

The Public Press

STRATEGIC PLAN • 2009 – 2011

**THE MISSION OF THE PUBLIC PRESS IS TO ENRICH THE CIVIC LIFE OF SAN FRANCISCO
BY DELIVERING PUBLIC-INTEREST JOURNALISM TO BROAD AND DIVERSE AUDIENCES,
THROUGH PRINT AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA NOT SUPPORTED BY ADVERTISING.**

WWW.SFPUBLICPRESS.ORG

**The Public Press project is fiscally sponsored by
Independent Arts & Media of San Francisco, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization
whose mission is to expand civic dialogue by increasing access to independent voices**

The Public Press: Our Objective

The Public Press is a startup nonprofit news organization that aims to strengthen reporting on general-interest and under-covered topics in the San Francisco Bay Area through a daily Web site and, eventually, a print newspaper.

Its long-range goal is to create a sustainable noncommercial business model for delivering quality local journalism to diverse audiences inadequately served by the commercial press. Founded in 2007, The Public Press plans to grow in phases, first by publishing local news through multiplatform digital media, and later by gradually expanding its reach with a print edition. Taking inspiration from the audience-supported public broadcasting model, The Public Press will operate without paid advertising. It will instead sustain itself economically through memberships, paper sales and philanthropic support.

The Public Press will provide the community with professional, context-rich and evenhanded reporting on important public-interest events and trends, while also encouraging meaningful and substantive community conversation.

In addition to original reporting, The Public Press will create content and distribution partnerships with an existing web of local independent and public media. By sharing technology and skills, members of this network can work together to encourage civic engagement and enhance communication among the diverse neighborhoods, ethnic groups and shared-interest communities that make up San Francisco.

Needs Assessment

Nation's Press in Peril

Many U.S. daily metropolitan newspapers seem to be in what Philip Meyer, author of “The Vanishing Newspaper,” called a “death spiral” — unable to escape a cycle of falling advertising revenue, staff cutbacks and circulation loss. Large corporations are consolidating formerly independent newsrooms and slashing important coverage areas to finance their debt from these acquisitions. “Wrap all these factors together,” Paul Farhi of American Journalism Review, wrote recently, “and you've set in motion the kind of slash-and-burn tactics that will hasten, not forestall, the end.” In its 2008 “State of the News Media” report, the Project for Excellence in Journalism estimated that from 2000 to 2007, U.S. dailies shed about 5,500 employees, or about 10 percent of their workforce.

We are only starting to feel the social consequences of this declining investment in newsgathering, including superficial and fragmentary coverage of education, public health, the environment, business, labor, social trends, crime and politics. With fewer reporters scrambling to cover larger beats, newspapers have begun to compromise their watchdog role and are missing important stories. As David Satterfield, former managing editor of the San Jose Mercury News, summed up newspapers' cutbacks recently: “It's the best time to be a crooked cop or crooked politician, because your odds of getting away with it are better than they've ever been.”

Bay Area Journalism Decimated

Northern California newspapers have collectively downsized by more than 800 journalists since 2000. At the same time, almost all major Bay Area papers, with the exception of the San Francisco Chronicle, have been consolidated under one owner, Denver-based MediaNews Group.

In February 2009, the Hearst Corp. announced that it would impose extreme budget cuts at the Chronicle and possibly sell or shutter the paper.

These trends have palpably changed news coverage in the Bay Area for the worse, eliminating many neighborhood beats and reducing the frequency of time-consuming investigative reports. With less public-interest reporting at their disposal, newspaper editors are tempted to emphasize inexpensive or commercially lucrative topics such as fashion, celebrities, travel, food, wine and luxury real estate. Though not always apparent to the typical reader, such changes do alter the public's perception of the role of the press in their communities, and could explain recent studies that note waning interest in civic affairs.

This local disinvestment in news reporting on core issues of public concern offers an opportunity for a startup to compete — but only if it focuses its attention and resources on original reporting about news that affects a large number of local people in deep and lasting ways.

