



# The Future of Public Media **FAQ**

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**A Future of Public Media Project, Funded by The Ford Foundation**

<http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/publicmediaFAQ>

## About the Future of Public Media Project

The Future of Public Media Project, funded by the Ford Foundation, explores how media for public knowledge and action are changing and growing in a digital era—beyond yesterday’s defined spaces of prestige journalism, public broadcasting, and community media such as public access cable. Social networking and other Web 2.0 tools, do-it-yourself media (DIY), and new shared platforms, such as Wikipedia, are not only creating new opportunities for media to spur public knowledge and action but changing the terms of mass media as well.

What will public media look like around the corner? How will public platforms in mass media adapt? How will new participatory platforms evolve to serve the needs of democratic publics? What resources and what policies are needed to survive? These questions inform the project.

This FAQ anchors our research and discussions by defining a “public” as a role that people in a democratic society play. They play that role using the tools and skills of communication, informed by media projects and outlets. This FAQ was developed through conversation with our peers, in the participatory tradition of the “Frequently Asked Questions” document, an Internet-era literary form. As such, it is the launchpad for discussion that we continue at [centerforsocialmedia.org/blogs](http://centerforsocialmedia.org/blogs).

## What do public media look like?

### Why a special term? Aren't most media created for public consumption?

Public media are projects and behaviors that address and mobilize publics, within any media. Some media are designed for this purpose (prestige journalism, public broadcasting), while others may do that occasionally (commercial television and radio, blogs).

The right to vibrant public media is an extension of the right to freedom of speech. A healthy democracy includes spaces and tools for members of the public to have informed conversations about issues of public significance and what to do about them.

What makes public media public is the public.

### Isn't "the public" just all of us, collectively?

Not the way we're using the word (and we're using the word this way because it helps us understand our shared media needs for democratic life most clearly). The term doesn't simply refer to a demographic or serve as another word for audiences, but is a concept that draws upon the work of such theorists as John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, James Carey, Benjamin Barber, Nick Couldry, and Michael Schudson.

We are all, potentially, members of the public when we encounter problems that can only be addressed by common action aimed at our governments and other institutions. Such public issues may emerge spontaneously, such as when epidemics or natural disasters occur, or may be caused by an identifiable actor.

For instance, if a factory pollutes the air, that affects everyone in the neighborhood. But to solve the problem, members of that neighborhood will need to know about it, understand related structures of power, and work to bring a group of neighbors together as members of the public (i.e., the affected people who are also aware of their power in a group). They could demand that their democratic government respond to their needs; they could ask the factory to improve (or run the risk of government regulation); they could mobilize a boycott of the factory's products; they might discover another way to respond, by brainstorming together and drawing on skills and connections in the group.

A public, then, exists because particular kinds of problems exist. These problems are created, often accidentally, by some private action or by bureaucracies without accountability. They affect lots of people, many of them outside the private firm or governmental body. The public—all of us when we share problems and find each other to help solve them—provides essential accountability in a healthy society. Each

of us may be a member of a number of several publics organized around specific issues, locations, or shared identities. Publics check the natural tendency of people to do what's easiest, cheapest, and in their own private interest—even when it's bad for others in some way (including ways they may not even have recognized or thought about). They are not rigid structures—publics regularly form around issues, problems, and opportunities for improvement—and this informality avoids the inevitable self-serving that happens in any institution.

Publics are served by standing institutions, although they may be oblivious of that service until they encounter them. For instance, nonprofit organizations that employ scientific and social scientific professionals to generate and analyze information; state-supported social and legal services; and commercial and noncommercial media all enable public life from time to time.

Publics did not exist before open and representative government. They were created around the struggle to create these governmental systems and are critical to maintaining them.

Publics are crucial to democracy because they are the social agents that can redistribute power in society.

