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SUMMIT:



CHANGING  
**MEDIA**

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**DISCUSSION GUIDE**  
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## WHO WE ARE

Free Press is a national, nonpartisan organization working to reform the media. Through education, organizing and advocacy, we promote diverse and independent media ownership, strong public media, quality journalism, and universal access to communications.

Founded in 2002, Free Press is now the largest media reform organization in the United States, with nearly half a million activists and members and a full-time staff of more than 30 based in offices in Washington, D.C., and Florence, Mass.

Free Press and the Free Press Action Fund, our advocacy arm, are nonprofit organizations that rely on the support of our members. To learn more or make a donation, visit [www.freepress.net](http://www.freepress.net) or call 1-877-888-1533.

## WHY CHANGING MEDIA?

We have arrived at a crossroads in the history of U.S. media — and are witnessing the greatest technological transition since the printing press. Traditional media institutions are facing off against more grassroots forms of communication. While the biggest media outlets still dominate, their established business models are under strain. There is widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of the mainstream media.

Yet as the Internet breaks down old barriers, it raises new concerns about free speech, control, privacy and equality. The rise of the new and the decline of the old

media are proceeding at different speeds, threatening to undermine critical social institutions before new ones can be built.

Communications are more decentralized, participatory and personal than ever before. Users no longer passively consume content, we actively participate in it. We no longer limit our political involvement to watching television ads and reading editorial pages. We “Google” candidates to learn more, create our own political networks on Facebook, and use Twitter to stay on top of our issues (follow or join today’s discussion via the tag #fpdc).

Despite this wave of digital empowerment, more than 40 percent of the country remains without a high-speed Internet connection today. Tens of millions of people can’t get online for reasons that seem largely defined by their class, location, race and ethnicity. On an international scale, the United States has fallen to 22nd place in the world in broadband adoption, a profound embarrassment for the country that invented the Internet. But bridging America’s “digital divide” is not merely a matter of national pride. The creation of good jobs, better education and health care, and a healthier democracy all depend upon a more open, affordable and accessible Internet for everyone.

Expanding Internet access alone doesn’t erase concerns over what kind of news and information people will find when they get online. The collapsing traditional media model — first newspapers, with broadcasting following close behind — means thousands of trained and experienced reporters are out of a job. The loss of journalists on the beat is deeply troubling for a democratic society: Less

news coverage encourages more corruption and worse. It is not clear yet whether the wonderful cacophony of the online marketplace of ideas can serve as an adequate replacement or improvement on the traditional institutions of journalism.

How can we create the quality news and information we need to hold our leaders accountable and learn about what's happening in our communities? How can we ensure that all Americans have access to that information and can contribute to the larger public debate? How can we ensure that our communications infrastructure meets the needs of all communities? What must be done to transform this crisis into an opportunity to change the status quo and create something better?

Fundamentally, these are policy questions. Access to communications networks and technology is core to infrastructure policy, education, economic development and social opportunity. Likewise, the quality of our media content — in particular, journalism — has informed broadcasting and postal policy as well as public media's core mission for decades. The issues of access and content are deeply intertwined, but they are rarely considered together.

We have turned from seeing the Internet as merely a source of entertainment and have begun to recognize it as essential infrastructure. Access to this infrastructure largely determines whether you can receive the range of information and ideas needed to actively participate in our democracy. Internet access has become a public good produced by a commercial market structured under public

regulation — which is exactly how we've long regarded journalism. That suggests we must have a dual focus on universal access and public service content. Access policies that are disconnected from content policies are inadequate — and vice versa.

Decisions we make now about our right to communicate will have an impact on our economic, social and civic life for generations to come. President Barack Obama has publicly declared his support for diverse, independent media ownership, universal and open access to the Internet, and robust public media. But the president's ability to turn support into real reform is constrained by the tremendous influence of money over American politics and policymaking — especially in the realm of media and technology.

One thing is clear: To implement the changes we need, politicians must be emboldened by broad-based public support. We have an historic opportunity to build this consensus and give our leaders the willpower to advance policies that make media more democratic, diverse and accessible. We are long overdue for a truly public conversation about what the future of the media should look like. It starts here today.

