FSG

KCIC Evaluation: 2012 MLS Participant Feedback Report

03/23/2012

I. Introduction

The Media Learning Seminar (MLS), sponsored by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, provides community and place-based foundations and other organizations with an opportunity to learn about the changing media landscape and emerging technologies that affect their communities' information ecosystems. The fifth annual MLS took place in Miami on February 20 – 21, 2012. After attending the conference, participants were asked to complete an online survey to collect information about their satisfaction with the event, as well as how they might apply their learning.

II. Summary of Findings

The 2012 Media Learning Seminar (MLS) comprised a diverse group of organizations that included not only community and place-based foundations, but also nonprofits, libraries, and other community organizations. By all accounts, attendees were very positive and satisfied with their MLS experience. Respondents felt that the MLS provided a good venue to learn more about the leadership role their organization can play in addressing information needs in their communities. They also felt, to a higher degree than last year, that it gave them new ideas for how their organization could take action to further address their community's information needs.

Two primary ways that attendees hope to act on their learning include: 1) Incorporating media strategy into their community work, 2) building partnerships and collaborations with other community organizations.

Prior to the conference, all attendees received a USB drive with documents related to MLS and the information was found to be worthwhile according to survey respondents. Nearly all respondents (95%) who received the thumb drive opened at least one document, and those that viewed the documents gave most of the materials a high rating for usefulness in preparing to attend the MLS. The videos included in the pre-conference materials received lower ratings of usefulness across the board. About two thirds of those who received the USB drive shared documents with other staff internally, with their board, or with external contacts.

Of the three plenary sessions, the *What's now, What's next* plenary with Paula Ellis, Amy Webb and Michael Maness, received very high ratings by attendees. It scored the highest in all three categories assessed in the survey; relevance, learning something new, and ability to take action. When asked what they would like to hear more of in the future, respondents indicated that they want to learn from case studies that draw lessons from successful (and unsuccessful) projects and learn how to build successful relationships.

Two new aspects of this year's MLS were the Sunday Expo and live tweeting during some of the plenary sessions. The *EXPO: Tested Tools and Ideas*, was attended by over half of the respondents

and the majority or attendees found the information interesting and valuable. In regard to the live tweeting, respondents had mixed feelings regarding its value; 30% felt that was very valuable, while 47% felt that the live tweeting was of little of no value.

In terms of attendees thoughts about the future of Knight's support of community information, 30 wished to see increasing knowledge sharing efforts, 23 wished that the CIC will continue in its current form, and 15 proposed that Knight provide deeper support to fewer organizations.

Overall, the 2012 MLS appears to have been a successful and effective conference in enhancing learning and understanding of community information needs and inspiring leaders to take action to address the information needs in their communities.

II. MLS Participants

The online survey was emailed to MLS attendees following the conclusion of the event. Of the 403 valid attendees emailed, 162 individuals took the survey for a response rate of 40%. One individual only completed part of the survey. This response rate is slightly lower than last year, which had a 45% response rate (318 people attended), and also used the Qualtrics online survey tool.

This year, MLS attendance was broadened to include leaders and staff of organizations beyond community and place-based foundations, including leaders in the field of community information and librarians. Nearly two-thirds of respondents

Figure 1. What type of organization do you represent?
N=162

Community Foundation: 54%
Place-based Foundation: 9%
Non-profit: 20%
Other: 17%

MLS Survey Respondents

Figure 2. What is your role in your organization?
N=162

Trustee: 12%
President/CEO: 25%
VP/Director: 31%
Program Officer: 7%
Other: 24%

MLS Survey Respondents

(65%) were representatives of a community or place-based foundation (n=101; see Figure 1). Overall, 20% of survey respondents were from non-profit organizations, which include some KCIC implementing partners; other types of organizations include libraries (n=8), universities (n=4), and implementing organizations, such as radio stations and local news organizations (n=6).

This year, a similar proportion of respondents were a President or CEO (25%) compared to last year (24%), which was down from 2010 (36%). Only 12% of respondents were Board Members/Trustees (see Figure 2). A substantial proportion of survey respondents (31%) were Vice Presidents or Directors in their organization, a level similar to last year (33% in 2011); 7% were program officers (n=11), and 24% held another position, such as marketing or communications staff (n=12), consultant (n=3) or coordinator (n=2).

