



THE MEETING OF TWO CULTURES

PUBLIC TELEVISION ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE DIGITAL AGE

**A Report of
Carnegie Corporation
of New York**



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OF THE DIGITAL AGE**



Sponsored by Carnegie Corporation of New York

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Introduction

“This Report of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television is addressed to the American people.”

That is how the members of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television began their landmark 1967 report, *Public Television: A Program for Action*. The report concluded that the American people urgently needed—indeed, deserved—a high-quality educational television system free of commercial economic constraints that would serve audiences “ranging from the tens of thousands to the occasional tens of millions.” The report’s recommendations were adopted into the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967. A subsequent Carnegie Commission report, *A Public Trust*, published in 1979, addressed the progress and problems that had emerged in the intervening years and set out a series of recommendations to strengthen public broadcasting and advance its mission into the future.

In endorsing the creation of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, then-president Lyndon B. Johnson articulated the connection between the vigor of our democracy and the need for the American public to be informed about the issues affecting both the United States and our global neighbors. He said, “From our beginnings as a nation, we have recognized that our security depends upon the enlightenment of our people; that our freedom depends on the communication of many ideas through many channels. [Hence,] I believe that educational television has an important future in the United States and throughout the world.”

Now, more than forty years later, public broadcasting finds itself at a crossroads. In an era marked by a seemingly limitless explosion of information and an equally dizzying and sophisticated array of digital and other technologies, along with interactive media platforms for delivering that information twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (whether we want it or not), it seemed an appropriate time to once again focus on the role of public media in our national life. And since the Corporation was involved in the creation of public broadcasting, we felt it was important for us to continue to contribute to its vitality by bringing together PBS leaders with policymakers, educators, journalists, philanthropists and others to consider the many questions to be asked and answered about how public broadcasting will continue to both evolve and thrive in the years ahead.

There is no visible horizon on the media landscape; new developments are constantly appearing and the competition for the attention and the support of both the American and international audience is fierce. And yet, despite these challenges, the

fundamental mission of public broadcasting remains unquestionably relevant: how can the power of media be used most effectively to enrich and enhance the public good? The conversation that began in November 2007 at the Carnegie Corporation meeting on *Public Broadcasting: The Digital Challenge* is only a beginning. Many innovative ideas were presented and certainly, there will be many more to come. We look forward to a continuing dialogue among those who value public broadcasting and are dedicated to its future. ■■

VARTAN GREGORIAN

President, Carnegie Corporation of New York

Public Broadcasting: *the* Digital Challenge

FORTY YEARS AFTER THE REPORT OF THE CARNEGIE COMMISSION ON EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

Public television might never have come into existence in the United States had it not been for the intervention of two powerful foundations: the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Corporation. In 1951, eleven years and a world war after the introduction of regular television broadcasting (all of it commercial), the Ford Foundation began an ambitious program to help finance educational television (ETV), as it was known at the time. The first ETV station, KUHT, was founded at the University of Houston in 1953. By the time Ford finally ended its program—more than twenty-five years and \$300 million later—280 stations were in operation and they were known as public television stations. Carnegie Corporation, the second foundation to intervene, was also very influential in the development of public TV. In the three-year period between 1965 and 1968, the Corporation launched two initiatives, the first, the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television (1965 to 1967), paved the way for public broadcasting to be given formal existence and status as well as proper philosophical and structural foundations; the second, Carnegie Corporation's major contribution to the creation of the Children's Television Workshop, led to the launch of Sesame Street and the beginning of public television's hard-earned reputation for quality programming in areas not properly served by commercial television. Preschool programming was the first, and arguably the most important, of these endeavors.

The Public Broadcasting Act was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on November 7, 1967. The law was clearly based on the Carnegie Commission report but differed from it in crucially important details—it called for no excise tax on television sets with which to finance public broadcasting and no independent members of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (instead, all nine were to be named by the president of the United States, not more than five from each party). As a result, public television's forty-year odyssey has been characterized by a number of highs, a number of lows and a good deal of angst. The highs have been programming successes, most notably a raft of fresh new series in the early days, which did exactly what public television had been



Alberto Ibarguen and Vartan Gregorian

invented to do—fill some of the gaps in what was then, for most people, a four- or five-channel marketplace. There have been other, more recent, high points, among them Ken Burns’ *The Civil War* and Henry Hampton’s *Eyes on the Prize*, but these have come less frequently and with much greater effort as the marketplace has grown at breakneck speed to the 100-plus channels most Americans now enjoy. The lows have almost all resulted from public television’s inevitable treatment as a political football, which is the penance to be paid for receiving part of its funding (about 16 percent) from the federal trough. The angst has almost always been financial, caused by public television’s chronic underfunding compounded by a business plan that may once have been adequate but does not work in a cable and satellite world, let alone a digital one.

So it might not be altogether surprising, forty years and one week after the signing of the Public Broadcasting Act, to find Carnegie Corporation hosting another meeting about public broadcasting. According to Susan King, Carnegie Corporation vice president of external affairs, this meeting is not prompted by nostalgia or the need to create a congratulatory moment, nor is it driven by an urge to hold an investigation or an inquiry. Rather, it is founded in the knowledge that public television is on the threshold of a new age—the digital age—in which broadcasters will be part of a much larger, less exclusive, more participatory media environment. This environment is largely made up of broadband carriers, of which broadcasting is one, but no longer the most powerful one, and it is a media environment to which every person in every country will one day have access.

If this is the obvious reason for convening the meeting, then there may also be another more speculative reason—the notion that the digital world may be just the sort of place in which public television can come into its own, fulfilling the prophecy of President Lyndon Johnson who, as he signed the Act, anticipated a future in which public broadcasting would play an important role in building “a great network for knowledge.”

I believe the time has come to enlist the computer and the satellite, as well as television and radio, and to enlist them in the cause of education. ...

So I think we must consider new ways to build a great network for knowledge—not just a broadcast system, but one that employs every means of sending and storing information that the individual can use.

So, forty years on, Carnegie Corporation has invited some of the critical thinkers and actors in public television's transition to the digital age—national leaders from the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) and a bevy of station managers—as well as a group of “informed outsiders” with practical knowledge of public television over many years. The meeting is held under the auspices of the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education, so the list of attendees also includes deans from some of the nation's leading journalism schools.



“This great public force dedicated to public service” is how Vartan Gregorian, President of Carnegie Corporation, refers to public broadcasting in his opening remarks. And he should know: During 1992 and 1993, when he was president of Brown University, Gregorian dedicated a lot of time and effort to chairing the Twentieth Century Fund's Task Force on Public Television. His influence can clearly be seen in its radical and reasoned report.¹ Indeed, the report was far too radical for public television at the time, calling for major restructuring so that far more of the available resources, including all federal monies, would be put into national programming rather than station upkeep, and recommending that federal funding be dramatically increased by giving public broadcasting a share of the proceeds of spectrum auctions or spectrum usage fees. It was then (and it remains) a passionately argued case for strengthening public television and, where necessary, for rethinking and refashioning it in preparation for the digital revolution already on the horizon. “Now is the defining moment,” read the epilogue to the report; “public television stations cannot afford to be merely passive and reactive, as has sometimes been the case in the past. The nation has made an investment in them, and it has a right to know that that investment will yield rich dividends in the future. Local communities have also made investments: they, too, must know what services their local public television stations will render them.” In its final paragraph the Task Force report quoted Newton Minow's 1991 address at Columbia University on the thirtieth anniversary of the speech in which, as FCC chairman, he had described American commercial television as a “vast wasteland.” Those two words were what the

¹ Quality Time? The Report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Public Television (The Twentieth Century Fund Press, New York: 1993).

speech was remembered for, but the two words he had wanted remembered, Minow said, were public interest. “To me, the public interest meant, and still means, that we should constantly ask: What can television do for our country? For the common good? For the American people?”

It is that idea to which Gregorian returns, fifteen years later, in his opening remarks to the digital challenge meeting—the importance, and the undervaluing of the public interest and the public sector in American life. Seventy-five to eighty percent of the nation’s talent, he points out, comes from, or through, the public sector, yet we take the sector for granted and, in so doing, we imperil it. Public broadcasting is a good example: 110 million Americans make use of its radio and television together, Gregorian has been told, compared to the 60 to 70 million served by the private-sector cable industry. Yet in national communications policy and legislation, cable has a gigantic voice, and a very influential one, while public broadcasting has almost none, except when fighting for its life. “Why are you acting as defendants? Or mendicants? ... You are a big force: act accordingly.”

Gregorian and his meeting co-chair, Alberto Ibarguen, president of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and former chairman of the PBS Board, encourage attendees to speak candidly and directly. “It’s not a funding day, so don’t make pitches. Give us sound analysis so we—and all other foundations and government authorities—can see how we can help to preserve public television.”

The National Perspective

Paula Kerger has been president of the Public Broadcasting Service since March 2006. PBS is the membership organization jointly owned by the 168 licensees who operate the nation’s 355 public television stations, so the President of PBS may truly be described as



Paula Kerger

public television’s leader. The position gives her enormous responsibility, including the charge that she deliver a national program service that is excellent, distinctive and competitive—although, to do this, she is provided a sum of money that is paltry by the standards of commercial television. In the financial year that ended June 30 2007, published accounts show that PBS spent a total of \$368 million on all its programming responsibilities, approximately 3,700 hours in all. The biggest part of this—2,500 hours—is known as the National Program Service (NPS). It includes all the prime-time programming as well as the



Lawrence Grossman

preschool children's programming, and is what the stations rely on most; some say they would be nothing without it (that *public television* would be nothing without it).

In the commercial world, at a very conservative estimate, such programming might be valued anywhere between \$1 billion and \$3 billion. Yet the total amount that PBS's 168 member stations are able to subscribe to it is \$135 million, and even that amount is a stretch for them. The rest of the \$368 million has to be scraped together from sponsors and grantmakers (an endangered species where public television is concerned), and there

are frequent, increasingly desperate resorts to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) for federal money to replace missing sponsors. CPB, however, by law, has to send 89 percent of its \$400 million allocation from Congress directly to public radio and television stations in the form of Community Service Grants, which doesn't leave much for its educational services, its mandate to promote diversity and its essential research and development projects, let alone for mainstream programming.

Sharon Rockefeller knows this all too well. She runs WETA in Washington, D.C., one of the system's three national producing stations. "I worry about the adequacy of our national program content, and the funding of it," she says. What we need is much more inspiring content, much more audacious content. And the two sources of funding that are drying up, and terrifyingly so, are corporate and foundation funding. Each has gone in a different direction from public television; the order of magnitude of their separation and loss is shocking."

One of Paula Kerger's predecessors, Larry Grossman, is also at the table. He ran PBS in its heyday in the late 1970s, before he went off to become president of NBC News, and he echoes Sharon Rockefeller's worries about prime-time programming. "We're still talking about the same mainstay programs we were twenty, thirty, even forty years ago. It's time to move on, to regenerate a sense of public excitement by saying 'here are the programs, the specific programs, we would like to produce,' the great canon of American drama, the great dance programs, and so on," says Grossman. "And then we'll figure out how to fund it, and how to promote it, and how to excite people about it."

Throughout the meeting, although many people make suggestions about national programming, no one helps Paula Kerger and Sharon Rockefeller to fund it. Eli Evans,

who played a part in the first Carnegie Commission and was a member of the second Commission (1978–79), puts it very simply: “It’s not resources, it’s ideas that raise the money. And what’s really needed... is the great idea.” Vartan Gregorian is quick to agree, and he and Evans put forward immigration and illiteracy as two such ideas, closely related major needs that we can carry as a national challenge to the federal government, the Congress, to governors, foundations and corporations. “Corporations will be happy to [offer] support because the nation is asking for their help,” they contend. Evans argues that using digital technology and public broadcasting, with all its related platforms, to see immigration issues from both sides—the immigrants’ and the authorities’—would be a huge contribution to an issue that underlies so much of American life, the sort of big idea that is needed to give public broadcasting the place in American life it really deserves.

In the meantime, why is it that corporations and foundations have increasingly pulled away from public television? Is it because there are no “big ideas” around? On the contrary, says Sharon Rockefeller; the fact is that it’s becoming difficult to find funding even for a Ken Burns series. “Foundations have their agendas ... our programs have to match their agendas, or help them fulfill a goal.” David Haas, who is chairman of the William Penn Foundation in Philadelphia and whose family foundation is deeply involved in public broadcasting, agrees, though he thinks a big enough national issue would bring foundations out in force. Corporations, however, have a different philosophy and motivation: “they are geared toward marketing outreach; they are much more about PR,” he says. Controversy is another problem: Rockefeller and Gregorian agree that no corporation, and very few foundations, will touch subject matter that may become controversial. And there is the simple matter of turnover: a new president takes over at a corporation or foundation and wants to do something for which he (or she) can take the credit. “Corporations now commit to three months, six months, not the three years we used to have, for example, on the *NewsHour*,” says Rockefeller.

Foundation giving is a field in which Vartan Gregorian has a great deal of experience, as both grantor and grantee. He acknowledges public television’s need to bring together a consortium of foundations (and maybe corporations, too) to address its national programming needs. He points out that very few foundations have public television as a priority, but they all have their own focuses—the environment, healthcare, community, education, and so on. Public television deals with all these concerns, Gregorian points out; it is the common link, which is why it might be possible to bring together a group of foundations with many different priorities around it. Others in the foundation business like David Haas agree, but they make it clear that such a consortium cannot be built on the basis of 20- or 30-year-old programs. The schedule must look and feel new and exciting.