Role of Print in the Local News Ecosystem

Audiences increasingly are looking to the Web for news, cutting into the market share of both print and broadcast news. At the same time, the rising cost of energy and paper is impinging on the newsprint business. This has caused some to declare the death of print. We think those predictions are premature.

While audiences find themselves awash in a torrent of 24/7 digital information sources, on a local level trustworthy filters and original sources of information are both still scarce. It is true that creative niche services can assemble global audiences across the Internet by appealing to interest, age, occupation and ethnicity. But the Web generally has a poor track record of building a daily following within a concentrated geographic area. Printed newspapers are more successful at attracting a large and loyal readership within their core geographic zone, even where household broadband penetration is high.

The prospect of a digital-only local news future presents profound equity concerns. For The Public Press, going exclusively online would be insufficient to achieve the goal of informing and engaging a diverse local audience with unequal access to technology. According to San Francisco's 2007 City Survey, only 50 percent of low-income households reported having home Internet access. And while access has improved in some demographic groups, others are being left behind by waves of technological change. In San Francisco, home access varies widely by race: While 87 percent of white respondents access the Internet from home, that figure is only 60 percent for Latinos, 65 for African Americans and 76 percent for Asians.

A new local information source aimed at a mass readership in a metropolitan area would do well to combine the faster pace and multimedia flexibility of digital with the street visibility, convenience and permanence of print. To be accessible, news must be affordable; for a newspaper, individual copy sales and home delivery should be reasonably priced, and low-income neighborhoods should get discounts.

Our Vision: The Public Press

The Public Press is positioned to address these trends as part of a comprehensive media initiative that will produce the nation's first truly noncommercial general-interest daily newspaper.

As a social venture, it will sustain itself by mixing philanthropy (from foundations, individuals and reader "pledges") with subscription revenue and newsstand sales. This alternative business model will sidestep the financial turbulence and anemic print advertising revenues now punishing the commercial press.

Without advertising, the print newspaper will use less than half the newsprint of a traditional daily, making it more portable and easier to read, and making the press run faster. It will employ a cutting-edge design

and reader-friendly Web-inspired organization, including comprehensive front-page indexing and user-generated commentary judiciously mixed into news sections of the print edition.

The Public Press will also draw lessons from the information-architecture revolution that started in Silicon Valley, creating innovative, dynamic news exchanges between the Web, mobile delivery and print platforms. A multiplatform publishing approach will sidestep some of the technological impediments facing existing newspapers, which waste time and energy manually moving news from one system to another.

We envision a new type of local news organization that is accountable to its member-subscribers, who will be invited to participate in decisions about news coverage priorities. This public engagement may come in the form of a community advisory board, public meetings and online forums.

A staff of professional journalists will cover public policy and social trends, with an emphasis on areas neglected or under-reported by the commercial press:

- consumer prices/quality
- wealth and poverty
- public transit
- rental housing
- land-use planning
- science
- environment
- public health
- major and third-party politics
- race and demographics
- primary through higher education
- labor and employment trends
- media accountability
- cultural and language diversity
- prisons
- public infrastructure
- independent arts
- local history

While the Public Press will not be an advocacy publication, it will actively solicit opinion from diverse viewpoints. National and international coverage will stress on-the-ground reporting from multiple perspectives — not just that of The Associated Press. The paper will make room for this enhanced coverage by eschewing luxury lifestyle, the political horserace and emotion-laden crimes and accidents that don't illuminate larger trends.

As Bay Area voters are increasingly asked to vote on complex ballot propositions to decide billion-dollar questions, The Public Press is an effort to re-knit the fabric of one community frayed by a weakened journalism tradition. By prioritizing aggressive coverage of public policy, we hope to kindle a renewed local interest in voting, volunteerism and civic engagement.