## So you're talking about the public interest? Or public opinion?

Neither of these terms deals with how publics form or act, unfortunately, so they're not very helpful in identifying the critically important relationship among publics, democracy, and media. The phrase “the public interest,” a term of art in U.S. policymaking, sadly begs the question of who the public might be and therefore has become a political football. The term “public opinion”—usually meaning the results of a poll of individuals—refers to aggregated individual opinions but avoids the question of how publics can form and be nurtured. More helpful are terms that describe public life as something that people actively engage in.

British scholar Nick Couldry for instance uses two terms, “public attention” and “public connection.” “Public attention” is focusing on a particular issue, and “public connection” is a precondition of understanding oneself as a potential member of the public—a citizen with access to a shared communication space where issues can and should be addressed.

Another useful term is German philosopher Jurgen Habermas's “public sphere”—social spaces and practices in which people discover their public aspects and find political mechanisms to resolve them. The public sphere is a set of social relationships created in the course of communication; media platforms are tools for creating it, not the sphere itself.

## Why are media important for the formation of publics?

Publics create themselves, and they do so with communication. While the forms and outlets for such public communication have changed over time—from the face-to-face meetings of the Roman Forum, to the newspapers sold to members of the emerging middle class in eighteenth-century London coffeehouses and French salons, through the emergence of U.S. broadcast television in the twentieth century, to the internationally available blogs and digital video sites of today—each has served as a central site for social interaction around shared issues and a tool for the construction and maintenance of democratic principles.

Communicating about shared problems—whether it’s traffic congestion in a city; lower wages for women; soldiers not receiving adequate body armor; threats to the business model of public broadcasting; legislation that imperils the environment—builds a group’s awareness of itself as a public. In this context, public media are media that aim to increase public knowledge and cohere and mobilize audience members.

Media, which are synthesized and coherent cultural expressions, have become over the last few centuries critical intermediaries in public communication. When people meet (virtually or not) to discuss what’s important to them, they typically draw upon their experiences with media.

## By public media do you mean outlets like PBS and NPR?

“Public broadcasting” got its name in 1967, when Congress passed legislation creating special federal funds to support noncommercial broadcasters. The people who pushed for that law imagined a service that could fuel public life in many ways and deliberately chose a word with strong civic connotations, although the legislation itself studiously avoided any specifics. The end result has always been hobbled by the fact that Congress decided not to pay for most of the services envisioned. Public broadcasters in the United States have been forced from the start to be full-time beggars.

Public radio and television—funded by a mixture of federal, state, and local funds; viewer support; and corporate underwriting—do sometimes feature programs and series that inform and engage the public. However, these outlets also offer programming that caters usefully to individuals outside their public roles—for instance as consumers who need home improvement information or investment advice, as potential entrepreneurs who want to sell antiques at auction, as caregivers who learn skills, and as children who learn basic concepts. They also offer comforting entertainment that often falls into the realm of what broadcasting historian Erik Barnouw has called the “safely splendid.” When public broadcasters address people in their role as members of the public, they’re serving as public media.

Another protected media zone for public projects, public access television—which cable companies provide in localities where officials have bargained for it in the cable franchise or contract—also offers opportunities for public media projects and behaviors. But whether it actually engages them depends on the political savvy and vision of the local access director. Direct broadcast satellite television is required to set aside some channels for nonprofit use, but those channels have suffered from lack of resources for programming.

Some programmers do take the opportunities of these venues and engage publics with them. In public broadcasting, public affairs programs like *Now* and cultural reporting such as that sometimes featured on *This American Life* often engage viewers and listeners to act as members of the public. Storycorps, featured on public radio, brings new voices and viewpoints to big issues and also enhances a sense of shared community. Web sites and outreach programs created by pubcasting projects like ITVS and *P.O.V.* directly engage publics around issues.

Niche media outlets—newsletters, magazines, low-power radio stations—also appeal to and grow social networks of affinity groups that can mobilize as publics. For instance, New America Media, an ethnic media syndication service, extends the capacity of individual niche outlets both to respond to their own publics and to extend their reach to involve larger publics. Independent film, alternative newsweeklies, zines, community radio, and other platforms have served as tools and rallying points for social change movements that mobilized publics.

