmond's NBC affiliate, WWBT, reports the news seen on the Fox affiliate, WRLH. In Jacksonville, the NBC and ABC affiliates, each owned by Gannett, jointly produce First Coast News for both stations. Other stations in Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities share camera crews, helicopters, and street reporting.

In the past, the Federal Communications Commission required station owners to show they were serving the public interest—including their providing local programming and news—before their broadcasting licenses could be renewed. But the FCC no longer effectively enforces the public service requirement, what FCC Commissioner Michael Copps has called “behavioral regulation.” License renewals now occur every eight years rather than every three, and station owners can simply stipulate that they are serving the public interest.

Some cable television systems offer all-news local channels produced by the cable company itself or by broadcast station owners. The cable news channels, which recycle a relatively few news programs throughout the day, are usually lower cost, smaller audience versions of host or collaborating broadcast stations.

New England Cable News is owned and operated by Comcast and shares resources with some New England broadcast stations. Northwest Cable News is operated by Belo out of its broadcast station, KING, in Seattle. News Channel 8, available on cable in the Washington, D.C., area, is operated by Allbritton Communications from the broadcast station WJLA that it owns there.

On radio, with the exception of all-news stations in some large cities, most commercial stations do little or no local news reporting. The all-news stations, like WINS in New York and WTOP in Washington, broadcast mostly traffic and weather updates, sports scores, and network, news service, and newspaper headlines, repeated over and over, along with snippets of their own local news from a handful of reporters.

A growing number of listeners have turned to public radio stations for national and international news provided by National Public Radio. But only a relatively small number of those public radio stations also offer their listeners a significant amount of local news reporting. And even fewer public television stations provide local news coverage.

The current system of public radio and television was created by Congress in 1967. Through the quasi-independent Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the federal government funnels about \$400 million a year to program producers and to hundreds of independent public radio and television stations that reach every

corner of the country. The stations, which are owned by colleges and universities, nonprofit community groups, and state and local governments, supplement relatively small CPB grants with fund-raising from individual donors, philanthropic foundations, and corporate contributors. Most of the money is used for each station's overhead costs and fund-raising, rather than news reporting—even though informing the public is a stated central mission of the CPB, according to the legislation that created it.

Three-fourths of the CPB's money goes to public television, which has never done much original news reporting. The Public Broadcasting Service, collectively owned by local public television stations and primarily funded by the CPB, is a conduit for public affairs programs produced by some larger stations and independent producers that consist mostly of documentaries, talk shows, and a single national news discussion program, the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, on weeknights.

Because PBS has no production capacity of its own, it does not do any news reporting. But, as a distributor of programming, it is exploring how to improve public television news in what a Pew Foundation-funded PBS consultant described as an often dysfunctional, entrenched culture with “too many silos”—meaning the many individual stations, production organizations, and programming groups—that have not worked well together on news reporting. An internal PBS study

reportedly recommends the creation of a destination public news Web site, with content from throughout public television and radio.

David Fanning, long-time executive producer of the *FRONTLINE* news documentary programs originated by Boston public television station WBGH, has proposed going further. *FRONTLINE* has produced much of public television's best national news reporting, often by collaborating with other news organizations and journalists. Fanning wants to create a full-fledged national reporting organization for public television with its own staff and funding. Realizing either his proposal, or the vision of the PBS study, would require a major realignment of public media relationships and funding. Neither would increase independent local news reporting by public television stations.

Faced with increased competition from cable and satellite channels, as well as video news on the Internet, public television's audience has been steadily decreasing, and financial support from its core audience as well as its corporate backers has fallen by hundreds of millions of dollars during the recession, according to the CPB. The CPB has been preoccupied with assisting financially stressed public stations and encouraging mergers or creative cooperation in a number of cities where there are multiple, competing public stations and signals.

While the audience for public radio of about 28 million listeners each week is just over one-third the 75 million weekly viewers of public television, it has been

growing substantially for several decades, driven largely by its national news programs. NPR's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* are the most popular programs on public radio or television. And *Morning Edition*'s audience of nearly 12 million listeners alone has been about a third larger than that for NBC's *Today*. Although NPR also has lost revenue during the recession and laid off staff for the first time in a quarter century, it recently launched an ambitious Web site with national news updates and stories. It also hired its first editor for investigative reporting, Brian Duffy, who is working on accountability journalism projects with reporters at NPR and local public radio stations. NPR has seventeen foreign bureaus, more than all but a few American newspapers, and six U.S. regional bureaus.

But only a small fraction of the public radio stations that broadcast NPR's national and international news accompany it with a significant amount of local news reporting. Those that do tend to be large city, regional, or state "flagship" stations, some of which have accumulated networks of signals, such as those in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Oregon, Alaska, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, and New York.

Some of these operations are impressive. Northern California Public Broadcasting, with stations in San Francisco, San Jose, and Monterey, has a thirty-person news staff reporting on the state's government and economy, education,

environment, and health. Its KQED public radio and television stations in San Francisco have announced a collaboration with the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley to launch, in 2010, an independent nonprofit Bay Area news organization with \$5 million seed money from local businessman Warren Hellman. The new entity's reporters, working with KQED journalists and Berkeley students, will cover local government, education, culture, the environment, and neighborhoods for its own Web site, other digital media, and public radio and television. The *New York Times* is considering whether it will publish some of the content in its own new Bay Area edition of the newspaper.

Southern California Public Radio has a twenty-person news department reporting in the Los Angeles area. Minnesota Public Radio has a fifty-person news staff for several dozen MPR stations throughout Minnesota and along its border in nearby states. Both Minnesota Public Radio and Southern California Public Radio are part of American Public Media, the St. Paul-based nonprofit that is the country's largest operator of public radio stations and produces national programs, including *Marketplace* and *Prairie Home Companion*.

Some public radio stations have sought advice from CPB asking how they could expand and finance local news coverage using journalists who had worked at local newspapers. A just-completed CPB Public Radio Task Force Report put "supporting significant growth in the scale, quality and impact of local reporting"

near the top of its recommendations for further increasing the audience for public radio. In an experimental competition, CPB has offered to make grants to several groups of three to six public radio stations that propose to work together on expanding their reporting—on radio and their Web sites—of news of particular interest in their regions.

Under National Public Radio’s CEO Vivian Schiller, NPR has taken steps to help member stations with local news coverage. NPR is a nonprofit that supplies national and international news and cultural programming—but not local news—to about 800 public radio stations. These stations are owned and managed by 280 local and state nonprofits, colleges, and universities that support NPR with their dues. Schiller says her goal now, approved by the board of member-station representatives that governs NPR, is “to step in where local newspapers are leaving.”

NPR has begun by offering its journalists’ time to help train and work with member-station news directors and reporters on investigative and other reporting. In its most ambitious project, NPR has created a digital distribution platform on which it and member stations can share radio and Web site reporting on subjects of local interest in various parts of the country, such as education or the environment. It has received grants of \$2 million from CPB and \$1 million from the Knight

Foundation for a pilot project to help a dozen public stations use this resource and expand their reporting staffs.

Overall, however, local news coverage remains underfunded, understaffed, and a low priority at most public radio and television stations, whose leaders have been unable to make or uninterested in making the case for investment in local news to donors and Congress.

What Are the New Sources of Independent News Reporting?

Different kinds of news organizations are being started by journalists who have left print and broadcasting, and also by universities and their students, and by Internet entrepreneurs, bloggers, and so-called “citizen journalists.” Many of these new organizations report on their communities. Others concentrate on investigative reporting. Some specialize in subjects like national politics, state government, or health care. Many of them are tax-exempt nonprofits, while others are trying to become profitable. Most publish only online, avoiding printing and delivery costs. However, some also collaborate with other news media to reach larger audiences through newspapers, radio, and television, as well as their own Web sites. Many of the start-ups are still quite small and financially fragile, but they are multiplying steadily.

Several new local news organizations, each different from the others, can be found in San Diego. The reporting staff of the daily newspaper there, the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, has been halved by a series of cuts both before and after its sale by the Copley family in May 2009 to a Los Angeles investment firm, Platinum Equity, which had no previous experience in journalism.

Five years ago, frustration with the *Union-Tribune*'s coverage of the city prompted a local businessman, Buzz Woolley, to fund the launch of an online-only local news organization, Voice of San Diego (voiceofsandiego.org). The dozen reporters, who work out of its light-filled newsroom in a new Spanish mission-style building near San Diego Bay, are far fewer than the nearly 200 remaining editorial employees at the *Union-Tribune*. So Voice publisher Scott Lewis and executive editor Andrew Donohue focus on the basics of local accountability journalism. The site has no recipes or movie reviews or sports. Their young journalists, most of who came from newspapers, do enterprise and investigative reporting about San Diego government, business, housing, education, health, environment, and other "key quality of life issues facing the region," Donohue said. "We want to be best at covering a small number of things. We're very disciplined about not trying to do everything."

Voice of San Diego's impact has been disproportionate to its steadily growing but still relatively modest audience of fewer than 100,000 unique visitors a month.

Its investigations of fraud in local economic development corporations, police misrepresentation of crime statistics, and the city's troubled pension fund, among other subjects, have led to prosecutions, reforms, and the kind of national journalism awards—from Sigma Delta Chi and from Investigative Reporters and Editors—usually given to newspapers. To increase their reach, Voice journalists appear regularly on the local NBC television station, the all-news commercial radio station, and the public radio station, giving those outlets reporting they otherwise would not have.