## WHY ARE WE COMING TOGETHER?

Strengthening America's media is crucial to our prosperity as a nation. Everyone stands to benefit. But building better media must start with the American public, in conversations about the future of communications. As new



leaders in Washington consider their agenda for media and technology, they need to hear from all of us about the ways we can work together. Public discussions like the Free Press Summit are where these conversations begin.

## WHAT WILL WE TALK ABOUT?

We'll be looking at what kind of media we want and discuss public policy approaches that will help make better communications a reality. Some of the questions we will focus on:

- What can we do to ensure open and affordable Internet services for everyone in America?
- How can we encourage new models for news that will support working journalists over the long term?
- How can new digital technologies expand the reach of public media?
- What roles should be played by the government, private industry and everyday citizens to build better media?

## WHAT IS MY ROLE?

You don't need to be an expert to take part in this conversation. Bring your own experiences and concerns and share them with others at your table. A facilitator will help collect your ideas, which will then be shared with the larger group. You'll have a wireless keypad for voting on your preferred ideas throughout the day.

## WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER TODAY?

Free Press is building coalitions, starting new campaigns and continuing ongoing initiatives to organize broad public support for a slate of related reform policies. Our work will be guided by the feedback collected during today's conversations and from collaboration with interested individuals and organizations here in the room today and around the country. Overall, our goal is not simply to convey a vision for better media, but to move from discussion and deliberation to a tangible plan of action.





THREE  
AREAS

OF

MEDIA REFORM

Free Press today released *Changing Media: Public Interest Policies for the Digital Age*, a blueprint for action during this critical time. The new collection of reports focuses on three key areas of media reform: the Internet, journalism and public media.

#### THE INTERNET:

The Communications Act established openness, access and competition as guiding principles for 20th-century communications policy. But these rules of the road have come under assault by special interests and been weakened by a compliant Congress and Federal Communications Commission, placing the free and open Internet in jeopardy. As we consider policies for a new century and a drastically shifting media landscape, how can we revitalize openness, access and competition while also ensuring that the public interest remains paramount?

#### JOURNALISM:

Journalism is in crisis, as the institutions that once supported newsgathering have fallen under intense economic pressure, and struggled to adapt to new technologies and a changing audience. But all too often lost in the discussion of new business plans, declining profit margins and job cuts is any evaluation of which old policies contributed to journalism's decline, and which new ones could help reverse it. While newsgathering institutions may die off or evolve, one thing must endure: We need to sustain a corps of qualified working reporters who can deliver the news and information that is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy.

#### PUBLIC MEDIA:

Policies crafted in the late 1960s paved the way for a national network of local, noncommercial television and radio stations in service of praiseworthy goals — to serve the underserved, to provide a forum for a plurality of voices, to educate, inspire and inform. Media are now undergoing a historic transition from broadcasting to broadband that requires re-imagining and redefining public media to provide the new models for journalism, education, culture and community involvement that commercial media seldom deliver.

We have significant opportunities right now to change policies in these three areas; the right outcomes will benefit the lives of millions of people from all corners of society. Through discussions like the ones happening today, and the organizing and public outreach we do going forward, we have an unprecedented opportunity to remake American media.



# INTERNET

Congress passed and President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act earlier this year to jump-start the economy with a combination of new projects, grant programs, tax incentives and infrastructure building. The stimulus package included \$7.2 billion for improving Internet infrastructure and providing Internet service to more Americans. Rightly, Congress put delivery of these projects on a rapid timeline, with distribution of all Internet funds to occur by September 2010.

Congress tasked the Federal Communications Commission with a year-long effort to draft a national broadband plan. The plan will be delivered to Congress in February 2010 as a blueprint for future action. A top technical adviser to the new administration made it clear that the broadband stimulus is only one piece of the president's larger plan to make high-speed Internet access an essential part of our 21st-century communications infrastructure.

This process is now open for public input. Through it, we have a profound opportunity to make recommendations to the FCC and Congress that will guide Internet policymaking for the next generation. We have the potential to build a future where a fast, open and accessible Internet is woven into the very fabric of American society. The decisions we make now couldn't be more important.

To begin, we must consider one basic question: How

can better Internet policies restore America's technological leadership while ensuring that the public interest remains paramount?