Innovation Rooted in Historical Precedent

This alternative business model for newspapers is not entirely new. Other newspapers have been nonprofit or advertising-free, but not both at once. There are now more than a dozen nonprofit-owned dailies in the United States and abroad, all of which are supported by advertising. These include the Christian Science Monitor, the Guardian (U.K.), the St. Petersburg Times (Florida) and the New London Day (Connecticut). There have also been a handful of non-advertising dailies, owned by for-profit companies. These included Chicago's Day Book in the 1910s, and New York's PM in the 1940s.

No one yet has combined the ad-free and nonprofit strategies into a comprehensive service that operates outside the commercial sphere, as many public broadcasters have done for decades — and as the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio were originally conceived. Of course, the hundreds of PBS and NPR stations across the country that broadcast quality original or syndicated journalism are proof that effective local media can be produced through a low-cost, mixed revenue model that relies in part on community financial support. For broadcast, that community funding supplements government support. For a newspaper, it could supplement subscription revenue.

What We Represent: Mission and Values

The mission of The Public Press is to enrich the civic life of San Francisco by delivering public-interest journalism to broad and diverse audiences, through print and interactive media not supported by advertising.

The Public Press is dedicated to the following core values:

INDEPENDENT NEWS, free from influence by commercial, government or political interests.

ETHICAL, PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS inspiring investigation of hard-to-report social problems.

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY, creating a replicable locally financed publishing model.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT and transparency in editorial and business decisions.

DIVERSITY of perspectives and participation from communities overlooked by existing media.

INNOVATION to speed access to information and exchange of reader opinions and expertise.

COLLABORATION with other public media and public-interest research organizations.

ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND USE OF RESOURCES, including newsprint, ink and fuel.

FAIR LABOR PRACTICES and opportunities for career development.

The Process: Strategic Planning and Recruitment

We are currently in a startup phase and are focused on capacity-building activities: organizational development, community outreach to determine unmet information needs, and development of an online publication as a proof of concept that will establish an editorial voice and a test bed for new coverage areas.

The Public Press was established formally in November 2007, when about 20 volunteers attended two brainstorming meetings to found the organization. In January 2008, the project opened an office in downtown San Francisco. The project's Web site, www.sfpublicpress.org, has been in constant development since then.

The strategic planning process began at a meeting on Feb. 9, 2008, and continued at meetings in March, June, August and September; more than 40 volunteers participated in these discussions to define a mission, vision for the future and core values.

In April 2008, The Public Press was granted fiscal sponsorship by San Francisco-based Independent Arts & Media, a nonprofit 501(c)3 whose mission is to expand civic dialogue by increasing access to independent voices.

The Public Press is currently a volunteer-run organization, consisting mostly of journalists. We also have students, documentary filmmakers, community organizers, fundraising experts, technologists and other professionals who have committed themselves to this effort. We anticipate that volunteers will represent the backbone of our planning, fundraising, development and marketing efforts for the next three years.

The Public Press project team is now engaged in research into several aspects of nonprofit and advertising-free media. Volunteers have consulted with more than 150 experts, some of whom were asked to be advisers and are candidates for the board of directors. We are also in the process of preparing grant

proposals, which we will submit to more than 50 charitable foundations that support activities related to journalism, media, public affairs and increasing civic participation.

In October 2008, we launched a public wiki and are inviting people in the community to use it to identify and discuss under-reported news topics in San Francisco. In early 2009, we plan to hold a series of community meetings to gauge residents' needs for information about social trends and public policy affecting their communities.

Content Partnerships

The Public Press will leverage associations with existing nonprofit and independent media and research institutions to build capacity for information gathering, analysis, packaging and dissemination. These groups include public broadcasters, independent community newspapers, civic-minded magazines and Web publishers, nonprofit civic organizations, scientific and social science research foundations, nonprofit journalism collaborations and consumer-protection organizations.