Susan King

nothing! ... Why not put it as an obligation? There are 2,300 TV stations in our colleges and universities; why not make them adjuncts to public television, make them auxiliary members?" Then, says Gregorian, they will have a stake in public television, which will be in a position to put pressure on them to use their endowments for its support.

Paula Kerger admits that "our biggest challenge is finding the financial model to sustain us," but she points out that her first eighteen months at PBS have coincided with the most exciting developments in public television's forty-year history—the last stages of digital transition and the early stages of harnessing digital technology to the needs and purposes of public television. This is going to be the key to public television's future, she says, to its reach, its programming, and its funding potential. She emphasizes the importance of the local mission in ensuring that the individual stations "emerge from the final stage of this digital transition as vital and engaged partners in the communities they serve" and she communicates some of her own excitement at the opportunities that are emerging for public television to do things in new digital ways. "The barrier of entry to create content is significantly different than it has been. What we need to be willing to do is to seize that opportunity, to take risks, and to understand that to take risks you have to be willing to occasionally fail." That's hard in an organization where financial margins are so narrow, but the challenges of the multiplatform environment are not limited to finance. "Anyone who has worked through the issues of user-generated content recognizes that this is complicated territory," she says. "We are focused very much on issues of editorial independence and integrity."

This is an important area for a number of people around the table, particularly Alberto Ibargüen of the Knight Foundation, which has taken a leading role in

Foundations are not generally willing to be long-term funders, Gregorian stresses. He likens Carnegie Corporation to "an incubator rather than an oxygen tank, because we have many things to do. We stay with you, we shepherd you, but if you're fifteen years old we don't want you still to be in a crib in need of milk. Get up and walk!" And, as someone who has been responsible for raising a vast endowment (at Brown University), he proposes that universities, with their huge endowments, should be challenged to make use of them to support public broadcasting. "Suppose every major university every year gives \$10 million for program support, or \$20 million. That's

development of new media. Speaking as “a former newspaper publisher and a former chairman of PBS, and as a control freak,” Iburgüen says, “I think a major issue is: how do you let go of editorial control? How do you equate your need to have editorial control, traditionally required to maintain those standards of objectivity, even-handedness and lack of bias that are so central to your mission,” he asks, “with the new media’s apparent requirement that you let the user have a kind of control?”

Getting the Story Across

Forty years ago, there was no real doubt about public television’s mission and purpose. The Carnegie Commission concisely summed it up in a sentence: public television should “include all that is of human interest and importance that is not at the moment appropriate or available for support by advertising.” But that statement was made in the days when there were three commercial networks and very little else on the dial, and cable TV was in its infancy. Now the situation seems very different to Richard Wald, who teaches journalism at Columbia University and whose distinguished career in network television news has covered the whole lifespan of public television. “What is the mission? I have 500 channels at home, God help me, and I can see things that used to be on *Masterpiece Theatre* on A&E or Bravo ... I get BBC America and all kinds of stuff from National Geographic and other channels that once upon a time had a home on public television. ...” Wald wants to know, does this still leave room for a mission for public television?

Not surprisingly, public television professionals are quick to respond. Welcome to A&E (the Arts & Education Network), Paula Kerger says, which tonight, and most nights, will be showing *CSI* and *The Sopranos* reruns! Where is Bravo’s performing arts programming? Compare the National Geographic Channel’s bland daily diet with the



Richard Wald and Jim Pagliarini

vastly superior specials it produces for public television. And so on. “The profound difference between what public television continues to create and what everyone else creates,” Kerger explains, “is that we’re not accountable to a stockholder, we’re not trying to sell an audience something. ... You’re going to make different editorial decisions if you’re really worried about what you’re going to be delivering toward the year-end profit.”

Jim Pagliarini, CEO of Twin Cities Public Television in Minnesota, doesn’t think the fundamental mission has changed at all. “The way we characterize our mission is ‘to use the power of media for the public good,’ and that is consistent ... but we have to stop playing the tapes of the case that we’ve made for the last forty years. We need to freshen it up.” In common with most of the station representatives at the meeting, Pagliarini wants to highlight the really important work that PBS does on national issues and that individual stations do in community partnership and development, and to separate them out from the incidental, more trivial output, which tends to get played up by critics at Congressional hearings: *This Old House*, the how-to programs, the British comedies. Pagliarini wants to reframe the conversation about public television’s problems and its future. Not simply a financial problem, “it’s a value proposition,” he insists. “We need to talk about our value.” His definition of value is expressed in strikingly different terms from those used by Larry Grossman and others speaking about national programming. Great dance programs and the performing arts may be part of the value, but he sees its true worth more in terms of the local stations’ providing public services for their own communities; it’s the station manager’s down-to-earth view as opposed to the PBS-centered view most outsiders seem to have.

Several people around the table suggest that public radio may be more successful than public television, especially in matters of reach and funding. Sharon Rockefeller, whose station has both radio and television licenses, is quick to set the record straight: public radio was certainly doing very well four or five years ago, but that’s no longer true,” she argues. “The audience has plateaued and is declining, and membership is declining with it. Moreover, Pagliarini points out, “two of three people watch public TV. Two out of three people will never listen to public radio. They are serving a much narrower niche of the population; they do it extraordinarily well, but there is fatigue in that system, which we’re starting to see.”

Pat Harrison, the president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), is involved with both radio and television. In broad terms, she says, the mission is evergreen, but “are we fulfilling the mission with programs that differentiate us from whatever is on commercial TV? That’s our mission—and especially now, with the new audiences, we’ve moved far beyond the idea of public TV as something that is just defined by *Masterpiece Theatre* and a nice glass of Chablis.” She differentiates public television children’s pro-

gramming from commercial children's programming "where there is no safe place for children to watch television without being sold something." Even in popular programs like *SpongeBob SquarePants*, the humor is really geared to parents, forty and up—"it's caustic, it's sarcastic," she says. How about politics, where you can't really turn on the set and find a safe place to debate except a *NewsHour* or a *Charlie Rose*, where you have a chance of being treated as if you have a brain instead of being shown yet another drive-by shooting? It's for this reason, Harrison says, that CPB is launching a Public Awareness Initiative, "to remind the American public what they have, very much like the Statue of Liberty. You don't want it to go away; it's there as a resource for you and your family."

Two Cultures: Is Public Television Part of the New Media?

Ernest Wilson, Dean of the Annenberg School for Communications at the University of Southern California, is a member of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Board. He, too, wants public broadcasting to tell a better story, but he points out that, at the moment, there are two separate stories—the conventional, traditional argument for public broadcasting, which appeals to the older, grayer part of the population, and the very different, much more exciting, much more optimistic message of the new media generation. One is " 'woe is me, we're dead, I'm losing my job, I can't find funding,' yet at the same time you have another community of people who are brimming with excitement. I don't understand why these two communities are not talking to one another," Wilson says.

"We've got to tell a better story, one that people can remember in an elevator, and part of that story is getting the traditional public service media together with the new public service media, the bloggers and the people who are doing stuff online, and then



Patricia Harrison

perhaps we can convince our communities that we are really worth paying for." Wilson points out that "the paradigm under which all of us operate is changing radically and none of us is really sure where it will go." Then he makes a passionate call to action: "What concerns me most of all, both as a dean and as a member of the [CPB] board, is the debate going on in the country about this digital transformation, the information revolution, and I just do not see public broadcasting at the center of that debate. It seems to me that every time you open a newspaper, and every time you turn on a television set, and every time you go to a community meeting,

public service media should be right there at the middle of the debate.” There is a sense of urgency in that debate, and it’s that sense of urgency Wilson wants to remind us of.

Alberto Ibarguen of the Knight Foundation reinforces the point: “We’ve been a long-time supporter of PBS and NPR. What we’re doing now, though, is really trying to shift all of our clients, all of our grantees, to working with new media. ... The focus needs to be on reach and on how this digital stuff actually gets used.”

Although not everyone speaks out, it’s clear that some around the table aren’t quite as all-embracing in their attitudes to the new media. Public television, like news



Ernest Wilson with DeAnne Hamilton and Paula Kerger

departments of commercial networks, has built its reputation on the premise that it is trustworthy, truthful and accurate—in a word, authoritative. Vartan Gregorian articulates something that many people at the table seem to feel.

“Everything is ‘lite’ in America now,” he says. “Why don’t we have something heavy, authoritative? It’s an important

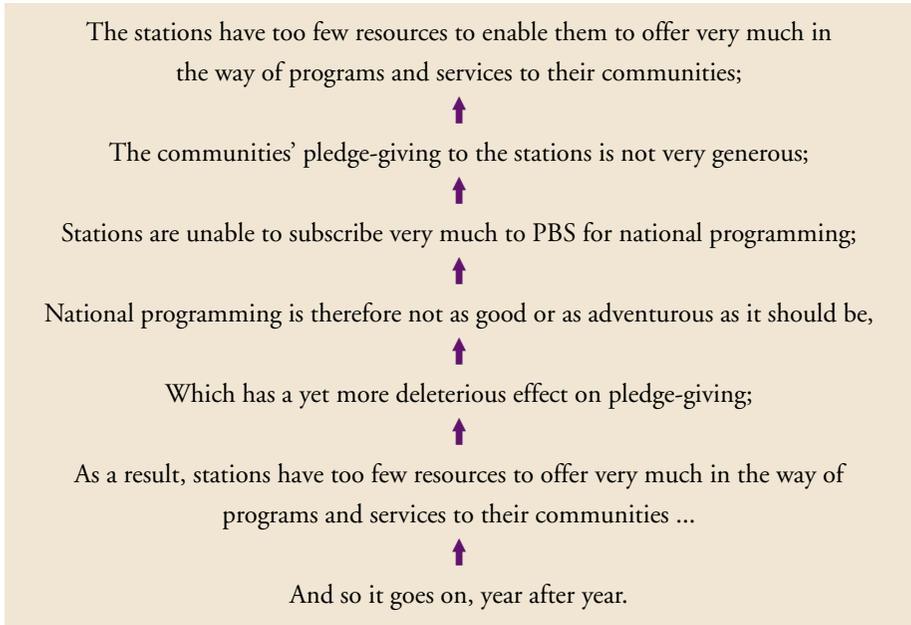
issue: as we develop all these things, we’re trying to educate, not just to entertain, not just to please, but to *elevate* by providing a national vocabulary, national standards so that as the ephemera passes, people will always return to what is best in our culture. We should not apologize for quality.”

Ernest Wilson will certainly not apologize for quality, but he is concerned that there are two cultures headed in two different directions. “There is a group that should not be underestimated, and that is younger people who do new digital stuff,” he says. “They don’t get First Amendment as much as we do, and they don’t get public ownership of the airways, but they really do get ‘open source’ and ‘multiple voices,’ and I think they really want to have a stake and participation in this discussion. But it’s two cultures right now—the traditional culture that we’re all involved in and this weird new media culture. There should be a way, it seems to me, to bring them together.”

The Local Context: Community Partners

Prior to attending the meeting, participants received a briefing paper suggesting that public television’s most persistent and pressing problem is the business plan on which it is based. According to the paper this plan is built around localism, the sovereignty of the local sta-

tions, to such an extent that the health of the system as a whole, particularly of PBS and the National Program Service, is dependent on the financial health of the stations. As a result:



The briefing paper* argues that the business plan needs to be changed or, at any rate, augmented, and it suggests that the new digital and broadband technologies provide the stations with a means of doing this, provided they are prepared to rethink and (to an extent) reinvent themselves as “public service media organizations.” The key to this will be a willingness to partner with other community institutions, thereby opening up new revenue streams and giving the stations an entirely new status within their communities.

Not everyone would agree completely with this assessment, but the five local stations represented at the meeting were chosen because they have all developed new forms of partnership with their communities. The Cleveland station, known as *ideastream*, is probably the best example. Created in 2001 out of the merger of two public broadcasters, WVIZ-TV and WCPN-FM, the station labeled itself from the beginning a “multiple media public service organization” whose intention was to share its resources with the community. “People in Cleveland were very excited about the arsenal of media that we would have to address education and public service needs,” explains Jerry Wareham, *ideastream*’s president, “but they quite politely and quite sincerely asked ‘just what the hell are you going to do with it, what are you going to address?’ Our response was some-

* See “Public Television: Today and Tomorrow” by Richard Somerset-Ward, page 32 of this publication.

thing called the Listening Project. ... The conversation is focused on the community, not on public broadcasting. We don't talk, we listen. And it is a transformative experience. ... People are asking not only that we provide information with journalistic integrity, but also that we partner with community organizations, that we convene community in order to address issues and problems and that we facilitate a process of identifying and implementing solutions in the community.

“This is a very different role from the one we have been playing, and it challenges our established editorial standards and practices,” Wareham says. The other thing the Listening Project did was confirm that the public television audience really is a pretty faithful reflection of the American population. “We were amazed at the diversity of age and race that sat around the table, and what changed as a result of the Listening Project was that we began to relate to those folks,” he explains. New priorities have come out of this project. Having learned that “the greatest assets of the community are its arts and culture, and the greatest challenge jobs and the economy, we’ve committed enormous resources to doing work in those areas through partnerships.”

Unique among public broadcasters, ideastream has a massive resource that links it with its community. OneCommunity, Northeast Ohio’s hugely powerful [gigabit] broadband community network, connects all the principal institutions of the region—schools, universities, hospitals (including the Cleveland Clinic), cultural institutions, municipal governments and, of course, the public service media organization. Three years into its mission and now based at the Idea Center, ideastream’s headquarters in downtown Cleveland, OneCommunity is the ultimate expression of community partnership, with ideastream as a pivotal part of its governance, its operation, and its future.



