

Exploring a
Networked Journalism Collaborative
In Philadelphia



*An Analysis of the City's Media Ecosystem
with Final Recommendations*

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Exploring a Networked Journalism Collaborative for Philadelphia

Final Report and Key Findings

Overview

Philadelphia is a city with enormous talents and assets that need to be better leveraged to achieve a well-informed electorate, an accountable leadership and a robust sense of place – importantly, a sense of place that acknowledges the New Philadelphia while attending to the Old.

The city's mainstream newspapers are steeped in a journalism of the 1970's and 1980's – even as they acknowledge they cannot do as much as they once did with only half the staff they used to have.

Many of the city's new media players, meanwhile, have come to understand what they *can* do. They are launching public policy and niche Web sites with a gritty entrepreneurship and considerable personal investment. Some are refugees of the city's traditional or alternative media. Others know the doors of The Inquirer or the Daily News will never be open to them so they are inventing their own futures. A few have thought about creating a citywide public affairs news site.

Philadelphia is home to an extremely collaborative creative-technology community that is well connected and organized. This community, with a forward-thinking anchor in Indy Hall, embraces a mindset that they don't need anyone's permission to do what they want to do – and anyone is welcome to participate if they abide by their collaborative values.

And then there are the ordinary citizens and every-day news consumers. For them, Philadelphia's Golden Era of Journalism is long past. They are weary of the newspapers' drama of survival and express pronounced antipathy at what remains – even as they credit the city's two major papers with undertaking some excellent, albeit episodic, enterprise journalism.

These key themes emerged in a four-month study of the problems and possibilities in the news infrastructure of the nation's sixth largest city. This study, commissioned by the William Penn Foundation, set out to understand gaps in public affairs reporting, map assets, explore opportunities and make recommendations for a possible philanthropic media investment strategy.

Between late June and late October 2009, J-Lab conducted more than 60 interviews of Philadelphia residents, performed content analyses of the city's two daily newspapers and four commercial television stations, and undertook a scan of the city's 260 blogs, and hyperlocal or niche Web sites. We have found about 60 blogs and Web sites that have some journalistic DNA. More have launched since the summer. On January 7, 2010, we invited more than 50 representatives of the city's legacy and new-media outlets and foundations to hear a report on initial findings and recommendations. Input from that meeting is included in this report.

Key Findings in Brief

- The available news about Philadelphia public affairs issues has dramatically diminished over the last three years by many measures: news hole, air time, story count, key word measurements.
- People in Philadelphia want more public affairs news than they are now able to get.
- They don't think their daily newspapers are as good as the newspapers used to be.
- They want news that is more connected to their city.
- People from both the Old Philadelphia, anchored by the city's union and blue-collar workers, and the New Philadelphia, representing tech-savvy, up-and-coming neighborhoods, want to be involved in helping to generate that news.
- The city is awash in media and technological assets that can pioneer a new Golden Era of Journalism.
- There is strong, but guarded, interest in exploring a collaborative journalism venture.
- A significant number of Philadelphia's new media outlets have expressed interest in pursuing a collaborative media initiative.
- Any collaborative news effort must validate and support the fiercely independent mindsets of the city's new media makers.

Key Recommendations in Brief

We suggest that the media ecosystem in Philadelphia is ripe for an innovative Networked Journalism Collaborative that would give citizens of Philadelphia a fresh opportunity to learn about – and participate in – what is going on in the city.

We recommend that this collaborative be anchored by an independent news Web site that would both curate and aggregate some of the excellent reporting originating in many of the city's new media sites as well as provide original reporting on a half-dozen key topics and serve as the connective tissue for the partners.

This should be a supplemental, rather than comprehensive, news enterprise. It should not try to cover everything the city's daily newspapers do. A new Web site should focus, initially, on Philadelphia government, politics, the local economy, and what it means to live in Philadelphia, supplemented by news from existing and emerging Web sites. The goal of the collaborative is to add new voices and amplify coverage of public

issues, providing smart, interactive news and information that will add value and understanding for the region's residents. The collaborative needs to set aside competition and leverage existing news and information producers in the region, giving a megaphone to their valuable information so all Philadelphians can learn about important issues.

