

# MEDIA GIRAFFE Project

*Innovation for democracy;  
Standing above the crowd*

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NOTES OF PARTICIPANT BILL DENSMORE

## COMMISSION ON THE ROLE OF THE PRESS IN A DEMOCRACY

Part of the [Institutions of Democracy](#) project

Meeting held June 12-14, 2005 at the  
[Annenberg Public Policy Center](#) of the  
University of Pennsylvania  
Philadelphia, Penn.

### ACTIONS SUGGESTED / IDEAS HEARD

(References to June 14 list of Top 11 Propositions -- 28 respondents,  
and to June 10 pre-meeting "More Topics to Consider" handout)

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1. MARSHALL PLAN -- Charles Lewis, founder of the Center for Public Integrity, the largest non-profit investigative reporting organization in the world. Calls for a "Marshall Plan" by foundations to fund investigative journalism. Karen Brown Dunlap, president of the Poynter Institute. What type of help is needed to save journalism - reporting, funds for causes, for journalism, research? (PROPOSITION 8)
2. ETHNIC MEDIA NEWS-SHARE -- Sandy Close, Pacific News Service, has the idea "of doing an AP of ethnic media." (PROPOSITION 2) (TOPIC 1)
3. EXPAND CIVIC EDUCATION - Gloria Ladson-Billings, UW-Madison, says civic education has demonstrated success in improving student engagement in school and community life, bolstering academic performances and reducing negative behaviors. Methods include service learning and charter education. Need a collaborative which links schools, families, higher education, community organizations, philanthropic organizations, local government and the business and non-profit sectors in support of student success in civic learning and civic engagement. (TOPIC 3)
4. CHANGE NEWS FORMATS - Gloria Ladson-Billings, UM-Madison, observes that kids ID with Beavis and Butthead "information is provided in a human context by people to whom they can relate . . . there's a lot of political education in some of the situation comedies. That's civic education too, and it gets across." (PROPOSITION 2)

5. CHANGE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS: Ladson-Billings suggests that the best way to inject more civics education into high schools is to convince colleges to make it a part of their admissions requirements. High schools will always “teach to college requirements,” she believes.
6. INCLUDE CIVIC PROJECT IN HIGH SCHOOL -- David Mindich, St. Michael’s College, says his research finds “kids are deeply interested in politics.” He suggests all kids be given a “civic project” they must complete for graduation. Ladson-Billings agrees: “I think young people are deeply concerned about the real world. I think school is the unreal [part] . . . there’s no democratic participation in school . . . it’s an authoritarian structure, and it’s apparently a structure that parents like.”
7. SURVEY USE OF NEWSPAPERS IN CLASSROOM – Jim Naughton, retired Poynter Institute president, suggests get a scholar to survey the field and find out what impact the use of news materials in the classroom is having.
8. VISIBILITY FOR ACCOUNTABILITY EFFORTS -- Claude-Jean Bertrand, author, “Media Ethics and Accountability Systems”, professor emeritus, Institut Francais de Presse of the University of Paris, suggests a website which inventories/chronicles media-accountability systems worldwide, including ombudsmen, news councils, journalism review, and archives Codes of Ethics. Michigan State University journalism professor Stephen Lacy suggested the idea of a network of accountability sites. (TOPICS 4, 6, 8)
9. CORPORATE INCENTIVES REFORM -- Lawrence Mitchell, George Washington University Law School and author, “Corporate Irresponsibility: America’s Newest Export?” He says corporate boards have the ability to fix the problem by changing incentives. They should insulate managerial compensation from the moves of the stock market. Specific tax changes he recommends to change corporate behavior: Change accounting rules to make human-resource costs like training, salaries and benefits assets rather than expenses – meaning the assets go down if there are layoffs of high-value employees (in terms of training). Impose punitive taxes on short-term gains. This can be done on an industry-specific basis. Limit board terms to no more than five years. John Soloski, University of Georgia professor and dean, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, suggests that companies like Gannett and Knight Ridder to educate their stockholders about the need for other considerations besides profit maximization. (PROPOSITIONS 1 and 4)
10. WHAT SHOULD NEWS BE? -- Judy Woodruff, former White House reporter and anchor of CNN’s “Inside Politics” says news divisions with enough money should be produce stories, which make things understandable. They would spend more time out and around the country, and inside federal agencies, and looking at the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of government action and asking, ‘Are you getting what you should?’

11. BAD GOODS/GOVERNMENT REGULATION -- James Hamilton, Duke University professor of public policy, economics and political science, say predominance of process, drama and conflict news is evidence that the media industry is producing goods, which are not in the public interest. "In other industries, when there is overproduction of a negative good, that is a prima facie case for government intervention," Hamilton says.
12. RE-INVENT JOURNALISM PROFESSION -- William M. Sullivan of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, says journalism needs to reinvent its social contract with the public. He sees journalism's function as "mediating conflicting conversations so we can all live together." (PROPOSITION 7), (TOPIC 8, 9)
13. PRODUCT-DEVELOPMENT PUSH - Merrill Brown, former MSNBC.COM news chief and now head of a five-school journalism-education consortium calls for a serious, businesslike effort at product development, a re-engineering of how planning takes place in American news organizations. (PROPOSITIONS 2, 11), (TOPIC 2)
14. COMMUNITY INVESTMENT - Brown advises media to invest in community journalism, "because merchants are hungry for new ways to reach people.
15. AGGREGATE/SHARE - Jeff Jarvis, a consultant to the New York Times' About.Com, BuzzMachine.com blogger and former Advance Publications Internet chief, says media organizations need to aggregate and share multimedia content.
16. CHALLENGE AUTHORITY MORE? -- Timothy E. Cook, mass-communication and political-science professor at Louisiana State University says his research shows that, "As adversarial questions go up at presidential press conferences, confidence in the press goes up." (PROPOSITION 7)
17. LOOK FOR SUCCESSES - Jeff Jarvis says industry should be looking for and tracking success stories, in new or old media. (TOPIC 5)
18. FAITH AND SOCIETY - Jane Kirtley, professor of media ethics and law at University of Minnesota and former director, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, advises looking at how the media are reaching, or can reach, people of faith.