The current \$1 million annual budget of the Voice of San Diego, which is a nonprofit, comes from donors like Woolley, from foundations, from advertising, from corporate sponsorships, and from contributions from citizen “members,” like those who support local public radio and television and cultural institutions. “We don’t count on mass traffic, but rather a level of loyalty,” Lewis said. “We’re seeking loyal people like those who give to the opera, museums, or the orchestra because they believe they should be sustained.”

They rent newsroom space from one of their supporters, the San Diego Foundation, which, like hundreds of other community foundations around the country, is a collection of local family funds and a professional staff to offer advice to the donors of these funds. Lewis said the foundation recommends contributions to the Voice. At the same time, the national Knight Foundation has been

encouraging such foundations to support news and information needs in their communities through a program of matching grants. Knight and the San Diego Foundation recently gave Voice of San Diego matching grants of \$100,000 each to increase its coverage of local neighborhoods and communities “underserved” by other news media.

Across town, the San Diego News Network has launched a quite different for-profit local news Web site, SDNN.com, which resembles the *Union-Tribune* newspaper’s Web site much more than it does Voice of San Diego. SDNN aggregates news and information from its own small reporting staff, freelancers, San Diego area weekly community newspapers, radio and television stations, and bloggers. It covers most of the subjects the newspaper site does, from local events, business, and sports to entertainment, food, and travel, but with less independent reporting. Local entrepreneurs Barbara Bry, her husband, Neil Senturia, and former *Union-Tribune* Web site editor Chris Jennewein say they have raised \$2 million from local investors. They want to create a network of similar sites in as many as forty cities; they hope to attract more advertisers and become profitable. Jennewein said that he expects cities like San Diego, which long had a single dominant newspaper, to spawn many kinds of news entities. “There’s going to be fragmentation,” he said. “It may be a good thing. We have to think of there being a new news eco-system.”

The most unusual San Diego start-up is the Watchdog Institute, an independent, local, nonprofit investigative reporting project based on the campus of San Diego State University. Lorie Hearn, who was a senior editor at the *Union-Tribune*, persuaded her former newspaper's new owner, Platinum Equity, to contribute money to the start-up so that Hearn could hire investigative reporters who had worked for her at the *Union-Tribune*. In return, Hearn will provide the newspaper with investigative stories at a cost lower than if Hearn and the other Watchdog Institute journalists were still on its payroll. She intends to seek more local media partners, along with philanthropic donations, while training San Diego State journalism students to help with the reporting. "They were downsizing to fit their revenue," Hearn said of the *Union-Tribune*. When she made her proposal, "they agreed that watchdog journalism was still important to the paper."

Still another kind of local news reporting start-up can be found in St. Louis in the makeshift newsroom of the St. Louis Beacon, which is located inside the building of the local public television station, KETC. Editor Margaret Freivogel started the nonprofit Web site with a dozen of her colleagues who were bought out or laid off by the venerable *Post-Dispatch*, the city's last surviving daily newspaper.

Like Voice of San Diego, the Beacon does in-depth reporting and analysis in targeted "areas of concentration," including the local economy, politics, race

relations, education, health, and the arts. “We cover news that we decide matters,” Freivogel said. Her budget of just under \$1 million comes primarily from foundations and local donors, advertisers, and corporate sponsors. KETC gives the Beacon rent-free newsroom space and collaborates with it on some news reporting, including coverage of the mortgage crisis in St. Louis.

In Minneapolis, veteran newspaper editor Joel Kramer in 2007 founded the nonprofit MinnPost local news Web site with his own money, that of his wife, and that of other local investors. Kramer’s journey epitomizes much of what has happened in local news reporting during the last three decades. He had been editor of the *Buffalo Courier-Express* until it was closed by its owner, the Cowles family, in 1982. He moved to Minneapolis to become editor and then publisher of the *Star-Tribune* until it was sold by Cowles to McClatchy in 1998, and then saw McClatchy sell the paper to Avista Capital Partners at the end of 2006 for half of the \$1.2 billion McClatchy had paid for it. The paper has since been taken over by its creditors in a bankruptcy reorganization.

Kramer said MinnPost, with several hundred thousand unique visitors each month, “is for serious news readers” of local public affairs. He relies on a mix of full-time, part-time, contract, and freelance journalists for the site’s news reporting, commentary, and blogs. His budget of more than \$1 million a year includes foundation grants and a significant amount of advertising. But Kramer emphasized

that, if MinnPost is to survive over time, “sustaining support must come from readers through donations, big and small, like museums, orchestras, and other community cultural necessities.”

Across the Mississippi River at nonprofit Minnesota Public Radio in St. Paul, Andrew Haeg has been experimenting with a still different kind of journalism. When he and his colleagues had questions about the work of military contractors in Iraq, they made use of their Public Insight Network database of about 75,000 American listeners, who could easily be queried by e-mail according to various demographic categories. The radio journalists contacted dozens of people from the list and culled about thirty responses from Iraq war veterans, soldiers, and military contractors still in Iraq—informed observers, some of whom thought the military has handed off too much responsibility to private companies, others of whom believed that the contractors contributed to U.S. military effectiveness. They helped shape the story, rather than just fill in “quote bubbles” that reporters had already drawn in their minds. This technique, which has been exported to other public radio stations for local reporting, is a version of what is being called “pro-am journalism”—not just professionals or just “citizen journalists,” but professionals and amateurs working together over the Internet.

Another version of the pro-am approach, called “distributed reporting,” is being tried by ProPublica, the nation’s largest start-up nonprofit news organization. It

employs three dozen investigative reporters and editors in a shiny new high-tech newsroom on the twenty-third floor of One Exchange Plaza on lower Broadway, just off Wall Street, in New York. ProPublica was launched last year by former *Wall Street Journal* managing editor Paul Steiger with a \$30 million gift from the California family foundation of former Golden West Financial Corporation owners Herbert and Marion Sandler.

ProPublica has provided investigative reporting on such subjects as government spending, the economic crisis, energy, and health care to the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Denver Post*, ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, WNYC radio, and the Huffington Post, free of charge, and sometimes in collaboration with reporters at those news organizations. ProPublica also puts its stories, accompanied by staff blogs, databases, and investigative journalism from other media, on its own destination Web site.

Its director of distributed reporting, Amanda Michel, pioneered pro-am journalism at the Huffington Post, where she enlisted thousands of political activists to send her news from the campaign trail during the 2008 elections. For one ongoing reporting project at ProPublica, Michel has recruited a network of volunteer citizen reporters to monitor progress on a sample of 520 of the 6,000 projects approved for federal stimulus money around the country. “We recruited

people who know about contracts,” she said. “We need a definable culture” of people with expertise on targeted subjects, “not just everybody.”

“More journalism is being done in smaller units with more experimentation,” said Steiger. Managing editor Stephen Engelberg, who previously supervised investigative reporters at the *Oregonian* and the *New York Times*, added that without the legacy costs of newspaper or broadcast production, most of ProPublica’s resources and those of other investigative reporting nonprofits can “go directly into the journalism.”

That reporting, though, has more impact when it is published and broadcast by news media that are still saddled with those costs, which is why collaboration with legacy news organizations is central to ProPublica’s mission. Steiger and Engelberg negotiate with their media partners over ideas, content, editing, and presentation for each story. “The process of journalism is being divided up and then brought back together again,” Steiger said. “There’s getting the work done, getting it seen and read, and having impact.”

The much older Center for Public Integrity in Washington, an investigative reporting nonprofit founded by former network television journalist Chuck Lewis in 1977, produces stories and databases on government accountability, lobbying, campaign finance, and national issues like climate change and the subprime mortgage meltdown that are used by news media all over the country. Under its

current executive director, Bill Buzenberg, it has a relatively large annual budget of \$4 million and an endowment of \$3 million from foundations, individual donations, and payments from some news outlets for its reporting.

Much smaller local and regional news Web sites founded by professional journalists—ranging from the for-profit New West network of Web sites in Montana and neighboring states to the nonprofit New Haven Independent in Connecticut—regularly supplement reporting by their relatively tiny staffs with contributions from freelancers, bloggers, and readers. The fast-increasing number of bloglike “hyperlocal” neighborhood news sites across the country depend even more heavily for their news reporting on freelancers and citizen contributors edited by professional journalists.

In Seattle, among the most Internet-oriented metropolitan areas in the country, pro-am neighborhood news sites are proliferating. “We believe this could become the next generation news source” in American cities, said Cory Bergman, who started Next Door Media, a group of sites in five connecting Seattle neighborhoods. “The challenge is to create a viable economic model.” Bergman, who also works at the msnbc.com news Web site, and his wife, Kate, who was a local television news producer, devised a “franchise model” in which the editor of each site, also a professional journalist, reports news of the neighborhood and

curates text, photo, and video contributions from residents. Editors earn a percentage of their own site's advertising revenue.

The Bergmans' neighborhood sites are among those joining with the *Seattle Times* Web site in an experiment to share links and news reporting. Next Door Media also is partnering in advertising sales with West Seattle Blog, an older for-profit neighborhood news site run by Tracy Record, a former television news director. "We are optimistic that a profit can be made from this little business that provides a community service," Cory Bergman said. However, a local television station and SeattlePI.com, the news aggregation site that Hearst launched after closing the *Post-Intelligencer*, are also starting neighborhood blogs, thus creating considerable competition for a kind of independent local news reporting that had not existed before.

