

MEDIA GIRAFFE Project

*Innovation for democracy;
Standing above the crowd*

<http://www.mediagiraffe.org>

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Proposal

Newshare Commons: Journalist-guided, social news net in libraries, cafes, public spaces

Describe the Newshare Commons project:

The Newshare Common marries the best features of online and real-world social networking, seeding and leading “citizen newsrooms” in libraries, cafes, country stores, museums, campus unions or community centers in a contiguous geography.

Using a circuit-riding professional reporter as teacher, curator, collaborator, convenor (details: <http://tinyurl.com/y9fuasl>) community newshares advance civic conversation by giving people more opportunity to invent and embed journalism as part of their daily lives. In the physical places they already visit, they build relationships and explore local issues.

Open-source collaboration and social-networking technology stitches together the contributions from physical newshares within the reporter’s circuit to create a hyperlocal digital mix of stories, multimedia and feeds.

Each space includes an LCD screen scrolling a package of headlines, photos, discussions and news “nutgrafs.” Three or four such packages rotate onto the screen every 10 minutes -- the equivalent of the old town crier, fed by hyperlocal, not national, sources. Screens show the running discussion and work of the new newsrooms.

The professional journalist teaches writing and reporting, curates submission quality, collaborates with volunteer reporters and convenes conversations and formal issues forums. The professional is a circuit rider, spending three hours twice a week at each site in his area.

The Commons widens the civic conversation, by drawing in other people who visit the locations in which the citizen newsrooms are placed. During its first developmental phase, Newshare will be beta tested in contiguous rural communities in Western Massachusetts and Southern Vermont; a suburban district of greater Atlanta; and in urban neighborhoods of Miami, Fla.

How will Newshare Commons improve the way news and information are delivered to geographic communities?

The Newshare Commons sites, as they emerge in other communities, will catalyze a new dynamic in public awareness and in public affairs. Through the guidance of a Newshare Commons staffer at each community site, a core of citizen newshounds will evolve, thus widening the circle of news providers, news sources, diversity of viewpoints, and creating a lively information environment that nurtures a sense of civic empowerment and engagement. This is more than a virtual news community. At the Newshare citizens' newsrooms, the community can convene a universally available, reliable local online news and information stream, that invites widespread public participation through a social networking Web platform designed for news sites.

How is your idea innovative? (new or different from what already exists)

The Newshare Commons is unique in bringing the virtual world of blogging and Web news into the physical world where the news of and commentary about local events, trends, municipal decisions and leaders, culture and education can become a real-time community conversation. The goal of Newshare Commons is to ignite civic engagement, a spark existing not only in the Website content provided by citizen journalists but also because it is in full view -- in the front windows of coffeehouses, in library community rooms, bookstores, community information kiosks, in the roundtables at country or urban stores, in a corner of a campus student union: wherever the process of transmitting news and information can be made tangible and transparent.

What unmet needs does your proposal answer?

Digital natives engaged with news, information and each other bypass legacy media's selection, editing, aggregation, platforms and place-based foundations. These participants link 24/7 via mobile devices, laptops and emerging platforms. Yet social-network adoption demonstrates they yearn for a community of shared, relevant, credible information and news. Newshare Commons will embed placed-based communities within these new platforms via face-to-face meetings, forums and one-to-one mentoring. NC will use and invent spaces. Trained news mentors, practicing ethics, accountability and transparency will guide these community information hubs.

What tasks/benchmarks need to be accomplished to develop your project and by when will you complete them?

- a. Month 1: Appoint executive director who combines legacy daily and community media experience with appreciation for new-media technologies and practices.