Effective public media are designed to create publics.



Mass media, especially television, have had to struggle against the very architecture of the medium in order to act as public media. Its one-to-many, top-down architecture makes the interactivity that fosters public life hard. Nonetheless, public broadcasters have long practiced outreach to nonprofits and community groups; talk radio hosts take questions; newspapers have letters to the editor and ombudsmen.

## Are good public media interactive, then?

Yes—when media create interactivity to address people as members of the public. Scholars such as Yochai Benkler, Henry Jenkins, Mimi Ito, and danah boyd have described a movement to seize media-making tools and use them to create culture and to generate and sustain social life. The same impulses can also fuel interaction with each other as members of the public, when the need arises.

Many mass media forms—book publishing, journalism, personal narrative, filmmaking, musical recording, magazine publishing, videography, photography, and more—have developed interactive capacities as they become digital. The Web has spurred new, many-to-many media, and Web 2.0 technologies like wikis and vlogs expand interactive options.

Public media exist and have flourished in all of these forms, and continue to emerge with each new wave of technology. Wikipedia pages on certain topics—abortion and 9/11 conspiracies are two examples—are good examples of online, interactive public media. They are constantly changing reflections of the existence of a group of people who often disagree with each other about how to understand and share information about something that they all agree is important. Projects like Congresspedia and Citizendium adapt the behaviors developed through the Wikipedia experiment to explicitly public purposes.

Emerging social network and media-sharing sites—from Facebook to Flickr to YouTube and beyond—are also flipping the media distribution equation on its head, detaching content from its original outlets and placing user relationships to the content and one another in the foreground. They are creating platforms for people not only to share their fascination with the latest celebrity but also to share media—their own or others’—about issues ranging from global warming to Darfur. In addition to large commercial sites, more targeted public social networks are emerging. Take oneclimate.net, which provides a media-rich platform for mobilizing around global warming, offering reports and video clips created by OneWorld reporters and partners.

These platforms generate new possibilities for forming publics around media—sharing, rating, and creating media online is much quicker and easier than it was with media in its analog forms. In such an environment, media that were not originally designed for a public purpose can become the center of a movement or an educational campaign. Users are remixing and recontextualizing clips from mainstream sources, for example, to tell new stories and highlight issues. DIY media—usually shut out in the one-to-many broadcast era—can also quickly rise to prominence in such open environments.

Interactivity alone is not the standard for public media, as *American Idol* demonstrates. Instead, it’s about intention and process—interactivity harnessed to mobilize publics.

## Are all public media political?

Publics mobilize around the problems they encounter, and they usually need to act politically and through or against political institutions to effect change, reform corrupt practices, or bring good new ideas into practice.

Public media have often been associated with educational, documentary, or journalistic approaches. However, personal expression and entertainment can equally serve a public media function if they grab

attention, helping people to recognize, articulate, and act upon a political or social issue. Cultural work often creates conditions for understanding that public affairs cannot. Since the 1990s, personal narrative and opinion have become increasingly popular and lively as sites to animate and aggregate publics; certain blogs (such as DailyKos and Feministing) and memoirs (such as Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*) have demonstrated how such expressions can encapsulate and elevate social and political topics. Works such as Byron Hurt's personal essay film *Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* start from a personal perspective and examine the social ramifications of cultural production.

Art has often served as a site for what cultural historian James Carey called "social conflict over the real." That is what has happened with the art of Fernando Botero, whose latest work focuses on torture and terrorism, or *The Vagina Monologues*, which has transformed from its original life as a play to a community performance repeated annually on college campuses across the nation.

Commercial entertainment has generally not served as public media, although programs can raise public issues (as happened when the TV sitcom *All in the Family* triggered national conversations about bigotry).