Several affluent suburban New Jersey towns outside New York City also have become test tubes for these kinds of hyperlocal news Web sites, some of which have been launched by big news organizations experimenting with low-cost local news gathering. A number of the sites—including TheLocal, started by the *New York Times*, and Patch.com, started by AOL—are run by individual professional journalists with reporting by themselves, freelancers, unpaid student interns, and local citizens. *Newsweek* journalist Johnnie Roberts, who lives in South Orange, reported that they are covering the towns in much greater detail than newspapers

ever did, while seeking advertising from the merchants. “For them, no event is too local,” he wrote on Newsweek.com.

At the state level, other new, nonprofit news organizations are trying to help fill the gap left when cost-cutting newspapers pulled reporters out of state capitals. The Center for Investigative Reporting, a three-decade-old Berkeley-based nonprofit that had long produced award-winning national stories for newspapers and television, has started California Watch to scrutinize that state’s government. Grants from the Knight, Hewlett, and Irvine foundations are financing a dozen investigative journalists working out of Sacramento and Berkeley for California Watch, which publishes its reporting in dozens of news media throughout California and on its own Web site.

The Center for Independent Media, with funding from a variety of donors and foundations, operates a network of nonprofit, liberal-leaning political news Web sites in the capitals of Colorado, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, and New Mexico, all battleground states during the 2008 presidential election. David Bennahum, a journalist and business consultant with a background in liberal causes and Democratic politics, launched the sites in 2006 with the stated mission of producing “actionable impact journalism” about “key issues, such as health care and reproductive rights, immigration, state budget and finance, clean elections and ballot access, environment and energy, civil rights and equal opportunity.” In 2008,

he launched a Washington-based national site for staff and freelance investigative reporting and left-leaning commentary about national issues and politics he believes get too little attention in commercial news media. Bennahum measures his impact in part by how often stories originated by his reporters and bloggers are cited in the mainstream media.

Texas venture capitalist John Thornton and former *Texas Monthly* editor Evan Smith have raised \$3.5 million from Thornton and his wife, other Texas donors, including entrepreneur T. Boone Pickens, and foundations to start the nonprofit Texas Tribune in Austin, where they are hiring fifteen journalists to do independent, multimedia reporting about state government, politics, and policy for its Web site and other Texas news media. In New Jersey, former *Star-Ledger* journalist Dunstan McNichol is trying to raise money for an online site that would cover the statehouse in Trenton for that state's news media. Several dozen other *Star-Ledger* reporters who received buyouts have been working without pay to launch a state news Web site, newjerseynewsroom.com, while they search for funding.

Not surprisingly, most of these start-ups are financially fragile. In Chicago, a former *Tribune* reporter, Geoff Dougherty, trained scores of volunteers to help a handful of paid reporters find news in the city's neighborhoods for his nonprofit Web site, the Chi-Town Daily News. But, in the summer of 2009, after four years

of operation with a variety of foundation grants, Dougherty announced he could not raise enough money to keep going as a nonprofit. He said he would instead seek investors for some of kind of commercial local news site.

Two start-ups—the nonprofit Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and the for-profit GlobalPost—produce independent international reporting, mostly by freelance journalists who sell or give their work to newspapers, magazines, and public radio and television. With funds from foundations and other donors, the Pulitzer Center selects and finances freelance foreign reporting projects suggested by journalists and news organizations. GlobalPost, with money from private investors, advertising on its Web site, and fee-paying clients, has contracted with sixty-five part-time freelance correspondents around the world to report individual stories for U.S. newspapers and broadcast outlets, including CBS News, for pay. GlobalPost also is selling subscriptions to a “Passport” Web site offering direct access to correspondents and additional reporting.

In San Francisco, freelance journalist David Cohn used a \$340,000 grant from the Knight Foundation to start an experimental Web site, Spot.Us, that solicits donations from readers to finance reporting of individual accountability stories proposed by local freelancers. In its first ten months, Spot.Us raised \$40,000 from 800 people, which paid for thirty stories about local politics, poverty, and other topics published on its Web site and in a few small local publications. It recently

announced a partnership with the Annenberg School of Journalism at the University of Southern California to try to expand its concept to Los Angeles.

Increasing numbers of unemployed professional journalists and aspiring reporters now depend on getting freelance assignments from commercial and nonprofit news media. While some graduates of Columbia University Professor Sheila Coronel's Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism continue to find full-time employment in journalism, others, she says, "put gigs together." She would like to see development of "an infrastructure for independent news reporters."

A few well-financed for-profit national news start-ups provide full-time employment for professional journalists who have left downsizing older news organizations. Launched by Robert Allbritton, CEO of Allbritton Communications, and two former *Washington Post* journalists, John Harris and Jim VandeHei, the Web site of Politico offers insider scoops, gossip, and commentary on national politics and government. Its news staff of seventy—including journalists hired from the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*—shares a newsroom with Allbritton's Washington stations, WJLA and News Channel 8, on the Virginia shore of the Potomac River just across from Washington. Politico's revenue comes mostly from advertising by corporations and groups trying to influence legislation and policy making, and is split between

Politico's Web site and its free-circulation congressional newspaper, published weekdays when Congress is in session.

Politico's core readership "is obsessed by what goes on in Washington," said editor Harris. "We speak to that readership as an insider audience" and efficiently target it for advocacy advertisers. Harris, a paid subscriber to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* Packer Insider site, said news Web sites for special interest audiences and advertisers should succeed because "you have to offer what people would pay for."

As it separates from Time Warner and transitions from an Internet portal to a generator of Web content, AOL also is betting on special-interest, advertising-supported, professionally produced news Web sites like that of Politico. AOL has launched or purchased such Web start-ups as Politics Daily for politics and government, Fanhouse for sports, BloggingStocks for business, and TMZ for celebrities and entertainment. It also is experimenting with small local new sites like Patch.com in suburban New Jersey.

Like Politico, AOL has been hiring experienced journalists from struggling news media to build "authoritative, trusted brands for breaking news, analysis, commentary, and audience involvement," said Marty Moe, senior vice president of AOL Media. "We start from the principle that high-quality content is here to stay."

The quality of news reporting by most of the national, regional, and local start-ups is generally comparable to, and sometimes better than, that of newspapers, as can be seen by their collaboration with traditional newspapers on some stories. Small hyperlocal or neighborhood news start-ups generally report on their communities in more detail than newspapers now can, even though the quality of reporting and writing may not be comparable.

Collectively, the newcomers are filling some of the gaps left by the downsizing of newspapers' reporting staffs, especially in local accountability and neighborhood reporting. However, the staffs of most of the start-ups are still small, as are their audiences and budgets, and they are scattered unevenly across the country. Their growth, role, and impact in news reporting are still to be determined by a variety of factors explored later in this report.

What Kind of News Reporting Has Been Spawned by the Blogosphere?

The boon and bane of the digital world is its seemingly infinite variety. It offers news, information, and, especially, opinion—on countless thousands of Web sites, blogs, and social networks. Most are vehicles for sharing personal observations, activities, and views in words, photographs, and videos—sometimes more than anyone would want to know. A large number also pass along, link to, or comment on news and other content originally produced by established news organizations.

And many of the participants—bloggers, political and special interest activists and groups, governments and private companies, and Internet entrepreneurs—generate various kinds of news reporting themselves.

Lumped together as the “blogosphere,” these sites are sometimes seen as either the replacement for—or the enemy of—established news media. In fact, the blogosphere and older media have become increasingly symbiotic. They feed off each other’s information and commentary, and they fact-check each other. They share audiences, and they mimic each other through evolving digital journalistic innovation. News media Web sites, including those of the most established media, now feature their own staff blogs and numerous opportunities for reader involvement, while a growing number of independent bloggers and Web aggregators are becoming more professional news sources, even hiring their own reporting staffs.

A milestone of sorts was passed at the end of 2008 when the *New York Times* published an obituary about “the blogger Tanta, an influential voice on the mortgage collapse.” Tanta was Doris Dungey, who wrote for a financial blog called “Calculated Risk.” Her blog posts analyzing what went wrong with mortgage financing were followed closely by insiders and were even cited with approval by *New York Times* columnist and Nobel economics laureate Paul Krugman.

A few blogs have grown into influential, for-profit digital news organizations. Upstairs in a loft newsroom in New York’s Chelsea neighborhood, Josh Marshall’s Talking Points Memo staff is combining traditional news reporting with an openly ideological agenda to create an influential and profitable national news Web site. TPM has grown from former print reporter Marshall’s one-man opinion blog into a full-fledged, advertising-supported digital news institution with a small group of paid reporters and editors in New York and Washington. In 2008, TPM won a George Polk Award for its investigation of the political firings of U.S. attorneys during the Bush administration.

Marshall described TPM as “narrating with reporting and aggregation”—including the involvement of “an audience with high interest and expertise”—accountability stories, including several congressional scandals, that gained national notice after he published them. He also republishes material from the Internet and other news media, alongside his own often pointed liberal commentary, in which he solicits information from his readers. “We have a consistent, iterative relationship with our audience—people telling us where to look,” Marshall said. “But all the information, stories, and sources are checked professionally by our journalists.”

In its way, TPM is still another example of “pro-am” journalism, in which citizens provide information to paid journalists who assess its validity and

relevance and incorporate what they find useful into news stories. TPM's audience knows it "operates with a certain broad center-left outlook," Marshall said. "We're not trying to be completely impartial, but fair and rigorously honest. Our viewpoint is distinguishable from the facts."

