



NEW ENGLAND NEWS FORUM

The New England News Forum is a collaboration among news professionals, citizen journalists, educators and the public to promote vigorous, trusted, accountable journalism – and accountable government.

Helping media, public with participatory democracy

Until now, there has been no common resource which aims to help the public become better citizens through better use -- and support -- of the region's news media. We hope to fill that void. Welcome to the New England News Forum.

New England news media are reexamining the role they play in civil society. They face uncertainties, questions and opportunities posed by the Internet and multimedia technology. They are welcoming and grappling with new forms of web-based journalism practiced by citizens. As a result, they are looking for fresh insight and new tools for remaining connected with and trusted by readers, listeners, viewers and users.

Amidst these changing times, citizens wonder where they can go for trusted news coverage. Where can they go to not only find news about the news, but discuss it -- and in the process improve it, and their communities?

The New England News Forum is going to start a conversation about our media and our region's public policies through a literate, articulate, moderated web community.

This is the New England News Forum's online meeting place for reporters and citizens to discuss journalism, democracy and community. This is an "alpha" site and will not be regularly updated until approximately February, 2007.

PRIVATE ALPHA: <http://test.newenglandnews.org/>

How can you help?

Sign a pledge sheet as a “founding collaborator.” Make a donation if you can. In each New England state, we’re going to need academic coordinators, subject-specific bloggers and reviewers. Let us know how you’d like to help.



NEW ENGLAND NEWS FORUM

ABOUT US

The New England News Forum is a collaboration among journalists, educators and the public to inspire active citizenship through discussion and spotlighting of media issues. We aim to increase public trust and deepen public understanding of the news media by promoting the practice of trusted, thorough and accountable journalism.

The forum, launching in early 2007, is supported by a seed grant from John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and is based at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

WHAT WE DO

The New England News Forum offers an independent resource which can help define, research, advise -- and hopefully strengthen and expand -- the relationship between news producers and news consumers. On the web we will offer journalists, web-news entrepreneurs and active citizens a place to engage in discussion, to share and resolve disagreements over media issues such as privacy, coverage, access, accuracy, bias and emphasis. Our topical, web-based, moderated forum will be open to regional public-policy issues that touch on matters of journalistic practice.

Our work is guided by the experiences of the [Minnesota](#) and [Washington state](#) news councils, but is charting a new approach to fostering media accountability and public collaboration. We will generally address issues broader than "complaints" and seek to resolve controversies by using Jeffersonian devices -- open discussion and forum-style debate which bring professional and ordinary-citizen voices together in a virtual public square.

Our activities advocate and advise on:

- General analysis of the region's media.
- The effect of the web and new technologies on news presentation and ethics.
- The relationship between traditional and "citizen" journalists.
- How to understand and contribute to the news.
- Open records and open government.
- Methods for assisting news organizations to perform openly.

SERVICE PROJECTS

Here are some specific services the News Forum is considering undertaking:

- Convene seminars, talks and other events around the region on topics addressing the relationship between media and the public.
- Consulting to regional media on accountability issues, including outsourced “ombudsman” function upon request.
- Develop a consumer guide to using the news -- in collaboration with regional newspaper, broadcast, and journalism associations.
- Study the state of open records, open meetings, and open information in New England, with the collaboration of existing and other new organizations such as the New England First Amendment Collaborative.
- Research and report on the state of New England K-12 efforts to teach and test critical skills for consuming media in ways which promote civic engagement and participation.

THE WEBSITE

<http://dbs.hosting.crocker.com/wiki/index.php/Website>

WHO BENEFITS FROM THE NEWS FORUM?

There are at least seven constituencies who can benefit from the New England News Forum's research, discussions and advice:

- Working newspeople in print, broadcast, cable, Internet and mission-driven media.
- Leaders of policy non-profits and government agencies whose success depends upon effective collaboration with the media.
- Active citizens, who use and care about the news and about the vitality, diversity and responsiveness of regional state and local institutions and government.
- Former journalists working in marketing, PR, or unrelated fields who maintain concern for the role of the press in civil society.
- Teachers, especially in grades 7-12, who seek help with curricula and ideas that connect news with the daily experience of youth.
- Professionals and individual contributors: Academics, nurses, doctors, lawyers, technologists, entrepreneurs, investors and others.
- Professors and graduates of journalism programs such as those at UMass, Emerson, Northeastern, Boston University, UNH, URI, St. Michael's College, UMaine and UConn.