- b. Month 2: Identify sustainability strategies and requirements for implementation. We are working with Avanoo Inc. and VillageSoup.com to implement community or network-publishing platforms that embrace group (Avanoo) and community commerce (VillageSoup) features.
- c. Month 2: Partner to deliver a first-generation technology platform that will power Newshare Commons web and mobile sites, social networking, advertising, commerce and other services. Choose a partner with an existing code base that can be quickly and inexpensively adapted to the unique needs of NC online-offline communities and workflows. (Iterations will be continuous)
- d. Month 3: Hiring “circuit-riding” news mentors (a/k/a reporters) to moderate Newshare Commons sites, recruit, engage, energize and train volunteer community journalists. Mentors will have demonstrated organizing skills and familiarity with emerging local online news community services.
- e. Month 4: Develop a training program for volunteers, using a customized version of UMass Amherst’s Certificate of Online Journalism, a well-developed distance-learning initiative to help train volunteer journalists.
- f. Month 5: Launch Newshare Commons sites in our three geographic venues (rural/Berkshires, Mass., suburban/Atlanta, metro/Seattle)
- g. Month 6: Deploy first-iteration of sustainability strategies. These will include advertising, sponsorships, mini-sites for businesses, event hosting, and memberships.
- h. Month 7: Name a site manager for each geographic venue to take ownership of sustainability strategies.
- i. Months 7-12: Incorporate Newshare Commons into the fabric of the civic life through coverage of local issues, events, trends; its development of a core of citizen journalists; and its partnership with other media, including public radio and community radio outlets.

What will you have changed by the end of your project?

The Knight Commission on Information Needs of Communities recommends that every community have an “information hub.” Newshare Commons will create “spokeless” hubs which link physical spaces with best-of-breed social-networking technologies in communities where no legacy media exists or where the legacy media is not able, or willing, to engage.

By the end of the project trial phase, we will have demonstrated:

- Newshare Commons (NC) can dissolve the barriers between the digital world and the physical world, merging one with the other in accessible information resource centers that engage citizens to share a news and information distribution network. Information delivered via the Web and mobile seems tangible and immediate because it is connected in the participants’ minds through known physical places and groups.
- A replicable model for successful online-offline communities around news and places. Newshare Commons will demonstrate a cost-effective way of catalyzing such communities.

- A bridging of the unproductive divide between traditional and social media.
- A method for inviting the community into a larger conversation about itself.
- Created a new egalitarian culture of local news and information creation and distribution in which ordinary citizens can participate.
- A news environment that matches the ways Americans increasingly access information, thereby extending the availability of civic discourse, and in the process establishing vital centers of civic engagement that are embedded in people's daily lives — in coffee houses, bookshops, libraries, schools, stores, etc.
- NC will have introduced to public officials – elected and appointed – a new kind of news and information platform to which they must answer and contribute, as they would to traditional media.

How will you measure progress and ultimately success?

- a. Polls/surveys will document that NC's are viewed as trusted information hubs by citizens and public officials.
- b. Each Newshare Commons site (coffee shop, library, school, public space) has at least one volunteer community reporter in charge and a network of contributors.
- c. A lightweight, participatory organizational structure exists for recruiting, training and appointing volunteer reporters in each NC site.
- d. A business structure is evolving to sustain each NC beyond the trial period whether by advertising, sponsorship, donations, grants, subscriptions, fundraisers or ancillary services, on a for-profit or non-profit basis.
- e. One or more NC's have formed independent, local ownership structures which try innovative, mission-driven forms such as cooperatives, associations or low-profit, limited-liability corporations (L3C).
- f. Partnerships and information-sharing relationships exist between NC, legacy media, public and nongovernmental organizations and groups.
- g. NC's facilitate discussion and resolution of civic issues as measurable by the number of meetings convened on a monthly basis, and their outcomes.
- h. Standard, simple metrics and technologies measure and track quantity and quality of NC services, whether by number of users, page views, comments, frequency of posts, multimedia, feeds, tweets, issues addressed or subject-matter impact.
- i. The NC trial results in requests nationwide for mentoring support to form additional community information hubs.

Do you see any risk in the development of your project?