Saying that he also believes in "the discipline of the marketplace," Marshall has not taken foundation money or philanthropic donations. Only advertising and small contributions from readers support TPM's still relatively small \$600,000 annual budget. Its first outside investment is coming from a group led by Netscape founder Marc Andreessen to help Marshall expand his reporting staff and advertising sales.

TPM's combination of news reporting, analysis, commentary, and reader participation is the model in varying forms for many blogs on the Internet. Some of the more widely read and trusted independent bloggers—like Doris Dungey—specialize in subjects they know and have informed opinions about, such as politics, the economy and business, legal affairs, the news media, education, health care, and family issues. Freelance financial journalist Michelle Leder, for example, turned her interest in the fine print of SEC filings into the closely watched footnoted.org blog, which is supported by both her freelance income and expensive subscriptions for investors to an insider version of her blog. The blogosphere "has proved especially attractive to those who, despite having specialized knowledge,

have little access to the nation's Op-Ed pages," wrote journalist and author Michael Massing in a largely approving survey of somewhat elite bloggers for the *New York Review of Books*.

They also are creating new ways to report news. In 2008, a Columbia University journalism school graduate, Kelly Golnoush Niknejad, launched an independent blog, called Tehran Bureau, to which Iranian and other journalists contribute reporting from inside Iran and the diaspora of Iranian exiles. Very few Western correspondents have been allowed to report from Iran. In 2009, Tehran Bureau joined in a partnership with the public television program *FRONTLINE*, which provides the blog with editorial and financial support and hosts its Web site. *FRONTLINE* and Tehran Bureau also are collaborating on a public television documentary about Iran.

Many political bloggers have become outspokenly ideological or partisan advocates. One of the most prominent and successful is Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, a liberal Democrat, who started his Daily Kos blog in 2002 during the Bush administration. Daily Kos, with its own staff of less than a dozen, supported in part by advertising, has created a large online, activist following. It welcomes contributing bloggers, and sponsors conferences and political activities.

Some bloggers' "willingness to dispense with such conventions" as balance "makes the blogosphere a lively and bracing place," Massing wrote. At the same

time, “the polemical excesses for which the blogosphere is known remain real,” he added, and the Internet “remains a hothouse for rumors, distortions and fabrications.” Some argue that content on the Internet is self-correcting, since anyone can respond to someone else’s assertions. But it has proven difficult to quickly stop the spread of such politically charged falsehoods as claims that Barack Obama is not a U.S. citizen or that Sarah Palin was the mother of her daughter’s child.

Brands appear to still matter on the Internet, whether they are established news media brands trusted to sort fact from fiction—which remain the most heavily trafficked news Web sites—or ideological brands that can be counted on to reinforce their readers’ perceptions and opinions. For example, Wikipedia, the Internet encyclopedia written and edited by its users, has been steadily tightening its editing process as some readers, whom Wikipedia insiders refer to as “vandals,” post updates that are intentionally and embarrassingly false. Many of its entries are now full of footnote-like verifications, which often link to the content of brand-name Web sites, and some entries warn readers that verification is needed.

For most of the millions of its practitioners, blogging is still a hobby for which there is little or no remuneration, even if the blog is picked up or mentioned by news media or aggregation sites. Very few are able to expand their audience or to hire staffs, as TPM and the Daily Kos have, or to get much income from

advertising or other sources. As a result, bloggers constantly appear and disappear on the Web.

Residents of Baltimore, for example, can currently choose among a variety of blogs about life there. Baltimore Crime posts contributions from readers about what they see happening in the streets. Investigative Voice, started by two journalists from the defunct *Baltimore Examiner* newspaper, and BmoreNews, owned by a public relations firm, focus on the city's African American community. InsideCharmCity posts press releases from local businesses and government agencies. BlogBaltimore aggregates reader contributions with stories from local news media. The anonymous Baltimore Slumlord Watch blogger posts photos of abandoned and derelict buildings, identifies the property owners, names the city council members in whose districts the buildings are located, provides links to city and state agencies, and proudly notes that the *Baltimore Sun* has nominated it—among some 200 others—for its “Maryland’s outstanding blogs” contest.

The most ambitious local blog there is Baltimore Brew, launched in 2009 by former *Baltimore Sun* and *Washington Post* reporter Fern Shen, who has recruited freelancers, including other former *Sun* journalists, to contribute reporting about the city and its neighborhoods, most without pay for the moment. Shen, who runs the blog from her kitchen table with money from an initial angel investor,

acknowledged taking advantage of buyouts and layoffs that took about 120 journalists out of the *Sun*'s newsroom in less than a year. "The folks that used to do things for a paycheck are now doing them for cheap or for free," she said. "Somebody has to get these reporters back to work again." She is hoping to take advantage of being named "best local blog" by the *Baltimore City Paper* to raise revenue from prospective advertisers and eventually create a paying business for herself and her contributors.

National online news aggregators have created business models for mass audiences and advertising they hope will make them profitable. They aggregate blogs and some reporting of their own with links to and summaries of news reported by other media, along with plentiful photographs and videos. To help attract large audiences for their advertisers, they also feature entertainment gossip items and revealing photos and videos of celebrities.

The small staff at Newser, for example, rewrites stories taken from news media Web sites. The Drudge Report's Matt Drudge, who has been at it much longer, simply links to other sites' content, along with bits of occasionally reliable media and political gossip. Founders Ariana Huffington of the Huffington Post and Tina Brown of the Daily Beast, who are media celebrities themselves, have attracted numerous freelance contributors and volunteer bloggers, including big name writers, to supplement their relatively small writing and editing staffs. The

Huffington Post on the left and Drudge on the right also display clear ideological leanings in their selection of stories, links, and blogs.

Newspapers complain that some aggregators violate copyrights by using their work without payment or a share of the aggregators' advertising revenue, although the aggregators also link to the original stories on the papers' Web sites. At issue, besides the trade between paying the papers on the one hand and driving some readers to their sites on the other, is the current state of copyright law, which has not kept up with issues raised by digital publication. It has not been decided, for example, how much of a story can be republished, or in what form, before the prevailing principle of "fair use" is violated.

In a departure from other for-profit aggregators, the Huffington Post has joined with the American News Project, a nonprofit print and video investigative reporting entity, to invest in a Huffington Post Investigative Fund, a legally separate nonprofit based in Washington with about a dozen investigative journalists and initial funding of \$1.75 million, including \$500,000 from the Huffington Post. The fund's editor, former *Washington Post* investigative editor Larry Roberts, said it will provide reporting on national subjects for use by the Huffington Post and other news media, much the way that ProPublica does. He said that he has a commitment from Huffington that the project would be editorially independent and nonpartisan.

The fast-growing number of digital start-ups, ambitious blogs, experiments in pro-am journalism, and other hybrid news organizations are not replacing newspapers or broadcast news. But they increasingly depend on each other—the old media for news and investigative reporting they can no longer do themselves and the newcomers for the larger audiences they can reach through newspapers, radio, and television. The many new sources of news reporting have become, in the span of a relatively few years, significant factors in the reconstruction of American journalism.

How Are Colleges and Universities Contributing to Independent News Reporting?

A growing number of universities are publishing the reporting of their student journalists on the states, cities, and neighborhoods where the schools are located. The students work in journalism classes and news services under the supervision of professional journalists now on their faculties. The students' reporting appears on local news Web sites operated by the universities and in other local news media, some of which pay for the reporting to supplement their own. In southern Florida, for example, the *Miami Herald*, the *Palm Beach Post*, and the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel* have agreed to use reporting from journalism students at Florida International University. "Many journalism teachers believe you teach journalism with live ammunition that results in real journalism that has real use for their

communities,” said Eric Newton, vice president of the Knight Foundation’s journalism program that has heavily supported journalism education and student news reporting projects.

The University of Missouri is unique in having run its own local daily newspaper, the *Columbia Missourian*, since 1908, when its journalism school opened. It has professional editors and a reporting staff of journalism students. The *Missourian* loses money, despite a large subsidy from the university, but the journalism school’s dean, Dean Mills, said the newspaper is still “a bonus, not a drain” because of its value as a journalism laboratory, a community news source, and an attraction for donors to the school.

While only the Missouri journalism school publishes an expensive printed city newspaper, in addition to its Web site, other universities operate local news sites. In New York, Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism operates several Web sites for reporting by its students in city neighborhoods. Investigative reporting on local, national, and global subjects by students in the school’s Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism has appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Albany Times-Union*, *Salon*, and on PBS and National Public Radio. In a class on investigative journalism, Pulitzer Prize–winning *Times* investigative journalist Walt Bogdanich assigned students to examine disability compensation for Long Island Rail Road

employees, which eventually produced prize-winning bylined stories in collaboration with the *Times*.

Students at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley also do reporting in several San Francisco area communities for the school's neighborhood news Web sites. The graduate school has plans for its 120 students to work with professional journalists, beginning next year, at the local news Web site it is starting with San Francisco's KQED public radio and television. The graduate school's dean, Neil Henry, said a more ambitious regional reporting operation was needed because "the news crisis is so urgent" in San Francisco, where the number of journalists working for the area's newspapers has been cut in half by newsroom buyouts and layoffs in recent years.