HBO's recent series *The Wire* suggests how a commercially produced media project might serve as the catalyst for public knowledge and action in the digital age. Over five seasons, the show has spurred media and blogosphere debate about the deep workings of municipal government, policing, and education. Discrete publics have formed around particular aspects of the show's storyline—for example, the Web site After Ellen is tracking the depiction of gay characters, and sociologist Sudhir Venkatesh has been watching the show with a group of gang members to gauge its accuracy. The last season—centered on the slow disintegration of a city newspaper, based on writer David Simon's own experiences—has riveted journalists. Group blogs at Salon.com and *The American Prospect* track different writers' reactions to each episode.

## FIVE PARTICIPATORY MAPS THAT SERVE AS PUBLIC MEDIA

Here are 5 online maps that demonstrate how communicating about shared concerns can help to unify, inform, and motivate publics:

- 1) Who is Sick?:

<http://whoissick.org/sickness>

**shared issue:** contagious outbreaks

- 2) Green Maps:

<http://greenmap.org/greenhouse>

**shared issue:** finding and supporting local resources for sustainability



Greenmap.org

- 3) Access Denied:

<http://advocacy.globalvoicesonline.org/maps/>

**shared issue:** international online censorship

- 4) Money Track:

<http://www.politicalbase.com/money/search>

**shared issue:** campaign finance

- 5) Cato Institute—Botched Paramilitary Police Raids:

<http://www.cato.org/raidmap/#>

**shared issue:** the militarization of law enforcement



cato.org

## Is there anything that couldn't be public media?

Some kinds of media are rarely public media—examples include commercial advertising, political campaigns, and promotional and fund-raising materials. Publications, Web sites, and other media created in the course of doing business as a corporation rarely are made as public media, though they may trigger it. Your personal diaries and home movies aren't public media, but they might become a public media project. If, say, you're the parent of an autistic child, the daughter of an under-resourced soldier on the front lines, or a person returning to a family after incarceration, you may decide to turn this private material into public media by crafting an expression using it, and sharing that with others who connect with you about the issues you're raising.

Individual communication, via phone, e-mail or snail mail, isn't public media, no matter what it addresses. Media are bodies of expression that mediate our understanding and facilitate our communication.

## How do I know when I'm creating public media?

There is no union or guild for creators of public media, and new opportunities present themselves every day. Until recently, our public media have always been proxies for the public, involving editors and producers who decide for us all what's important to know about and how to portray it. Not any more.

Filmmakers are making work—like Judith Helfand and Dan Gold's *Everything's Cool* (about global warming) and Robert Greenwald's *Iraq for Sale* (about military contractors)—that spur public action. Advocacy organizations, like the human rights group WITNESS, showcase video both online and in theatrical and small-group settings, to support and encourage human rights work. New platforms, like nonprofit news platform OneWorld.net and international metablog Global Voices, have sprung up. Cell phones, iPods, and other mobile media devices are providing public media makers with new opportunities to reach and inform micropublics as they go about their daily lives.

**Digital platforms offer the chance for participatory public media.**

The limitations of old mass-media-style public media no longer have to constrain our imaginations. Public media are no longer static sites on the media landscape; they are interwoven in a complex, constantly changing media landscape. We can now begin to create public media made by publics, for publics. We can find creative ways to combine the resources, skill, and knowledge base of mass media with the energy, curiosity, and passions of new grassroots media-makers.

## So it's all good?

No, because this is also an unstable and experimental moment, and we don't have public policies that nurture such experiments in public media. New challenges are emerging along with opportunities. Can you trust that online information? Will your participation invade your privacy? Will the site you've helped to build be there tomorrow? Can potential allies and colleagues find and exchange information easily without your software or your kind of broadband access? Will our infrastructure support our connectedness as members of the public?



## How should public media work?

### What makes for good public media?

High-quality public media make people aware of their role as members of the public, not just consumers of information. We know that the public exists when people act as members of the public—viewers-listeners-readers recommend the piece of media to friends, form an interest group to pressure officials, start a national petition as a result of what they've learned, or change their own habits in response to the larger problem and share that change of habits.