Jim Pagliarini and Dean Mills

The Listening Project resonates with Dean Mills, Dean of the Missouri School of Journalism. “I think one of the most striking and difficult things about the new media landscape is the idea that we journalists have to change the way our minds operate in order to make this work. Our work with Minnesota Public Radio illustrates this. They’re doing just amazing things in terms of building social networks of listeners throughout Minnesota—and increasingly regionally—but they were almost scared of what they had engendered. ... They said, ‘but we want to do this as journalism, we don’t want these people to have a conversation with one another,’ and we were saying, ‘look, this is terrific, you now have this network of people who not only want to talk to you but want to talk to each other, so you’re in effect fulfilling the function of a community newspaper.”

Since the 1950s, Nebraska has been fertile ground for public broadcasting, and the state government has invested massively in radio, television, fiber-optic cable, microwave, satellite, distance learning ... anything that will span the great distances of the Plains. Rod Bates is the general manager of Nebraska ETV: he explains the thinking behind *Nebraska Connects*, which may be the best example in the United States of how to conduct a community-wide (in this case, statewide) discussion. Each month a different subject of importance to Nebraskans—from immigration to water resource conflicts to family violence—is explored in a series of radio and television



DeAnne Hamilton

broadcasts, town meetings, online forums and other forms of outreach. “In the old days,” says Bates, “we used to do a big special on cancer, for instance, and we’d raise public awareness about issues related to smoking ... and our local organizations would always get angry because we’d call all attention to it and then we’d be off to the next issue. What we do differently now is that we work with a community partner.” Together, they plan and execute the multimedia programming and events and establish the Web sites and other resources; then the public broadcasters hand everything over to the partner(s), who will ensure that it stays on the front burner, while the broadcasters go off to join forces with a different partner to mount the next *Nebraska Connects*.

Partnerships come about in many different ways. Bates describes a very productive ongoing partnership with the University of Nebraska established through the vice chancellor for research. Some of the projects for which he is applying to the National

Science Foundation or other federal agencies for funding are particularly suited to having an added outreach component. “There was a significant project in Antarctica to do research on global warming; the vice chancellor talked to us, we talked to PBS and *Nova*, and we’ve got \$1.5 million earmarked in that grant to do a *Nova*.” As a state network, Nebraska ETV also has a lot of highly productive partnerships with the state government for education, healthcare, emergency services, agriculture, rural services and other aspects of Nebraska life. The next logical step, Bates says (and he’s already at work on it) is the creation of a public media archive that will be a major resource for teachers, scholars and all Nebraskans. In the meantime, he works equally hard with Nebraska’s nonprofits. “Because of the switch to digital, we invited every state agency over to our facility for a lunch and a free seminar on the capabilities we have with our wireless broadband network, and 73 agency directors attended! That resulted in a lot of business because they have money in their budgets to do outreach to the citizens of Nebraska, and they saw a potential partnership with us. We’re doing the same with every nonprofit.”

Jim Pagliarini of Twin Cities Public Television (TPT) also has a major interest in nonprofits. He has created the Minnesota Channel, a 24/7 cable channel, which is based entirely on partnership with content providers. The channel’s purpose is “to share the power of television with Minnesota’s finest nonprofit and mission-centered organizations to magnify their impact by helping them reach a broader audience.” Most of the programs are produced by TPT in partnership with these organizations, and there is clearly no shortage of willing partners. They share editorial control and modest production costs with TPT on the basis of carefully, and very clearly, written guidelines provided by TPT. The result is a powerful outreach tool for the nonprofits, often augmented by Web streaming, DVD distribution, etc. For TPT, the partnerships provide a great deal of local content—ranging from a speech or lecture delivered at a museum or library to a video made while traveling with the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra on a European tour—on the basis of an economic model that really works. In fiscal year 2007 TPT did over \$2 million in partnership production. The inspiration for the channel, Pagliarini says, was the simple knowledge that “the public sector in and around the Twin Cities is spending tens—maybe even hundreds—of millions of dollars each year trying to educate the public and get information and content in front of a larger audience.” TPT is addressing that need.

DeAnne Hamilton spent many years at KQED in San Francisco. From very early on in the digital transition, she says, KQED was using its new digital firepower to form partnerships with big institutions such as the San Francisco Symphony. It was generally a win-win situation where “they had their donor base and we had our donor base and we shared some of those donors,” she recalls. But now Hamilton finds herself running a much smaller public broadcasting station, WKAR at Michigan State University. Even



Rod Bates and Lynn Burnstan

though it's licensed to the university, the station traditionally maintained an arms-length relationship to the institution for fear of being seen as its mouthpiece. But the university is the station's natural partner, and Hamilton has sought to build that relationship. "There are museums on the campus and we should be working with them, there are performing arts centers on the campus and we need to work with them. But they are struggling to raise their funds and we struggle to raise ours. We haven't yet found the economic model that will work."

"You're giving them national visibility; you should have access to the alumni, not just to the university," Vartan Gregorian argues. But in the meantime, the station continues to associate itself as much as possible with the university. It seeks out stories, highlights university research, collaborates with various departments on interactive video services, podcasting, cultural programming and more. In doing so, the station confronts the same anxieties as other public broadcasters entering into partnerships: Are they compromising quality? Who controls the content? Still, the gains seem to outweigh any downside.

UCSD-TV is another university station, but a very different sort. Noncommercial, but not part of the PBS system, it's a low-power analog station owned by the University of California, San Diego, and it's unapologetically 'highest common denominator.' The station reflects UCSD's intellectual and cultural diversity, devoting significant airtime to in-depth coverage of ideas, culture, sciences and the humanities while providing a consistently high level of entertainment from the community and performing arts organizations (amateur and professional) that surround, and are part of, the university. Their roster includes theaters, dance companies, orchestras, music groups, museums, libraries, town meetings, ethnic and religious organizations. UCSD-TV is seen on cable throughout San Diego County, is targeted at the general population rather than the university, has a scientifically measured (and faithful) audience of half a million viewers each month and does it all on an annual budget of just over \$800,000—which is less than the cost of a single *Great*

Performances program on PBS. Every program represents an individual partnership agreement between UCSD-TV and the content provider.

Lynn Burnstan, who has been managing director of UCSD-TV since its founding fifteen years ago, gives some examples of how the partnerships work. The La Jolla Chamber Music Society, for one, puts on a Summerfest, and brings in musicians from all over the world. The Society's auditorium holds only around 300 people and the concert happens only once. What the Society and the musicians want is reach, which is what UCSD-TV can give them. A budget is drawn up and a partnership agreement is made. The Music Society puts in some money, maybe from one of its sponsors, and some rights, if appropriate, while UCSD-TV puts in its in-kind production resources. Together the partners may solicit additional funds from donors or foundations. Another very different example is in the field of nanoscience. In this case, a UCSD professor gets a National Science Foundation grant that includes a sum of money to cover all the expenses of producing a video program (or even a series of programs) about the research. The funding, in this case, is easier to acquire, but a partnership agreement is still necessary to govern matters of editorial control, ownership, the exploitation of after-rights and so forth.

So Who's Watching?

Does the audience know, or care, about what's happening to public broadcasting? *The New York Times* recently reported that "the audience for public TV has been shrinking even faster than the audience for the commercial networks. The average PBS show on prime time now scores about a 1.4 Nielsen rating."²

Compare that with the highest average rating for a whole year, which was 2.7 in 1986-87 or, a fairer point of comparison, its 1990-91 average of 2.2. But ratings, on their own, no longer tell the whole story. They show how many people were watching a particular broadcast at a particular hour,³ but they cannot show how many people time-shifted the broadcast via Tivo or similar device, and they cannot show how many people have accessed the show online or how many may ultimately see it as video on demand (VOD). At the local level, station managers are more concerned with the "depth" of the audience than with a headcount. Jim Pagliarini of the Twin Cities goes even further, saying, "I'm not interested in growing our audience. I'm interested in deepening relationships with my existing audience." Public television audiences, he points out, are almost always "engaged, active and curious—they want to learn. But the delivery systems to

² Charles McGrath, "Is PBS Still Necessary?" *The New York Times*, February 17, 2008.

³ According to Nielsen Media Research, a **rating** tells how many people watched a particular TV program; it is the percent of households or persons within a given population (universe) tuned to a particular program. One **rating point** is a value equal to one percent (one rating) of a population or universe. Given 111.4 million TV households in the U.S. in 2007, a rating of 1 indicates about 1.1 million TVs.

reach them will be different. To get to the younger generation, the cool kids and gadget-teers, we need to create content, and repurpose some of our own content, so that we give them the information the way they want to receive it.”

At this point in the discussion the journalism representatives play a large part. Nancy Palmer, executive director of the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government, points out that there has been a major shift in audience perception. “It’s the many niche audiences, not the one broad audience,” she argues. “One person may be deeply interested in opera but could care less about smart growth, or the other way around. ... We get into trouble if we try to make one program that both the opera lover and the smart growth aficionado will love, because you’ve dumbed down the program to the extent that you’re not satisfying its niche audience.” Dean Mills of Missouri agrees, adding “It ain’t *the* audience: it’s a whole bunch of audiences, and you have to figure out which slivers you’re going after.” And Ernest Wilson of USC goes even further, contending it’s not an audience, but younger folks who will not watch, will not listen, if they don’t have a chance to talk back. They’re audiences but they’re not really audiences—because they are producers or in Wilson’s term, “prosumers.”

Rod Bates of Nebraska has collected evidence of how his audience is deepening, using the method of “deliberative polling” McNeil Lehrer Productions pioneered in *By the People*. He gives the example of *Nebraska Connects* coverage of one of the state’s more important issues: water. “We’ll poll people and see what they think about the issues surrounding water,” he explains, “then we’ll do a program and bring in a panel of legislators and water experts. And then we’ll poll the people again, after they’ve heard the expert discussion, so that we can see what difference it made. We’ve seen the needle move on attitudes toward very specific issues. It’s not a perfect measure, but it shows us something about the work we’re doing.”

A Role for Foundations?

The role foundations might play in funding national programming had come up in the earlier discussion, but now, when the subject is local programming and local foundations, it becomes more concrete. “There are plenty of local and regional foundations and corporations who have an interest in applying media to education and public service,” says Jerry Wareham of Cleveland’s ideastream. “So, as we prepare for the next four to forty years, it might be time to convene local stations along with local and regional foundations and other donors, so that together we can explore and understand the needs and applications of digital technology across communities. It could be just the kind of digital ‘turn-on’ we need to assure that we build on the success of public broadcasting over the past forty years and employ the power of digital media to address critical educational, cultural and civic needs.”

David Haas, who, as a foundation head, is actively involved in funding public media, is supportive of the idea of creating a consortium of foundations, but stresses that it has to be forward-looking; it has to have a vision. “I think it’s important not just to get them to rally around what you have (your mission in terms of supporting children, for instance) but also what you *could* be (the notion of the public space, for instance),” he maintains. Convening these foundations, persuading them that there is an investment to be made, that it is an investment capable of yielding handsome returns in education, healthcare, economic development and many other forms of community building within their areas of interest, is probably the hardest part of the process. Station managers are clearly hoping for assistance in meeting this challenge, maybe from some of the larger foundations. Vartan Gregorian is not sure that this is such a good idea because “local community foundations resent it when a big foundation comes in and tells them what it’s going to do for them.”

Another area of concern is the extent to which stations share their experiences with each other, their successes and failures, their experiments and their best practices. Twenty-nine years ago, Richard Wald says, he was commissioned by PBS to do a study of the stations and their work in news and public affairs. He was forcibly struck by “the extraordinary animosity and insularity of the stations, which hated each other and hated whatever they could do together.” Representatives of public television don’t think that is the case today. They cite the existence of organizations such as *Putting Communities First* (originally nurtured and funded by David Haas, more recently by CPB), which represents 25 stations (15% of the licensees). Ernest Wilson wonders whether there should be a clearing house within the system so that stations can see what others are doing. Jerry Wareham wants more than that. “We need a function within the system that is more proactive than a clearing house, that tries to encourage adoption of best practices in a



Nancy Palmer and David Haas

more proactive way ... And it's not just about the stations either; it's about stations *and* communities. That's why I suggest a convening of community foundations, of local and regional foundations ... They are deeply interested in their communities, deeply interested in innovative uses of technology—broadcasting and beyond—to address real community needs and interests. We need to talk about real community needs, and identify them, and meet them in measurable ways.”

Last Words

So what has been achieved around the Carnegie Corporation table? For Ernest Wilson, “It’s been heartening. ‘The perfect wave’ is probably too strong a term for it, but it does seem that there’s a confluence of some things that make action more possible and more likely of success.” One positive factor, he says, is that foundations are increasingly



Alberto Ibarguen

concerned with the public media and with the issues they give rise to. There is a potential for leadership here, the more so because several of the foundations have, or will soon have, new leadership of their own. On the public broadcasting side, a great deal is happening, and most of it is exciting. Local stations are grappling with the possibilities of a fully interactive “pull” environment taking over from public broadcasting’s traditional “push” mode. At the same time, stations are attempting to bring together

the two cultures into which the media world is divided—the traditional culture public television has been a part of for forty years and the new culture, which has captured the imagination of at least half the population. Much will now depend on the adopting of best practices and lessons learned, and that effort is one in which the Knight Foundation is already playing a significant part. But, Wilson notes, where there should be a consortium of interested institutions, there appears to be not one university in the United States focusing on public service media and providing consistent research, training and thought leadership for it. Wilson urges that this conversation about the public media be carried on, with urgency and intensity, and he urges the leadership “to stick with the high vision, to pull together a coalition of foundations, large and small, national, local and regional, working with the public broadcasting system, to begin a Carnegie-type conversation.”