WHO ARE WE?

The New England News Forum is a service of the University of Massachusetts Amherst [journalism program](#) and its [Media Giraffe Project](#), with seed funding from the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#).

We are forging region-wide collaborative relationships with:

- Other academic institutions committed to teaching journalism
- Media, news and professional associations
- Businesses, foundations and organizations concerned with journalism's role fostering democracy
- Groups and individuals concerned about New England's future

Founding members, friends, benefactors, sponsors and key founders form the support for the news forum, along with the Knight Foundation grant. An 18- to 24-member advisory board constituted during 2007 is envisioned to include one at-large citizen member from each state, four daily newspaper members, three non daily, three broadcast, two web-media, one from key involved academic institutions and up to four at-large members.

Our principal investigator is [Prof. Norman Sims](#) of the University of Massachusetts Amherst journalism program and our executive director is [Bill Densmore](#), director of The Media Giraffe Project at UMass Amherst. Ananda Lennox serves as project assistant. [Prof. Ralph Whitehead](#) is a research collaborator.

FOUNDING COLLABORATORS

Founding collaborators have agreed to advance the mission of NENF by participating in NENF-sponsored events and spreading knowledge of forum activities. Here are some of our founding collaborators to date:

Joe Bergantino (MA)	Investigative reporter, CBS-4, Boston
James Boylan (CT)	<i>Retired editor, Columbia Journalism Review</i>
Michael Dukakis (MA)	<i>Faculty, Northeastern University, former governor</i>
Loren Ghiglione	<i>Dean emeritus, Medill School; former publisher, Southbridge News</i>
Irwin Gratz (ME)	<i>News director, Maine Public Radio, ex-SPJ national president</i>
Randy Holhut (VT)	<i>Editorial-page Editor, The Brattleboro Reformer</i>
Ray Lamont (RI)	<i>Editor, The Westerly, R.I., Sun</i>
John McCright (VT)	<i>Assistant Editor, The Addison Independent, Middlebury, Vt.</i>
Meredith McCulloch (MA)	<i>Retired library, Bedford, Mass.</i>
Daniel Okrent (MA)	<i>Ex-editor, New England Monthly; first New York Times public editor</i>
Larry Parnass (MA)	<i>Managing editor, Daily Hampshire Gazette</i>
Laurisa Sellers (MA)	<i>Ex-board member, Minnesota News Council; Simmons College</i>
Norman Sims (MA)	<i>Journalism professor, UMass Amherst</i>
Michael Waller (CT)	<i>Ex-publisher, Hartford Courant</i>
Robert Whitcomb (RI)	<i>Editorial-page editor, Providence Journal</i>
Lisa Williams (MA)	<i>Placeblogger, Watertown, Mass.; Center for Citizen Media, Harvard</i>

HOW WERE WE CREATED?

The [Washington News Council](#) and the [Minnesota News Council](#) announced June 30 that Southern California and New England were the winners in a national contest to create two new local news councils. The Southern California News Council and the New England News Forum now become the fourth and fifth such councils in the United States, joining those in Minnesota, Washington and Hawaii. Dozens of other such councils exist in nations around the world.

The new news councils will each receive a \$75,000 start-up grant, given by Washington and Minnesota from funds provided by the Knight Foundation in Miami, Fla. The WNC and MNC received a joint grant last year from Knight to design the national contest, advertise it nationwide, review applications and select two winners.

The New England News Forum resides in the Journalism Program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and covers the six New England states. Organizing committees for the two new councils include journalists, academics and members of the public. Both councils will invite participation of a broad and diverse range of citizens who care about the vital role of news media in a democracy. An informal advisory board for the project included national journalism leaders Merrill Brown, Fabrice Florin, Dan Gillmor, Loren Ghiglione, Cyrus Krohn, Phil Meyer, Bill Moyers, Jay Rosen and Jan Schaefer.

WHAT IS A NEW COUNCIL?

News councils are independent, nonprofit citizens organizations that function as "outside ombudsmen" for the news media. News councils provide a forum where citizens and journalists can engage each other in discussing standards of media ethics and performance. They are a meeting place for communities and their storytellers.