The best public media don't just provide information; they also contribute to helping people understand ongoing and complicated issues. They offer models for respectful and engaging conversation. Public media projects are not the preserve of any particular political party, ideology, social group, or aesthetic style, although they are (implicitly or explicitly) supportive of and conducted according to democratic principles. Public media can be generated via partisan or advocacy organizations and become more than partisan or advocacy media if people use them to fuel their ability to act as members of the public.

Good examples of public media are open, accountable, transparent, and participatory, rather than hegemonic, top-down, cloistered, or cheerleading.

### How interested are publics really in creating and consuming public media?

For entertainment and leisure, most people today still like professionally produced commercial media (like *Lost*). Personal media (your baby's first steps on YouTube) are important for family and friends. Public media serve a different and crucial function: as a form of communication for assessing and resolving differences and challenging entrenched or unjust power.

You may not always want to make or view or read media for public knowledge and action, but you want them there when you need them. You want reliable sources of information about events and processes that affect your quality of life and political options. You want reliable communication platforms that allow you both to use and make media to contribute to public knowledge and action. You want the opportunity to benefit from public media when you need it.

### What behaviors and standards help to mark public media in open environments?

Standards are evolving for making and recognizing public media on digital platforms as we develop practice. It will be important to articulate and share those standards in the public spaces where such media are created. Scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Peter Jaszi have argued that standards and practices are critical resources for governance of participatory media for the public good.

Communities of practice and professionalism have grown up around those forms of media that have traditionally served a public role. For example, through practice and academic training, the field of journalism has developed standards for judging objectivity, vetting and protecting sources, limiting libel and slander, and protecting free speech. Prizes, professional schools, membership organizations, ombudsmen, and trade groups all uphold and reward these journalistic standards, creating an accepted community of

## FIVE WAYS ANY MEDIA BECOME PUBLIC MEDIA

- 1) Members of the public make and assess the media about shared issues themselves (DIY media, blogs and vlogs, community media, Wikipedia, etc.).
- 2) Media-makers engage members of the public to co-create media with them (pro-am media like *Off the Bus* and investigations by *Talking Points Memo*, participatory filmmaking like *The War Tapes*).
- 3) Media products are created or adopted by advocacy groups and activists and incorporated into public outreach campaigns to educate and stir conversations about shared issues (*A Lion in the House*, *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*).



*A Lion in the House*

- 4) Media-makers incorporate significant feedback and discussion tools that allow publics to form around their projects (Global Voices, Slashdot, call-in radio and TV shows).
- 5) Media projects become symbolic markers of a particular issue or public, stimulating wider debate in both niche and mainstream outlets (*The Wire*, *The Colbert Report*, *Sicko*, comedy routines by Chris Rock and Margaret Cho).

practice. Legacy public media organizations, such as PBS and NPR, stake their reputations on providing evenhanded, informed reporting that prepares audience members to serve as informed citizens.

Standards are easier to monitor in top-down media organizations. Open platforms, which allow users to post content that hasn't been assessed for accuracy, bias, or malice, raise questions of truth and legitimacy. The community of practice has not yet stabilized. In some cases, the users of these platforms serve as monitors. Through ranking, editing, and feedback tools, sites like Slashdot self-police. Other communities of new media makers—such as political bloggers—have embarked on their own standard-setting efforts, forming online and offline networks to discuss ethical guidelines and sanction bad actors.

Users, academics, membership organizations, media monitors, foundations, and media-makers themselves all have a role to play in determining the behaviors that will mark public media in a digital, participatory era.

In some cases, makers are working collectively to assert commonly held standards. For instance, through national organizations documentary filmmakers have created a *Documentary Filmmakers' Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use* ([centerforsocialmedia.org/fairuse](http://centerforsocialmedia.org/fairuse)), which clarifies when new creators can use copyrighted material without permission or payment. The *Statement* has changed industry practice. This example has been so persuasive that art teachers, media literacy teachers, dance archivists, cinema scholars, and others have also publicly asserted their commonly held standards for employing fair use.