Developing and potential content partnerships:

- KALW-FM's Crosscurrents Radio (crosscurrentsradio.org)
- KQED-FM (kqed.org)
- Spot Reporting Project (spot.us)
- Newsdesk (newsdesk.org)
- New America Media (newamericamedia.org)
- Neighborhood Newswire (neighborhoodnewswire.net)
- The Potrero View (potreroview.net)
- Central City Extra (studycenter.org/test/cce/)
- Fora TV (fora.tv)
- Cal Express/California Media Collaborative (californiamedia.org)
- Center for Investigative Reporting (centerforinvestigativereporting.org)
- The Christian Science Monitor (csmonitor.com)
- Consumer Reports (consumerreports.org)
- National Public Radio (npr.org)
- Center for Public Integrity (centerforpublicintegrity.org)

In the weeks leading up to Election Day 2008, The Public Press joined with Newsdesk in a unique noncommercial news collaboration to fact-check the dizzying array of voter propositions on the San Francisco ballot. The project, which was co-published on Newsdesk.org and Public-Press.org, with segments broadcast on Crosscurrents Radio on KALW-FM, took to task the spinmeisters who flooded San Francisco neighborhoods with fliers containing truths, half-truths, and "truthiness." The series allowed us to begin identifying freelance writers, online producers and editors, and provided invaluable experience in working with content partners.

Additional planning documents

This document will be accompanied by additional specific plans in key areas during the first year of operation: financial (business plan), editorial, marketing and communications, technology, design, human resources, partnerships, fundraising.

Organizational Milestones

The Public Press has established the following organizational milestones for three phases of operation. The ideal timeline for these phases correspond to the calendar years 2009 through 2011, though this pacing depends on funding:

PHASE 1 (2009)— ONLINE ONLY

The Public Press' Web site re-launches as a news platform, publishing investigative, trend and spot news stories. The site will begin with weekly updates and progress to daily publication as funding is secured to hire additional staff.

Organizational Development:

- Conduct community meetings to assess unmet information needs
- Write business plan
- Hire business manager to oversee non-editorial operations
- Establish advisory boards
- Establish board of directors

Reporting and Editing:

- Write editorial plan to target community's unmet information needs
- Hire part-time editor and freelance reporters to create Web stories
- Pitch stories for funding through Spot.us

Partnerships:

- Exchange content with radio, Web sites and cable-access channels
- Contact and recruit additional local and national content partners

Technology:

- Design and launch beta site and begin regularly publishing online
- Investigate mobile-platform delivery
- Develop Web-to-print platform

Production and Design:

- Build design mockups for print publication (phase 2)
- Model printing costs based on revenue projections
- Market-test formats and sections

Distribution:

- Choose neighborhoods for initial print distribution
- Design low-fossil-fuel delivery system (especially bicycles)

Fundraising:

- Pursue grant funding from charitable foundations
- Hold fundraising events
- Construct plan for memberships and pledge drives

PHASE 2 (2010) — WEEKLY PRINT

The Public Press expands digital reporting while beginning to print a weekly newspaper. Print distribution will begin in one neighborhood with carefully managed expansion.

Organizational Development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Rent larger newsroom➔ Hire operations staff for print publication➔ Conduct community meetings
Reporting and Editing:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Hire full-time reporters. Revise beat topics, sections and columns➔ Produce weekly enterprise and investigative reports
Partnerships:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Print public radio transcript excerpts
Technology:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Expand team to include expert multimedia producers➔ Build video, audio and interactive tools
Production and Design:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Hire additional production staff➔ Produce weekly print edition
Distribution:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Build billing and sales infrastructure➔ Distribute prototype in selected neighborhood by bicycle
Fundraising:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Establish membership benefits tied to print subscriptions➔ Solicit grants for distribution to low-income neighborhoods➔ Market through mail, phone, broadcast, Web, public events

PHASE 3 (2011) — DAILY PRINT

The Public Press in print transitions to a daily newspaper in steps.

Organizational Development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Hire ombudsperson; evaluate outreach and expand public events➔ Complete hiring process➔ Invest in technology infrastructure expansion
Reporting and Editing:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Establish investigative team➔ Hire staff librarian and database expert
Partnerships:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Schedule public events with content partners
Technology:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Expand digital staff➔ Explore Web & mobile micropayments, subscriptions, syndication
Production and Design:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Transition to daily print publication
Distribution:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Transition to daily home delivery
Fundraising:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➔ Mail billing and pledge forms as charge for daily paper begins

Financial Model

Costs: Advantages of Noncommercial Publishing

The Public Press model will allow it to hire professional journalists to produce high-quality, substantive news coverage at less expense than traditional newspapers. Cost-saving opportunities include tax avoidance due to nonprofit status, content sharing with strategic partners and reduced materials use.