As important, the collaborative should seek to involve the city's younger residents, not just in consuming the news, but also in creating new forms of participatory and interactive forms of journalism. And it should invite broad participation from throughout the community – via creative technologists, expert columnists, subsidized office space and pro bono marketing, legal and business advice. Such partnerships will help generate buzz and build a genuine sense of community ownership.

We believe that in partnering new media makers with creative technologists, a Networked Journalism collaborative will serve as a unique and important laboratory, engaging in nimble experiments that will chart a course for the future of news in metro areas around the country.

This future must focus on the needs of the community more than on the needs of particular corporate entities. We believe it can usher in a new Golden Era of innovative, public affairs journalism in Philadelphia.

How this is Different from Philadelphia's Legacy News Outlets

- A new independent public affairs news site would have a sharply defined focus on only six to eight issues to start.
- It would shoulder the tasks of building and maintaining relationships among, and support systems for, the collaborators.
- A collaborative would build on existing content from responsible media makers rather than replicating stories or competing with them.
- It would amplify excellent coverage, driving new eyeballs to existing sites.
- It would be open to experimentation, pilot projects and new applications.
- It would expand the definition of interactivity beyond just posting comments and video and involve users in working with choices, consequences, options and solutions.
- It would have a higher comfort level in *building* community, not just covering it.
- It won't have all the answers; the partners must play a role in inventing how a collaboration would best work.

In the following sections, we offer highlights from our interviews and content analyses, and we sketch the shape of the city's evolving media ecosystem.

A Scan of the Media Ecosystem

The Newspapers: Interview Highlights

Simply put, people in Philadelphia are mad at the city's dailies and most of their anger homes in on The Inquirer – even as they credit the paper with occasional good enterprise reporting on such topics as the Board of Revision of Taxes, Vince Fumo, and “Bonusgate.”

Throughout our interviews, Philadelphians asserted that news coverage in the daily papers is superficial, follow-ups are missing, and stories are often days late. They say reporters want stories they can “turn” quickly. And they feel the papers “don’t have a pulse on [Mayor] Nutter.” For those in the know, the issues they hear talked about around town are not reflected in the papers, contributing to a pronounced sense that the daily newspapers are not well connected to the daily goings on. (Some of the observations were quite harsh so here we focus on key threads of their input. We also have elected not to attribute all the quotes by name in the interest of safeguarding good will in the community.)

“There are fewer and fewer stories presented to me that I want to read,” said the chief executive of a local tech company.

People, again and again, recount specific stories that were missed. And they point to a lack of urgency that is reflected in the quality and comprehensiveness of the reporting. “If I get a call at 2 p.m. to comment on a story and I call back at 6 p.m., the quote is not in the paper the next day,” observed one non-profit official. “It used to be that if I left a voicemail, they’d call back at 10 p.m. That was The Inquirer ethic.”

One communication scholar yearned for “cheap, easy aggregating by someone. We need the ‘finders.’ ”

The Inquirer, in particular, is criticized for not reflecting the city’s significant minority population. A local journalism educator sees a paper run by “middle-aged white guys who did journalism 30 years ago and think that’s the gold standard.”

The Daily News engenders more fondness among city residents for being quicker off the mark. However, more than one-third of its coverage of public affairs issues comes from columnists, not reporters, according to our content analysis below.

The Philly.com Web site was taken to task in our interviews for trying to drive traffic with sports, entertainment and sex and for not originating much content, just packaging it.

The site is hobbled by efforts to maintain three separate brands – for The Inquirer, the Daily News and Philly.com, a situation that doesn’t seem to make any of the partners

happy. “We don’t feel it expresses our journalistic values at all,” said a top Inquirer editor. “We want more of our content on it.”

The Inquirer now has about 280 reporters and editors, less than half the 600 it had earlier this decade. Bureaus have been cut. Circulation is down to about 300,000 on weekdays and just over a half-million on Sundays. The so-called Neighbors editions that covered suburban counties have ended. An auction to determine ownership of the media company is in legal limbo.