Figure 3. Have you been part of a KCIC project?
N=162

No: 54%
Yes: 42%
Not sure: 4%

MLS Survey Respondents

Figure 4. Have you attended MLS before?
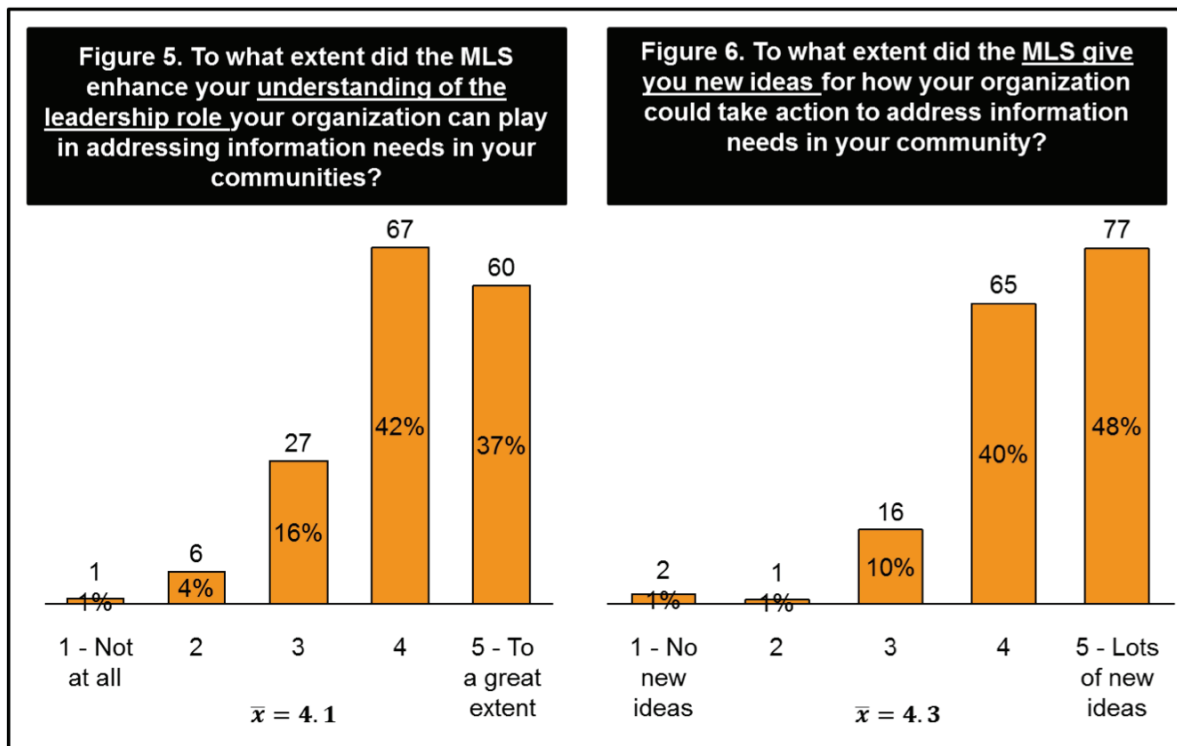N=162