Vartan Gregorian agrees, adding that the cultural division is not simply an age issue but “the reality of technological revolution.” He urges those involved to be prepared to take risks, and be prepared to fail from time to time. Failing is not necessarily a negative, in his view, “but an accepted way for practitioners, to assess what things did *not* work.”

The last word goes to Alberto Iburgüen of the Knight Foundation, which is already deeply involved in conversation and experimentation on models of the new media. “We are trying to shift all our clients, all our grantees, to working with the new media—not working on *our* ideas, *our* projects, but setting up the grant-making process more as an open RFP (request for proposals).” The Knight News Challenge, which has received 3,000 applications in its second year, is about delivering news and information to a geographically defined community, using one or more digital platforms. Knight is working with young journalists and teenagers, with texters and bloggers; and has given a grant to MTV to have teenagers cover the presidential campaign in their own states, using cell phones only, texting their reports to other teenagers in the same cell phone network. Knight is sending all National Public Radio reporting staff to a course at USC; and is about to mount a separate initiative with community foundations, challenging them to work on the information needs of their particular communities. “We need to hurry up and do more of it,” says Iburgüen, “We’re open for ideas, suggestions... for ways in which we can generate ideas, generate experiments ... and bring some fun back into this thing.”



While this conversation has reached no conclusions, *per se*, nor was that its aim, a number of ideas do stand out.

- It’s clear that public television will be different in the digital age—no longer strictly a *push* medium, but *push and pull* with a high quotient of interactivity. Broadcasting will still be its principal function, but almost any platform in the broadband universe, especially the Internet, will be in play as well. This is the promise of the digital era, and it opens up amazing opportunities to the local stations, which now have the potential to become what the first Carnegie Commission believed they should be—essential and valuable parts of a community.

- This overarching change might seem to indicate that *everything* must change. But most participants in the meeting seem to feel the most necessary changes concern the *culture* of the medium. As of February 17, 2009, the analog world will belong to the past, creating a culture problem that is most detrimental within the stations. There seems to be no appetite for changing the structure of public broadcasting, and there is an underlying fear that any attempt to restructure will destabilize the industry at the very moment when stability is most needed.

■ In broadest terms, public television’s mission to “use the power of media for the public good” has not changed. But the mission originally stated by the Carnegie Commission was more specific: to fill the gaps left by commercial television. With so many channels now available, there are fewer gaps at the national level. But of those that still exist, many are filled by public television. Its preschool programming is unrivaled; its science programs, period dramas and arts programming all supplement commercial content. Yet PBS could do a lot more—and do it more adventurously—with more money. At the local station level, the switch to digital has the potential to reinvigorate a 40-year-old mission that, for the vast majority of stations, has scarcely taken off or has been stifled by lack of resources.

■ The new media culture is challenging public television in a way that some embrace but that many others at the roundtable find troubling. Some see the digital challenge more as a war than an opportunity: new media seems unregulated, anarchic, hugely powerful in reach and influence; rife with unknown possibilities and potential problems. In contrast, traditional media, public television included, is regulated and meant to serve the public interest. The two cultures are struggling to meld, and this meeting revealed that while the Luddites aren’t controlling the next step, the optimists’ vision has yet to win out.

■ Not driven by advertising or the profit motive, with its roots in education, public television is unlikely to move away from the ‘elevated’ output that distinguishes it from commercial and most new media outlets. As Vartan Gregorian pointed out, not everything needs to be “lite” in America, and public television’s high-minded menu may help the country compete on the global level.

Whatever public media’s future, funding remains its greatest problem. Two schools of thought emerged at the meeting: (1) Financial survival hangs on national programming, which is the highest priority, and if the programmers find some “big ideas” money



Vartan Gregorian

will materialize; (2) Public television’s national problems will persist until the stations are healthy, since most money for the National Program Service comes from (and should come from) the stations’ PBS dues. The funding shortfall is due mainly to corporations and foundations abandoning public television and producers forsaking creativity to avoid potentially controversial subject matter. At the same time public media leaders insist there are

plenty of exciting program ideas—the problem is paying for them. Of these two schools of thought, the one that stresses financial growth through local station engagement promises a long haul with little revenue. However, federal funding is both erratic and highly political and, as well, corporate and foundation funding is expected to remain limited. In this age of digital opportunity where building community has new meaning, these questions must be raised: Should new alliances be built? Should the concept of community in public media be rewritten? And should the field focus on local stations as centers of change and on promoting new business opportunities?

The means of revitalization are at hand: a digital armory, a nation whose people depend on digital media and local communities who will be welcoming, even generous,



Sharon Percy Rockefeller

toward public media companies who are productive partners, conveners and facilitators. To move ahead on this front the stations would need help in the short term, which local and regional foundations are likely to provide once they know what the stations will do for the community. Local foundations specializing in education, healthcare or the arts could be persuaded to accept public media companies as partners in promoting

their missions, since many are active in fields where public television has a presence and where digital technology could be harnessed to considerable effect.

Public television at 40 has a new name—public media—and, consistent with that iconic birthday, is at a turning point, forced to assess its role in a new era quite unlike the one in which it came of age. The meeting at Carnegie Corporation revealed public media's pride in how far the system has come, but revealed as well its struggles to remain vibrant while facing an uncertain future. Everyone present agreed there were no guarantees, and little time to waste. ■

► Carnegie Corporation Meeting on Public Broadcasting

November 14, 2007

ATTENDEES

ROD BATES,
General Manager, Nebraska ETV

LYNN BURNSTAN,
Managing Director, UCSD-TV, La Jolla, CA

JEANNE D'ONOFRIO,
Chief of Staff, Carnegie Corporation

ELI EVANS,
formerly President, Revson Foundation

VARTAN GREGORIAN,
President, Carnegie Corporation

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN,
formerly President of PBS, President of NBC News

DAVID HAAS,
Haas Charitable Trusts

DEANNE HAMILTON,
General Manager, WKAR, Michigan State University

PATRICIA HARRISON,
President, Corporation for Public Broadcasting

ALBERTO IBARGÜEN,
President, John S. & James L. Knight Foundation

AMBIKA KAPUR,
Program Associate, Journalism Initiative & Dissemination Program,
Carnegie Corporation

PAULA KERGER,
President, PBS

SUSAN KING (*Moderator*),
Vice President, External Affairs; Director, Journalism Initiative, Special Initiatives
and Strategy, Carnegie Corporation

ELEANOR LERMAN,
Director, Publications & Public Affairs, Carnegie Corporation

DEAN MILLS,
Dean, Missouri School of Journalism

JIM PAGLIARINI,
President, Twin Cities Public Television

NANCY PALMER,
Executive Director, Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics & Public Policy,
Kennedy School of Government, Harvard

SHARON PERCY ROCKEFELLER,
President, WETA, Washington, D.C.

RICHARD SOMERSET-WARD,
formerly Senior Fellow, Benton Foundation

RICHARD WALD,
Professor of Journalism, Columbia; formerly Senior Vice President of ABC News and
President, NBC News

JERROLD WAREHAM,
President, ideastream, Cleveland

ERNEST WILSON,
Dean, Annenberg School for Communications, University of Southern California

My Vision for PBS *in the 21st Century*

Do you remember where you were on September 23, 2007?

Chances are you are one of the millions of Americans who settled in front of their living room TV sets that Sunday evening to watch the debut of *The War*, PBS's acclaimed documentary miniseries about life on the homefront during World War II. The 15-hour series aired in seven installments during the next 10 days, drawing an average 38 million viewers, PBS's largest audience in more than a decade. But *The War* was much more than a television event.

Thousands of Internet users visited the program's Web site to stream video clips from the film. Others watched clips on YouTube or logged onto the online iTunes store to download free podcasts of the series, including interviews with filmmakers Ken Burns and Lynn Novick. And in every state, PBS's member stations produced local documentaries and organized oral history projects with the World War II veterans in their community, many of whom talked publicly about their experiences for the first time.

The War is a wonderful reminder of the power of public television and its ability to open minds, touch hearts, and change lives. It also underscores the strength of the national/local model that makes public television so vital and forms the basis for my vision for PBS in the 21st century.

A Commitment to Localism

As PBS's president and chief executive officer, my top priority is ensuring our member stations have the tools they need to survive—and thrive—during these turbulent times.

As I often remind audiences when I speak, PBS is not a television network—it is a membership organization comprised of 355 independent, locally owned public television stations. A commitment to localism provides public television with its greatest distinction in this era of corporate-owned, profit-driven media. The big names in new media—Google, Microsoft, Apple—don't have a local presence in 355 communities in this nation. We do.

The commercial broadcast networks have local affiliates, but the only thing “local” they have left to offer is news, and let's be honest: That's not localism. Hidden camera

“investigations” into dirty nail salons and feature reports on waterskiing squirrels don’t do much to enrich people’s lives.

Our member stations are deeply connected to the communities they serve. Not only do PBS stations produce local documentaries, series, and other programs, they also have the power to choose what national PBS programming they offer. In addition, the stations do extensive work in their communities, conducting literacy campaigns, holding workshops for parents and caregivers, offering professional development for local schoolteachers, and partnering on projects with schools, libraries, colleges, and civic groups. To help public television keep alive this proud tradition of localism, PBS is focused on supporting its member stations in three key areas: content, community outreach, and technology.

Strengthening Content

PBS remains committed to providing its member stations with the best content on-air and online. Our television programming remains exceptional. During the past year, PBS has been honored with 15 Daytime Emmys, including the most awards for children’s programming for the 10th consecutive year; ten News and Documentary Emmys, twice as many awards as the nearest competitor; nine Primetime Emmys; and eight George Foster Peabody Awards, to name just a few.

Viewership has also risen for many programs. In prime time, ratings are up at series such as *Antiques Roadshow* and *Masterpiece*, while *Curious George* remains the nation’s most-watched program among preschoolers. My goal is to continue building on this success, especially in three key genres: public affairs, the arts, and children.

Public affairs. Record numbers of Americans are engaged in the 2008 elections, but they’re not just casting ballots: They’re also volunteering on campaigns, going door to door on behalf of their favorite candidates, and spending countless hours staffing phone banks. Volunteer levels are also up. More than 61 million Americans spent 8.1 billion hours volunteering in 2006, according to published reports. Twenty-seven percent of all Americans volunteered that year, a near-record high and a level not seen in decades. Meanwhile, published reports also show the number of incoming freshmen who are starting college with volunteer experience has surged, and applications to Volunteers in Service to America and the Peace Corps are soaring.

Americans are taking citizenship seriously again, and that’s very good news for public television.

As the proud home of series like *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, *Frontline*, and *Washington Week with Gwen Ifill* and *National Journal*, we provide Americans with serious news and information, as well as critical context and analysis. We look forward to

continuing to provide our member stations with the kind of public affairs content that allows them to serve as an independent voice in the national media chorus.

The arts. When President Johnson signed the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967, he spoke eloquently about his hope that public television would become a modern Greek marketplace, where democracy took place in view of all citizens. It's worth remembering that the Greek marketplace was home not just to politicians, but also to poets and painters, sculptors and singers, artists and artisans of all kinds. The performing arts have always been integral to civic life, helping us to understand the world around us. As Hans Christian Andersen said, "Where words fail, music speaks."

The arts are another reason why public television is vital. Without PBS and its member stations, millions of Americans would never have an opportunity to see an opera, hear a symphony, or watch a ballet dancer soar across a stage. I speak from experience. When I was growing up in Baltimore in the '60s, public broadcasting helped open the world of the arts to me. The first opera I heard was on public radio, and the first ballet I saw was on public television.

Before they became part of my job, shows like *Great Performances* and *Live from Lincoln Center* were part of my life, kindling my lifelong love of the performing arts. Since I became PBS's president, two new series have been added to our arts lineup: *From the Top*, a weekly showcase of extraordinary young musicians; and *Great Performances at the Met*, a series of specials that give viewers a virtual front-row seat at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. My goal is to add even more in the years to come.

Children. *Sesame Street* revolutionized the face of children's television when it debuted in 1969. Almost 40 years later, public television hasn't lost that pioneering spirit. PBS still helps broaden children's horizons. *Curious George* helps introduce preschoolers to science concepts, while *Super Why!*, *WordGirl*, and *WordWorld* introduce children to the joys of reading.

Our commitment to research-based programming that educates while it entertains will be on display again in the 2008-09 television season, when we introduce three new children's series: *Martha Speaks*, which will promote early childhood literacy; *Sid the Science Kid*, a science series from the Jim Henson Company and *The New Electric Company*, a revival of the '70s era PBS classic.

Expanding Community Outreach and Education

In public television, we believe our commitment to our viewers doesn't end when the credits roll at the conclusion of our programs. This is why PBS is working to help its member stations reach out to the communities they serve. For example, the new PBS Kids Health Initiative strives to strengthen public television's commitment to children's

health and combat obesity. It includes on-air and online content, as well as community outreach programs that are designed to foster healthier lifestyles.

Similarly, PBS offers a range of educational services for children, parents, teachers, and caregivers. PBS TeacherLine is an acclaimed professional development service that helps teachers meet No Child Left Behind requirements in key subjects such as reading, math, and science. Meanwhile, the PBS Kids Raising Readers initiative offers resources to help children ages two to eight learn to read.

In the years to come, PBS wants to partner with experts in early learning to develop a comprehensive, standards-based preschool curriculum and professional development for preschool educators and child care providers. We're also eager to partner with universities and other academic organizations to create a network of virtual labs to conduct extensive testing and research of preschool content and to serve as an incubator for the next generation's *Sesame Street* or *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*.