Still, top editors view the paper as the “only game in town.” They express a limited awareness of the city’s emerging media ecosystem.

At the same time, Mayor Nutter’s press secretary describes how his media list has grown from about 40 to 700 in the last two years as more residents and Web sites seek news directly from City Hall.

Although many other metro newspapers around the country are collaborating with independent online news outlets in their cities and states, Inquirer editors voice a limited view of such partnerships, especially if they don’t think the partners are “as good as us.”

The Daily News, however, has exhibited a higher comfort level with collaborations, especially involving City Hall news. They include the “It’s Our Money” and “City Howl” projects spearheaded by the paper’s editorial page and the highly successful TheNextMayor.com project, which preceded the 2007 election and demonstrated the benefit of collaboration between the newspaper, WHYY and the Committee of Seventy. The William Penn Foundation funded all of these initiatives.

Content Analysis: Mainstream Media Coverage of Public Affairs

It is not surprising that with fewer reporters on the street, both the number of stories and the space and airtime devoted to public affairs reporting has suffered in both daily newspapers and on commercial television newscasts over the last three years. Here is a recap of our findings.

Coverage was marked by fewer stories and fewer column inches in The Philadelphia Inquirer and by fewer stories, albeit more column inches, in the Daily News. Public affairs news coverage on Philadelphia’s four commercial television stations also decreased, but there was not a significant amount of coverage for either period measured.

In The Inquirer, both the number of stories and the column inches devoted to public affairs coverage declined from August 2006 to August 2009. The latter, ironically, was a particularly newsy month in which the city’s budget crisis dominated the news.

- The number of public affairs stories **dropped 17.4 percent**, from 190 articles in August 2006 to 157 stories in August 2009.
- There were 682 fewer column inches of public affairs news in August 2009 – a **17.1 percent decline** to 3,297 inches in August 2009, from 3,979 inches in August 2006. (A full column of news, without advertising, in The Inquirer is 19 inches long and there are five columns to a standard page.)
- This meant there were nearly 36 fewer columns of public affairs news for the entire month of August 2009 than in the earlier period. This is equivalent to a decline of seven full pages plus one additional column of news for the month.

For the Daily News:

- The number of stories **declined 7.2 percent**, from 83 to 77 stories from August 2006 to August 2009.
- Ironically, the amount of news *space* given to public affairs journalism **increased by 5 percent**, or an additional 63 column inches in August 2009 over August 2006. (This is because more than one-third of these stories were opinion columns and most columnists write to a prescribed length – about 600 words, or 17 to 18 inches, which is longer than many news articles in the Daily News. Of 83 public affairs stories published in the 2006 period, 28, or 33 percent, were by columnists; for the 2009 period, 29, or 37 percent of the 77 stories, were columns or editorial pieces.)
- This means there were six additional columns of public affairs news in the Daily News for August 2009, equivalent to one additional full page plus one additional column for the month. (A Daily News column is 10.5 inches long, with five columns to a standard news page.)

For commercial TV newscasts, both the number of stories and the number of minutes devoted to public affairs stories declined on local Philadelphia television evening newscasts from 2006 to 2009. It's hard to describe this decline as precipitous because there wasn't a great deal of public affairs reporting to begin with.

J-Lab commissioned both time logs and story-subject logs for the nightly newscasts of WCAU (NBC 10), WPVI (ABC 6), WTXF (Fox 29) and KYW (CBS 3) for May 1-7, 2006 and May 1-7, 2009.

- From May 1 to 7, 2006, the four stations aired a total of 46 minutes, 30 seconds of public affairs stories about the broadcast market region during their nightly newscasts. For the same period in 2009 all four stations aired only 38 minutes, 58 seconds, a **16 percent drop**.
- A larger discrepancy occurs for coverage aimed more specifically at Philadelphia and South Jersey. Of the 46.5 minutes devoted to public affairs coverage in May

2006, 32 minutes, or almost 69 percent, focused on local issues. For the same period in 2009, coverage of local issues **dropped to 17 minutes, 22 seconds or only 44.5 percent**, of the 38 minutes, 58 seconds aired.