The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism at Arizona State University in Phoenix operates the Cronkite News Service, which provides student reporting about Arizona to thirty client newspapers, television stations, and their Web sites around the state. Cronkite students also have worked as paid news reporters in the Phoenix suburbs for the *Arizona Republic's* Web site. Other students produce local newscasts on cable television and video stories for other local stations and national networks.

The Capital News Service of the University of Maryland's Philip Merrill College of Journalism operates news bureaus in Washington and Maryland's

capital in Annapolis. Students working under professional supervision produce hundreds of state and federal government news stories each academic semester for fee-paying news media clients throughout Maryland. Northwestern University students staff a similar Medill School of Journalism news service in Washington that produces and sells reporting on such national news beats as education, the environment, health care policy, and emergency preparedness to newspaper, Web site, and public radio and television clients across the country.

The student news services have been operating only when school is in session. But some journalism schools are experimenting with ways to keep them going during holiday breaks and summers, including by paying students to work as reporting interns for local news media while school is out.

Universities also are becoming homes for independent nonprofit investigative reporting projects started by former newspaper and television journalists. Some are run by journalists on their faculties, while others, such as the Watchdog Institute at San Diego State University, are independent nonprofits that use university facilities and work with faculty and students. For example, former *Wisconsin State Journal* investigative reporter Andy Hall started the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism as an independent foundation-supported nonprofit on the campus of the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Its reporting by professional journalists,

interns, and students appears in Wisconsin newspapers, on public radio and television stations, and on their Web sites.

In Boston, both Northeastern and Boston universities now have investigative reporting projects that offer stories to the *Boston Globe* and its Web site. Former Pulitzer Prize–winning *Globe* investigative reporter Walter Robinson and students in his investigative reporting seminars at Northeastern have produced eleven front-page investigations in the *Globe* since 2007, including exposing firefighter pension abuses and another revealing cover-up of health violations by Boston restaurants. A group of former local television and newspaper journalists now on the faculty at Boston University recently launched the New England Center for Investigative Reporting in its College of Communication, staffed by the journalist faculty members and their students, in collaboration with the *Globe*, New England Cable News, and public radio station WBUR. *Globe* editor Marty Baron said he welcomed stories from both projects as “a supplement, not a substitute” for investigative reporting by the *Globe*’s own beat reporters and the Spotlight Team, which he has maintained despite staff cutbacks in his newsroom.

How Can Fledgling News Reporting Organizations Keep Going?

Money is obviously a major challenge for nonprofit news organizations, many of which are struggling to stay afloat. Raising money from foundations and other

donors and sponsors consumes a disproportionate amount of their time and energy. Advertising and payments from media partners for some stories account for only a fraction of the support needed by most news reporting nonprofits.

Nearly twenty nonprofit news organizations—ranging from the relatively large and well-established Center for Investigative Reporting and Center for Public Integrity to relatively small start-ups like Voice of San Diego and MinnPost—met this past summer to form an Investigative News Network to collaborate on fundraising, legal matters, back office functions, Web site development, and reporting projects. Joe Bergantino, a former Boston television investigative reporter who is now director of the New England Center for Investigative Reporting at Boston University, said such collaboration is vital “if we’re all going to be back next year.”

A number of national foundations—led by Knight and including Carnegie, Ford, Hewlett, MacArthur, Open Society Institute, Pew, and Rockefeller, among others—have made grants to a variety of nonprofit reporting ventures in recent years. A study by the Knight-funded J-Lab at American University in Washington estimated that, altogether, national and local foundations provided \$128 million to news nonprofits from 2005 into 2009.

Nearly half of that money, however, has been given by major donors to a handful of relatively large national investigative reporting nonprofits, including

ProPublica, the Center for Investigative Reporting at Berkeley, and the Center for Public Integrity in Washington. Some foundations fund only national reporting on subjects of particular interest to their donors or managers—such as health, religion, or government accountability. Grants for local news reporting are much smaller and usually not high priorities for foundations, many of which do not make any grants for journalism.

But the future of news reporting is a priority for the Knight Foundation. Its money comes from a family that once owned twenty-six newspapers. Knight has given tens of millions of dollars to nonprofit reporting projects and university journalism instruction. It focuses on digital news innovation, accountability journalism, and citizen participation in news reporting. It also has a preference for places where the Knight family newspapers once were located. “We don’t yet know which experiments will prove the smartest or the most successful,” said Knight vice president Newton. “But to stand on the sidelines while this is happening is to disregard centuries of experience in the importance of news and information in a democracy.”

Knight also is encouraging hundreds of community foundations around the country to join with its foundation in supporting local journalism, as the San Diego Foundation has done with the Voice of San Diego and the Greater St. Louis Community Foundation with the St. Louis Beacon. Knight holds an annual seminar

with leaders of community foundations to encourage grants to local news nonprofits and has started its matching grants initiative to donate with them. “The bottom line,” Newton said, “is that local news needs local support.”

Knight foundation president Alberto Ibarguen has also been talking with national foundations for the past two years to encourage more of them to provide more support for local news reporting. “Foundations should look at experimentation with solutions to news media economic models in the way the Ford Foundation did with poverty or criminal justice,” said Steve Katz, vice president for development at *Mother Jones*, a long-established nonprofit investigative reporting magazine. “They can leverage other money, donors, and public policy changes over time.”

Some foundations have recognized the importance of news reporting to the advancement of their other objectives, while trying to protect the independence of the reporting. The Kaiser Family Foundation, which has long supported health care policy research, started its own nonprofit news organization in 2009. At Kaiser Health News, about a dozen experienced journalists, working out of Kaiser’s headquarters in downtown Washington, produce news reporting on health care delivery, costs, policy, and legislation for its own Web site and other news media. Kaiser, which foots the whole bill, has given editorial independence to the site’s professional editors and a board of outside advisers.

The California HealthCare Foundation, which also funds research, has given \$3.25 million to the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California to support a team of six California newspaper journalists for three years to expand health care reporting in the state. Annenberg faculty member and former *Los Angeles Times* executive editor Michael Parks directs the team, which has helped newspapers in half a dozen California cities report on local hospitals, the pattern of Medicare reimbursements to doctors, and causes of mortality in the state’s central valley. “We went to newspapers and asked what stories they have wanted to do, but were unable to do—no resources, no expertise, whatever,” Parks said. “We can help.”

Parks emphasized his journalistic independence by pointing out that the foundation funding his project “does not see anything until it is published.” State-level health care reporting also is being funded by similar foundations in Florida and Kansas. Editors who publish the reporting said they are satisfied with its quality and editorial independence, according to a recent study by Harvard’s Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy.

What Other New Sources Are There for Public Information?

The Internet has greatly increased access to large quantities of “public information” and news produced by government and a growing number of data-

gathering, data-analyzing, research, academic, and special interest activist organizations. Altogether, these sources of public information appear to be a realization of what Walter Lippmann envisioned nearly ninety years ago when he argued that, in an increasingly complex world, journalism could serve democracy only by relying on agencies beyond journalism for dependable data. He urged journalists to make greater use of what he termed “political observatories”—organizations both in and out of government that used scientific methods and instruments to examine human affairs.

Digital databases, for example, enable journalists and citizens to find information in a fraction of the time it would have taken years ago—if it could have been found at all. “For information the government wants you to have, it’s a different world than it was ten years ago,” said former *Washington Post* reporter Sarah Cohen, now a professor of public policy at Duke University. Routine documents a reporter once had to obtain in a reading room of a government agency or by filing a Freedom of Information Act request can now be found online and are easy to download.

Access to much of the information is dependent on new online intermediaries. Neither house of Congress, for instance, nor any city council of the twenty-five largest American cities nor 89 or 99 state legislative houses make an individual legislator’s roll-call votes available in easily usable form, for example, although

the U.S. Senate made some progress in 2009. However, that information is now available online for a fee from three different Congress-watching organizations and free on the Web sites OpenCongress.org, GovTrack.us, and WashingtonPost.com. Princeton's Center for Information Technology Policy has created a keyword-searchable online database of federal court records that is much less cumbersome to use than the database maintained by the courts themselves.

Some of this public information comes from government agencies that have been around for a long time, like the Government Accountability Office or the Securities and Exchange Commission. Others, like the Federal Election Commission (1975) or the Environmental Protection Agency, which produces the Toxic Release Inventory (1986), or the individual departments' and agencies' inspectors general (most of them established through the Inspector General Act of 1978) are products of the past several decades. All produce abundant information and analysis about government and what it regulates, information that both resembles and assists news reporting. Sixty inspectors-general assigned to federal agencies as auditors and investigators produce reports about problems and wrongdoing that resemble the sort of investigative reporting journalists do. Some IG investigations are spurred by and confirm independent news media reporting and others produce fresh inquiries and stories themselves that the press then covers.

Outside government, advocacy groups and nongovernmental organizations, most of which have been established only since the 1960s, do research and have sometimes created what resemble news staffs to report on the subjects of their special interest. It is then up to journalists to separate the groups' activist agendas from their information gathering, which, in many cases, the journalists have grown to trust. Taxpayers for Common Sense, founded in 1995, has painstakingly gathered data on congressional "earmarking" that is the starting point for journalists who report on how members of Congress add money to appropriation bills for projects sought by special interests, constituents, and campaign contributors.

Human Rights Watch, a nongovernmental organization with a large staff of researchers and writers, publishes detailed reports on the status of human rights in countries around the world, and its work frequently sets the agenda for news media reporting. Human Rights Watch has "dozens of investigators covering more than seventy countries—more than the foreign correspondent corps of either the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*," said Carroll Bogert, its associate director and a former *Newsweek* magazine foreign correspondent. Bogert called her staff "more than journalists" because their mission is both to expose human rights abuses and to pursue corrective action and policy change.

