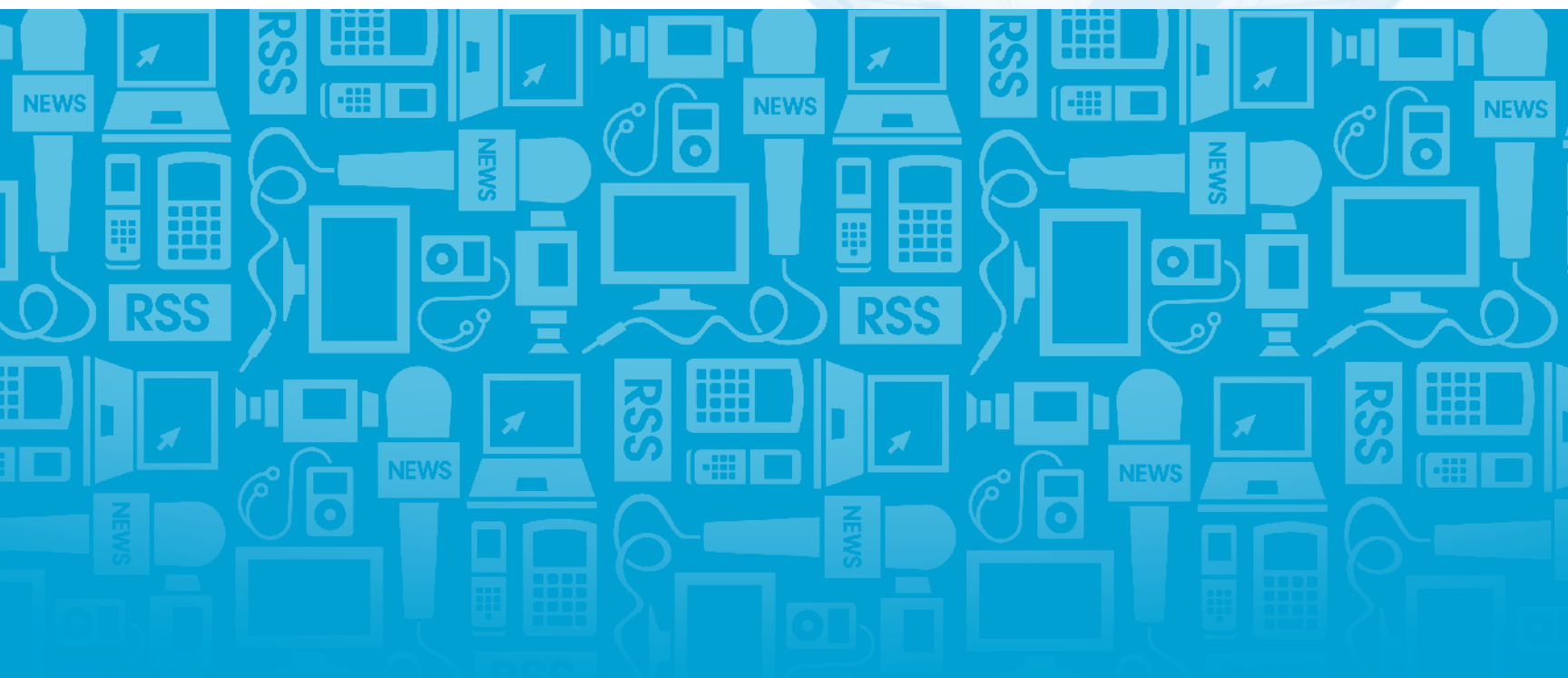**Knight News Challenge**

Casting the Net Wide for Innovation

A quest for fresh ideas and a dose of humility drive **the Knight News Challenge**
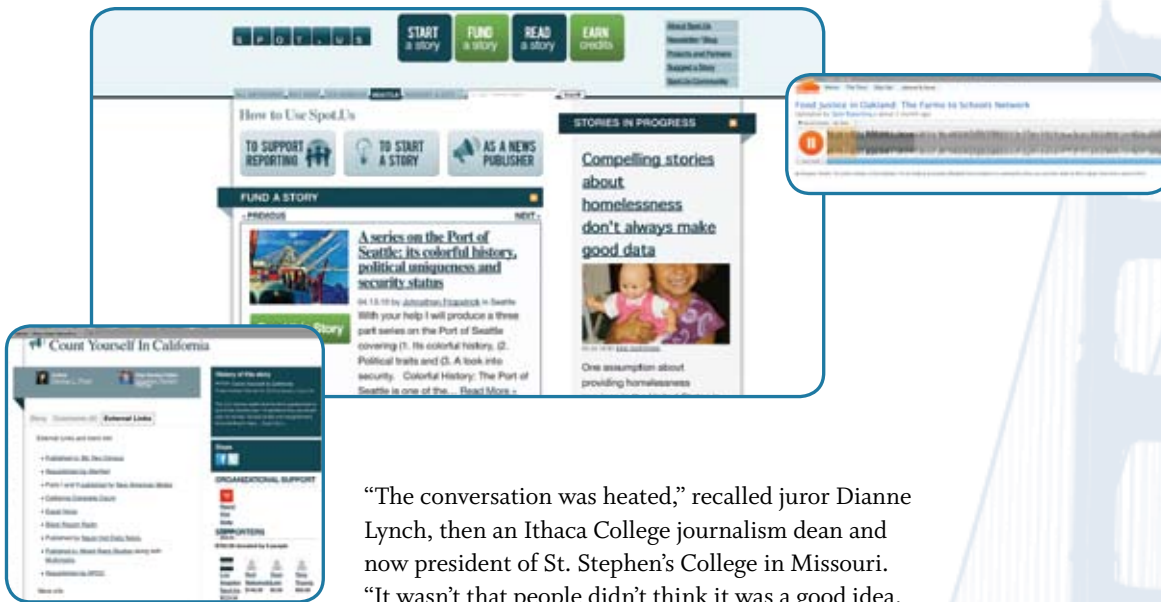
BY CHRISTOPHER CONNELL

> It wasn't that people didn't think it was a good idea. But there were a lot of questions and much discussion about special interests and the co-opting of the process: if you paid for a story, did you expect certain kinds of outcomes?

> …if this particular proposal is making everyone so uncomfortable, that's actually a great reason to fund it.

THE KNIGHT NEWS CHALLENGE reviewers, meeting at the foundation's headquarters in a Miami skyscraper overlooking Biscayne Bay, were divided over one intriguing entry. A 25-year-old freelance tech reporter and blogger wanted to pioneer a new, public subscription model for investigative journalism. David Cohn wanted to launch a website in San Francisco where reporters could pitch ideas for stories and invite the public to contribute small amounts, on the order of $10 to $50, to underwrite the investigations. The public – the crowd – would decide which stories to go after. When enough money came in – as little as a few hundred – as much as several thousand dollars, the reporter would go out and do the job. Spot.Us, as Cohn dubbed his brainchild, would publish the results on its website, but also look for other media outlets for the work.

That the lean, scruffy Cohn could go from graduate student at the Columbia School of Journalism to media innovator capable of placing stories in *The New York Times* seemed, at the time, a pipedream. But this was a new digital age, with mainstream newsroom staffs and budgets in freefall and millions of people, young and old, getting their news online. Besieged newspapers and broadcasters were open to partnering with nonprofit start-ups, eager to stretch their budgets and audience reach.

Some of the journalists on the Knight review panel voiced misgivings. Was this checkbook journalism wearing a public interest mask? What were the safeguards against conflicts of interest? The unscrupulous might try to fuel investigations of people or institutions they opposed. Reviewers steeped in digital media saw things differently. The idea of giving ordinary folks a real say in what got covered thrilled them. The Spot.Us supporters saw this "as a great way to use the Web to improve reporting in a local community and to involve the community in those stories," recalled Gary Kebbel, director of Knight Foundation's journalism program and guiding hand of the News Challenge.

