

Mission

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THE MISSION The Media Giraffe Project (MGP) mission is to foster participatory democracy and community. We do so by discovering and celebrating above-the-crowd individuals making innovative, sustainable use of media. They use fresh, effective tools and approaches that empower and inform citizens. By focusing on media role models, our website, conference, planned book, film, curricula and workshops: * Celebrate and support innovation in both traditional and emerging media. * Help citizens find and support -- as both consumers and creators -- media that informs civic dialog and aids open, participatory government.

THE PROBLEM The Media Giraffe Project responds to growing public concern that U.S. media are increasingly less able to equip citizens with knowledge they need to demand accountability in government. This threatens effective democracy and communities.

LINK: READ MORE ABOUT THE PROBLEM

A COMMON GOAL The Media Giraffe Project takes the view that individuals -- both inside and distinctly apart from large media organizations -- have a common goal of fostering participatory democracy and community, and that they will work together when given the opportunity. They may also be in education, public policy or info-technology. Journalists -- and a public increasingly able to contribute to the news conversation -- need role models. By focusing on exemplary individual "giraffes" -- rather than institutions or policies -- the Media Giraffe Project tells compelling stories, avoids jargon and assumes no prior knowledge of journalism or media topics.

ONE SOLUTION -- FOCUS ON PEOPLE We believe focusing on the stories of individual people is the best way to inspire additional leadership and action. Since April, 2005, the Media Giraffe project has been finding and spotlighting individuals making innovative, sustainable use of media (new and old) to foster participatory democracy and community. Because of their â above the crowdâ work, we call these individuals â media giraffes.â Our intent is to provide role models, and to regularly convene these leaders. Our beta profiles database is part of our first-phase objective to gather research on up to 300 prospective "media giraffes." Through a book, documentary film and a June 29-July 1, 2006 conference, we will communicate the stories of 20 of the most-motivated and most effective "giraffes." Finally, with workshops,

talks and multimedia resources, we will educate. We will work with premier giraffes to show how citizens can use their ideas to create or consume media that advances participatory democracy. We examine entrepreneurs and mavericks within both independent, local, new-media efforts as well as giraffes who are sticking their necks out in traditional, major media. Media giraffes most typically are: (a) Starting or supporting local and topical information services -- electronic and new media -- profit, non-profit or cooperative, or (b) uniquely using existing or innovative media to hold government or major private interests accountable to democratic values, or (c) developing or using new technologies, which change and extend the relationships among consumers and creators of civic information. [LINK: MORE ABOUT GIRAFFE ATTRIBUTES WHO IS OUR AUDIENCE?](#) The audience for the Media Giraffe Project's work includes media professionals as well as two growing groups -- citizens who have responded to the calls of "media-reform" activists, and citizens who are using new technology tools to practice journalism and public-policy advocacy part time or as an avocation. [SUPPLY AND DEMAND RELATED](#) Together, these efforts are intended to uncover and illustrate market forces promoting media responsiveness to the information needs of a sustainable democracy, including support for literacy, civic participation and reflection of justice, equality, fairness, free-speech and open-government values. In addition, they may produce ideas for structural rules changes, which might increase the competitive and marketing advantages of independent media. We look for innovation on both the supply and demand sides (in technologies, systems or techniques), which will rekindle the public's interest in civic affairs. * On the supply side, technology is creating many new, independent "voices" and also shrinking the number of major companies who run the largest voices -- print and electronic. Some observers are concerned that the news and entertainment industries' structure or incentives no longer serve democracy as envisioned by our nation's Founding Fathers. They seek to reform the industry through changes in regulation, or new competition. * On the demand side, some studies document a perceived lack of public interest in civic affairs. Potential causes include: (a) more adults working longer hours with less time for civic engagement and volunteerism (b) a proliferation of media offering diversionary entertainment (c) diminished quality of news-media offerings. Observers look for new techniques, technologies or systems to rekindle the public's attention to civic affairs. [WHAT ARE WE ACHIEVING?](#) The Media Giraffe Project, working in collaboration with citizens, media insiders and groups, seeks to contribute to realizing three visions within five years. [LINK: READ MORE ABOUT WHAT WE'RE ACHIEVING WHO ARE WE?](#) The Media Giraffe Project is an interdisciplinary research initiative housed with the journalism program at the University of Massachusetts

Amherst and drawing on scholars and advisors from business, education, public policy and communication studies. We are assisted by students, and draw upon the insights and experience of both media insiders and citizen activists. We are research driven and non-partisan. To keep the effort manageable, we are focused on media located in, or serving the United States. [LINK: READ MORE ABOUT WHO WE ARE](#) The MGP acknowledges the work and collaboration of The Giraffe Heroes Project, (www.giraffe.org) a separate and unrelated organization, which has pioneered over two decades the concept of "sticking one's neck out" for the public good. To learn about the Media Giraffe Project's current and future initiatives, over three years, [CLICK HERE](#).