Putting Technology to Work for Stations

PBS has always been on the leading edge of technology. In the 1970s, for example, we pioneered the use of closed-captioning, winning an Emmy for our efforts. We also were the first major broadcasting organization to distribute programming to stations using a satellite, and we were one of the first broadcasters to recognize the power of the Internet.

Our commitment to new technology continues in the 21st century. Today you can visit your local PBS station's Web site to stream episodes of *The NewsHour*, *Frontline*, and many other series. You can also go to YouTube to watch hundreds of PBS video clips, from *Tavis Smiley Show* interviews to full-length reports from David Brancaccio's *Now*. Meanwhile, iTunes allows you to download episodes of shows like *Nova* and *Teletubbies* to your desktop, iPod, or iPhone.

We also offer PBS Kids Play, an online service that features educational games for children, and soon we'll introduce PBS Kids Go, a broadband service that will help stations serve school-aged children.

In addition, we're continuing to build PBS Engage, an online social media initiative that helps citizens foster a stronger connection to PBS content. Another project in development—the Educational Digital Content Asset Repository (EDCAR)—will be a digital archive that links the tremendous resources developed by PBS stations and producers throughout the public television system. These new platforms are helping our stations reach younger Americans who might not otherwise discover PBS on television. These projects are critical toward our work to help our member stations cultivate a new generation of public television consumers.

Of course, we recognize that many citizens—especially the elderly, the poor, and

minorities—lack access to the Internet and other new technology. Every home in this country may not have a computer, but virtually every one has a TV. This is why we're working so hard to ensure the success of America's transition to digital television on Feb. 17, 2009. PBS and its member stations have joined other organizations in a national grassroots campaign to educate viewers about the DTV transition and ensure they have the resources they need to make the switch.

But when the transition is complete, public television will have more ways than ever to serve citizens. Not only will our stations be able to offer viewers superior picture and sound quality, "multicasting" will allow stations to offer a main channel and separate channels that can be tailored to individual genres such as public affairs, children, and lifelong learning.

As one of my colleagues likes to say, technology has finally caught up with public broadcasting's mission.

Expanding Resources

PBS's efforts to strengthen its work in the areas of content, community outreach and education, and technology will go a long way toward helping our member stations serve citizens across the United States. But we recognize our ambitions will take us only so far. Individual donors remain the largest single source of financial contribution to public television, and we continue to rely on federal funding and philanthropic foundations for additional support. But I am also working to identify new resources for a new generation.

We remain committed to our public service mission, but we also recognize the opportunities to move beyond an analog model to one better suited for the Digital Age. This means not only honoring our commitment to education, but also thoughtfully developing some new revenue-generating models to support our core mission.

I am also enthusiastic about the PBS Foundation, which works in partnership with member stations to bring new revenue into the public television system. Since its formation in 2004, the foundation has raised about \$20 million, including a recent \$1 million gift from the Adobe Foundation, the philanthropic arm of software giant Adobe Systems Inc. The Adobe grant sends an important signal to Silicon Valley, which is home to so many entrepreneurs and philanthropists who are eager to invest in public service organizations like PBS and its member stations.

Conclusion

In March 2008, for the fifth consecutive year, PBS and its member stations were named America's most trusted institution in a poll by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media Partners. In this same survey, PBS ranked second only to the U.S. military as the best

use of taxpayer dollars. It would be easy to rest on our laurels, but that isn't my way—and it isn't public television's, either.

As PBS's president and chief executive officer, my top priority is serving our member stations, which are dedicated to keeping alive the cherished values of localism and community service. By providing our stations with stronger content, community outreach, education and technological services, we will ensure a bright future for public television and the citizens we are so proud to serve. ■■

PAULA KERGER

President, Public Broadcasting Service

Public Television: Today *and* Tomorrow

A PERSPECTIVE FOR CARNEGIE CORPORATION'S MEETING ABOUT PUBLIC BROADCASTING NOVEMBER 14, 2007

In the United States—but in no other major country—public television came after commercial television. Elsewhere, because it came first, public television established itself across the whole spectrum of content—from news and sport to all forms of entertainment, information and education. Commercial television, when it arrived (generally in the 1950s and '60s), was largely modeled on the norms already established by public television, and it took 30 to 40 years in most countries for commercial companies to win the biggest sporting and entertainment contracts and thereby to establish ratings dominance—although, even today, a lot of public broadcasters are highly competitive in ratings terms.

American public television, by contrast, was established in the wake of commercial television. It should, according to the 1967 Carnegie Commission, “include all that is of human interest and importance which is not at the moment appropriate or available for support by advertising.” So there was never any intention that it should be part of the mainstream of popular television: rather, it was to be an extension of the system of educational stations that covered almost two-thirds of the U.S. population in 1967, and that already boasted its own national program service.

The Business Plan

Having ruled out advertising as a source of revenue, there was no real argument about the business plan that would be imposed on public television. In Britain in the 1920s it had been possible to enforce a business plan that said (in not quite so many words): “Pay the BBC an annual license fee for your radio [later television] receiver, or go to prison.” Most people elected to pay, and they still do, which is rather more surprising. In the United States, 45 years later, this was never really an option—not a politically viable one, at any rate. Instead, the easy way out was taken: the business plan of the educational stations al-

ready in existence was adopted, with the important addition of a provision for federal funding through the newly invented Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), which received Congressional appropriations and then spread out the money among the stations. It wasn't very much in 1968 (just \$5 million) but it grew over the years and has eventually come to average about 16 percent of public broadcasting's total income—a useful core on which to base a budget, especially if (as was intended but has almost never happened) the Congress authorizes multiyear funding three (or, for one giddy moment, five) years in advance.

The business plan of the educational stations in 1967 was based largely on a quaint mixture of grants (from state governments, local authorities and university licensees, as appropriate), sponsorship (not on any account to be thought of as advertising) and philanthropy, and this became the lot, by inheritance, of public television. As a business plan, it never worked well, but it did work tolerably well in the early years when most communities had a mere four to ten stations on the dial (very little cable, no satellites, no VCRs) and when PBS was compiling a raft of exciting new series, several of which are still on the air 30 to 40 years later. In the late 1970s and early '80s, however, a torrent of new cable channels arrived, many of them devoted to the content niches that public television had pioneered. Programming costs rose astronomically, would-be sponsors became harder to find, local programming declined and the average viewer's dial became seriously crowded. The business plan kept pace into the mid-1980s, but it never seemed to have any way of answering developments in the industry. And that, of course, became a much more crucial consideration in the last years of the twentieth century, as a whole new world opened up before us: the Internet, broadband, digital television, cell phones and the like, bringing with them massive societal changes in the ways we learn, do business, get news and receive entertainment.

In pure dollar terms, it is possible to argue that the business plan has coped. In 1990 public television's total income was \$1.24 billion. In 2005 (the last year for which there are published figures) it had risen to \$1.78 billion. But a business that relies so significantly on its philanthropic income needs to look with special care at the line items that show how deep are its roots in public esteem. The 1990 statistics show that a total of 5.1 million Americans subscribed \$280.7 million in that year (an average of \$55.04 per subscriber). In 2005 the total dollar amount had risen to \$369.5 million, but the number of subscribers was very significantly reduced (to 3.7 million), even if their average contribution was a good deal higher (\$98.84).

Public television has many accomplishments to boast of in its first forty years, not the least of which is the recognition factor of its brand. PBS is constantly cited as one of the half-dozen most recognizable brands in the nation, which is hardly surprising when you consider that most American children are raised on its preschool programs. So criticism

of public television's business plan is not to suggest that the system itself is in danger of collapsing. There is, maybe, a feeling that it has been treading water for some years, and it is no surprise that those years have coincided with a period in which stations have been striving to fulfill an unfunded mandate from the federal government to switch to digital technology. That switch has largely (but not entirely), and very expensively, been achieved. Most public stations will be ready to turn off their analog transmitters by the appointed day—February 17, 2009—and become all-digital operations. But that, in itself, is the reason that the business plan so urgently needs reconfiguring.

When you read the Carnegie Commission report of 1967—or even the much more turgid prose of the Public Broadcasting Act—it is as if public television has been waiting all these years for the digital revolution to happen. The system was predicated on a nationwide network of healthy stations. Carnegie I devoted the first of its twelve recommendations to underlining this fact and pleading for the stations to be properly financed. They never were—partly because of the inherent weakness of the business plan, partly because licensees failed to fulfill their responsibilities, but mainly because the stations never had the wherewithal to establish themselves within their communities as genuine community partners. If there were new revenue streams available to them, then it would be within their communities that they would be found, but the continuous rounds of pledging and fundraising were all that most stations could manage. Contributing to their communities through local programming and services became increasingly rare as the first forty years rolled by.

Now, however, the stations have technology that enables them not just to “push” content from their transmitters to the viewers’ receivers. It also enables the viewers to be participants—to “pull” content at times, and to places, that suit their convenience. Digital technology makes television compatible with, and interoperable with, computers, cell phones and other broadband communicators. In all of this, public television is ideally positioned to be a community enabler, to become the sort of “hub” or nexus of a community that forward thinkers foresaw as far back as 1967. Among them was President Johnson, who stated, “I believe the time has come to stake another claim in the name of all the people, stake a claim based upon the combined resources of communications,” and called for creation of a network of knowledge, incorporating computers, satellites and other means.

The Local Imperative

If the business plan upon which public television is based is to be altered in any way, then it is highly unlikely to happen in Washington. It is something the stations will have to do for themselves. Years of waiting for the Congress to move toward some other form

of funding—a tax on the transfer of commercial licenses, a tax on households having a television set (as in Britain), a portion of the proceeds from spectrum auctions, and many other proposals—have gone nowhere. There is no real incentive for the Congress to move on this issue, and a lot of disincentives. The stations, on the other hand, do have incentives (survival, growth, new revenues)—and public television’s Washington-based institutions (CPB, PBS and the Association of Public Television Stations, or APTS, which is the lobbying arm) have just as many incentives to help them.

It may not look that way, but in public television everything percolates upward from the stations. They are the sovereign institutions—the ones with digital frequencies and licenses to broadcast. It is true that CPB distributes \$400 million in federal funding, but, by law, it sends 89 percent of it directly to the stations according to a pre-set formula. PBS, of course, is the stations’ own membership organization: it provides services (including national programming) to the stations, who own it. So everything comes back to the stations. There are 355 of them (168 licensees) scattered across the nation, but to describe them as a single entity would be nonsense. They are 168 entities, each of them sovereign in its own territory, with the health of the whole system dependent on the health of the stations, which is dependent on the health of the national system and so on.

Breaking out of this vicious circle is not going to happen by divine intervention, nor even by federal mandate. It requires the stations to take the initiative—actually, lots of initiatives, station by station. Almost every one of them has to reinvent itself as a community institution. Yes, they will continue to be broadcasters first and foremost, but they will certainly need to operate on other platforms as well (most of them already do, to some degree) and they will certainly need to form partnerships with, and within, their communities (something far too few of them do in any meaningful way). These partnerships, in turn, will almost certainly require the rethinking of established guidelines for editorial control, financial responsibility and other traditional roles in broadcasting—but that’s fine: there is little that is sacred about those guidelines, other than the requirement that each licensee takes sole legal responsibility for everything that is transmitted over its airwaves.

No one, least of all the stations, is talking of throwing out the old business plan and substituting a brand new one. The dream of being able to abolish pledge weeks is just that—a dream. Moreover, most of the component parts of the old plan still work, to a greater or lesser degree. The problem is that they don’t add up to much more than a marginal existence, and a marginal existence for the stations means that PBS’s National Program Service will deliver a lot less than its full potential.

As a generalization (and admittedly generalizations are dangerous when you are talking of 168 separate licensees) what has to change is the relationship between stations and their communities.

That relationship has often been defined more by competitiveness than by partnership. Stations are perceived by other community institutions as competitors in fundraising. Moreover, they are generally viewed as the Goliaths of local fundraising (in terms of noise made rather than cash raised) because they use a very big megaphone for the purpose: their own airwaves. Nor do they customarily offer that facility to anyone else; why would they? And when partnerships are formed with other community institutions, the partnerships most frequently break down over the issue of shared control. Broadcasters have traditionally objected to such a concept on grounds that production and editorial control do not work well when they are shared or exercised by some sort of committee—and anyway, broadcasters know best!

So why should things be any different now? Partly it is because the broadcasters are very aware that you don't have to be a broadcaster to make effective use of digital and broadband communications. If you have content, you can produce it and distribute it yourself, often as effectively as a broadcaster can. Partly it is because broadcasters don't possess, and cannot afford, anything like enough content to fill the far greater number of outlets that digital technology gives them. It is not just the innovation of multicast broadcasting, which enables them simultaneously to transmit four or five channels on a single frequency, but also their online operations, which lap up video content at a great rate. Partly it is because it is clear to many stations that the only possible way they have of expanding their sources of revenue is by expanding their community service.

The biggest change public broadcasters have to make in order to accommodate all this is a change of culture and attitude. Changing their attitude to their community neighbors, with all it implies about partnering, sharing and editorial control, is radical enough. But far more scary, in all probability, is coming to terms with what “content” means. Broadcasters have always thought about it as “programs,” but in the digital age content is as likely to involve the distribution of services (health information services, social services, educational services) as it is the transmission of familiar 30- or 60-minute programs. And whether it comes in the form of services or programs, the content is much more likely to belong to someone else (a local museum, a hospital, the city government) than it is to the public broadcaster.