spot.us

"The conversation was heated," recalled juror Dianne Lynch, then an Ithaca College journalism dean and now president of St. Stephen's College in Missouri. "It wasn't that people didn't think it was a good idea. But there were a lot of questions and much discussion about special interests and the co-opting of the process: if you paid for a story, did you expect certain kinds of outcomes?" Lynch felt strongly it was worth a try. "Maybe you're right, maybe that's what will happen," she remembers arguing, "but this is something people haven't tried before. Darn it, let's try it." Susan Mernit, a social media expert who helped Knight organize and promote the contest that year, concurred. Mernit, a former vice president of Netscape and America Online, said Knight President Alberto Ibargüen repeatedly had counseled the judges to take risks. It struck her that "if this particular proposal is making everyone so uncomfortable, that's actually a great reason to fund it." Indeed, Ibargüen, sitting around the table with outside judges and senior Knight staff, liked Spot.Us. His only concern was that Cohn had misjudged what it would take to get this crowd-funded investigative reporting enterprise off the ground. Cohn had requested $170,000 for his first year of operation. In the end, the reviewers advised trying it. When the 2008 News Challenge winners were announced, Cohn and Spot.Us were down on the list for $340,000 over two years. Cohn told blogger Anthony Wojtkowiak that he felt like Charlie at the end of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* "when Willie Wonka gives him the keys to the glass elevator and says, 'Whatever your vision is, try and make it happen.'"
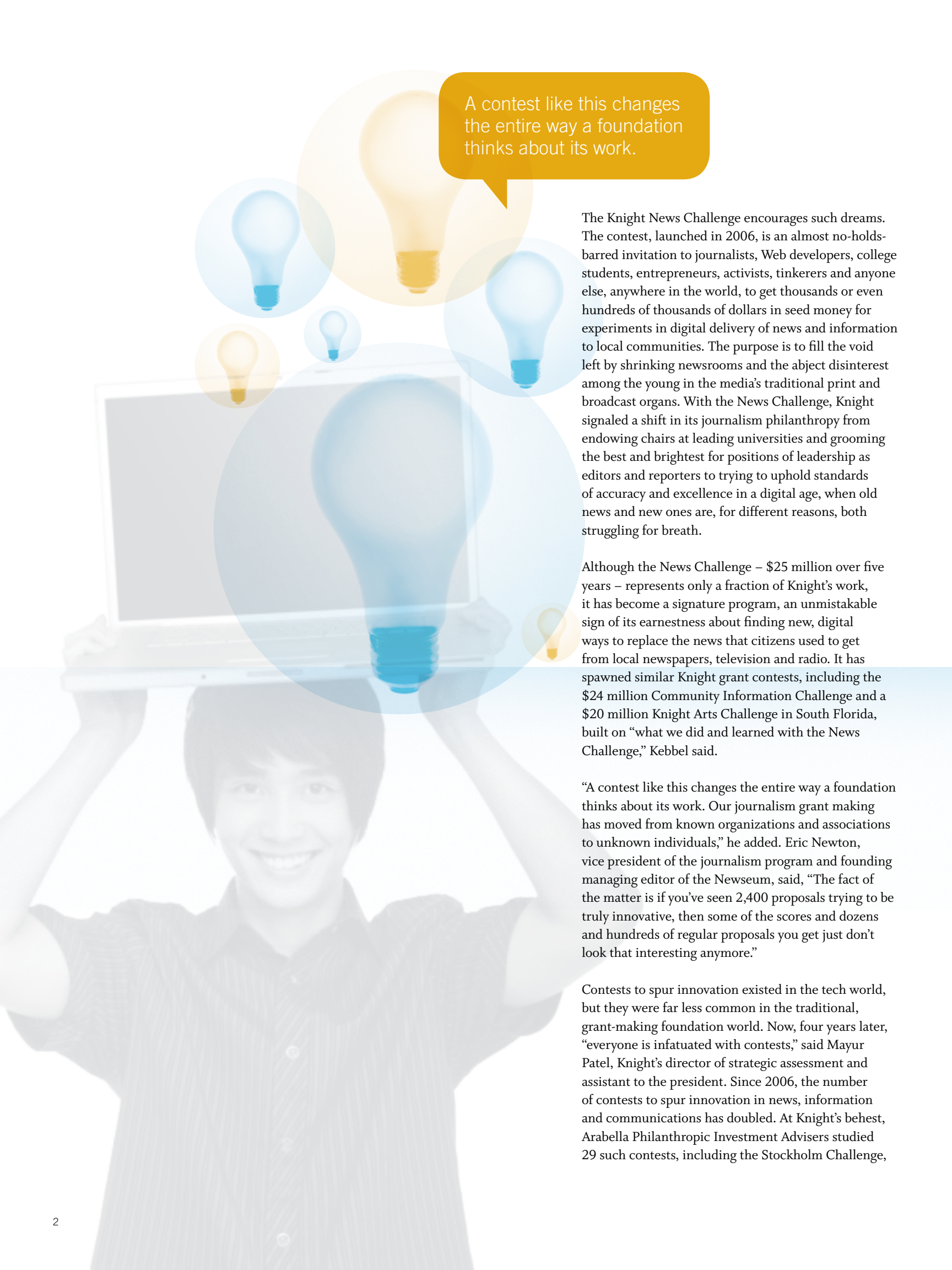
Two years later, Cohn's crowd-funded journalism has landed stories in major newspapers, generated buzz in old and new media worlds, and, thanks to an additional $250,000 Knight grant to the University of Southern California, expanded to Los Angeles in a partnership with the Annenberg School of Journalism. Spot.Us posts sales pitches for stories and solicits reader contributions and suggestions on its website. It accepts only modest amounts – usually $10 or $20 but sometimes as much as $50 or $100 – from any contributor. The stories have ranged from investigations of the Oakland Police Department to a look at where the waste goes when San Franciscans flush their toilets. Cohn calculates that $1,000 in donations can pay for 60 hours of a journalist's work on an investigative piece.