No: 52%
Yes: 48%

MLS Survey Respondents

Of the 162 respondents, 42% (n=68) have been, or are currently part of a Knight Community Information Challenge (KCIC) project (see Figure 3). Just under half of this year's respondents (48%) attended MLS for the first time (see Figure 4); compared to 68% last year.
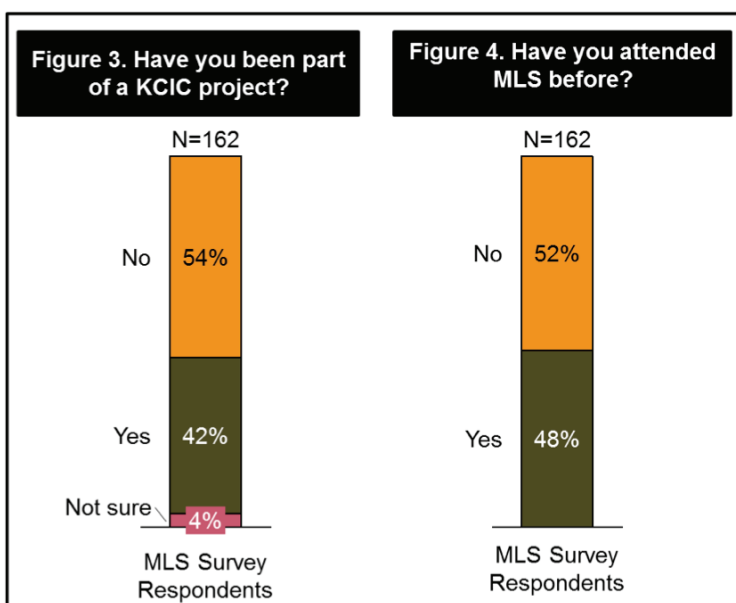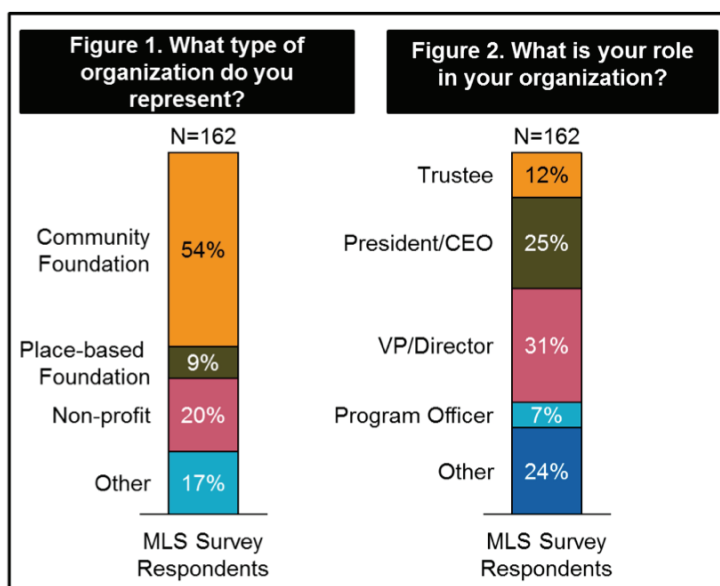
III. Overall Experience and Application of Learning

The Media Learning Seminar was very well-received by respondents; 158 out of 161[1], or 98%, reported that the time they invested in attending the Media Learning Seminar was worth it, which is up from 95% of respondents in 2011.

Overall, respondents believe that the MLS provided a good venue to improve their understanding of the leadership role their organization can play or is playing in addressing information needs in their communities ($\bar{x}$=4.1, same as in 2011)[2], and left with new ideas for how their organization could take action to further address their community's information needs ($\bar{x}$=4.3 compared to $\bar{x}$=4.2 in 2011)[3].

Figure 5. To what extent did the MLS enhance your understanding of the leadership role your organization can play in addressing information needs in your communities?

Figure 6. To what extent did the MLS give you new ideas for how your organization could take action to address information needs in your community?

The *EXPO: Tested Tools and Ideas*, held in the Mezzanine on the Sunday before the start of the MLS was attended by 90 survey respondents (56%). Out of the people who attended, 65% found the information very interesting and valuable (rating of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale). One attendee noted:

> *"I would recommend that you introduce the organizations/programs that are highlighted as part of the Expo during a conference plenary session and then build the Expo in during the conference instead of before it so that people can identify which programs they'd like to know more about and that it be better attended"*

In response to an open-ended survey question, most attendees (n=140) described ways in which they will act on what they learned from the MLS when they return to their organization and community.

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[1] The number of respondents drops from 162 to 161 in Section 3 as one respondent did not complete the full survey.
[2] On a 5-point scale from 1=Not at all, to 5=To a great extent.
[3] On a 5-point scale from 1=No new ideas, to 5=Lots of new ideas.

Based on these responses, 96 citations were coded to analyze themes in the action items mentioned. The two most common areas for action include:

Incorporating a media strategy into their community work: 48 respondents (50%) mentioned that they came away with a commitment to make media a more integral part of their strategy. In addition, they felt they left with actionable knowledge about how to do so. Seven participants mentioned that they had realized the full potential of the Community Information Toolkit, and 5 respondents mentioned that they were going to invest in their social media strategy. As a take-away message, many respondents stressed the "collect, curate, amplify" message as a particularly useful.