## RESTORING THE PRINCIPLES

In *Changing Media: Public Interest Policies for the Digital Age*, Free Press identifies the three pillars of better Internet policy: access, openness and competition. The principles of universal access and openness (or "nondiscrimination") are among the central organizing ideas of the 1934 Communications Act, the foundation of all U.S. media and technology policy. While those principles were originally drafted for telephone and radio communications, they are no less relevant to the Internet.

The principle of competition was embodied in the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which empowered the FCC to impose rules that opened up legacy networks for use by competing providers. Congress crafted this pro-competition structure of the 1996 Act with the emerging Internet marketplace in mind.

Unfortunately, the three pillars of access, openness and competition have been undercut or dismantled over the past 13 years by the phone and cable industry with the help of an FCC bent on "promoting" competition by undermining it at every turn. In a painful irony, the regulatory structure

we pioneered in legislation but abandoned in practice was adopted successfully by many of the countries that have now leapfrogged past the United States in technology innovation and broadband adoption.

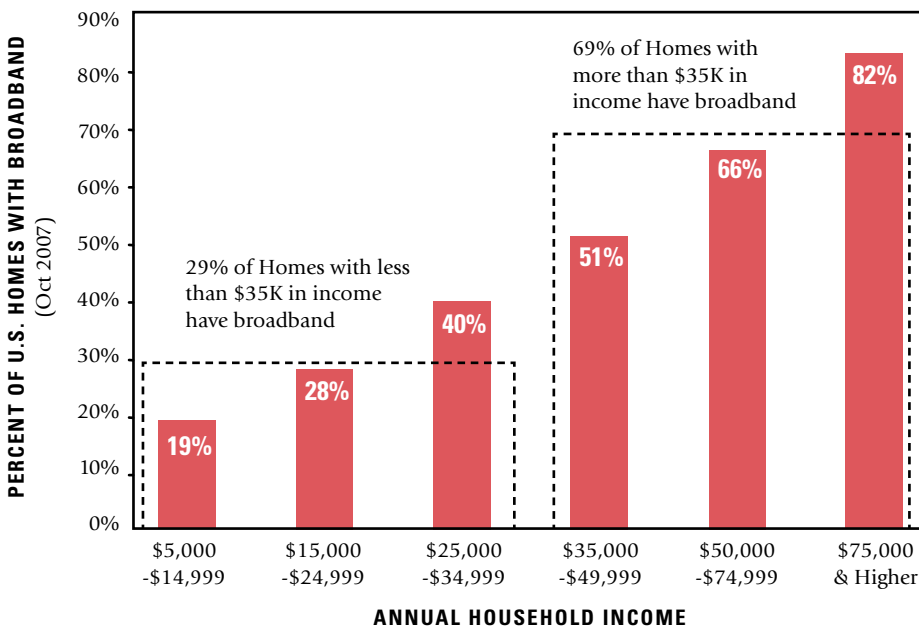
Under new leadership in Washington, we have the opportunity to restore America's Internet leadership by changing the policies that got us into this mess.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

To start our discussion about the right policy approaches, let's consider two questions:

1. How does access to a fast, affordable, open Internet impact you and your community?
2. What policies can Congress and the FCC pursue to make sure the Internet is more open, competitive and accessible?

## THE DIGITAL DIVIDE



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2007 Current Population Survey

## UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

**ACCESS:** Millions of Americans use the Internet on a regular basis for work or school, to stay in touch with friends, to find information and purchase goods and services. Still, approximately 40 percent of all U.S. homes are not connected to the Internet or use slow “dial-up” technology. Broadband subscribers are largely middle- or upper-class and living in urban or suburban areas. Poorer communities, people of color, and those living in rural settings have been largely left off the grid.

**OPENNESS:** A high-speed connection is useful only if you can connect to everyone else online. The principle of openness was built into the basic architecture of the Internet — leaving ultimate control over the Internet experience with the individual user. However, some network operators are considering charging extra money for users to go where they please or to do what they want online. Others want to sift through, filter and even block the content that users share online.

**COMPETITION:** The United States has fallen behind other developed nations when it comes to broadband speeds and prices. A substantial part of the problem is the lack of competition among broadband providers in local markets. With few real choices for high-speed Internet — at best, between the phone and cable company — Americans are left paying much more for connections that are far slower than what's available in Western Europe and Asia.