Whatever your vision is, try and make it happen.

David Cohn

Its most celebrated piece, Lindsey Hoshaw's feature on the garbage patch in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, carried a price tag of $10,000, which is what a research scientist was charging for a berth on his latest voyage to explore the agglomeration of plastic bottles and other debris, fed in large part by the trash washing out of California storm drains. *The New York Times* ran Hoshaw's report, "Afloat in the Ocean, Expanding Islands of Trash," on Nov. 9, 2009, along with a slide show of Hoshaw's underwater pictures of the trash. Among the donors listed on Spot.Us were Pierre Omidyar, founder of e-Bay, who gave $100; Craig Newmark, the eponymous creator of Craig's List, who gave $50; and Alberto Ibargüen, also down for $50. *The Times* paid Hoshaw $1,100 for her story and slide show – a bargain for the newspaper, but nevertheless a coup for the freelance environmental reporter and for the concept of community-funded journalism. Cohn, who blogs as Digidave, became a prototype new media journalist and entrepreneur – young, brash, brimming with ideas and possessed with an ambition to become, in his words, "the Rupert Murdoch of nonprofit journalism."

The Knight News Challenge encourages such dreams. The contest, launched in 2006, is an almost no-holds-barred invitation to journalists, Web developers, college students, entrepreneurs, activists, tinkerers and anyone else, anywhere in the world, to get thousands or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in seed money for experiments in digital delivery of news and information to local communities. The purpose is to fill the void left by shrinking newsrooms and the abject disinterest among the young in the media's traditional print and broadcast organs. With the News Challenge, Knight signaled a shift in its journalism philanthropy from endowing chairs at leading universities and grooming the best and brightest for positions of leadership as editors and reporters to trying to uphold standards of accuracy and excellence in a digital age, when old news and new ones are, for different reasons, both struggling for breath.

Although the News Challenge – $25 million over five years – represents only a fraction of Knight's work, it has become a signature program, an unmistakable sign of its earnestness about finding new, digital ways to replace the news that citizens used to get from local newspapers, television and radio. It has spawned similar Knight grant contests, including the $24 million Community Information Challenge and a $20 million Knight Arts Challenge in South Florida, built on "what we did and learned with the News Challenge," Kebbel said.

"A contest like this changes the entire way a foundation thinks about its work. Our journalism grant making has moved from known organizations and associations to unknown individuals," he added. Eric Newton, vice president of the journalism program and founding managing editor of the Newseum, said, "The fact of the matter is if you've seen 2,400 proposals trying to be truly innovative, then some of the scores and dozens and hundreds of regular proposals you get just don't look that interesting anymore."

Contests to spur innovation existed in the tech world, but they were far less common in the traditional, grant-making foundation world. Now, four years later, "everyone is infatuated with contests," said Mayur Patel, Knight's director of strategic assessment and assistant to the president. Since 2006, the number of contests to spur innovation in news, information and communications has doubled. At Knight's behest, Arabella Philanthropic Investment Advisers studied 29 such contests, including the Stockholm Challenge,

Let's use the technology to ask the question of anybody who might have an answer. Let's ask the crowd. Let's engage the community.

Alberto Ibargüen

NetSquared N2Y4 Challenge, We Media Pitch It and Sunlight Lab Apps for America for insights on how to improve the News Challenge. Some contests rely entirely on "the wisdom of crowds" to choose their finalists and winners, the Arabella study noted, and some require applicants to pitch their proposals in public at conferences. "Several competitions invest in creating a community of winners," the Arabella study said, and some "offer supplemental support, including mentoring, coaching and facilitating business development opportunities."