- **Trust commitments.** Newshare Commons' "trust commitment" is to independent, fact-based reporting by identified sources, signed analysis and opinion which reveals bias or personal interests, and prompt, transparent handling of complains. A shortage of volunteers, or overcommitment by the news mentor may jeopardize this commitment.
- **Mission alignment.** As Newshare Commons hubs become more active, cultivating and maintaining alignment with venues may become a challenge. The NC mission might interfere with a host place's business objectives. Or a host may become concerned about the effect on business of controversial points of view or inaccurate reporting.
- **Speech challenges.** Hosting of Newshare Commons by libraries and other municipal facilities could lead to unfortunate free-speech misunderstandings. It will be critical to anticipate and deliberately establish acceptable practices that respect First Amendment values as well as the need for government to remain neutral.
- **Unreasonable expectations.** NC could invite a level of time commitment, training and performance on the part of paid news mentors and volunteer reporters that may be not be sustainable over time. Management for the long haul is important.
- **Legacy competition.** Newshare Commons may be viewed as competitive by existing news and advertising providers who do not choose to partner. The Commons must maintain a policy of non-interference with, cooperation and respect toward other providers.
- **Insufficient revenues.** Anticipated revenue and contribution sources may not develop quickly enough to sustain trial hubs beyond the grant period. By tracking spending and revenues carefully and in near real time, we will have enough time to take appropriate actions.

What is your marketing plan? How will people learn about what you are doing?

The marketing of Newshare Commons (NC) will proceed on two levels: (a) a national awareness-building effort among proponents of journalism and civic engagement; and, (b) feet-on-the-street, engagement and partnerships within each Newshare Commons regional hub.

NATIONAL AWARENESS

1. Establish a national advisory board composed of representatives of journalism and civic-engagement groups and institutions.

2. Undertake writing and speaking about NC; including preparation of multimedia “how-to” materials for establishing a community information hub.
3. Help lead a national dialog and assessment process about the information needs of communities.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

- a. Acceptance requires that NC be of, by and for the community. We start local, with town meetings to discuss information needs of community.
- b. Signage in venues to indicate that NC is coming soon. Flyers explaining what NC is in venues. Link to a Web site for more information.
- c. In Berkshires, alliance with WAMC 90.3 FM Northeast Public Radio, WFCR-Five College Radio (NPR-Amherst, Mass.), WBCR-LP, Great Barrington, Mass., and WBTV-AM 1370 in Bennington, Vt., to co-market and co-brand NC. Agreement from some of our physical venues to feature broadband-enabled, large-format LCD displays that feature continuous NC feeds to be mounted in storefront windows.
- d. In suburban Atlanta, a partnership with the Center for Sustainable Journalism at Kennesaw State University to help develop a NC hub in Marietta, Ga.; a partnership with Paulding.com to experiment with integrating NC into an existing commercial local online news community.
- e. In metropolitan Seattle, an alliance with Seattle Commons (created as an initiative of the Journalism That Matters-Pacific Northwest) to seed and support Seattle Newshare Commons.

Is this a one-time experiment or do you think it will continue after the grant?

The Newshare Commons project is intended to set up a replicable and sustainable organization that fosters participation in journalism, re-engages citizens in civic discourse, and brings together the best of both online and offline interactions. Phase I is developmental; Phase II is distributing and sustaining the model, modified by the lessons learned during its developmental stage.

Phase I will established a vital news ecology for citizens and a replicable model for other communities in three trial venues – rural Berkshire County, Mass., suburban Atlanta, and urban Seattle. We anticipate this model, already being deployed commercially in the Czech Republic, will spread virally throughout the country. Therefore a Phase I objective Newshare Commons, besides supporting the trial regions, is to assemble a strategy for supporting what could be rapid growth of both the model and organization. While the convening entity will be non-profit or cooperatively owned and its intellectual property “open source,” the local entities which form and join the network may involve a mix of non-profit and for-profit entrepreneurial talents and structures.

We will secure partnerships with existing media at each Newshare Commons site, establish relationships with local officials and train a core of participants. Citizens will be

depending upon the Newshare Commons information hubs. Having demonstrated value within communities, Newshare Commons will be in a position to monetize aspects of its model. Precedents for advertiser-supported information hubs even without place-based alliances include Front Porch Forum in Burlington, Vt., VillageSoup.com in Camden-Rockland, Maine, BaristaNet in Montclair, N.J., West Seattle Blog in Washington state and Paulding.com, Paulding County, Ga.

If it is to be self-sustainable, what is the plan for making that happen?