Building partnerships and collaborating with others in their community: 19 participants (20%) are planning to build partnerships or connect with community organizations, such as libraries and community foundations. This year, slightly fewer respondents mentioned building collaborations or partnerships compared to last year (in 2011 only 35 people said they would act through greater collaboration). Among the 19 people that mentioned this topic, several were keen on forging relationships with organizations that can help them "amplify" their message, such as universities or local news outlets.

Survey respondents also mentioned that the MLS created awareness about how to engage the board in community information strategies (n=6) and that improving access to information, in addition to creation of content, is an area of crucial importance (n=6). Other participants plan to use what they learned at the conference to apply for a KCIC grant or enhance their KCIC application (n=10).

V. Plenary Sessions

Table 1. Overall Ratings of the Plenary Sessions *To what extent to you agree with the following statements?*				
	I learned something I can act on	The session focused on issues relevant to my community	I learned something new in the session	Responses (N=161)
Dan Gillmore	4.3	4.0	3.8	148
WOW and Doable!	4.1	4.1	3.7	149
What's now, what's next	4.5	4.3	4.1	134
A Community Information Toolkit	3.8	3.9	3.6	129

Overall, the plenary sessions were well received by survey respondents. Attendees rated the *What's Now; What's Next* session highest, with all 3 categories (learning, relevance, and action) receiving a mean rating above 4.0 on a 5-point scale[4] (see Table 1).

A Community Information toolkit received the lowest overall ratings from respondents. Fewer respondents felt that they learned something new, and something they could act on in their community. This might be due to the fact that a similar session was held in 2011.

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[4] On a 5-point scale from 1=Strongly disagree, to 5=Strongly agree.

No information was recorded on the *Building Partnerships: Lessons learned and lessons to be learned* plenary session with Sandy Close, Mary Lou Fulton, Joaquin Alvarado and Dennis Scholl due to an error in the online survey software. 124 respondents attended the session. One qualitative response indicates that this session was greatly appreciated:

"PS: Sandy Close was an amazing speaker. I love her style and her message"

Table 2. Overall Ratings of the Featured Speakers *To what extent to you agree with the following statements?*		
	Interesting and/or inspiring	Responses (n=161)
Eli Pariser	4.5	136
Ethan Zuckerman	4.5	127

VI. Featured Speakers

Overall, the featured speakers were highly appreciated, with respondents rating them higher than any of the plenary sessions (average rating 4.5 on a 5-point scale). The turnout was slightly higher for the sessions by Eli Pariser (n=136) but both sessions were found by respondents to be equally interesting and /or inspiring (see table 2)

VII. Breakout Sessions

This year, MLS attendees were invited to join one of eleven breakout sessions. Respondents were very satisfied with most of the breakout sessions (see Table 3). Overall, they thought breakout sessions were well facilitated ($\bar{x}$=4.3) and fairly engaging ($\bar{x}$=3.7), but less useful for action-oriented learning ($\bar{x}$=3.4). Overall, attendees rated the sessions lower than last year (min: $\bar{x}$=3.9, max: $\bar{x}$=4.9).[5]

The *Board capacity: Engaging board members in the information arena* breakout session was rated highest among respondents in all three areas (facilitator engagement, relevance and learning to act). The sessions *Five things you need to get started* and *How do we measure audience, engagement and revenue* as well as *How do we strengthen our capacity as a foundation* were all rated highly as well. Ratings were higher in terms of facilitator engagement and relevance than learning something that respondents could act on, indicating that while happy with the sessions, presenters could do more to make the learning applicable and actionable.

The two sessions that received lower mean ratings (i.e., below a mean of 3.5 on 5-point scale) were about developing partnerships and an engagement model. Ratings from survey respondents suggest that *Developing and engagement model* and *How do we develop or strengthen relationships* provided some, but not many, useful ideas that attendees felt they could act on ($\bar{x}$=2.6 and $\bar{x}$=2.7). *How do we develop or strengthen partnerships* did, however, receive very high ratings for facilitation ($\bar{x}$=4.2).