- Of the approximately 1,000 minutes per week the four Philadelphia stations devoted to local news in 2006, the four stations spent only 32 minutes on local public affairs – about 3.2 percent of their overall news budget. In May 2009, the 17 minutes, 22 seconds of local public affairs stories aired represented about 1.7 percent of their overall news budget.

The City and Its Emerging Media Ecosystem

Several of our interviewees stressed that there is an Old Philadelphia and there is a New Philadelphia. The Old Philadelphia is made up of row houses, blue-collar workers, political patronage, sports fans and marked poverty. The New Philadelphia finds young do-it-yourselfers and start-up entrepreneurs, technically multilingual, converting pockets of the city into very cool places.

Any networked journalism collaboration would need to bridge both of those communities.

“Young entrepreneurs don’t want to work in the institutional settings – or they can’t. They feel they can do things that the establishment is not inclined to do. They’re very savvy about that,” said a local expert in creative economies.

“The town is now flourishing in a way that is remarkable, but not noticeable,” he said. The trick is to create an environment that allows them some ownership and doesn’t impose agendas. “The more we behave as a ballet pole for them, the more they dance.”

For many of the new media makers and creative technologists who populate the New Philadelphia, this is the city they want to call home.

Pa2010.com, for instance, came about when founder Dan Hirschhorn’s other news organization went belly up. He could have worked elsewhere, but decided to stay in Philadelphia and launch his own “nonpartisan news” site focused on this year’s elections. “My passion for journalism and my passion for Philadelphia are very much intertwined,” he said.

He has dreamed of a new independent Web site to provide news for Philadelphians. “I don’t think it would take that much to do that in Philadelphia but money and a bunch of good journalists with a passion for Philadelphia and I would hope to be a part of that.”

One thing Joey Sweeney strives for in his successful Philebrity.com is reconciling “the Starbuckyness of the New Philadelphia with the gritty weirdness of Old Philadelphia that

we all grew up on.” He dreams of soon hiring professional reporters and has also thought about launching an independent news Web site.

A few of the city’s new reporting initiatives have attracted grants, including funding from the William Penn Foundation, to support in-depth reporting on specific topics. Philadelphia Public School Notebook (thenotebook.org) has made important inroads in its coverage of local schools, and the award-winning PlanPhilly.com has earned respect for its reporting of planning and preservation issues. Like many of the city’s new online new sites, they offer niche information to specific communities of interest but would welcome bigger audiences for their information.

Wendy Warren, Philly.com vice president, sees young tech people and site founders “stalking around the city waiting for an organizing mission to bring them together.”

The fierce entrepreneurial spirit of many of the new media makers in the New Philadelphia is an important asset. Any attempt at collaboration would need to validate and support their sense of personal ownership.

But they all want to grow their audiences. “If you want to have influence, you have to have audience,” said Tom Ferrick. “This is the next thing, don’t you think? Go for a larger audience and aggregation.”

Currently, while the newspapers are cutting back, WHYY public television and radio is trying to increase its local news coverage with a \$1.2 million initiative. It is moving forward with reallocated funds and a grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which currently has a keen interest in enhancing the local journalism efforts of public media. WHYY plans to beef up reporting and train citizen journalists in eight Zip codes in Northwest Philadelphia.

Mapping Philadelphia’s Media Assets

In examining possibilities for enhanced coverage of public affairs in Philadelphia, we took note of many media assets currently providing news and information. We believe their content would inform and enlighten local residents – if readers could easily find it. It would also benefit the media makers if their content had wider audiences.

Of significance, we note that, collectively, there are at least 100 reporters producing stories on the various independent news sites and blogs that we tracked. Here’s what we found.

Asset I: Blogs and niche Web sites

Philadelphia is awash in new media makers. We have found at least 260 active blogs and public policy or niche Web sites. Of these about 60 have some journalistic DNA in that they report news, not just comment on it. This is more than San Diego or Minneapolis had prior to the launch of independent metro news sites in those cities – although it is about the same number that Chicago has.