The foundation used information from the Arabella study and feedback from past judges to make various changes to the 2010 contest. Modifications included a more conscious effort to advertise the contest to the software developer and entrepreneur communities. The foundation also added more venture capital investors and young entrepreneurs to the review panel.

Thanks to its strict requirement for open sourcing – many Challenge projects are built on Drupal – the News Challenge is beginning to fill a digital toolbox that fledgling entrepreneurs and established news operations alike can use to connect with communities and audiences in ways that before the digital age would have been impossible. Last year it gave $719,500 to DocumentCloud, the joint project of ProPublica and *The New York Times* that will give the media and the general public access on the Web to a trove of original documents uncovered by investigative reporters.

The News Challenge's largest grant ($5 million) has underwritten the creation of a Center for Future Civic Media under the aegis of the famous Media Lab and the Comparative Media Studies Program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Knight brings News Challenge winners to MIT each spring to bounce ideas off each other and hear from previous winners about their pilot projects.

Knowledge-sharing also takes place on the Idea Lab blog on the Knight-funded PBS Media Shift website, where all News Challenge grantees are asked to blog regularly. Knight also lines up technical advisers and partners for some News Challenge projects, especially those awarded to "young creators" (i.e., 25 and younger).

The News Challenge is the centerpiece of a $100 million package of Media Innovation Initiatives that Ibargüen steered forward after taking the foundation's

helm in 2005. Ibargüen came from the world of newspapers – he was publisher of *The Miami Herald* and *El Nuevo Herald* and before that an executive and attorney with *The Hartford Courant* and *Newsday* – but made clear at the outset that neither he nor Knight was wedded to print. Knight's mission of promoting excellence in journalism and getting communities the information that people need for democracy to function was unchanged, but the foundation was "agnostic" about the platforms on which news was delivered. News and information, Ibargüen said at the September 2006 launch of the News Challenge, are "the glue that binds communities. We want to help today's high-tech news do in the 21st century what the Knight brothers did with ink and paper in the last."

Ibargüen had been frustrated by the difficulties that *The Miami Herald* encountered in establishing its beachhead online. "One of the big mistakes we made in the newspaper business – and it was a natural one – was that we were trying to make a movie out of the book instead of making a movie out of an idea or a story or a storyline," he said in an interview. The *Herald* and other newspapers had great difficulties understanding this new medium and how it had profoundly altered the relationship between writers and editors and their readers.

Ibargüen also wanted to move beyond Knight's traditional approach to bolstering journalism education and training. "Our list of grantees was about as safe a set of bets as you could have possibly made," he observed. There were two dozen Knight chairs at such top journalism schools as Columbia, and endowed fellowships at Stanford, Michigan and MIT. These programs, he noted, prepared the best and brightest "not only for jobs that might not exist, but for a world we couldn't honestly say we understood and neither could the universities." Knight needed to recognize that the news and information world was going digital and to acknowledge "we didn't know exactly how this was going to affect things," he said. "I thought, 'Let's use the technology to ask the question of anybody who might have an answer. Let's ask the crowd. Let's engage the community.'"

And so the News Challenge was started.

Ibargüen gave his lieutenants the task of drafting rules for the contest, then promptly discarded the three pages of strictures they came up with. "I took the rules and turned them over – I didn't actually look at them – and said, 'With all due respect to the good thought and the hard work you put into doing these rules, if we have this many rules all we are going to get are variations on things we've already thought about,'" Ibargüen said. "The whole purpose of this is to open it up to ideas we've never thought about and people we've never heard about, and so the answer is no to all the rules except for these three: [each project must be] news and information, delivered on a digital platform and focused on a geographically defined community."

The contest hews to those three rules from a recognition that while "there are a lot of virtual communities, at the end of the day, we all live, go to school and pay taxes in our community. The idea is we look for projects that are using the Web to improve a community and to bring citizens the information they need to lead informed lives," said Jose C. Zamora, a journalism program associate and former news executive with *elPeriódico de Guatemala*. Zamora, who works with all News Challenge grantees, often tells audiences, "We love the person who invented the suitcase and the person who invented the wheels, but what we really are looking for is the person who put the wheels on the suitcase."