Most people reported that they attended a breakout session because the content sounded interesting (68%), although a few people did say they attended a session to hear or see a particular presenter (16%). Out of the people who indicated that they choose the session for another reason (13%, n=23), 14 did so because they had been assigned to attend the session.

Table 3. Overall Ratings of the Breakout Sessions *To what extent to you agree with the following statements?*				
Breakout Sessions	Did your facilitator engage the group in the discussion?	Relevance to your organization's interest in this area?	Did you learn something that you can act on?	Responses (N=161)
Board capacity: Engaging board members in the information arena	4.8	4.4	4.2	13
Five things you need to get started	4.5	4.2	4.1	11
How do we measure audience, engagement and revenue?	4.6	4.1	4.0	22
How do we strengthen our capacity as a foundation?	4.5	3.9	3.6	14
Experiments in sustainability: Who's doing what?	4.2	4.1	3.4	14
New election year tools and techniques	4.4	3.7	3.3	7
Developing a pool of donors: Funding in the information arena	4.6	3.6	3.0	23
The decision-making process: Funding new or existing projects	4.3	3.7	3.0	3
Mapping your community's information needs	3.9	3.5	3.3	19
How do we develop or strengthen partnerships?	4.2	3.0	2.7	6
Developing an engagement model	3.1	2.7	2.6	20

[5] On a 5-point scale from 1=Not at all, to 5=A great deal.

VIII. Networking Opportunities at MLS

According to survey respondents, the Media Learning Seminar proved, again, to be an effective environment for networking. This year, 75% of survey respondents said that the MLS provided "many excellent opportunities for networking" (rating of 4 or 5), compared with 74% of survey respondents last year.

The live tweeting session was new this year, and attendees had mixed feelings as to its value. 30% of survey respondents said that the tweeting session was very valuable (rating of 4 or 5). That said, 47% found the live tweeting to be of little or no value (rating of 1 or 2) and 23% positioned themselves in between. This could be explained by a low level of twitter use as a number of respondents suggested a session for next year focused on how to use basic social media tools such as twitter.

IX. Pre-Conference Materials

This year was the second year the Knight Foundation sent a USB drive to all MLS attendees that was pre-loaded with conference and KCIC-related materials. The purpose of the drive was to help attendees prepare for the MLS and to facilitate attendees' ability to share key documents with others. Of the 161

Figure 7. How valuable did you find the live tweeting session?
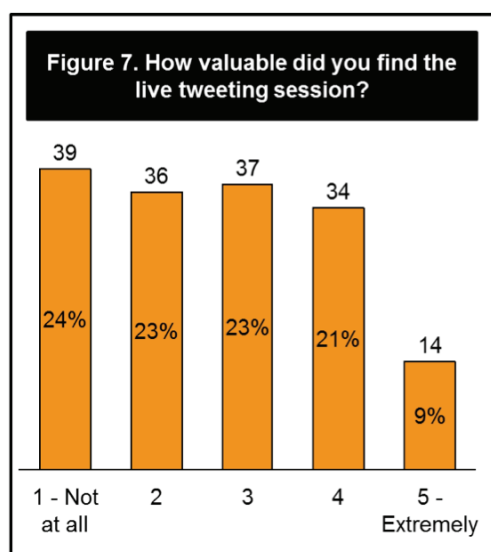
survey respondents that were asked about the usefulness of the pre-conference materials, 95% said that they received the USB drive (n=153).[6] Nearly every respondent who received the pre-conference materials opened at least one document (n=153, 95%). Most the materials received high ratings of usefulness, with the top-rated materials being the *Media Learning Seminar Agenda* ($\bar{x}$=4.8), the *How Foundations Partner Effectively to Address Their Community's Information Needs* ($\bar{x}$=4.2) and the *Community Information Toolkit* ($\bar{x}$=4.2) (see Table 4).[7] The videos highlighting the work in the Bay Area, New Jersey and Greater Buffalo received the lowest rankings ($\bar{x}$=3.4, $\bar{x}$=3.6 and $\bar{x}$=3.7).

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[6] Only people who initiated the survey on or after March 7, 2011 were asked about pre-conference materials.
[7] On a 5-point scale from 1=Not useful, to 5=Very useful.