Besides their own version of reporting, governments and interest groups also are opening up increasing numbers of digital databases to journalists and citizens. For instance, ProPublica and the Washington-based Sunlight Foundation have created a downloadable database of two years of federal filings from 300 foreign agents on their lobbying of Congress. ProPublica's Web site also contains the financial disclosure forms of more than 300 Obama administration officials, as well as a running account of federal economic stimulus disbursements, accompanied by an interactive map of the data. A start-up Web site, Everyblock, scours local databases in cities like Chicago and New York to give its users neighborhood information about crime, street closings, building permits, restaurants, and nightlife.

A database is not journalism, but, increasingly, sophisticated journalism depends on reliable, downloadable, and searchable databases. The federal government alone has fourteen statistical agencies and about sixty offices within other agencies that produce statistical data. Such data, said Columbia Professor of Public Affairs Kenneth Prewitt, former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, "has an assumed precision that the journalistic world is trained to question." It needs to be evaluated carefully and skeptically. "Good reporting is full of nuances and slippery slopes and blurred boundaries," Prewitt said. "That's part of what makes reporting interesting."

The accessibility of so much more public information changes the work of journalists and the nature of news reporting. It provides reporters new shortcuts to usable, usually reliable information, saving them and their news organizations time and money. It runs the risk of drowning reporters in deep seas of data, but it makes possible richer and more comprehensive and accurate reporting.

What Needs to Be Done to Support Independent News Reporting?

We are not recommending a government bailout of newspapers, nor any of the various direct subsidies that governments give newspapers in many European countries, although those subsidies have not had a noticeably chilling effect on newspapers' willingness to print criticism of those governments. Nor are we recommending direct government financing or control of television networks or stations.

Most Americans have a deep distrust of direct government involvement or political influence in independent news reporting, a sentiment we share. But this should not preclude government support for news reporting any more than it has for the arts, the humanities, and sciences, all of which receive some government support.

There has been a minimum of government pressure in those fields, with a few notable exceptions. The Public Broadcasting System fended off attacks by the

Nixon administration in the late 1960s, and both it and National Public Radio were criticized by some members of Congress for liberal bias in the 1990s, leading them to add more conservative voices. The National Endowment for the Arts also came under fire in the 1990s for the controversial nature of some of the art it helped sponsor with federal funds. So any use of government money to help support news reporting would require mechanisms, besides the protections of the First Amendment, to insulate the resulting journalism as much as possible from pressure, interference, or censorship.

From its beginning, the U.S. government has enacted laws providing support for the news media, with varying consequences. In the year following enactment of the First Amendment, Congress passed and President George Washington signed the Post Office Act of 1792, which put the postal system on a permanent foundation and authorized a subsidy for newspapers sent through the mail, as many were at the time. Those early newspapers also could mail copies to one another free of postage, creating the first collaborative news reporting, a kind of early, government-financed, technologically primitive form of the Internet. This subsidy assisted the distribution of news across the growing country for many years. While the First Amendment forbade the federal government from abridging freedom of the press, the founders' commitment to broad circulation of public information produced policies that made a free press possible.

Nearly two centuries later, the Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970, in a specific exception to antitrust laws, allowed newspapers in the same city to form joint operating agreements to share revenue and costs in what proved to be a futile attempt to prevent single newspaper monopolies in most cities. This intervention did not work as intended, and most joint operating agreements ended with just one of the newspapers surviving.

An antitrust exemption that would allow newspapers to act together to seek payment for the digital distribution of their news would not be any wiser or do much more to support independent reporting. Antitrust laws forbid industries from setting prices in concert, which we do not think is desirable or necessary for newspapers. Antitrust laws are meant to prevent industries from conspiring to fix prices, and we do not think it is desirable or necessary for newspapers to be exempt from these rules. Individually, newspapers are already experimenting with or contemplating various ways to charge for digital content. And they do not need an antitrust exemption to continue and expand the collaborations in news reporting among themselves and with other news organizations that we strongly encourage.

We are not advocating nor discouraging specific ways for news organizations to seek payment for digital content. We believe the marketplace will determine whether any of the many experiments will ultimately be successful. And we believe that managers of news organizations, now awakened to the severe

economic challenges they face, are best positioned to shape and test responses to them.

For example, newspapers should develop detailed information about their digital audience to sell more targeted, and higher priced, advertising to accompany specific digital content, while protecting individual readers' privacy. They also should experiment with digital commerce that does not conflict with their news reporting, such as facilitating the purchase of books they review. To borrow a phrase from another digital news context, we see a long tail of possible revenue sources—payment for some kinds of unique digital content, online commerce, higher print subscription prices, even new print products—being added to much diminished but still significant advertising revenues.

There is unlikely to be any single new economic model for supporting news reporting. Many newspapers can and will find ways to survive in print and online, with new combinations of reduced resources. But they will no longer produce the kinds of revenues or profits that had subsidized large reporting staffs, regardless of what new business models they evolve. The days of a kind of news media paternalism or patronage that produced journalism in the public interest, whether or not it contributed to the bottom line, are largely gone. American society must now take some collective responsibility for supporting independent news reporting in this new environment—as society has, at much greater expense, for public needs

like education, health care, scientific advancement, and cultural preservation—through varying combinations of philanthropy, subsidy, and government policy.

Government already plays a role in supporting American journalism. Tax laws and Internal Revenue Service rulings and interpretations that determine which institutions working in the public interest are treated as nonprofits have underpinned the economic models of some news organizations for decades. Their scope could now be widened to support more independent nonprofit news reporting.

The Communications Act of 1934 created the Federal Communications Commission, which licenses and regulates radio and television users of the public spectrum. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting fosters and helps finance a nationwide system of public, nonprofit radio and television stations. Both the FCC and CPB have streams of revenue that could be used to support more independent news reporting without government control and, with stronger safeguards, without political interference.

Foundations, other philanthropists, private interests, and individual citizens could also significantly increase their voluntary support for independent news reporting entities to levels they provide to other vital community, cultural, and educational institutions like colleges and universities and museums and orchestras. Universities themselves could devote more of their resources to support news

reporting in ways similar to their support for student and faculty work in other fields.

Our recommendations are intended to support independent, original, and credible news reporting, especially local and accountability reporting, across all media in communities throughout the United States. Rather than depending primarily on newspapers and their now waning concentration of reporting resources, each sizable American community should have a number of diverse sources of news reporting. They should include a variety and mix of commercial and nonprofit news organizations that can both compete and collaborate with each other. They should be adapting traditional journalistic forms to the multimedia, interactive, real-time capabilities of digital communication, sharing the reporting and distribution of news with citizens, bloggers, and aggregators.

To Support Diverse Sources of Independent News Reporting, We Specifically Recommend:

1. The Internal Revenue Service or Congress should clearly and explicitly authorize any independent news organization substantially devoted to reporting on public affairs to be created as or converted into a nonprofit entity or a Low-profit Limited Liability Corporation serving the public interest, regardless of its mix of financial support, including commercial sponsorship and advertising. The IRS or Congress also should explicitly authorize “program-related investments” by philanthropic foundations in these hybrid news organizations—and in designated public service news reporting by for-profit news organizations.

Many of the start-up news reporting entities—from local news Web sites like Voice of San Diego to national investigative reporting projects like ProPublica—are already tax-exempt nonprofits recognized by the IRS under section 501(c)(3) of the tax code. Some magazines with news content, including *Harper's*, *Mother Jones*, and the *Washington Monthly*, as well as public radio and television stations, also have been nonprofits for years.

They all are able to receive tax-deductible donations, along with foundation grants, advertising revenue, and other income, including revenue from for-profit subsidiaries. Their nonprofit status helps assure contributors and advertisers that they are primarily supporting news reporting rather than the maximization of profits. Tax deductibility is an added incentive for donors, and the nonprofit's tax exemption allows any excess income to be reinvested in resources for reporting.

However, neither the IRS nor Congress has made clear what kinds of news organizations qualify as nonprofits under section 501(c)(3), which specifies such charitable activities as the advancement of education, religion, science, civil rights, and amateur sports. News reporting is not one of the “exempt purposes” listed by the IRS, which has granted 501(c)(3) nonprofit recognition to start-up news organizations individually by letter rather than categorically. News organizations cannot be certain whether they would qualify—or whether they would be able to keep their 501(c)(3) status, depending, for example, on how much advertising or

other commercial income they earn or the extent to which they express political opinions.

The IRS has not made clear whether a certain amount of a nonprofit news organization's advertising revenue might be considered "unrelated business income" subject to tax or even might be regarded as an impediment to continued nonprofit status. And, while its regulations stipulate that a 501(c)(3) nonprofit "may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities and it may not participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates," it is not clear whether that restricts political editorial opinion apart from the endorsement of candidates.

It is particularly unclear whether an existing newspaper could be converted into a 501(c)(3) nonprofit news organization because so much of a newspaper's income is commercial advertising and circulation revenue. As noted earlier, the current economic conditions of many newspapers and the overhanging debt of some of their owners make it unlikely that many of them could be converted into viable nonprofits anyway. But it could still be an option for preserving a source of independent news reporting in some communities.