Some examples of major costs and potential savings:

PROFIT REINVESTMENT

As a nonprofit venture, revenue gains are returned to the project, not distributed to investors.

SLIMMED-DOWN PRINTING

The Public Press will use about 40 percent as much paper as a daily newspaper with the same size news hole — shrinking a typical 60-page broadsheet paper to 24 pages. This reduces a major materials expense burdening the entire newspaper industry.

COLLABORATIVE NEWSGATHERING

The Public Press will save money by sharing content with other nonprofit and independent media outlets, including radio stations and Web-based publications.

TAX EXEMPTION

As a 501(c)3 tax-exempt nonprofit organization (initially through fiscal sponsorship), The Public Press will pay no corporate taxes. State law also specifically exempts advertising-free and membership-based newspapers from tax on sale of both the finished newspaper and its component materials.

NEXT-GENERATION TECHNOLOGY

The Public Press has the opportunity to invest in a next-generation publishing platform (through a Web-based, possibly open-source content management system) that will help it leapfrog ahead of existing papers that have sunk investment into older technologies.

DISTRIBUTION

To minimize delivery costs, distribution will grow from a nucleus of one or a few neighborhoods. The paper will save on fuel by relying primarily on bicycle delivery — a possibility only because of the more compact, lightweight ad-free design.

Revenue: A Balanced Portfolio

The Public Press business model is similar to the handful of local nonprofit Web-only journalism startups around the country in many respects. But it differs in that it will not depend entirely on grants and donations. The Public Press will raise funds from four sources:

MEMBERSHIP-SUBSCRIPTIONS AND NEWSSTAND SALES

Members who join the organization at the basic level will receive a free subscription to the newspaper. This model reflects the success of several nonprofit journalism organizations, such as Consumer Reports, National Geographic and hundreds of public broadcast stations.

INDIVIDUAL DONATIONS AND MEMBER “PLEDGES”

The Public Press will solicit additional donations from members through billing statements. It will also seek donations through periodic member fundraising events and pursue legacy gifts, matching grants and other large donations from local philanthropists.

FOUNDATION GRANTS

The Public Press is in the process of preparing more than 50 grant proposals to be submitted by spring of 2009 to charitable foundations that support activities related to journalism, media, public affairs and/or increasing civic participation.

“CROWDFUNDING” THROUGH SPOT.US PARTNERSHIP

We will raise revenues from new and alternative fundraising models, such as Spot.us, which raises small amounts of money for individual freelance journalism projects from Internet users.

Fundraising Achievements of 2008

By December 2008 we raised \$26,064 in donations from individuals, including half of the \$2,500 for the fall 2008 election-ad fact-checking series in collaboration with Newsdesk.org and Spot.us. It also includes \$2,760 we raised at a fundraising event in San Francisco in December 2008.

We received a \$20,000 grant from the San Francisco Foundation in January 2009. This money will be spent compensating a part-time editor, contracting with freelance writers, redesigning the Web site and paying for office rent and supplies. Independent Arts & Media receives 7 percent of incoming donations as part of its fiscal sponsorship program.