## What does it take to get public media?

### Is today's public broadcasting the base of tomorrow's public media?

Not solely. Although public broadcasting is an important public resource, into which billions of taxpayer dollars have been sunk and which millions of Americans trust and benefit from, it cannot be the only platform for tomorrow's public media. In fact, public broadcasters are struggling to adapt to the opportunities presented by an open, digital environment. What public broadcasters can provide is an important service of taxpayer-funded, user-supported, high-end media with a mission to mobilize publics. (In that case, many public broadcasters will have to refocus their daily priorities.) Similarly, today's leading journalistic operations, such as the *New York Times*, could be important platforms to grow tomorrow's public media, benefiting as they do from public trust and experience. They too would have to focus their core-mission efforts to engage and mobilize publics.

**Participatory public media will need standards, universal access, and shared skills.**

Tomorrow's public media can grow not only from those bases but from many other current and emerging sites of media for public knowledge and action. These include professional and citizen journalism; nonprofits' databases and tools for public knowledge and action; and Web sites that aggregate, focus, and showcase diffuse knowledge (such as open video platforms like Miro and recommender sites like Reddit and Digg).

### How should public media be paid for?

Good question. In the past, public media have depended on a mix of taxpayer dollars, incentive policies, and donations. Even with volunteer knowledge-building projects like Wikipedia, there are real costs, ranging from servers to electricity to computers to your time. They also depend on often-hidden policies that financially support such projects (including taxpayer support for the creation of the Internet!). So figuring out how to pay for public media creation is a real issue.

Increasingly, Web 2.0 social networking has created opportunities for self-funded media projects, including online "tip jars," micropayments, advertising, and new forms of distribution. But business models for an open, participatory, peer-to-peer environment are all experimental and unstable. No one, including commercial media, knows what emerging business models will look like for any digital media.

Some people envision a future of volunteer public media—publics self-forming through the creation of do-it-yourself media that they volunteer to make and share freely, like what happened with Wikipedia. Others think that taxpayer support, both through direct allocations and through policymaking, will be critical to a stable set of public media practices.

### Do public media need a special "zone," like public broadcasting's special swatch of broadcast spectrum?

Certainly all commercial media are working hard to create strong brand identification, to channel user interest, and to create zones of activity, whether through partnership or aggregation. Whether employed for profit-making or civil-society purposes, zones and "brands" (such as PBS and NPR) are effective ways to help people find not only what they are looking for but other people who are interested in the same thing.

Zones and brands can make clear to people where they can find the media that can help them be the best members of the public they can be, and where they can upload their own contributions.

However, today media for public knowledge and action are created far beyond restricted zones, such as public broadcasting. Tomorrow will also bring new opportunities to infuse our media practices with civic culture. Decentralization and disintermediation have typified the growth of digital culture, and if publics are to be nurtured as digital culture grows, they need to use all the tools and platforms they can.

Just as important as zones and brands will be standards and practices—guides to behaviors that help people know how to communicate with each other as members of the public.

## Do we need to restrain big commercial media giants in order to grow public media?

Commercial media corporations, whether really big (as they were 20 years ago) or super-big (as they are now), have never had mobilizing the public on their agenda. Nonetheless, as the example of *The Wire* and similar experiments shows, it is possible for commercial media to both do well and do good. Commercial media companies, which themselves are struggling to make the transition to a digital era, may yet provide useful examples, tools, and models, as well as shared cultural context, for members of the public. Media consolidation is an issue that may become relevant in some circumstances. **Control** is an enduring issue.

In order to identify what policies about control are central, you have to know what you want out of media for public knowledge and action. Among the key features are universal **access** to communication and media platforms and products; **freedom** to speak, make, and share; and **knowledge** of both techniques and cultural habits of communication and media for public knowledge and action. **What kinds of policies are central, to let makers and users of media for public knowledge and action have control?**

In a participatory, digital era, public media practices will need to be sustained at several levels.