Congress should add news organizations substantially devoted to public affairs reporting to the list of specifically eligible nonprofits under section 501(c)(3), regardless of the amount of their advertising income. Or the IRS itself should rule

that such news organizations are categorically eligible under the criteria already established by Congress. The IRS also should explicitly allow news nonprofits to express editorial opinions about legislation and politics without endorsing candidates or lobbying. The Obama administration, in which the president and some officials have expressed their openness to ways to help preserve public interest news reporting, should weigh in on these policy decisions.

A possible alternative for news organizations is a Low-profit Limited Liability Corporation, known as an L3C, a hybrid legal entity with both for-profit and nonprofit investments to carry out socially useful purposes. Both private investors and foundations could invest in an L3C, with private investors able to realize a limited profit. A small but growing number of states, beginning with Vermont in 2008, have passed laws enabling the creation of L3Cs to make it more economically feasible to set up businesses for charitable or education purposes that might have difficulty attracting sufficient capital as either commercial firms or nonprofits. Illinois, Michigan, Wyoming, and North Dakota also have recently enacted L3C laws.

Each of the state laws was written to enable foundations to make “program-related investments” in the new hybrid organizations. The IRS created the concept of program-related investments in the 1960s to enable foundations to make socially useful grants to for-profit ventures. But foundations have been hesitant to make

such grants because they are not certain which ones would be allowed by the IRS. Congress or the IRS should provide a process by which a qualifying journalistic organization seeking a program-related investment from a foundation could be assured that it would qualify.

Nonprofit news organizations should, as some already have, individually and collectively through collaboration, develop professional fund-raising capabilities like those of advertising departments for commercial news organizations. They also should develop other sources of revenue, including advertising, partnerships, and innovative marketing of their reporting to other news media and news consumers.

2. Philanthropists, foundations, and community foundations should substantially increase their support for news organizations that have demonstrated a substantial commitment to public affairs and accountability reporting.

Philanthropically supported institutions are central to American society. Philanthropy has been essential for educational, research, cultural, and religious institutions, health and social services, parks and the preservation of nature, and much more. With the exception of public radio and television, philanthropy had played a very small role in supporting news reporting because most of it had been subsidized by advertising.

Led by the Knight Foundation and individual donors like Buzz Woolley and Herbert and Marion Sandler, foundations and philanthropists have begun to respond to the breakdown of that economic model by funding the launch of nonprofit news start-ups and individual reporting projects, as discussed earlier. But foundations are not yet providing much money to sustain those start-ups or to underwrite all of their journalism rather than only their reporting on subjects of special interest to each foundation or donor.

Foundations should consider news reporting of public affairs to be a continuous public good rather than a series of specific projects under their control or a way of generating interest and action around causes and issues of special interest to them. They should ensure that there is an impermeable wall between each foundation's interests and the news reporting it supports, as there has been between advertisers' interests and news reporting at the most credible newspapers. Recognizing the urgent need for philanthropic support of news reporting, especially by new kinds of fledgling news organizations, foundations should make that support a much higher priority than it has been for all but a few like the Knight Foundation.

These steps would represent major shifts in the missions of most national foundations. Their model of grant making has relied on documenting specific "outcomes," explained Eric Newton of the Knight Foundation, and it is not easy to measure the impact of news reporting. "News is not like electricity," Newton said.

“When there’s a news blackout, you don’t know what you’re not getting.” But what communities are now missing in news reporting is becoming increasingly apparent as newspaper and television station newsrooms empty out.

Philanthropic leaders concerned about the future of independent news reporting should convene high-level discussions among foundations about how to increase their support for journalism. They also should collaborate with the recently formed Investigative News Network of nonprofits and similar groups, such as the deans of university journalism schools, engaged in local news reporting. It is time for other national foundations to join with Knight in a concerted effort to preserve public affairs news reporting.

Because of the importance of local news, the nation’s more than 700 community foundations should take the lead in supporting news reporting in their own cities and towns. Community foundations, which manage collections of donor-advised local philanthropic funds, have large assets and make large gifts. Donations from the twenty-five largest community foundations alone in 2007 totaled \$2.4 billion. If community foundations were to allocate just one percent of their giving to local news reporting, it would roughly equal all the money that all foundations have spent annually to support news reporting in recent years. Given their local leadership roles and sense of obligation to their communities, these foundations should make ideal partners for local news organizations.

Some community foundations have taken the first steps in this direction.

Several donor-advised funds of the Greater St. Louis Community Foundation are among donors to the St. Louis Beacon. The San Diego Foundation has been a key supporter of the Voice of San Diego. The Minneapolis Foundation received a Knight grant to encourage its donors to help MinnPost pay for reporting on local subjects like education and poverty, in which the foundation has a long-standing interest and record of grant giving.

Community foundations also should consider funding public affairs and accountability reporting not only by nonprofits but also by local commercial newspapers that no longer have the resources to fund all of it themselves. For example, James Hamilton, director of Duke University's DeWitt Wallace Center for Media and Democracy, has proposed that local foundations finance specific accountability reporting projects, individual reporters, or the coverage of some subjects at the *Raleigh News and Observer*. That would not be such a big step beyond the journalism produced by nonprofits like ProPublica or the Center for Investigative Reporting that many commercial news media are already publishing and broadcasting.

3. Public radio and television should be substantially reoriented to provide significant local news reporting in every community served by public stations and their Web sites. This requires urgent action by and reform of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, increased congressional funding and support for public media news reporting,

and changes in mission and leadership for many public stations across the country.

The failure of much of the public broadcasting system to provide significant local news reporting reflects long-standing neglect of this responsibility by the majority of public radio and television stations, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and Congress. The approximately \$400 million that Congress currently appropriates for the CPB each year is far less per capita than public broadcasting support in countries with comparable economies—roughly \$1.35 per capita for the United States, compared to about \$25 in Canada, Australia, and Germany, nearly \$60 in Japan, \$80 in Britain, and more than \$100 in Denmark and Finland. The lion's share of the financial support for public radio and television in the United States comes from listener and viewer donations, corporate sponsorships, foundation grants, and philanthropic gifts.

It is not just a question of money, but how it is spent. Most of the money that the CPB and private donors and sponsors provide public broadcasting is spent on broadcast facilities, independent television production companies, and programming to attract audiences during fund-raising drives. In many metropolitan areas, the money supports more stations and signals than are necessary to reach everyone in the community.

At the same time, outside of a relatively few regional public radio station groups, very little money is spent on local news coverage by individual public

radio and television stations. The CPB itself, in its new Public Radio Audience Task Force Report, acknowledged that “claiming a significantly larger role in American journalism requires a much more robust news gathering capacity—more ‘feet on the street’ with notebooks, recorders, cameras and more editors and producers to shape their work” for broadcast and digital distribution by public radio stations. “The distance between current reality and the role we imagine—and that others urge upon public radio—is large,” the report concluded. And that distance is immense for the vast majority of public television stations that do no local news reporting at all.

The CPB should declare that local news reporting is a top priority for public broadcasting and change its allocation of resources accordingly. Local news reporting is an essential part of the public education function that American public radio and television have been charged with fulfilling since their inception.

The CPB should require a minimum amount of local news reporting by every public radio and television station receiving CPB money and require stations to report publicly to the CPB on their progress in reaching specified goals. The CPB should increase and speed up its direct funding for experiments in more robust and creative local news coverage by public stations both on the air and on their Web sites. The CPB should also aggressively encourage and reward collaborations by public stations with other local nonprofit and university news organizations.

National leaders of public radio and television who have been meeting privately to discuss news reporting should bring their deliberations into the open; reduce wasteful rivalries among local public stations, regional and national public media, and production entities; and launch concerted initiatives to increase local news coverage. The CPB should be more assertive in its efforts to consolidate duplicative public stations and signals, and it should encourage changes in the leadership of public stations that are not capable of reorienting their missions.

Congress should back these reforms. In its next reauthorization of the CPB and appropriation of its budget, Congress should change its name to the Corporation for Public Media, support its efforts to move public radio and television into the digital age, specify public media's local news reporting mission, and significantly increase its appropriation. Congress should also reform the governance of the reformed corporation by broadening the membership of its board with appointments by such nonpolitical sources as the Librarian of Congress or national media organizations. Ideological issues that have surfaced over publicly supported arts, cultural activities, or national news coverage should not affect decisions about significantly improving local news reporting by public media.

4. Universities, both public and private, should become on-going sources of local, state, specialized subject, and accountability news reporting as part of their educational missions. They should operate their own news organizations, host platforms for other nonprofit news and investigative reporting organizations, provide faculty positions for

active individual journalists, and be laboratories for digital innovation in the gathering and sharing of news and information.

In addition to educating and training journalists, colleges and universities should be centers of professional news reporting, as they are for the practice and advancement of medicine and law, scientific and social research, business development, engineering, education, and agriculture. As discussed earlier, a number of campuses have already started or become partners in local news services, Web sites, and investigative reporting projects, in which professional journalists, faculty members, and students collaborate on news reporting. It is now time for those and other colleges and universities to take the next step and create full-fledged news organizations.

Journalists on their faculties should engage in news reporting and editing, as well as teach these skills and perform research, just as members of other professional school faculties do. The most proficient student journalists should advance after graduation to paid residencies and internships, joining fully experienced journalists on year-round staffs of university-based, independently edited local news services, Web sites, and investigative reporting projects.