# JOURNALISM

Journalism is in crisis. The ways that people consume the news are changing so profoundly that the business models that once sustained traditional news production are collapsing. The migration of news audiences to a free-flowing Internet has led to declines in circulation, subscription and advertising revenues for traditional media. Falling revenues translate directly into budget cuts, layoffs, fewer journalists, and a lower-quality product.

While many blame the Internet for the demise of traditional news organizations, many of their wounds are self-inflicted. Over the past two decades, newsgathering corporations (aided by Congress and the FCC) have pursued consolidation instead of innovation. The short-term benefit of mergers has been an increase in revenue and market share. But the long-term consequences have been a mounting debt load and relentless shareholder pressure for steeper profit margins. Meeting Wall Street's expectations has become unsustainable, and quality journalism has paid the price.

It's true that technological change is destabilizing the traditional news marketplace. But it's also true that this change is encouraging remarkable experiments. Upstart news organizations are launching online with more efficient production and distribution models. The blogosphere is exploding with news and opinion of all kinds.

The crisis in journalism is not monolithic. It is a mistake, then, to prescribe one remedy to restore health to *all* of journalism. A solution will best be found in a combination of policies and initiatives.

## WHAT JOURNALISM NEEDS

What journalism needs most to survive is journalists – and lots of them. Newsgathering institutions may die off or evolve over time, but one constant must remain: We need to sustain a corps of qualified working reporters who can earn a living delivering the news and information that is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy.

News is a public good that has rarely paid for itself. During the 20th century, the model that happened to take root was one in which advertising subsidized news operations. That model is no longer working. But just because advertising no longer supports journalism does not mean that we no longer require news. We still need journalism, perhaps now more than ever. That means we must find a new means of subsidizing the press. And it is difficult imagining how this may occur without government getting involved in some capacity.

Our present moment is a turning point for modern journalism. We have the unique opportunity to reinvent the structures and policies needed to support the quality news and information we require to hold our leaders accountable, understand the world around us, and participate in our democracy.

## A NATIONAL JOURNALISM STRATEGY

To support journalists, new forms of reporting and new methods of distribution, we are going to need to think outside of current policy structures and beyond bailout

remedies that simply keep creaky business models afloat. We need to rethink journalism enterprises and consider models sustained by different revenue streams, new ownership structures, inventive policies and public investment.

Saving journalism is urgent, but it doesn't need to be haphazard. In *Changing Media: Public Interest Policies for the Digital Age*, Free Press outlines five guiding principles for a national journalism strategy:

- Protect the First Amendment
- Produce Quality Coverage
- Provide Adversarial Perspectives
- Promote Public Accountability
- Prioritize Innovation

These five principles should serve as a baseline for our broad consideration of policies and approaches that will help foster the journalism our democracy requires.

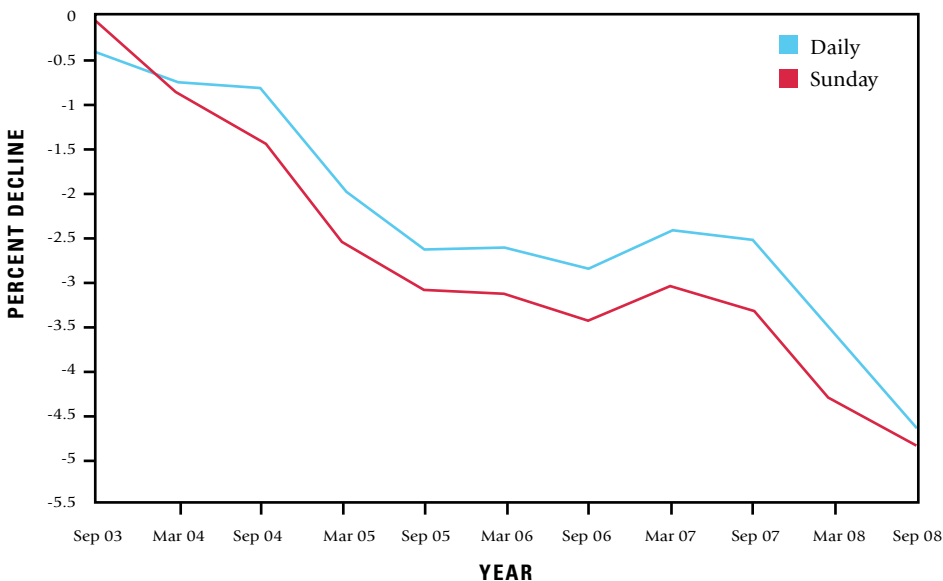
## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

To begin a discussion about the right policy approaches, let's consider two questions:

1. Why should we save journalism? How can we support newsgathering in the 21st century?
2. How can we foster much needed private-sector innovation, usher in new models, and elevate noncommercial alternatives while protecting journalistic independence?