Most participants (52%) who received the materials reported sharing the documents with staff at their organizations (n=83), 26 respondents (16%) said they shared the document with others outside of their organization. This year, 18 people (11%) said the shared the information with their board, up slightly from 8% in 2011 and 51 respondents (32%) reported not sharing the information at all.

Table 4. Usefulness of Pre-Conference Materials *Which of the following materials did you find most useful for preparing to attend the MLS?*			
Usefulness of pre-conference materials	Rating	Number of Respondents who viewed	% of Respondents who viewed
Agenda	4.8	142	93%
How Foundations Partner Effectively to Address Their Community's Information Needs (pdf)	4.2	119	78%
Community Information Toolkit (pdf)	4.2	101	66%
Mediactive - Dan Gillmore (pdf)	4.1	114	75%
10 News and Information Ideas - Michele McLellan(pdf)	4.1	96	63%
Opportunities for Leadership: Meeting Community Information Needs (pdf)	4.1	72	47%
Alberto Ibaruen's introduction to MLS 2012 (video)	4.1	84	55%
Getting Local: How Nonprofit Ventures Seek Sustainability (pdg)	4.0	107	70%
Media learning Seminar - Susan Mernit (pdf)	3.9	77	50%
Trabian Shorters' introduction to MLS 2012 (video)	3.8	68	44%
Slides by Lisa Williams (pdf)	3.7	101	66%
Community Foundations' role in the Bay Area/San Jose (video)	3.7	69	45%
Community Foundation of New Jersey (video)	3.6	66	43%
Community Foundation of Greater Buffalo (video)	3.4	91	59%

XI. Topics for a future MLS

114 of the 161 attendees surveyed (71%) mentioned several topics that they would be interested in learning about in future MLS sessions. Based on these responses, 86 citations were coded to analyze themes in the topics mentioned. The 5 top mentioned topics include:

Case studies that draw lessons from successful (and unsuccessful) projects: 23 respondents (27% of coded responses) said that they would like to learn more about best practices that can help them implement what they learned at the conference in their own organizations. For example, individual respondents suggested that future sessions cover:

> *"(I would like to see) some case studies of how a project was done - a timeline, who was hired, how staff were deployed, a budget as well as partners used. Learning about these kinds of practical approaches is not intended to copy what others did but rather to compare and contrast our thinking"*

> *"More "failure transparency" case studies -- I'm a big fan of the DigiDave (Dave Cohen Spot.us). This is often more valuable data than shiny success through a PR bubble"*

How to build successful partnerships: 15 respondents (17% of coded responses) would like to see more examples of how partnerships can contribute to their project's success, as well as tools and techniques that can help them engage with other organizations. Respondents suggested addressing:

> *"How to bring the public and private sectors together to create greater impact on ensuring equitable access to digital information in our communities."*

> *"How do organizations and CFs work together effectively? Who manages what?"*

How to use technological tools in community information work: 13 respondents (15% of coded responses) would like to learn more about trends in new technologies and how their organizations can either get on the bandwagon or use these tools more effectively.

> *"I would love to get more detail on how to use/access some of the new technology that was being presented. The tools look powerful, but, I don't know where to start to consider using them in our communities."*

> *"Not to make you laugh, but what about a basic course on setting up a twitter and other media accounts and managing them? The basic tool kit how to utilize the media at your fingertips. How to understand the changing trends as one tool emerges and another fades into the "tubes" of the internet past. Just an idea to help us who are not media crazy."*

How to achieve sustainability of community information projects: 13 respondents (15% of coded responses) would like to learn how to create a viable business model for community information projects.

> *"I would like more on sustainability -- what is the business model for all of this when Knight funding ends?"*

> *"I remain deeply concerned about the sustainability of projects, and sharing what works to assess the likelihood of sustainability as well as what has been learned about ways in which foundations can help the non-profits we fund to sustain those projects."*

How to get citizens engaged in local information: 6 respondents (7% of coded responses) would like to learn how to increase civic engagement in their communities. In particular, respondents were interested in how to work with marginalized and rural communities. Respondents wanted to know:

> *"How to get CITIZENS directly engaged in LOCAL civic life (NOT how one agency gets other agencies engaged with a certain agenda)."*

> *"How, specifically, organizations get residents/audience involved in conversations in conjunction with information provided to them."*

Other topics mentioned by respondents included how to measure the impact/outcomes of projects (n=6) and how community information intersects with community leadership activities (n=3).