At the level of **deep infrastructure**, public media makers will need equitable, universal access to broadband. Public media projects need to be first-class citizens of the media world, too; such work needs to travel across wired and wireless communication with as high a priority as commercial entertainment.

At the level of **platforms**, public media makers need identifiable venues, channels, “brands.”

At the level of **production**, public media makers need resources and tools to make good media. They need best-practices guidelines—ways to understand ethics, culture, and etiquette of media for democratic civil society in a digital era. They need technical training and cultural education—media literacy for a digital era. They need virtual and face-to-face community centers where media can fuel conversation and action. And they need money and help in figuring out how to make their projects sustainable over time.

## What specific policies could foster and support public media?

Public media will need, not only creative use of existing and emerging platforms, but also protection and support from government. Local, state, and federal governments have done this in the past. For instance, the federal government provided low-cost postal rates to newspapers in 1794 and created a national system of public broadcasting in 1967.

Opportunities to support making public media through policy will continue to emerge as the digital environment grows. A sampler of today's issues might include:

**At the infrastructure level:**

A national broadband policy that can create "universal service" standards for a digital era.

"Net neutrality"—the need for standards that will prevent second-class status (or worse) for public media as providers prioritize the lucrative.

Privacy and identity security—the need for members of the public to be safe communicating with each other, unafraid of government surveillance or corporate information-harvesting.

**At the level of the platform:**

Taxpayer support for public media venues, channels, and brands.

Congressional support for the development of participatory and interactive digital projects by public broadcasting, which is currently constrained to dedicate taxpayer resources to broadcast.

Community support for public media experiments outside of the pubcasting system.

**At the level of production:**

Taxpayer support for public media training and cultural education both in public education and in community centers such as libraries and caregiver sites.

Taxpayer support for professional or professional-amateur public media production.

Public policies that provide tax incentives and privileges for nonprofits creating information banks and tools for media designed for public knowledge and action.

Expansion of the use of balancing features of copyright, such as fair use, which permit makers to quote freely from their commercial culture in order to comment on it or make a new work.

**FIVE WAYS TO TRACK THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC MEDIA**

- 1) Join our conversation at the News from the Future of Public Media blog: [www.centerforsocialmedia.org](http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org), and share your own discoveries about how to track the future of public media.



centerforsocialmedia.org

- 2) Learn about media and internet policy debates at Hear Us Now: <http://www.hearushow.org>.
- 3) Explore new online trends at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/home>.



law.harvard.edu

- 4) Follow the reinvention of community news at the MediaShift Idea Lab: <http://www.pbs.org/ideallab>.
- 5) See how citizens are reshaping media through technology at the MIT Center for Future Civic Media: <http://civic.mit.edu>.



civic.mit.edu

## How would we ever get any of that?

There are plenty of technical mechanisms to raise money from taxpayers and consumers. People have suggested many approaches to raising money, including taxes on durable electronic goods, endowments created by spectrum auctions, and routine appropriations.

The hard part is raising political capital to be able to win battles over policies, regulatory strategies, and enforcement to structure and fund the media environment. Publics will have to mobilize to demand of their elected officials, their regulators, their communications service providers, and their media entities the platforms, services, and opportunities to be able to use and make media for public knowledge and action.