## DAILY AND SUNDAY NEWSPAPER CIRCULATION DECLINES

Percent declines in circulation by six-month period



Source: Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism/Deutsche Bank Securities

## GUIDEPOSTS TO A NATIONAL JOURNALISM STRATEGY

### PROTECT THE FIRST AMENDMENT:

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are essential to a free society and a functioning democracy. Everyone should have the right to access and impart information and opinion through the media of their choice.

### PRODUCE QUALITY COVERAGE:

To self-govern in a democratic society, the public needs in-depth reporting that is accurate, credible and verifiable on local issues as well as national and international affairs.

### PROVIDE ADVERSARIAL PERSPECTIVES:

Reporting should hold the powerful accountable by scrutinizing the actions of government and corporations. Journalism should foster genuine debate.

### PROMOTE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY:

Newsrooms should serve the public interest, not private or government aims, and should be treated primarily as a public service, not a commodity. Journalism should be responsive to the needs of diverse and changing communities.

### PRIORITIZE INNOVATION:

Journalists should use new tools and technologies to report and deliver the news. The public needs journalism that crosses traditional boundaries and is accessible to the broadest range of people across platforms.

# PUBLIC MEDIA

The first Carnegie Commission on Public Television mapped a vision that led Congress to pass the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. This landmark legislation paved the way for a national network of local, noncommercial television and radio stations in service of praiseworthy goals — to serve the underserved, to provide a forum for a plurality of voices, to educate, inspire and inform.

Public broadcasting has not always realized the enormous potential envisioned at its founding. Some critics point to chronic underfunding and commercial pressures; others fault partisan political influence and an outdated governance structure. Still others blame slow adaptation to new media by local stations or the lack of programming for younger, more diverse audiences.

Yet recent public opinion surveys find public broadcasting to be No. 1 in public trust among America's public institutions, and it's considered "money well spent" by more than four out of five taxpayers. A poll by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting found that most Americans believe that public television provides high-quality programming that is more trustworthy, in-depth and less biased than any major commercial news network.

## PUTTING CONSENSUS TO WORK

Our challenge today is to move this consensus of support for public media toward a new concept of noncommercial media, one that embraces formats beyond broadcasting and supports outlets beyond the few recognized brands. In the 21st century, we need to reinvent public broadcasting

as a more robust and interactive "public media" system that can provide the journalism, education, culture and community involvement that commercial media seldom deliver. Instead of maintaining one of the lowest-funded public media systems in the developed world, we must raise the bar and join other global leaders in public media investment.

The key to succeeding where previous reform efforts have failed is in finding the right answers to the issues confounding the current structure:

- **SUPPORT.** How can we dramatically increase funding for public media?
- **LEADERSHIP.** How do we foster better governance while protecting public media from undue political and commercial influences?
- **TECHNOLOGY.** How can we embrace new digital technologies to expand distribution and increase collaboration?
- **DIVERSITY.** How do we broaden public media's audience, content and formats?
- **EXPANSION.** How can we redefine public media to reflect the variety of entities and individuals that create it?