Partnership and collaboration and sharing are the watchwords of this new kind of broadcasting, but the realities of those words are not easy for broadcasters to accept, accustomed as they are to “pushing” their product down a one-way transmission line, on their schedule, under their total control.

Community Partnership—A Formula for Change

Nevertheless, during the past few years a number of stations have become serious about community partnering, and some of them have entered into it with real commitment, as

a new way of life. The boldest, Cleveland's ideastream, has worked closely with its community to create and build a broadband network of great power and speed—not a private 'members only' network like Internet2, but one that is available to all the citizens of the community. This is just the biggest of many examples of partnership in which ideastream is earning the trust of the people it serves. It is hard to analyze the prescription for such success, but an outsider looking in might note, first, that ideastream has rethought itself as "a multiple service public media organization," not just a public broadcaster, and second, that it does not feel compelled to take the leadership position in every partnership it enters into.

What has happened in Cleveland in the past five or six years is proof that public broadcasters can play a vastly greater role in their communities than has previously been the case, but it is not easy and it is not quick. Other stations are moving in the same direction, and several of them are providing models of partnership in particular areas—between universities and local stations, between the not-for-profit sector and public television, in community archiving, in health education, in agricultural services, and in several other areas. These experiments (for that is how most of them are still thought of) are beginning to add up to something that might tentatively be thought of as the future of public television stations.

The test will be whether or not the community partnership strategy delivers new revenue streams. If it does, then a new business plan can evolve—as an augmentation of the old one rather than as a total makeover. If it doesn't, then public television is probably doomed to struggle on under its old business plan—a plan that was designed for a different time and a different industry.

What has to happen, from my perspective, to make the strategy work? First of all, the attitude adjustment—the willingness to change the culture—has to take place within each station, from its board right down to its humblest employee. There is no point in trying to engage the community unless this change has taken place, or is taking place.

Second, since it is time-wasting and expensive to reinvent the wheel 168 times over, it is important that stations have a way of knowing what other stations are doing—what works and what doesn't work. Public television stations, even though they meet each other fairly often, have a tendency to be isolationist—to think no other station is quite like them. One of the most amazing things about what has happened in Cleveland during the past six years, while it has been written about and spoken about a good deal—is that so few stations have thought it holds any practical applications for them. "You can do that sort of thing in Cleveland. You couldn't do it here." But models are created to be adapted as well as copied, and it is important that some kind of an exchange—perhaps a lab, maybe a virtual lab—is established so that stations can see some of the 'best practices' from other stations (and, indeed, some of the successful experiments in commu-

nity partnering by libraries, hospitals, universities and other community organizations that have nothing to do with the media).

Third, the stations are going to need help, and probably a good deal more help than the central organs of public television are capable of giving, because these very fundamental experiments in community partnership will have to be undertaken while the stations are struggling to adapt to digital technology, and while most of the revenue streams on which they still rely are either flat or declining. Local and regional efforts, which should be the broad base of the strategy for the future and the means by which 168 licensees have the opportunity to move forward, would seem to be peculiarly suited to the sort of funding and involvement that local and regional foundations are capable of, and for which most of them exist.

Forty Years On

Remarkably, public television took almost no time at all to establish itself and become part of our tradition—ten years, at most. Its children’s programming and its primetime schedule, which so obviously filled a gaping hole in American television, were primarily responsible. But it was not given the means to develop and grow along with the rest of the media. When cable channels started up and stole its clothes, it was unable to respond. When its national programming should have been developing and diversifying, it was actually narrowing down to be the product of only three stations, all of them on the east coast. When the high quality and distinction of its educational archive could best have been exploited in the streaming boom, public television’s OnCourse quickly collapsed in face of commercial companies with vastly inferior content. When the stations should have been growing into vital community resources, most of them were (at best) on a plateau, cutting back on local content, and some of them were hanging on, sometimes by their fingertips. In these and many other disappointments, the spirit was generally willing, but the business plan didn’t allow for it.

Outsiders tend to think of public broadcasting as a “top down” organization. They think that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Public Broadcasting Service—and even the Congress itself—will be the agents of change, if change is needed. But CPB and PBS can’t be and Congress won’t be—at least not unless Congress is prepared to allocate a tidy proportion of upcoming spectrum auction revenues as a trust fund for public broadcasting, which seems a very distant proposition at this (or any other) time. In fact, if public television is to change, it will have to be from the bottom up, from the stations right up through the system.

And this is a propitious moment for that change—a moment when new technologies have so transformed the media habits of the nation that many traditional forms of media

are in real danger of becoming obsolete, but also a moment when these same technologies, by nature so flexible and adaptable, can be harnessed to do things in new, fast, and relatively cheap ways. For a local public television station, they offer a number of very timely opportunities—to provide new services in new, nonbroadcast ways; to distribute other people’s content as well as its own; to open up the possibility of new revenue streams; and to become, in general, a community enabler, a go-to organization at the heart of the community, one whose own identity is bound up in that of the community.

“The local stations must be the bedrock upon which Public Television is erected, and the instruments to which all its activities are referred.”

Thus spoke the 1967 Carnegie Commission, and it’s just as true today. If public television is to do more than survive during the next forty years, if it is to flourish, then it will be because it changed and greatly augmented its business plan in the first years of the digital dispensation (sometime between now and about 2012). And that change will have happened at the local station level, from where it will have percolated to the national, and even the international, level. ■

RICHARD SOMERSET-WARD

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WVIZ



ideastream

ideastream: the New “Public Media”

In Cleveland, a partnership between a public radio station and public television station may be one model for the future of American public media. ↪ BY M.J. ZUCKERMAN

A short walk from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and not far from “The Jake,” home of the Cleveland Indians, there’s a curious 95-year-old seven-story building—originally a fashionable furniture showroom—which, recently renovated, is the home of ideastream, a re-invention of public broadcasting that is generating a digital pulse of media excitement in the surrounding communities while, nationally, attracting curiosity and some downright envious stares.

An engagingly open structure, with more than 80 feet of windows on the avenue enticing passersby to peer in on live broadcast operations and dance studio rehearsals, the building is the physical manifestation of an elegantly simple concept. This is the vision of two media veterans who placed the mission ahead of all other interests to create an

organization whose work is rippling outward into the education community, rejuvenating real estate development, bringing at least a thousand jobs to downtown, increasing public access to government and the arts, providing a center for performing artists to train and exchange ideas, giving rise to a hip tech neighborhood and convening public debate about American ideals.

And those are just the bonuses, the add-on benefits. Originally, when this all began about 10 years ago, the goal was to define a sustaining purpose for public broadcasting in Cleveland. The underlying concept was to merge the resources of public television and public radio. And then things kept percolating. By most accounts, ideastream has not only succeeded in defining a sustaining purpose for public broadcasting in Cleveland, but also demonstrated enduring potential as a hybrid: public media.

Along the way, ideastream's founders struck upon what more than a few leaders in the industry see as one of the most robust models for the future: A multiple media public service organization operating on broadband and built on two critical principles: 1) a commitment to the mission of "strengthening our communities," which is realized by 2) placing the values of partnership ahead of any desire for control.

If this sounds simple, it isn't. Even if you are deeply versed in the pervasive challenges facing public radio and public television, there is likely to be an "Aha!" moment as you come to understand that Jerry Wareham and Kit Jensen—respectively, the CEO and COO of ideastream—have established a *raison d'être* for public television and public radio that transcends traditional notions of broadcast and simultaneously offers a model that could, in time, remedy what some have called "the flawed business model" of public broadcasting.

Wareham, formerly CEO of television station WVIZ, acknowledges that his "mid-western modesty" is an essential asset, keeping ideastream's partnerships free of control issues and, yet, it is also a quality that innately limits his ability to openly tout the accomplishments he has realized in concert with Jensen. He is the genial host and deal maker, she is the firewall and executor of planning.

Jensen, the former CEO at radio station WCPN, is a serious woman who chooses her words carefully and whose frontier, can-do spirit (she spent nearly 20 years in Alaska, building the state's first National Public Radio station, which for years broadcast the only statewide news content) has been instrumental in shaping ideastream. Jensen recalls arriving in Alaska in 1968 as a period ripe with potential, a time when the federal government was anxious to see Alaska's social, cultural and economic infrastructure developed in support of the oil pipeline to Prudhoe Bay. But she says it took "intentionality" to make the government's interests dovetail with the community's need for honest, broadcast information.

“I had this incredible opportunity to be there and be part of it, so my background is predisposed to possibilities and a little broader view of what broadcast could be and mean to a community,” she says. “It was an exciting, and heady time.”

She speaks similarly of her work with Wareham in creating ideastream and later overseeing the renovations of the building at 1375 Euclid Avenue, now known as the Idea Center. Though Jensen sees the development of idea-stream as mostly the product of “really hard work,” she also says, “I think a lot of it is making your own luck. Seeing things as they might be and asking: Why not? I think it’s a matter of will, willing it to be and using every asset you can find to bring it about.”

Initially, what Wareham and Jensen sought to accomplish, the merger of WVIZ and WCPN, was by itself no small management task. While each organization had outgrown its facilities and recognized the benefits of convergence, both in terms of technology and reducing costs through shared infrastructure and operations, they faced an uphill struggle in making their boards and staffs understand the value of surrendering separate, time-tested identities as traditional programmers and broadcasters to become a single, multiple-media public service organization.

And, as they began to wrap their minds around the challenges inherent in such a merger, the tougher, bedrock issues emerged: lingering 20th century questions facing public broadcasting, made more critical by the digital era’s costly rules of engagement:

- Is public television still relevant in an era when 90 percent of American households are wired to receive 500 television channels, which in many cases deliver the type of content formerly available only from the Public Broadcasting System (PBS)?
- How are PBS, NPR, their affiliates and sister organizations to produce competitive, quality programming when the business model for financing public broadcasting—dependence upon the whims of federal, corporate and philanthropic sponsors, supplemented by mind-numbing on-air fund drives—is showing signs of new structural defects and losses in audience?

The answer, in Cleveland, was to create a multiple-media center that is not only about more or better-targeted programming but also about becoming a resource for community interaction, providing a variety of traditional broadcast and extraordinary broadband-related services.

David Giovannoni, whose market analysis of public radio over the past 20 years is widely credited with shaping today’s success at NPR, insists that it’s a mistake to lump radio and television together. They are separate entities with their own strengths and failures. “There is no such thing as ‘public broadcasting,’” he says. “There is public radio and there is public television, and then, arguably, there is something you could call public media.”

From the consumer’s perspective the merger is seamless. WCPN is still public radio

and WVIZ is still public television. *Morning Edition* is there when folks awake and *All Things Considered* brings them home at night; *Sesame Street* inspires children's learning and *The NewsHour* informs adults' ideas. But when you talk to those who have worked with ideastream, they will tell you, again and again, that together, the two stations are doing much more than they could ever have done separately to serve their communities.

The media and technology here runs the gamut: obviously there is television and radio and, certainly, Internet, but also broadband delivering on-demand, digitally stored lesson plans, live accounts from the state legislature and the state supreme court, hi-tech classrooms to help educators learn cutting-edge software to engage their students and a truly stunning state-of-the-art theater adaptable for live performance and/or broadcast. They have done away with separate TV and radio staffs; there is no "newsroom." Instead, they have merged into a single "content staff," charged with finding new ways to embrace and engage various communities—defined with a broad brush as regions, ethnic groups, political interests, technologies, educators, health matters, families, children, religions, and so on—with a digital presence. That's how you compete and remain relevant in a 500-channel environment.

Think of ideastream as a digital community center or a virtual YMCA, seeking to draw together the resources of "heritage institutions" (museums, theaters, colleges, libraries, medical centers, government agencies, etc.) and make them digitally available on-demand to patrons, clients and students. For these and other services they develop, ideastream and its partners receive grants or are paid an operating fee by school districts, government agencies or philanthropies. This is still a not-for-profit organization, but one financed, sometimes directly, by the communities it serves. They call it a "sustainable service model." Skeptics have called it "pay to play."

Ideastream is certainly not the only PBS or NPR affiliate attempting these kinds of initiatives. Wareham and Jensen rattle off the call letters of many affiliates in cities large and small that have inspired, influenced and informed ideastream's efforts. Many of the 355 PBS and 860 NPR stations are examining the benefits of mergers or partnerships, experimenting with new media, working with new ways to produce and distribute content, and becoming more interactive with their communities. Yet ideastream, for now, seems to be ahead of the crowd.

"What Jerry and Kit are doing in Cleveland may well be the model for what other stations should be doing," says David Liroff, a widely recognized visionary of public media. "And they are not alone in this. They just have focused more clearly as a locus and catalyst and convener of civic discussion. And what is truly radical about them is that they mark such a departure from the traditional expectations of what the traditional public television and public radio model should be."

Origins of Public Broadcasting

There seems little doubt that the original lofty goals set out for public broadcasting remain deeply woven into the character of the organization and the aspirations of its leaders. “On a sustaining basis no one is in the space that we’re in,” says Paula Kerger, President of the Public Broadcasting System. “At the end of the day, the commercial marketplace simply is not fulfilling what public television originally set out to do, which was to use the power of media to entertain, educate and inspire. They [cable] sometimes entertain pretty well but they don’t always hit that educate and inspire part.”

While several of the 500 channels—“the vast wasteland” as former FCC Commissioner Newton Minow famously labeled television in 1961—have sought to produce high-minded programming, it rarely survives Wall Street’s demands for ever-increasing profits, which require large and loyal audiences, typically built on a formulaic “lowest common denominator” of public interests. Thus, A&E has lowered its once PBS-like standards and now provides prime-time staples such as *CSI Miami* while Bravo touts its lineup as: “Fashion, Comedy, Celebrity and Real Estate.”