## What's the bottom line for people who think they need public media?

We live in a time when we are connected by information networks as never before. The possibilities are boundless. How will they actually develop? The growth of commercial digital media needs to go hand-in-hand with nurturing of public media opportunities and practices. Public media incentives and practices are investments in the public health of a democratic society ■

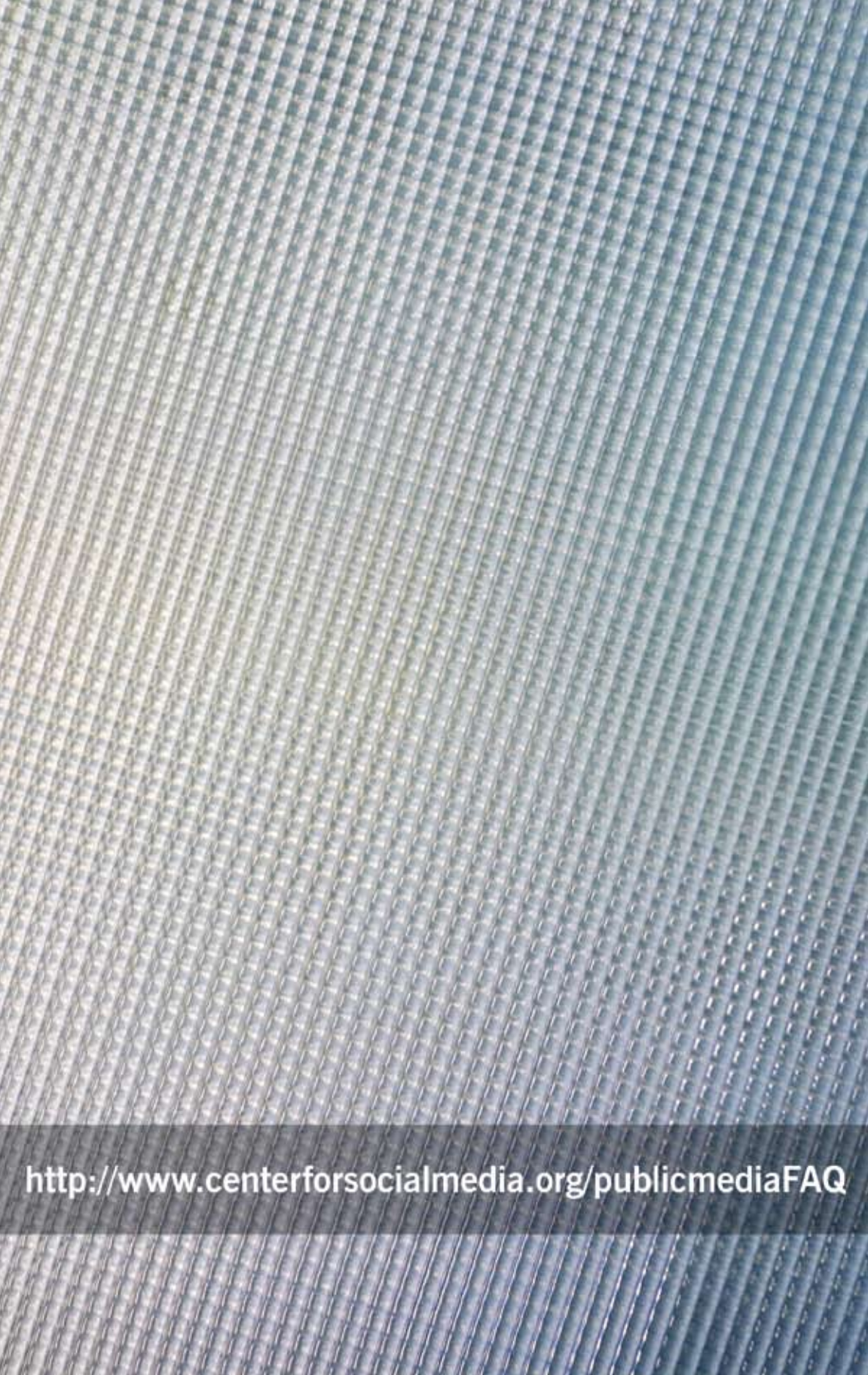


**The Center for Social Media**, led by Professor Patricia Aufderheide, showcases and analyzes media for social justice, civil society and democracy, and the public environment that nurtures them. The center is a project of the School of Communication, led by Dean Larry Kirkman, at American University in Washington, D.C.

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