As in many professional fields, integrating such practical work into an academic setting can be challenging. Although much basic news reporting is routine, enterprise and accountability journalism, which by definition bring new

information to light, can grow into society-changing work not that dissimilar to academic research that makes original contributions to knowledge in history and the social sciences. Perhaps its highest forms are books by journalists, based on their reporting, that have become required texts in various academic disciplines over the years, including Anthony Lewis's *Gideon's Trumpet*, Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Elie Abel's *The Missile Crisis*, Tom and Mary Edsall's *Chain Reaction*, and numerous recent works by reporters on the war in Iraq. The capacity of the best journalists to combine original investigation with writing and other communications skills can enhance the teaching and research missions of universities daily.

Funding for university news organizations should come from earmarked donations and endowments, collaborations with other local news organizations, advertising, and other sources. Facilities, overhead, and fund-raising assistance should be provided by the colleges and universities, as is the case for other university-based models of professional practice. Reporting on specialized subjects in which university researchers can offer relevant expertise in such fields as the arts, business, politics, science, and health could be assisted by faculty and students in those disciplines, funded in part by research grants, so long as independent news judgment is not compromised.

University news organizations should increase their collaboration with other local news nonprofits, including local public radio and television stations, many of which are owned by colleges and universities themselves and housed on their campuses. They also should collaborate with local commercial news media, providing them with news coverage and reporting interns, as some journalism schools and their news services do now. They should provide assistance for hyperlocal community news sites and blogs.

In one experiment, launched in 2009 with a Knight Foundation grant, the University of Kentucky's Department of Community and Leadership Development has started a local news Web site, Lexington Commons, in which residents of Lexington are being trained to report and write neighborhood news. It is being assisted by the university's Cooperative Extension Service, Agricultural Communications Services, and public radio station, WUKY.

Universities should incubate innovations in news reporting and dissemination for the digital era. They could earn money for this from news media clients, as the Walter Cronkite School at Arizona State University does for research and development work for Gannett. Universities are among the nation's largest nonprofit institutions, and they should play significant roles in the reconstruction of American journalism.

5. A national Fund for Local News should be created with money the Federal Communications Commission now collects from or could impose on telecom users, television and radio broadcast licensees, or Internet service providers and administered in open competition through state Local News Fund Councils.

The federal government already provides assistance to the arts, humanities, and sciences through independent agencies that include the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health. The arts and humanities endowments each have budgets under \$200 million. The National Science Foundation, with a budget of \$6 billion, gives out about 10,000 grants a year. The National Institutes of Health has a budget of \$28 billion and gives 50,000 grants. In these and other ways, the federal government gives significant support to individuals and organizations whose work creates new knowledge that contributes to the public good.

The Federal Communications Commission uses money from a surcharge on telephone bills—currently more than \$7 billion a year—to underwrite telecom service for rural areas and the multimedia wiring of schools and libraries, among other things. In this way, the FCC supports the public circulation of information in places the market has failed to serve. Local news reporting, whose market model has now faltered, is in need of similar support.

The FCC should direct some of the money from the telephone bill surcharge— or from fees paid by radio and television licensees, or proceeds from auctions of telecommunications spectrum, or new fees imposed on Internet service providers—to finance a Fund for Local News that would make grants for advances in local news reporting and innovative ways to support it. Commercial broadcasters who no longer cover local news or do not otherwise satisfy unenforced public service requirements could also pay into such a fund instead.

In the stimulus bill passed in early 2009, Congress required the FCC to produce by February 17, 2010, a strategic plan for universal broadband access that specifies its national purposes. One of those purposes should be the gathering and dissemination of local news in every community, and the plan should include roles for the FCC and the federal government in achieving it.

The Fund for Local News would make grants through state Local News Fund Councils to news organizations—nonprofit and commercial, new media and old—that propose worthy initiatives in local news reporting. They would fund categories and methods of reporting and ways to support them, rather than individual stories or reporting projects, for durations of several years or more, with periodic progress reviews.

Local News Fund Councils would operate in ways similar to the way state humanities councils have since the 1970s, when they emerged as affiliates of the

National Endowment for the Humanities. Organized as 501(c)(3) nonprofits, they have volunteer boards of academics, other figures in the humanities, and, in some places, gubernatorial appointees, all serving limited terms. Local News Fund Council boards should be comprised of journalists, educators, and community leaders representing a wide range of viewpoints and backgrounds. In the largest states, it would be reasonable to have two or even three councils for different regions in the state, but for most states a single council should suffice. Each council—and the news organizations awarded grants—should be representative of local communities’ geographical, racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity.

Grants should be awarded in a transparent, public competition. The criteria for grants should be journalistic quality, local relevance, innovation in news reporting, and the capacity of the news organization, small or big, to carry out the reporting. A Fund for Local News national board of review should monitor the state councils and the quality of news their grants produce, all of which should be available on a public Fund for Local News Web site.

We understand the complexity of establishing a workable grant selection system and the need for strict safeguards to shield news organizations from pressure or coercion from state councils or anyone in government. As stated earlier, we recognize that political pressure has played a role at times in the history of the arts and humanities endowments and public broadcasting. But these

organizations have weathered those storms, and funding for the sciences and social sciences has generally been free of political pressure. With appropriate safeguards, a Fund for Local News would play a significant role in the reconstruction of American journalism.

6. More should be done—by journalists, nonprofit organizations, and governments—to increase the accessibility and usefulness of public information collected by federal, state, and local governments, to facilitate the gathering and dissemination of public information by citizens, and to expand public recognition of the many sources of relevant reporting.

With the Internet, the compilation of—and access to—public information, such as government databases, is far easier than ever before. Yet much of this information is not easily available, and the already useable information is not being fully exploited by journalists. Optimal exploitation of these information sources is central to the mission of journalism, as it is to the practice of democratic governance. Governments, nongovernment organizations, and news organizations should accelerate their efforts to make public information more accessible and to use it for news reporting.

With the Obama administration taking the lead, governments should fulfill “open government” promises by rapidly making more information available without Freedom of Information Act requests. News organizations should work

with government agencies to use more of this information in their reporting. The federal government has some 24,000 Web sites, a massive bounty of information that should be made more accessible by opening closed archives, digitizing what is not yet available online, and improving its organization and display so everyone can use it easily.

News organizations should also move more quickly and creatively to involve their audiences and other citizens in the gathering and analysis of news and information, as Josh Marshall has done with readers of his TPM blogs, Minnesota Public Radio has done with its Public Insight Network of radio listeners, and ProPublica's Amanda Michel has done with her citizen reporters. Local news organizations should collaborate with community news start-ups that utilize citizen reporting, as the *Seattle Times* has committed to do with neighborhood blogs. University scholars should archive and analyze these experiments and produce guidelines for "best practices."

Involving thousands of citizens in the collection and distribution of public information began long before computers and the Internet. For over a century, the Audubon Society has relied on thousands of local volunteers for a national bird count that provides crucial data for scientists in what might be termed pro-am scientific research. This is similar to the reporting that volunteers all over the world do for Human Rights Watch, or the information gathering that health workers do

for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or the reporting that census takers do. The original gathering and reporting of information also includes expert investigations like those of the Inspectors General in federal agencies. All of this work amounts to “adjunct journalism”—public information gathering, analysis, and reporting that is adjunct to the news reporting journalists do and available for them to use. It should be fully integrated into what journalists, scholars, and the public recognize as reporting in the public interest.

Where Do We Go from Here?

What is bound to be a chaotic reconstruction of American journalism is full of both perils and opportunities for news reporting, especially in local communities. The perils are obvious. The restructuring of newspapers, which remain central to the future of local news reporting, is an uphill battle. Emerging local news organizations are still small and fragile, requiring considerable assistance—as we have recommended—to survive to compete and collaborate with newspapers. And much of public media must drastically change its culture to become a significant source of local news reporting.

Yet, we believe we have seen abundant opportunity in the future of journalism. At many of the news organizations we visited, new and old, we have seen the beginnings of a genuine reconstruction of what journalism can and should be. We

have seen struggling newspapers embrace digital change and start to collaborate with other papers, nonprofit news organizations, universities, bloggers, and their own readers. We have seen energetic local reporting start-ups, where enthusiasm about new forms of journalism is contagious, exemplified by Voice of San Diego's Scott Lewis when he says, "I am living a dream." We have seen pioneering public radio news operations that could be emulated by the rest of public media. We have seen forward-leaning journalism schools where faculty and student journalists report news themselves and invent new ways to do it. We have seen bloggers become influential journalists and Internet innovators develop ways to harvest public information, such as the linguistics doctoral student who created the GovTrack.us Congressional voting database. We have seen the first foundations and philanthropists step forward to invest in the future of news, and we have seen citizens help to report the news and support new nonprofit news ventures. We have seen into a future of more diverse news organizations and more diverse support for their reporting.

All of this is within reach. Now, we want to see more leaders emerge in journalism, government, philanthropy, higher education, and the rest of society to seize this moment of challenging changes and new beginnings to ensure the future of independent news reporting.

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The authors thank Nicholas Lemann, dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, for his leadership of this project; Bill Grueskin, dean of academic affairs at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, for his valuable input; Christopher Anderson, assistant professor of communications at the College of Staten Island, who served an integral role as research assistant; Jeffrey Frank, for his editorial direction; and Susanne Braham, university publications editor at the Office of University Publications, for her copyediting.

The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism thanks the Charles H. Revson Foundation for its leadership support of this project.

We also thank the Surdna Foundation and Barbara G. Fleischman for their generous support.