The local community that a News Challenge project must impact can be any place on the planet. The News Challenge has funded projects to help hamlets in India open low-cost radio stations, to create a community sounding board for residents of Sochi, Russia, where the next Winter Olympics will be held and to give people in Zimbabwe access to news they cannot get from government-controlled newspapers and radio stations. The 51 winners who shared $19.2 million in grants in 2007, 2008 and 2009 included several prominent academics and Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the computer scientist who invented the World Wide Web (and insisted that it be kept royalty free), as well as social activists and college students or recent graduates just starting their careers.

Dianne Lynch, who was the founding executive director of the Online News Association and who shared in a $230,000 grant the first year seeking to infuse the innovative spirit in journalism schools, said it took great courage for Knight to take the "humble position" that it didn't have the answers to how to keep communities informed in the digital age.

Aaron Presnall, a political economist whose Jefferson Institute won a News Challenge grant in 2009 to build visual tools to help people penetrate massive databases, sounded the same note. "The News Challenge is Knight Foundation taking a break from its usual approach to journalism development, stepping back and saying, 'Look, we're not quite sure even what the right questions are; we certainly don't know what the answers are. We're just going to throw it open to all kinds of actors that we've never approached before and see what happens,'" he said.

A flood of **entrants**

FROM THE OUTSET, the contest attracted a flood of entrants, with 1,600 applications the first year, 3,000 the second and about 2,500 each in years three and four. The foundation purposely has kept the barrier to entry low: the only way to apply is by explaining the kernel of the idea in a short form on the News Challenge website. No applications are accepted by mail, e-mail, fax or other means. "If we think your idea shows promise, we'll ask you to write a full proposal," the website advises. Journalist and blogger Scott Rosenberg, the co-founder of Salon.com, was in crunch time for finishing a book manuscript in late 2008 as the News Challenge deadline loomed. Rosenberg had an idea for creating a website to track corrections of media errors. "I thought, 'Do I really have time to apply for this grant?' Then I looked at the entry form and [saw] that they don't ask for a whole lot of details unless you make the first cut," he said. "I realized I actually could take one evening and put this idea together and not fall too far behind on my book." In 2009, Rosenberg got a $335,000 grant to turn his idea for MediaBugs into reality.

While no projects can be built around proprietary software or with other black box technology, Knight in 2009 allowed would-be news entrepreneurs to submit proposals in public or private categories. Winners would still have to make their project code public at the end of the grant period. But the public applications were visible to all on the News Challenge website, where visitors were invited to rate them and post comments. About 500 applicants make it to the second round, where they must submit a much more detailed proposal.

Among the News Challenge reviewers have been Jordan Greenhall, founder of DivX; Sue Gardner, executive director of the Wikipedia Foundation; Yahoo! Executive Vice President Hilary Schneider; Rich Skrenta, co-founder and former CEO of Topix.net; and Mary Lou Fulton, vice president of audience development for The Bakersfield Californian and former managing editor of washingtonpost.com. Several members of Knight's Journalism Advisory Committee have helped review the entries, including Lynch, Eduardo Hauser, founder of DailyMe, and Rosental Alves, Knight Chair in Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin.For the 2010 contest, Knight expanded to 16 the number of first-round reviewers, adding wellknown Internet entrepreneurs such as Esther Dyson. The foundation also brought in younger voices. They included Jennifer 8. Lee, the former *New York Times* reporter and author of *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles*, and past Challenge winners David Cohn and David Sasaki, director of a global blog called Rising Voices. Lee served as chief judge and outside manager for the 2010 contest, overseeing the reviews from start to finish as the field was narrowed from 2,500 to 500 and then to 50. Then Lee and a separate panel of reviewers made the final recommendations in a marathon meeting in Miami in mid-March with Ibargüen, Newton, Kebbel, Zamora and the panel. From there, the Knight staff further scrutinized the top-ranked projects and their business models, reducing their number again before presenting the ultimate slate of recommended winners to the Knight board for its approval. One thing reviewers are instructed to look for, Zamora said, is that each project have "at least a seed of self-sustainability" after the grant runs out. Winners were announced at the E&P Interactive Media Conference in 2007 and 2008, and in 2009 and 2010 at the annual News Challenge brainstorming session at MIT.
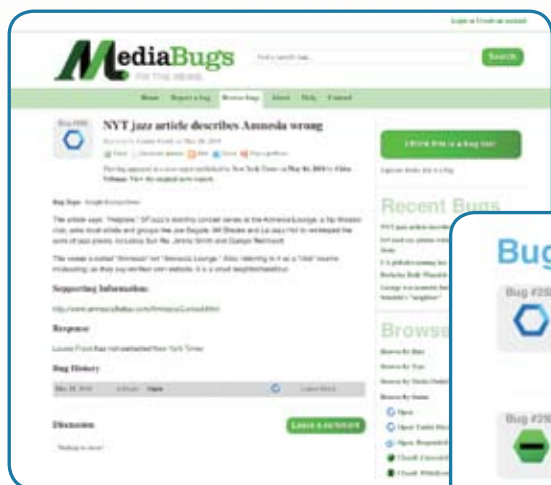
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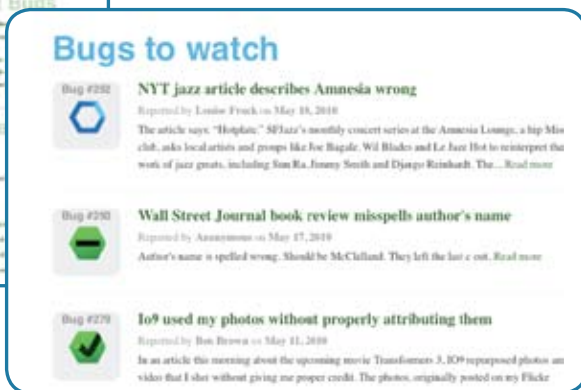
Saga of the
SochiReporter.ru