Although commercial attempts at playing in the PBS marketplace have frequently fallen short, PBS itself, while true to its calling, struggles to maintain its viewership, with the commensurate loss of pledges those viewers provide. Add to that erosion in the financial support it previously enjoyed from business, foundations, governments and universities.

The New York Times wasn’t the first to question PBS’ future this past February, when it wrote a biting analysis beneath the headline “Is PBS Still Necessary?” According to the article, “Lately, the audience for public TV has been shrinking faster than the audience for commercial networks. The average PBS show on prime time now scores about a 1.4 Nielsen rating, or roughly what the wrestling show ‘Friday Night Smackdown’ gets.” Acknowledging the occasional “huge splash” from a Ken Burns special, the *Times* uses the term “mustiness” to describe PBS’s prime-time lineup, noting, “The *Newshour*, *Nova*, *Nature*, *Masterpiece* [Theatre] are into their third or fourth decade, and they look it.”

While PBS viewership has slipped from 5.1 million members in 1990 to 3.7 million in 2005, public radio scored dramatic gains in weekly audience, up from about 2 million in 1980 to nearly 30 million today. But NPR, too, is realizing significant losses, according to Giovannoni, whose market research is the gold standard of public radio.

There was a 6 percent decline in listeners to *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition* between 2004 and 2005, Giovannoni’s research found. His most recent report, *Audience 2010*, which “set out to identify what is causing public radio’s loss of momentum” found that “our listeners are still listening to radio [but] increasingly not listening to us.”

Losses in popularity translate into lost revenues. While listeners and viewers who remain loyal have been willing to pay more in annual subscriptions or membership

fees—on the PBS side, an average of \$55.04 per subscriber in 1990 rose to \$99.84 in 2005—the loss in market share has taken its toll as corporate sponsors follow the audience. And because the federal side of the ledger is light in a good year, the bulk of funding comes from subscribers, corporate sponsors, foundations and state and local government, with the balance coming from colleges, universities, auctions and other activities. For 2005, the last year for which the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) has reported data, statistics reflect a one-year loss of 6.7 percent in business sponsorships, a 7.1 percent decrease in foundation support, a 3.9 percent cut by states, a 3.7 percent loss in federal grants and contracts, and a meager 0.3 percent rise in subscriber support.

Adding to the difficulty, each year since taking office, the Bush administration has sought to slash spending for public broadcasting operations, most recently seeking a \$200 million slice of the \$400 million Congress approved for the FY2009 budget. Each year the faithful have rallied, successfully preserving the 10-to-20 percent federal share of the PBS and NPR budgets.

This financial dilemma is as old as public radio and public broadcasting in the U.S.. In January 1967, the landmark Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, created by Carnegie Corporation of New York, completed a two-year study, providing the blueprint for creating public television—to which Congress added, over some



Jerry Wareham and Kit Jensen of ideastream

objections, public radio—and enacted the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, creating CPB as the oversight mechanism which, in turn, created PBS in 1969, and NPR in 1970, as the national content producers and parent organizations for stations throughout the nation. Congress rejected the Carnegie Commission's proposal for a 2-to-5 percent excise tax on the sale of television sets—modeled on the British system for funding the BBC—to guarantee the unfettered, financial health of public broadcasting.

Ten years later, a second Carnegie Commission, often

called Carnegie II, issued *A Public Trust: The Report of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting*, which sought, once again, to secure financial independence for media technology and a more forward looking purpose for public broadcasting.

Carnegie II recognized that new technologies were affecting the media and reinforcing the deeper questions, raised by visionaries such as Marshall McLuhan, regarding media's influence on society, cultural values and democracy. Said the report, "This institution [public broadcasting], singularly positioned within the public debate, the creative and journalistic communities, and a technological horizon of uncertain consequences, is an absolutely indispensable tool for our people and our democracy." Thus, Carnegie II sought to keep the door propped open to future technologies through a strong, independent financing mechanism, noting, "We conclude that it is unwise for us to attempt to chart the future course of public broadcasting as it continues to interact with new technologies. We are convinced, however, that it is essential for public broadcasting to have both the money and flexibility necessary to enable it to chart its own course as it responds to the future."

That idea, too, went nowhere. Not surprising, suggest Liroff, a 28-year veteran of WGBH in Boston and currently Senior Vice President, System Development and Media Strategy at CPB. He says, "It was, to paraphrase McLuhan, as though we were speeding into the future at 90 miles per hour with our eyes firmly fixed on the rearview mirror.



Paula Kerger

The idea of public broadcasting pre-Internet, pre- any of these technologies, was going to be a manifestation of the broadcasting system they knew at the time, dominated, of course, by commercial broadcast." He continues, "This question of what is the role of public broadcasting in the media environment is as relevant today as it was back then except that the answers have to be very different. This is hardly the environment in which this system [of media distribution] was first envisioned."

Increasingly, there is appeal for public broadcasting to expand its traditional role, to grow their portfolios as ideastream has done in order “to provide new services in new, non-broadcast ways,” explains Richard Somerset-Ward, an expert on public media and senior fellow at the Benton Foundation, which promotes digital media in communications. “This includes distributing other people’s content as well as its own; to open up the possibility of new revenue streams and to become, in general, a community enabler, a go-to organization at the heart of the community, one whose identity is bound up in that of the community,” he says.

Ward and others argue that public broadcasting has followed a flawed trickle-up business model: local public broadcasting stations must raise funds which they pay to NPR or PBS to produce programming. This has created enormous challenges, primarily for television where production costs are huge and viewership is decaying.

“The problem with the PBS stations is that they’ve never been able to contribute enough for PBS to not be almost totally dependent upon sponsorships, which they have been unable to keep up,” says Somerset-Ward. “What you need to do is to increase the amount of funding the stations put in and that means optimizing the health of the stations. That doesn’t mean an entirely new business plan [for the stations], just augmenting the present one. And the way is open to do that because of digital and all that implies. And Cleveland is the best example of how that can be done.”

However that requires an attitude adjustment on the part of broadcasters accustomed to an “I-produce, you-view” model, in which content is tightly control by producers and “pushed” to consumers, says Liroff.

Larry Grossman, the former PBS president, highly regarded as a visionary in public broadcasting, began talking in the 1980s about the need to create “a grand alliance” of “heritage institutions,” bringing together public broadcasters, universities, libraries and museums. Today, Grossman remains committed to a top-down approach in which PBS and NPR lead and the stations follow. What is lacking, he says, “is a blueprint and anybody articulating the dream: what is the role of public broadcasting, what should it be going forward?”

Yet, Grossman’s vision in the 1980s remains vital today. Explains Liroff, “What Grossman saw more clearly than the rest of us is that public broadcasters and universities and libraries and all the rest are all in the same business and the old business model that makes them look so different is being compromised—in the best sense of that word—in terms of their separate identities by digital technologies, which they all share. So it is just as likely...that digital technologies allow these heritage institutions, among others, to begin to extend their services...on the Internet in ways, which at least in form, will be indistinguishable one from the other.”

Or, put another way, Internet consumers tend to be agnostic about the sources of data; they don't necessarily know or care which museum or library provided the recording of, say, Robert Frost reading "The Road Not Taken"—just that they can access it. Add to that the current steep declines in the cost of digital storage and you have "extraordinary consequences for any individual's ability to call up what they want when they want it," says Liroff.

What all this means is that broadcasters and journalists, who have been trained by competition and regulators, most notably the FCC, to fiercely protect and keep tight reign over their turf, to serve as gatekeepers, must learn to loosen the controls, become more interactive and accepting of "pull" technologies.

But that raises an important question: if traditional broadcasters are expanding their roles to serve as content developers and data distributors on platforms other than broadcast, does the mean that five or ten years from now their primary function could be something other than delivering programming by radio and television?

That seems a distinct possibility, say many observers, including Liroff, Grossman and Somerset-Ward. Yet industry leaders, including Wareham, Kerger and others, are quick to disagree.

"Everyone is quick to write off traditional broadcasting, but it's been around a long time and survived all sorts of predictions of early demise," says Ken Stern, former CEO of NPR. "So I don't think that's going to change."

Stern resigned his post as CEO this March after only 18 months, reportedly in a dispute with his board over NPR's digital future, which he saw combining a strong video presence on the web with Public Radio's traditional radio journalism. "I absolutely agree that the audience is being fragmented and it's important for public broadcasters to meet the audience where it is, so things like podcasting and moving to multiple platforms is the reality," he says. "But the need is to meet the audience across many platforms and not to give up the broadcast platform."

Creating ideastream

Wareham and Jensen are absolutely sure that they can't recall the first time they discussed merging WCPN and WVIZ. That's probably because they tried dating for a while before contemplating marriage—that is, the broadcast operations, not Wareham and Jensen.

In 1997, the stations joined forces to do a series of stories on "urban sprawl," and despite a rough start it pointed the way towards greater cooperation. "It was a really miserable experience," says Wareham, laughing. "The computer systems didn't talk to one another. The radio people thought the TV people were shallow. The TV people thought the radio people were weird. But a funny thing happened. We started getting these phone calls from

viewers and listeners: ‘Didn’t I see or hear something about how to get involved in my community?’ And, in spite of ourselves, we had made an impact and that got the attention of our boards.” They continued to look for joint projects and, with Wareham and Jensen in the lead, by the fall of 1999 the planning committees of the two boards were in meetings discussing merger.

While Cleveland’s economy was and continues to be distressed, the financial motivations for merger related to increased efficiencies realized in staffing, marketing, fundraising and grant seeking. Both were also desperate to replace dilapidated facilities.

“But this did not start out with something being broken. Both broadcast stations were in good shape. Except for their physical location,” says Susan Eagan, then with the Cleveland Foundation, which served as a neutral moderator to the discussions. “It was mostly Kit and Jerry looking out ahead and seeing a lot of unrealized opportunities...and knowing that if public broadcasting was not repositioned and aligned with what was going on in the larger marketplace, at some point down the road there could be some significant issues.”

Wareham and Jensen argued that the emerging reality, the shift in the marketplace, meant, “Access to programming through broadcast distribution is becoming relatively less valuable than content creation, packaging, marketing and control of intellectual property.” In other words, having control of the media delivery system is no longer sufficient to remain a player in the community; content development is of greater importance.

While much of this may seem self-evident today, it wasn’t all so clear in 1999 to members of the two boards. To make their case, Wareham and Jensen turned first to Chicago and then to Cinderella.

Network Chicago, a multiple media public service organization operated by Chicago’s WTTW was a model very similar to what Wareham and Jensen wanted to create in Cleveland. A 1999 promotional video, which they brought to a meeting of the Cleveland boards, explains, “We can create alliances with cultural, educational and business institutions...We can leap beyond the television screen and carry our quality content to radio, print, and the Internet...[create] strategic alliances...driven by our values.” (Unfortunately for WTTW, Network Chicago’s business model relied heavily on advertising in a print publication, which did not succeed.)

But the “Aha!” moment in the negotiations, the inspiration that enabled people to understand how this worked, they say, came when Jensen posed the question, *What is Cinderella?* To illustrate the point, she passed around several props including a Disney DVD, an illustrated story book, a Cinderella Barbie, and a volume of the original French fairy tale. Which one of these various media forms is Cinderella? “The right answer was really intellectual property,” she says. “We needed an object to illustrate that

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The Idea Center

It was here, at 1375 Euclid Avenue, back in the 1950s, in the studios of WJW, that disc jockey Alan Freed coined the phrase “Rock & Roll.” Well, Cleveland still rocks!

Alice Walker

All the proof you need is a visit to The Idea Center, home of ideastream, where you will experience a symbiosis of community-based arts and media raised to the highest level of quality. For example: one afternoon last December, Alice Walker and Marsha Norman sat facing each other on the stage of the black box theatre that occupies a three-story space in the center of the building.

This was an event that served multiple purposes. Walker, author of *The Color Purple*, was in Cleveland to promote the Oprah Winfrey musical based on her book, due to open in the spring of 2008. Norman, author of the play *‘night Mother*, wrote the libretto for the Winfrey musical.

Walker made a little news by saying this would be her final appearance on behalf of the book, the movie or the musical. But the real show was listening to these two sophisticated ladies light up a corner of downtown Cleveland.

Filling the 300-seat bleachers rising up two stories in front of the floor-level stage were college and high school students as well as several local arts dignitaries, who took turns lining up at the microphones to ask questions. Meanwhile, at a half-dozen schools throughout northeast Ohio, another hundred-plus students watched the event live via broadband and they, too, lined up for a chance to interact with the two Pulitzer Prize-winning writers. Currently, ideastream is linked via broadband to 115 public schools and 190 private schools, reaching a potential audience of 500,000 students.

On any given day, the black box theater does double duty, serving primarily as a theater for the performing arts sponsored by the Playhouse Square Foundation and also as a live TV studio for WVIZ and PBS. So, on this occasion, the two-hour event was also taped for local broadcast in the spring, when *The Color Purple* is presented at one of the major theatrical stages at Playhouse Square and is being offered to PBS affiliates as one in a series of artist appearances at the Idea Center.

These presentations, and the resulting TV productions, are called “Master Moments,” where famous performers speak candidly about their work. Some other recent visitors to the “Master Moments” stage include composer Marvin Hamlisch, actress Chita Rivera and composer/lyricist Adam Guettel.