Some of the newest initiatives, such as Tom Ferrick's Metropolis, are started by professional journalists who have left their news organizations. Older online initiatives are maturing into new phases, hiring commissioned ad sales people, or launching affiliated niche sites.

One newcomer has made a quick impact. TechnicallyPhilly.com was founded in the spring of 2009 by three Temple grads. Since then, it has achieved a notable level of recognition for its coverage of the city's technology community. And it is moving forward to hire an ad salesperson, who will work on commission.

"They break the news that needs to be broken," says one tech entrepreneur, who points to TechnicallyPhilly as a key example of what can happen in the city. "They remain timely, relevant and interesting" in part, he says because "they are there when the story breaks because they would be anyway."

Of the Philadelphia news sites that are receiving grants, Public School Notebook is already comfortably collaborating with the city's mainstream media, says founder Paul Socolar. He has been moving his efforts from a monthly newsletter to a regularly updated blog and focusing on developing new revenue sources. PlanPhilly.com is now doing most of the city's available reporting on planning, zoning and historic preservation. The Notebook and PlanPhilly, together with other sites that receive funding from the William Penn Foundation, field some 16 journalists providing in-depth coverage of their specialty areas.

Several of the city's newsy online sites are more hobby than business. SeptaWatch focuses on mass transit's customers and riders and was registering about 11,000 page views a month. The Inquirer occasionally picks up stories from the site. Founder Michael Froelich sees a subset of public policy blogs that might be open to a loose confederation, as long as it was structured in a way that preserved independence and credibility.

Dan Rottenberg, founder of the arts site BroadStreetReview.com, said he sees opportunities to grow and he is benefiting from professional reviewers who are writing for his site now that The Inquirer is no longer reviewing Broadway shows.

The disappearance of at least two valuable online sites has been acutely felt in Philadelphia's online community – an indicator that good sites are noticed and appreciated. Phillyblog, a robust discussion and reporting site, abruptly went dark in

July 2009. Hallwatch, which gathered important city data, also disappeared soon after its founder got married.

While this executive summary cannot go into the merits of every site, we are impressed with the energy even as we understand the challenges. In Philadelphia's online news community, interest in collaborating in a Networked Journalism consortium runs the spectrum: There is guarded interest among the more successful sites and welcoming interest among smaller sites that want help. And a few prefer to go it alone rather than join a collaboration.

J-Lab has observed that the most successful hyperlocal sites around the country are not creations of mainstream news organizations. Rather they are products of the passion, ownership and entrepreneurship of their founders, be they hobbies or businesses.

Any Networked Journalism collaboration must respect the fierce independence of these startups while validating their strengths and shoring up their weakness with a business support system, which could include business plans, legal help, tech support, even employee benefits.

Asset II: WHY Y

Although WHY Y is mostly known for its syndicated radio talk shows, it recently has been trying to ramp up efforts to do original reporting with both professional and citizen journalists. We believe WHY Y should be regarded as a media asset. A Networked Journalism collaborative can give a megaphone to and get story tips from the kinds of hyperlocal citizen media initiatives WHY Y is seeking to nurture. These small-j journalism venues can be the listening posts for tips and insights that will help jumpstart Big-J reporting on the ramifications of public decision-making.

We also believe a Networked Journalism project could amplify through links and/or content sharing both WHY Y's arts and culture and its environmental stories. On the environmental front, WHY Y is involved in a regional initiative to cover the Delaware and Susquehanna River watersheds with other public broadcasters along these waterways. We believe WHY Y could tap network partners to appear as reporters or commentators on a nightly newscast planned for launch by the end of 2010.

A collaboration between WHY Y and a networked collaborative could also open pilot project opportunities that could be attractive to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and National Public Radio.

Asset III: Data Gatherers

Philadelphia has at least two valuable data gatherers:

- The Pew Charitable Trusts' Philadelphia Research Initiative
- MPIP, Metropolitan Philadelphia Indicators Project (<http://mpip.temple.edu/>)

Both would benefit from collaborating with a Networked Journalism site that would give their information a bigger megaphone and, in the case of MPIP, do more journalism on their numbers. Both would also benefit from collaboration with technologists who could improve visualizations and develop interactions and exercises to allow people to engage with their information. We encourage pursuing these possibilities.