Newshare Commons anticipates a mix of profit/non-profit network collaboration. Beyond the seed grant phase, Newshare Commons may incorporate independently of the Media Giraffe Project at UMass Amherst as a 501(c)3 non-for-profit, a cooperative or a low-profit, limited-liability corporation (L3C). Any otherwise proprietary work and intellectual property will be available in open source and Creative Commons licensing as required by the Knight News Challenge. However, we believe the profit motive may help speed adoption of the Newshare Commons service by existing local online news communities and the creation of new local Newshares. Thus we will not dictate their corporate form.

By whatever form, we project these revenue streams or program-related income:

Advertising/sponsorship. Local advertisers and sponsors are quickly embracing community news hubs which have a commitment to provide selling tools, platforms and marketing expertise. Newshare Commons will acquire the resources to assist and expect to share ratably in revenues.

Memberships. Newshares can offer memberships entitling the user to discounts at retailers, free private-party advertising, premium information services and discounted or free invitation to events.

Underwriting. Not-for-profit Newshares can solicit underwriting grants.

Partnerships. Legacy and non-legal publishing, entertainment and service companies might pay for permissioned-access to Newshare Commons members as a method for faster penetration of local markets.

National network. As technology is deployed enabling shared-user networks across the web, Newshare Commons could help to promote and clear transactions among local Commons based on content sales and advertising views – taking a clearing fee.



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Dear Mr. Zamora:

I write to confirm that the University of Massachusetts is prepared to serve as fiscal sponsor for "The Newshare Commons Project: Journalist-guided, social-news net in libraries, cafes and public spaces." I would undertake Newshare Commons as sponsored academic research and would serve as academic principal investigator, as I have with The Media Giraffe Project.

INITIAL PROPOSAL: <http://tinyurl.com/yacnxdn>

The Newshare Commons Project will be administered as an initiative of the Media Giraffe Project and we will seek some additional contingent matching funds for it beyond seed funding from the Knight Foundation.

In its initial three-year scope, the Media Giraffe Project worked to find and spotlight people making innovative, sustainable use of media to foster participatory democracy and community.

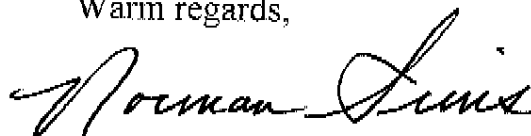
We've build an interactive database of "Giraffe prospects," have helped conduct a half dozen national and regional conferences as fiscal sponsor of the Journalism That Matters collaborative, are working on ways to integrate what we've learned into news- and media-literacy curricula, and have

received preliminary approval from the Northwestern University Press for a book featuring MGP profiles.

The Newshare Commons initiative would move MGP into a new phase implementing many of the ideas we have studied, discussed and profiled. We would view it as a one-year to 18-month initiative. It would be spun out as an independent non-profit or added to a related operating organization upon successful trial completion.

Thank you for allowing me, Bill Densmore and David Scribner to more fully develop this proposal. Please encourage reviewers to call me if they have any questions.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Norman Sims". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Norman Sims, Professor
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Date: Sat, 30 Jan 2010 16:14:20 -0800
From: Mike Fancher <fanch@mikefancher.com>
To: Bill Densmore <mediagiraffe@journ.umass.edu>
Cc: David Scribner-441-4307 <dscrib@verizon.net>
Subject: Re: NEXT STEPS: Letters etc. to line up for Newshare Commons application

I'd be happy to be listed as an advisor, so that things can move forward.

Here's a mini-bio:

Mike Fancher retired from The Seattle Times last year after 20 years as executive editor. During his tenure as executive editor The Times won four Pulitzer Prizes and was a Pulitzer finalist 13 other times. He served as a 2008-2009 Donald W. Reynolds Fellow in the Missouri School of Journalism, focusing on journalism ethics in the digital age. He is chairman of the ethics committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, vice president of the Washington Coalition for Open Government and member of an advisory committee to the Fordham University Graduate School of Business. In 2009, the Western Washington Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists presented Fancher its award for Distinguished Service to Journalism.