Forty years after the Carnegie Commission, *Changing Media: Public Interest Policies for the Digital Age* calls on President Obama to establish a "White House Commission on Public

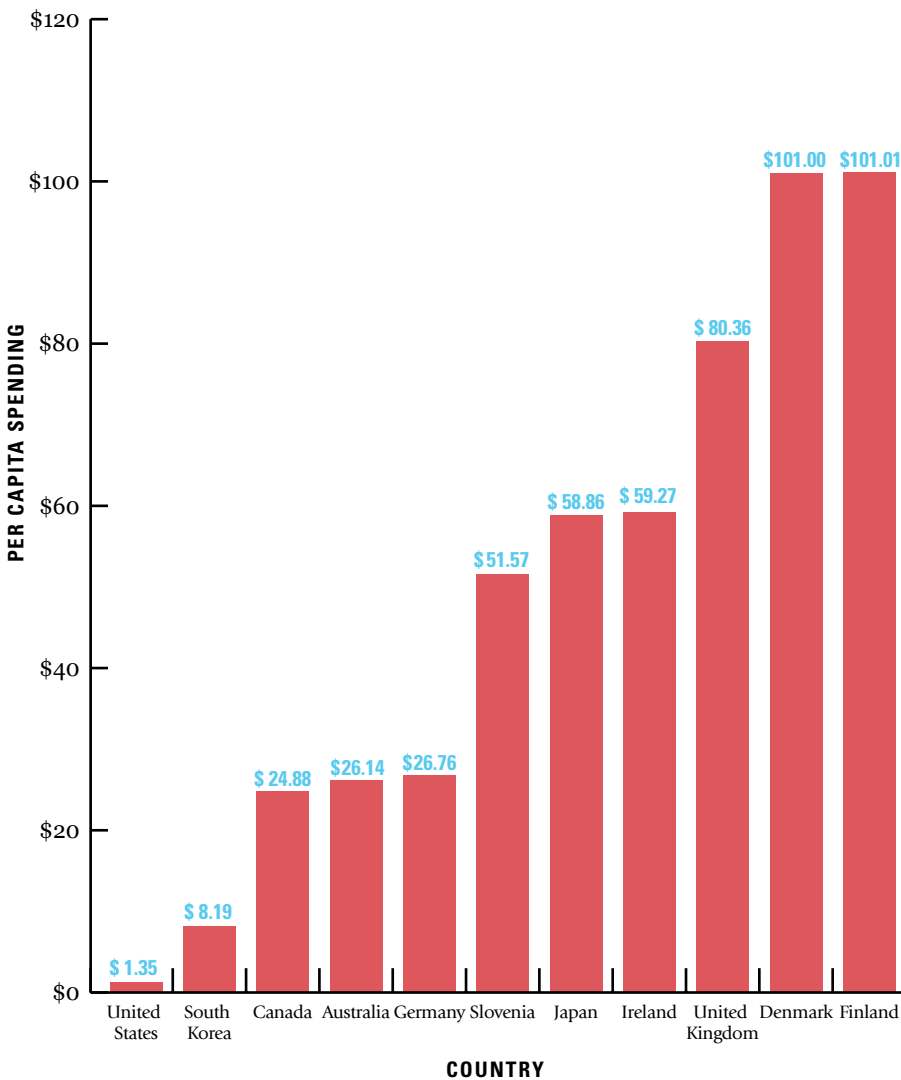
Media in the Digital Age.” Simultaneously, we need to solicit public input on what a vibrant new public media system should look like.

Creating a new public media system will require concrete policies and creativity, popular organizing and political savvy. This is a work in progress that will be refined through our feedback and discussion, beginning today.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the value of public media?
2. What actions should we take to reinvent public media in the digital age? What new policies do we need?

## GLOBAL SPENDING ON PUBLIC MEDIA



NOTE: In many countries, public media funding is derived from an annual government-mandated television license fee. In general, the total amount generated through this license fee for 2007 was divided by the population of the country for the same year. The currency was converted to U.S. dollars using the relevant exchange rate from January 15, 2009. The U.S. figure was calculated by relying on the money appropriated in 2005 for the 2007 fiscal year.

## WHAT PUBLIC MEDIA DO

**FOSTER ARTS, EDUCATION AND CULTURE:** Public media bring us educational, arts and cultural programming that is too often in short supply on commercial outlets.

**STRENGTHEN JOURNALISM:** As commercial journalism falters, with unprecedented layoffs and newsroom closures, public media can provide the hard-hitting, in-depth reporting and analysis that’s gone missing.

**ENGAGE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:** Democracy requires media that better inform the public and engage them in governance. Public media offer new avenues for debate, interaction and exchange.

**BUILD LOCAL COMMUNITY:** As public media move into the digital age, their potential to produce more diverse content and better engage local communities continues to grow. Community radio and television, independent producers and journalists all have important roles to play.