Asset IV: Creative Technologists

Philadelphia has a robust creative class of designers, architects, performers, artists, chefs, and others. However, we particularly think there are exciting possibilities for involving the city's creative technology community of computer programmers, designers and inventors in a journalism collaborative. And we think the University of the Arts could be a key player.

The city's technologists are already creating things that don't quite have a home. Things like Rip-it, a DVD backup archive. Or iSEPTA, a mobile application that helps mass transit riders find ways to get from Place A to Place B.

Such utilities can have enormous applications for journalism and we believe they should be deliberately incentivized as part of a Networked Journalism project. Moreover, the project should serve as a futures lab to test them out. We think an annual Pitch-It competition should award top prizes to best ideas coming out of the creative technology community. The prize would fund prototypes to be built and tested on the Net-J main site and/or partner sites.

New data mining, geomapping or mobile tools and other entry points to information would give a journalism collaborative the coolness and buzz that will not only supply momentum in the overall community but will especially hook the 20- and 30-somethings into civic life in new ways. A site that only appeals to the 50-somethings in Philadelphia won't go far.

Asset V: Indy Hall

Philadelphia is uniquely endowed with Indy Hall, a networking and co-working space that has already tripled in size due to demand, growing from 1,800 to 5,400 square feet last spring.

IndyHall is considered to be more than just a place; it's regarded as a "movement." IndyHall co-founder Alex Hillman is credited with being a "super connector" and a major information hub. He is a big believer in what he calls "small pieces loosely joined."

“We have established a set of core values: community, collaboration, accessibility and sustainability,” Hillman said. “We’ve been picky who we align with to further establish those values.” He has many lessons to share on collaboration.

Hillman himself is involved in a Web enterprise that is a case study in how to build a flourishing niche Web site by building the community first so that the financial support comes later. Two Guys on Beer has grown, virally, from podcasts on beer reviews to a highly visible partnership with Philly.com. It has grown a community in which brew masters from around the world seek their reviews and want to sponsor their events.

“I want to give our fans the tools to market for us. Give them the story worth telling over and over again. Not just link to us,” he said.

A Networked Journalism collaborative should pay attention to how he grew his passion.

Hillman recommends that in any Networked Journalism collaborative, a distribution of resources needs to be “an enabling body, not a crutch.” It should be clearly defined as an experimental lab approach and the people who are participating need to understand that “the longevity of involvement need not be permanent.” He notes, “We rarely do anything that can’t be undone.”

Asset VI: Temple University’s Journalism Program

Philadelphia is blessed with a journalism school that “gets” it. It understands what it should be teaching and how it should be preparing students to participate in the emerging new media ecosystem.

Temple brings to the table budding entrepreneurs. In addition to the TechnicallyPhilly team, Temple grad Shannon McDonald has launched the NEast site for Northeast Philadelphia and a few other non-news sites have launched. And the school is seeking funding to help jumpstart other entrepreneurs. Students are urged to think “how to monetize this stuff,” said Andy Mendelson, chair of the Department of Journalism.

A part of the journalism schools curriculum involves about 80 student reporters working for PhiladelphiaNeighborhoods.com, which fields students to cover city neighborhoods.

Temple has been hosting workshops on the future of journalism and it has launched the Temple Journalism Review (tujreview.wordpress.com), which could play a role in keeping the city’s new media makers honest.

Full Recommendation: A Networked Journalism Collaborative

Forty-five people attended the Jan. 7, 2010, brainstorming summit, including many who had participated in our interviews. They heard the key findings and early recommendations and weighed in with additional suggestions. In follow-up surveys and interviews later that month, eight important media makers circled back to J-Lab to say they wanted to participate in a collaborative journalism project in Philadelphia.

At least four others embraced the idea, although not all are regularly generating news content. That represented 50 percent of the possible partner *organizations* that attended the meeting (not including funders). Importantly, they are a desirable 50 percent, generating the sorts of news and information that could aggregate citizens of the region around the public issues at the core of the William Penn Foundation's mission.