Active participants

Steering committee

Project director: **Michael Stoll**, journalism instructor, San Jose State University

David Cohn, director, Spot.us

Deepti Gottipati, technology entrepreneur

Tom Honig, retired editor, Santa Cruz Sentinel

Steve Jones, city editor, San Francisco Bay Guardian

Leslie Katz, editor, CNET.com

Lila LaHood, independent grant writer and journalist

Tom Murphy, editor, RedwoodAge.com

Marc Smolowitz, technology chair, Full Circle Fund

Michael Winter, freelance online editor

Suzanne Yada, page editor, Visalia Times-Delta

Louise Yarnall, former Los Angeles area reporter; grant writer, SRI

Staff

Michelle Fitzhugh-Craig, news editor

Local volunteers, contributors & supporters

Bea Ahbeck, freelance photojournalist
Cristina Azocar, director, Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism, S.F. State University
David Barreda, photojournalist, San Jose Mercury News
Chris Borden, voiceover artist
Rebecca Bowe, reporter, San Francisco Bay Guardian
Lindsay Bryant, former managing editor, the Spartan Daily, San Jose State University
Heather Cassell, freelance reporter
Samuel Chapman, freelance journalist; reporter, World Affairs Council
Lisa Chung, former columnist, San Jose Mercury News
Rene CiriaCruz, associate editor, California Lawyer magazine
Christopher Cook, freelance writer and author, “Diet for a Dead Planet”
Rhyen Coombs, student, UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism
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Bethany Fleishman, freelance journalist
Louis Freedberg, director, California Media Collaborative
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Matthew Hirsch, freelance writer
John Hornberg, managing editor, the Spartan Daily, San Jose State University student newspaper
Monica Jensen, freelance photojournalist
Holly Kernan, news director, Crosscurrents on KALW Radio
Ambika Kandasamy, student, Boston University College of Communication
Dorothy Kidd, professor of media studies, University of San Francisco
Tim Kingston, freelance writer
Richard Knee, freelance writer and member of San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance Task Force
Josh Koltun, First Amendment lawyer
Mack Lundstrom, journalism instructor, San Jose State University
David Mathison, author, “Be the Media”
Pam MacLean, California bureau chief, National Law Journal
Susan Mernit, social media entrepreneur; director, 2008 Knight News Challenge
Brian Moore, designer, 499 Commute
Chris O’Brien, director, NextNewsroom project; columnist, San Jose Mercury News
Matt O’Brien, reporter, Bay Area News Group
Brenda Payton, freelance writer
Jeff Perlstein, program coordinator for media policy, Grantmakers in Film & Electronic Media
Lisa Pickoff-White, student, UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism
Kevin Rand, former editor, the Spartan Daily, San Jose State University student newspaper
Jon Rochmis, journalism instructor, San Francisco State & City College of San Francisco
Jonathan Rowe, founding co-director, West Marin Commons; Contributing editor, Washington Monthly
Maritza Schafer, online strategist, Green for All
Lisa Sculati, writer and radio journalist
Norman Solomon, director, Institute for Public Accuracy
Mike Strickland, photojournalist and editor, SF Civic Center blog
Luke Thomas, photojournalist and editor, FogCityJournal.com
Lorri Ungaretti, freelance writer and editor
Venise Wagner, journalism department chair, San Francisco State University
Jim Welte, freelance reporter
Carmel Wroth, multimedia producer
Josh Wolf, reporter, Palo Alto Daily Post
Bernice Yeung, freelance writer
Jonathan Zuk, multimedia producer

National journalist advisory board

C. Edwin Baker, professor of law, University of Pennsylvania; author: “Media Concentration and Democracy: Why Ownership Matters”

Bill Briggs, director, School of Journalism and Mass Communications, San Jose State University

Chris Daly, professor of journalism, Boston University

Bill Densmore, director, Media Giraffe Project, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Ted Glasser, professor of journalism, Stanford University

Linda Jue, executive director, New Voices in Independent Journalism

Joe Mathewson, professor of journalism, Medill Journalism School, Northwestern University

John McManus, project director, GradeTheNews.org

James Naughton, former president, Poynter Institute; former editor, Philadelphia Inquirer

Ricardo Sandoval, president, Northern California chapter, Society of Professional Journalists; assistant city editor, Sacramento Bee

Martha Steffens, professor of journalism, Missouri School of Journalism

Tom Stites, contributing editor, Center for Public Integrity

David Wallis, founder and editor, Featurewell.com; author of “Killed: Great Journalism Too Hot to Print”

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