XII. Suggestions for the future of supporting Community Information

108 respondents (67%) offered their views for the future of the KCIC. Based on these responses, 68 citations were coded to analyze themes. Feedback from 2012 MLS attendees regarding the future of Knight's support of community information focused on 3 themes.

Increase knowledge sharing efforts: Prioritize knowledge sharing, both by continuing and increasing Knight materials and by facilitating knowledge exchange between foundations and other stakeholders, for example by holding regional MLS gatherings. This strategic direction was recommended by 30 respondents (44% of coded responses).

> *"I liked the idea that was shared at the MLS of doing more local MLS events -- rather than one national conference, it would be great for example if Knight could provide guidance and materials so Community Foundations can host a similar seminar in their own regions for local nonprofits and journalists, essentially "franchising" the MLS concept.t"*

> *"Continue researching and publishing on the issue. The publications are very useful."*

> *"Continue to share best practices online. Those are very valuable and spur many good ideas with our local team."*

Continue the current KCIC strategy: Continue supporting community information in the same way, funding a wide range of organizations and continuing the national MLS. This was recommended by 23 respondents (37% of coded responses). Out of these, 15 respondents stressed the value of continuing the current funding model. Here are the words of two respondents:

> *"I also believe the KCIC has not reached full penetration or potential, and should be continued. Many smaller community foundations are just learning of the opportunity, or just getting up to speed, or just beginning to engage with local information needs."*

> *"Please stay with us. You have helped to kick-start some great work in this area. Many of us need your funding in order to continue moving into this area. Aside from a handful of mega-large community foundations, many of us simply don't have the resources on our own to make an impact in this area when the needs in our community across the board are so great."*

Provide deeper support for fewer organizations: Evolve the KCIC to target successful organizations that can serve as examples, both for community information work in general and in terms of specific issue areas**.** This strategic direction was recommended by 15 respondents (22% of coded responses).

> *"Make an in-depth ("deep dive") commitment, probably over several years, to one or more promising projects that collaboratively develop high quality content and provide extensive distribution of local and statewide news across several platforms."*

> *"Focus significant investment in promising sites that align with Knight's mission and develop more clear best practices and use cases about how investing in information strategies impacts community change."*

> *"It would also be great to see more issue-focused (health, education, etc.) strategic information investments."*

"I also think that community foundations are not necessarily motivated exclusively by providing information. They provide information for some larger purpose, often related to social change."

In addition, 8 respondents recommended continuing the MLS in its current state. Here are the words of two respondents:

"I think there is something invaluable about hosting a national seminar, to be able to learn from others of different backgrounds, environments, experiences."

"It is critically important that board members continue to be invited and encouraged to attend the MLS. Although the regional MLS concept might encourage board members to attend, we wouldn't want to lower the quality of the keynote speakers."

About This Report

This report of findings was prepared by FSG Social Impact Consultants, the Knight Foundation's evaluation partner for the Knight Community Information Challenge. Questions about this report may be directed to Carina Wendel (Carina.Wendel@FSG.org).

FSG is a nonprofit consulting firm specializing in strategy, evaluation and research, founded in 2000 as Foundation Strategy Group and celebrating a decade of global social impact. Today, FSG works across sectors in every region of the globe—partnering with foundations, corporations, nonprofits, and governments to develop more effective solutions to the world's most challenging issues. FSG brings together leaders that are hungry to exchange information, elevate learning, and to create collective impact in discovering better ways to solve the world's most difficult social problems.

FSG's Strategic Learning and Evaluation Center offers several evaluation related services, which include designing and implementing developmental, formative, and summative evaluations, building organization-wide evaluation systems, building staff and grantee evaluation capacity, facilitating organizational learning processes, and building the field through the development of tools, resources, and research to support innovative evaluation practices.

FSG works extensively with community foundations in a strategy capacity, and owns and operates Community Foundation Insights, which provides operational benchmarks and analysis to the field. Learn more about FSG at *www.fsg.org.*