Nearly all of those who said they were "in" wanted to move forward quickly. At least one proposed that the collaborative have co-working space.

There was some discussion both at the January brainstorming meeting and in follow-up feedback about the merits of anchoring a collaboration with a central public affairs Web site that would also produce some original reporting versus just the "process" of collaborating without it being reflected in any "product."

Several participants paid homage to the idea of aggregating good content from the city's various media makers, but they could not address, when asked, where those aggregated links might appear if not on a Web site that was trawling for and curating the good stories.

J-lab is very encouraged by this baseline level of interest and recommends all parties move forward with pursuing the creation of an independent public affairs initiative. We suggest that this be a collaborative enterprise and we recommend that it be anchored by a central Web site tasked with helping the new venture create a brand, achieve momentum and attract notice.

We see two scopes of work: One for the central Web site and one for affiliated partners.

Tasks for a Central Web Site

We see a series of specific tasks for a new central Web site that, in addition to generating stories, would also need to attend to managing any collaboration. Some of these tasks include:

- **Generating original stories** – news and information on six to eight key issues or "beats" that need additional coverage.
 - Also providing a place where city officials, agencies, NGO's and others **can share their information with the public.**

- **Curating** the best content from individual media makers in an efficient way that pulls quality from some uneven efforts.
- **Serving as connector for existing information silos** so that citizens of the region can more easily learn about and navigate the kinds of news and information that might not be in their immediate interest zones.
- Serving as a **connector in the community** by aggregating special-interest audiences, not just content, and **amplifying to more citizens** the responsible news and information coming from the region's existing media makers.
- Building a **sense of community**, and of the region, by advocating for the good of the region, something that can be out of the comfort zones of traditional news organizations, and which individual media makers might not consider part of their mission.
- Engage in **ambassadorial work** – with nonprofits, city agencies, other audiences – to elicit needs and pique interest.
- Collecting input for developing Web wireframe.
- Supporting and serving as a **laboratory for news tools** developed by the city's robust creative technologists.
- **Marketing** the existence of the region's news and information providers and other assets.
- Supporting partners in the region's media ecosystem with a **back-end support network**.
- Administering possible **licensed content deals** with national media outlets and apportion revenues to participating content contributors.
- **Organizing events or community discussions** around important public issues, as needed.
- **Cataloguing** the region's organizations, civic groups and Web sites.

Tasks for Networked Journalism Collaborators

We believe the participants in any news collaborative will ultimately need to determine what works and what does not work for them. But we think there are multiple merits in sharing assets, content and photos, in crowdsourcing knowledge and tips, in engaging in collaborative investigations and enterprise stories, and in participating in the development of forward-thinking Web and mobile applications. Partners could:

- **Draft partnership agreements**, ethical standards, mission statements for the collaborative.
- Engage in **collaborative enterprise stories and investigations**, calling out to their audiences for crowdsourced input on how city policies and legislative decisions are affecting people on the street.
- Administer an **Enterprise Reporting Fund** that would make awards to network-partner sites to enable them to hire a reporter temporarily and quickly pursue and "turn" important stories as they see them. This would add further glue and stimulate an important knowledge network, tying together the consortium by helping members know about and possibly contribute to their partners' reporting.

- Propose and serve as **test sites** for news applications that would be built by the city's creative technologists.
- Raise the profile of their best stories by contributing them to a national partner such as the New York Times or another national news outlet. This could generate **licensing income**, validate the partners' efforts and provide enhanced branding opportunities.
- Engage in **revenue-raising events**, inviting Philadelphians interested in, say, education, planning or entrepreneurship to attend specific events.
- Share **back-office support systems** that could supply such things as business plan assistance, marketing help, payroll processing, employee benefit pools, fiscal agent status for startups not yet ready to spin to a 501(c)3 nonprofit entity, and an advertising sales staff.
- Explore and realize possibilities for a **localized ad network**.