Many of the student-questions Walker fielded related to fame—How has it changed her life? Does it make writing easier or more difficult?—and with each answer she seemed to become more succinct and focused until, towards the end of the two-hour session, she offered in reply a poem she said she wrote some time ago:

*Expect nothing,
Live frugally
On surprise.*

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platforms do not define content, content just exists. Cinderella had presented itself in all these different media in all these periods of time. And now we were facing the need to re-invent how we present our stories. This really worked for people.”

From that point forward, parties to the talks say, there was only one essential sticking point: who’s in charge? And this provided a defining moment in ideastream’s reinvention of public broadcasting.

“When it came to the CEO question it all fell apart because people had their loyalties,” says Eagan. The WVIZ board pressed for Wareham; the radio side wanted Jensen. But what happened next was iconic in terms of the ideastream partnership model: Wareham and Jensen wrote a memo saying, if the boards agreed, they would resolve the leadership issue on their own. But until the discussions moved off this point neither of them would have anything further to do with the proposed merger. They took their egos off the table.

“That was a very, very critical moment,” says Eagan. “And it set a standard that said, this is not about us, this is what the community is entrusting to us.”

The boards bought it. Weeks later, on a Sunday, Wareham and Jensen met over coffee. Each made a long list of what they liked most and least about their jobs. They exchanged documents. They agreed he would be CEO and she COO. The same procedure was followed with other managers at the two stations.

Somerset-Ward and others credit this enduring, almost stubborn, spirit of cooperation as the primary reason for ideastream’s success, stemming from the Wareham-Jensen leadership model. “They don’t take credit for anything and that, of course, is one of the main reasons why it works,” he says. “Everywhere else, public broadcasting stations that I know of, would leap at the opportunity to grab credit. Jerry and Kit understood from the beginning that you couldn’t do that, not if you want to be a partner. That is why they have been successful.”

On July 1, 2001 ideastream became a reality.

The Listening Project

Wareham is fond of noting how clearly the current mission and approach of ideastream mirrors a key statement of the 1967 Carnegie Commission report, which contends that the underlying purpose of public media is not about technology or distribution: “It is not the location of the studio or transmitter that is most relevant. Rather, what is critical is the degree to which those operating the facilities relate to those they seek to serve.”

Toward that goal, Jensen created The Listening Project, which has informed ideastream’s programming, content and partnerships since its inception. Every year since 2001, ideastream goes out into the communities it serves, drawing leaders and citizens

into a discussion of what matters most to them, how they see their lives, what assets they see in their communities and what public services they see a need for. Ideastream was overwhelmed when nearly 10,000 people took part in 2001. Since then, the number has been held to a more manageable level—1,410 in 2007—who respond to on-air, in-print and online solicitations to fill out a questionnaire. There are also live town meeting discussions open to the public.

This is not the usual market research approach: what do you think of our product and how can we make you use it more? Instead, the key proposition is how to connect to communities in ways that are deemed useful by those in the communities.

Four standard questions are asked each year are: 1) What are the most important assets of the community? 2) What are the most important challenges? 3) Who strengthens those assets and challenges? 4) What could multi-media do to strengthen those assets and [address those] challenges?

What they have heard clearly is that citizens want public media to look into problems and then stay on the topic long enough to lead the way towards some resolution. That means, unlike the normal *modus operandi* of media, not merely shining a bright light on an issue. Such an approach, The Listening Project finds, only serves to increase public anxiety.

“What the community was really asking us to do was to do the partnership, but then hang in there and be consistent about addressing these challenges and assets,” says Wareham. “They wanted us to create community connection and participation. They wanted us to facilitate the process of community members talking with one another.” That has given rise to a community advisory board and two new programs, *Sound of Ideas* a daily radio show and *Ideas* a weekly television program, which extend the community dialogue.

In 2001, Doug Clifton, the editor of *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, asked ideastream to join the newspaper in a project ideal for the new organization. Clifton wanted to do a series of stories, editorials, town meetings and panel discussions examining the departure from Cleveland and the surrounding area of Fortune 500 companies. Wareham and Jensen jumped at the opportunity.

During the next few years, the organizations shared resources and promoted one another’s efforts in what was called “the Quiet Crisis,” which rapidly became the shorthand by which everyone in the region referred to the economic downturn affecting northeastern Ohio. “It was an effort to document the depth of the decline, assess what the future might hold and look at some solutions,” says Clifton. “Although the *Plain Dealer* penetrated the home market very deeply some people would turn to public radio and public TV and that was the audience we were looking for.”

Both organizations saw the effort as a success. “The sum of it was greater than its

individual parts because it brought together three of the serious institutions in the region who were speaking with one voice,” Clifton says.

In addition to anecdotal evidence of success, ideastream can point to:

- Combined 2007 radio and television fund raising campaigns that brought in \$1,999,653, up from \$1,419,530 in FY 2006, \$1,425,575 in FY 2005, \$1,632,609 in FY 2004 and \$1,490,434 in FY 2003.

- Weekly cumulative audience for the spring Arbitron ratings found WCPN audience increased 32 percent between 2001 and 2005. During the same period, the national audience increased 11.5 percent.

- Weekly cumulative audience for the February Nielsen ratings period found the WVIZ audience declined 6.25 percent between 2001 and 2005 compared with a 13.5 percent downturn regionally.

- In the past five years, public radio and public television stations throughout the U.S. have sought guidance from ideastream; they have taken their story on the road to public broadcast operations in at least nine states.

Partnerships: Inside ideastream

Playhouse Square Foundation Provides a Home

Among the partnerships fostered by ideastream, the most evident is The Idea Center, at 1375 Euclid Avenue, from which all else emanates.

One of Wareham’s and Jensen’s earliest ambitions for the WVIZ-WCPN merger was to combine their infrastructure operations and develop a new headquarters. After contemplating a number of locations and partnerships, they became enamored with a proposal from Art Falco, Executive Director of Cleveland’s Playhouse Square Foundation, which, with 10,000 seats, is the second largest center for the performing arts in the U.S., after New York’s Lincoln Center.

Over the past 20 years, Playhouse Square has invested \$55 million to obtain and renovate almost one million square feet of commercial real estate in downtown Cleveland in an effort to restore the once-thriving theater district, says Falco. According to one economic impact study, the commercial and theatrical programs enabled by Playhouse Square generate \$43 million a year for the local economy.

The building on Euclid Avenue was seedy, run down, and only about 10 percent occupied when the mortgage holder agreed to donate it to the foundation, which hoped to turn it into auxiliary work space for its performing arts operations. “We needed to create an arts education space,” says Falco. “We had these wonderful theaters but we didn’t have classrooms and we didn’t have a dance studio, we didn’t have a...theater, we didn’t have gallery space.”

Knowing that ideastream was in the market, he approached Wareham and Jensen and after some design work the two organizations realized they could realize some big savings by sharing their most costly facility needs: Falco wanted a “black box theater” (unadorned performance space) and ideastream needed a second television studio, but neither needed to have access to it on a daily basis. “We knew that we could build a great education and arts center and they could build a great tech and broadcast facility, but we knew it wouldn’t be as good as it would be if we did it together,” says Falco.

By sharing their space needs, the two groups reduced their total footprint from 120,000 square feet down to 90,000, and saved \$7 million. It also meant that a greater portion of the four upper floors would be available to rent, creating revenue flow to defray their annual operating costs. “It has turned out to be a building that not only served our purposes, but has been characterized as a ‘cool’ building, where other commercial tenants who have connections with technology and architecture and design want to be located,” says Falco. “It’s surpassed my expectations.”

As has proven true with many of its partnerships, the ideastream-Playhouse Square partnership is a wondrous symbiosis. Their combined capital campaign exceeded its goal, bringing in \$30 million. They began moving into the facility in fall of 2005 with the last wave in February 2006. The upper floors are 90 percent occupied, well ahead of schedule.

OneCommunity Provides Reach

The grand symbiotic relationship ideastream has embarked upon, which has drawn national attention—including a Harvard Business School study—and opened vast opportunities for Cleveland, is with OneCommunity.



Television Control Room at ideastream

OneCommunity—formerly OneCleveland—was the vision of Lev Gonick, who became CIO and Vice President, Information Services at Case Western Reserve University in 2001, just as ideastream came into being and the Cleveland community was coming to know about the Quiet Crisis. Essentially, what Gonick sought was to build a regional broadband network at relatively little cost to serve the educational, health and nonprofit communities of northeast Ohio. What he didn't have in mind, until he was approached by Wareham, was someone to provide content to that network and, perhaps more importantly, someone with the community connections to bring together the nonprofit community in Cleveland in support of Gonick's vision.

Toward the end of the 20th century, an estimated \$3 trillion-plus was sunk into the streets of the U.S. in the form of fiber optic cable in anticipation of the explosion in broadband digital service, which halted abruptly when the e-commerce bubble burst. Gonick understood that this fortune in so-called "dark fiber" (unused cable), was everywhere in the country. In 2003, Gonick convinced City Signal Corp. to donate several strands of dark fiber to his nonprofit organization, for which the corporation got a substantial tax write-off. In September of that year, OneCleveland was incorporated and Scot Rourke, a former venture capitalist and Cleveland native, became its first executive.

If Gonick is the visionary, Rourke is the master builder. Rourke's plan for the nonprofit was to expand the broadband connection well beyond the city of Cleveland. What he proposed was that the corporations donating some portion of their dark fiber would not only get a healthy tax write-off, but also, said Rourke, "We are going to build the market for you. We will expose the community to the value of [broadband], we'll do the missionary work and build a market demand for the rest of your fiber."

"Scot has a wonderful concept," says Wareham. "He refers to 'Liberating content held captive by various community institutions, universities, foundations, and nonprofit organizations.'" Adds Rourke: "It's not that they are trying to imprison it, it's that they don't know how to let it out."

Some of the programs enabled by the ideastream-OneCommunity partnership:

Distance Learning enables schools, which pay an annual fee, to have interactive access to live shows and instructional classes presented at the Idea Center.

Voices and Choices enables anyone interested in the economic issues of the region to log into a dedicated web site, study the issues, make choices and contribute to an ongoing dialogue, including community town meetings.

One Classroom is the outgrowth of a \$2 million grant from the Cleveland Clinic connecting 1,500 area schools to the OneCommunity network, making rich media content created by ideastream, including lesson plans and other educational content, available on-demand. In time, this is expected to include digitized content from the

many museums and cultural institutions in the region.

Wireless Mesh Network is a work in progress, building on ideastream's FCC licenses to develop a citywide wi-fi network with OneCommunity, Case Western Reserve University, the city of Cleveland and area schools.

Rural Health Network, when completed, would create a broadband network for participating medical institutions in Northeastern Ohio to exchange medical data ranging from paper records and MRIs to televised medical exams.

Somerset-Ward says of ideastream and its partnerships: "They are becoming much more than just community broadcasters, they are becoming community enablers. And they are doing that by forming partnerships with community institutions. Jerry and ideastream are in a class of their own...But it's a model of what communities can do when institutions like schools, universities, and health authorities create partnerships."

Harsh Realities

Perhaps the toughest part of using ideastream as a model is broadband access. Rourke, however, insists that should not be a problem. Dark fiber exists throughout the nation and large telecommunication companies are anxious to build a market for broadband by getting the attention of consumers—and one way to do that is to donate a couple of strands of fiber to a local nonprofit, with the added benefit of a tax break. "We know we can repeat this pretty much anywhere in the United States by promising that we are going to create the market and we aren't going to touch the residential customer," says Rourke.

Some observers say that an equally tough challenge is finding people willing to cede control, both in terms of the traditional gatekeeper role played by broadcasters/journalists and a willingness to enter into partnerships in which the traditional objectivity of the broadcaster/journalist might be questioned. Other skeptics have challenged ideastream's partnerships with regional institutions that are sometimes subjects of media scrutiny, such as the Cleveland Clinic, the second-largest employer in the state, which has provided grants to OneCommunity and ideastream.

Unquestionably, partnerships can create the appearance of conflicts of interest for journalists whose stock in trade is perceived objectivity. But the same can be said with respect to advertisers: does *The New York Times*, for example, have a problem covering a scandal at General Motors because it accepts ads from GM?

David Molpus, a veteran reporter with NPR and Executive Editor at ideastream since March 2006, says that there are some legitimate issues to be addressed when working with another organization on content creation. "What are the rules of the game? We've started to work that out and codify it," he explains. "We obviously see that there is one level of cooperation with another news organization like the *Plain Dealer*. But

then there are degrees of variation: What could you do with the university? What could you do with the city library? What could you do with other nonprofits? What could you do with a government agency?”

There was an early dust-up over a perceived conflict of interest, concerning a grant provided to ideastream to do stories about affordable housing by an organization that also provided affordable housing. “There was concern in the newsroom, at that time, that this organization was setting some agenda,” says Mark Smukler, ideastream’s Senior Director of Content. “But they never did get involved, there was no direct conversation, no proposals, no story ideas. At one point they did place a call to the reporter that was working on it and I told them not do that and they said fine and that was the end of it.”

And, as with any merger or change in corporate identity, there were myriad management issues, including heightened staff distress and brain drain. “I have a great deal of admiration for the model and for the people who put it in place,” says Mark Fuerst of the Integrated Media Association. “Merging any two organizations is a particularly hard undertaking. There are fears, anxieties and big concessions that have to be made. Kit and Jerry deserve great credit for what they’ve done.”

Neither Wareham nor Jensen is recommending others follow ideastream’s lead. “I don’t know if our model can be or should be replicated elsewhere,” says Jensen. “But the key has to be to work within the resources that the communities provide and with full recognition of the communities’ needs.” ■

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