News councils offer a non-threatening, impartial way to explore, mediate and resolve citizen complaints about news coverage. They help citizens examine media ethics, and help journalists communicate more clearly about the purpose and techniques of journalism. They are great places to strengthen the ties between news outlets and their communities.

News councils are all strong defenders of the First Amendment. They don't want to interfere with the constitutional rights of the press. Because news councils offer a form of "peer review," they provide a defense against government control of the press.

Dozens of news or press councils exist all over the world. There was a National News Council in the U.S. from 1973 to 1984. Some journalists are skeptical of news councils, fearing that any form of outside accountability will have a "chilling effect" on aggressive reporting. Others argue that non-journalists cannot fairly scrutinize the press.

Many leading American journalists have endorsed news councils, including Bill Moyers, Jim Lehrer, Mike Wallace, Hodding Carter, Geneva Overholser, Al Neuharth, Gene Roberts and others. Bill Gates Sr. and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have been a premier supporter of the Washington News Council.

IS THE NEW ENGLAND NEWS FORUM A “NEWS COUNCIL”?

The New England News Forum is more than a news council, and part of an evolution in thinking about media accountability and public involvement. We are relying upon the experience and credibility of the Minnesota and Washington state news councils, but intend to experiment with new forms of public-media interaction which seem more appropriately described as a forum rather than a council.

WHERE ARE NEWS COUNCILS NOW?

Councils exist in Washington state (founded 1998) and Minnesota (30 years). Complainants must waive the right to sue to qualify for a hearing. In Minnesota, half the complaints have been upheld and half denied since the news council started in 1970. In Washington, only two complaints have been upheld since the council was formed in 1998, while others were dismissed as unwarranted or were resolved with the council's help. Participation by news outlets is entirely voluntary.

The Minnesota and Washington councils regularly conduct public forums that stress civil discourse, not media-bashing. The results often improve media quality and increase public trust. The existing councils also work with college and high-school journalism students, conduct mock news council hearings, and award scholarships.

The Minnesota News Council operates on an annual budget of about \$220,000 with money contributed by the following: Media organizations 20%, non-media companies 40%, foundations 30%, individuals 10%.

THE ORIGINAL COUNCIL

The National News Council was created in 1973 in New York City upon the recommendation of an independent task force of the Twentieth Century Fund, a research foundation. Conceived as a private, nonprofit organization, the council began operation with two basic objectives: to consider complaints brought against the media, whether by individual citizens or organizations, concerning alleged misstatements, inaccuracies, or unfairness; and to study possible infringements on the freedom of the press. Dissolved in 1984. Major issues addressed by the National News Council include First Amendment freedoms, journalistic ethics, censorship, the balance of free press and fair trial, conflict of interest, concentration of media ownership, journalistic hoaxes, and use of confidential sources.

JOINING US

We invite you to support the work of the New England News Forum by becoming a member. You will be making a tax-deductible contribution to the University of Massachusetts dedicated exclusively to the work of the NENF. Checks should be made out to “Univ. of Mass.-NENF” and send to:

New England News Forum
Journalism Program
108 Bartlett Hall
University of Massachusetts
Amherst MA 01003
email: mail @ newenglandnews.org / voice: 413-577-4370

SUGGESTED LEVELS:

FOUNDING MEMBER – \$25

- One-year membership in NENF
- 25% discount to any NENF forums/events/workshops
- 25% discount all UMass Online courses

FOUNDING FRIEND -- \$100

- All benefits of Founding Members
- Copy of Dan Okrent's book: "Public Editor No. 1"
- Receive all NENF written reports by mail
- Free attendance at New England News Common, UMass-Amherst Fall 2007, or one other NENF workshop or seminar
- Founding Friend benefits for one other individual

FOUNDING BENEFACTOR -- \$500

- All benefits of Founding Friends
- Free attendance at all NENF events for one year
- Founding Friend benefits for one designated individual
- Founding Member benefits for up to four designated individuals
- Invitation to special meeting of NENF Board of Advisors

FOUNDING SPONSOR -- \$2,000

- All benefits of Founding Benefactors
- NENF membership for up to 100 employees/associates in one organization
- Invitation to all meetings of NENF Board of Advisors

FOUNDER -- \$5,000

- All benefits of Founding Sponsors
- NENF membership for up to 500 employees/associates in one organization
- Nomination to Board of Advisors for standard term.