Baselines for Success

A Networked Journalism initiative must meet some baselines to be successful:

- It must adhere to journalistic values of fairness, accuracy, and truth telling.
- It must have a comfort level being deeply connected to the community – caring about it without being boosterish. A cool, dispassionate objectivity will not work in the new ecosystem, or give the collaboration enough sizzle.
- It must be transparent about its supporters, advisors, and partners.
- It must have a bootstrapping, entrepreneurial mindset, willing to experiment and take risks – with the understanding that any deal can be undone if it's not working.
- It must rethink the kinds of journalism the community needs. One challenge would be to recruit an editor who understands this and is willing to experiment with new forms of storytelling.
- It should be fun, informative and cool. It may have a voice but should avoid being snarky.

Additional Recommendations

Reader Involvement: It is recommended that the core site use crowdsourcing and reader tips to help inform coverage and jumpstart enterprise stories. It is recommended that all reader comments be moderated to ensure a civil, safe place for community dialogue.

Do Not Covers: It is not recommended that this site attempt original sports coverage, movie or restaurant reviews, an entertainment guide, coverage of parades or community events, or coverage of local companies and business, except as they impact living in Philadelphia. It is recommended that good content on these topics be curated from other sites in the city as well as the city's dailies and the Philadelphia Business Journal and audiences be directed to those content generators for stories.

Advisory Board: It is recommended that the initiative have an Advisory Board to help guide opportunities, open doors, and relay news tips.

Mindset: We do not think this project should launch as a Cadillac project because it would set too high a bar for sustainability. It needs to start with an entrepreneurial, bootstrapping mindset. We anticipate guerrilla-marketing ideas. We do not envision Class A office space or swanky quarters. We do envision some pro-bono services.

Structure: We think the project should launch under the auspices of fiscal agent, to be identified. However, we think it should move to become either a 501(c)3 or L3C, which might enable it to straddle nonprofit and for-profit status.

Sustainability: We recommend planning for at least three to five years of philanthropic support for this project, to allow for reputation to be established, buzz to build and revenue streams to be created. We would hope that there are opportunities for philanthropic collaborations among funders as well as content collaborations for this project.

Revenue Sources: We can see possibilities of revenues from a number of sources, but we generally find all business plans for these sites to be overly rosy at the start. We recommend a slow build.

Future: We believe in future years a statewide Investigative News Network should be established. We also recommend following the Chicago Community Trust's model of issuing an RFP and supporting small news projects that are getting off the ground that could be future satellite collaborators.

Conclusion

We have used the term “Networked Journalism Collaborative” as a generic descriptor only. While we have laid out a framework of recommendations, we have not delineated all of our specific ideas because we believe it is critical for the participants of any new collaboration to spearhead development of the project. They must be charged with building it, and re-building it, as they invent how it will ultimately work. We will continue to lend our support.

Bottom line: We believe the focus of any new public affairs initiative has to be what is best for the citizens of Philadelphia – not what is best for any commercial news organizations or individual Web start-ups. While collaborative processes, alone, might be good for individual news sites, they don't do much to build a collective audience for public affairs news and information.

Philadelphians are not getting all the public affairs news and information that they once did. There is a robust media ecosystem that has emerged in the city. There is a

talented and organized community of creative technologists. People in the community feel that the city's traditional media outlets are failing to cover some important issues or covering them in a haphazard manner with undependable follow up.

At the same time, there is interest among enough media makers doing journalism to partner with a new public affairs initiative. They see potential in creating something bigger out of "small pieces loosely joined." While many foundations, including William Penn, were once hesitant to create competition for mainstream news outlets, they are now moving forward because of concerns about the need for high-quality information for civic and public dialogue and debate.

What can be created in Philadelphia is something very different from a newspaper or television station doing "journalism." What needs to be created is an initiative that will engage in new paradigms for the future of news in communities. It is what one Columbia University doctoral student has labeled "news work."

News work is more than reporting and publishing stories. It involves curation, aggregation, data-gathering and visualizations, interactive opportunities for the public – and a mission that doesn't just *cover* community, but helps to *build* it as well.

We feel confident that Philadelphia's media makers can build something that will not only be transformational for the community, but for the future of journalism as well. We firmly believe plentiful building blocks are in place. And we believe there is sufficient interest to start.

We also believe this will happen because it makes sense.

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