sochireporter.ru/en

ONE OF THE LARGER and more unusual News Challenge grants was the $600,000 awarded in 2008 to Alexander Zolotarev, a 25-year-old Russian graduate student who proposed creating a local news website and virtual community for the 100,000 residents of the Black Sea resort of Sochi, Russia, where the 2014 Winter Olympics will be held. The SochiReporter, as Zolotarev later named his fledgling site, would be a laboratory to watch not only the wrenching changes that every city undergoes as it is transmogrified for the sports spectacle, but also the flowering of citizen journalism in the former Soviet Union. Zolotarev, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in journalism at Moscow State University, learned of the News Challenge when he heard Ibargüen speak at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism in September 2007. Zolotarev had just landed there on a Fulbright research fellowship.

Zolotarev, the son of music professors, wrote a travel guide to Norway at age 21, worked on the Russian language edition of *Esquire* magazine, booked artists and entertainers and played a part in the opening of an IMAX theater in Moscow. When the International Olympic Committee in July 2007 made the surprise selection of Sochi for the 2014 Games, Zolotarev immediately thought it would be a great place to undertake an experiment in community journalism. He told no one at CUNY of his plans to apply to the News Challenge, but the more he learned about the contest, the more certain he became that he had a winner. He likens Sochi to the 26 U.S. cities that Knight Foundation considers "Knight communities" – places where Knight Ridder published newspapers upon the death of the last Knight brother, Jim. SochiReporter is not just "about the Olympics. It's about social change. It's about building a virtual community and empowering people to give their ideas and opinions," Zolotarev said in an interview via Skype from Moscow.

We really believed in Alexander's idea and dedication … but we were fully aware that he had never developed a website or run a project of this magnitude.

The $600,000 award was three times what Zolotarev asked for. "I wasn't so impudent to ask that much," he said with a smile. But as with Spot.Us, Knight figured Zolotarev would need more resources to pull this off. It also arranged for outside help. "We really believed in Alexander's idea and dedication … but we were fully aware" that he had never developed a website or run a project of this magnitude, Kebbel said. "That caused us to think, 'how do we make sure that this good idea succeeds?'"

Knight enlisted Aaron Presnall, an American political economist, and his Jefferson Institute, a nonprofit R&D shop based in Belgrade, Serbia, with extensive experience in digital matters, to build the bilingual SochiReporter site. Ibargüen had first met Presnall a quarter century earlier when Presnall was the student representative on the Wesleyan University Board of Trustees, which Ibargüen chaired. Presnall's institute was a spinoff of the East West Institute, a fixture in foreign policy circles, and it had undertaken such projects as digitizing Serbian military archives for the Hague war crimes tribunal. Presnall also had done previous work with Knight training journalists in Eastern Europe.

SochiReporter.ru went live in October 2009 in colorful Russian and English versions, with ads from Kodak and Olympus, blogs, stories, photos and videos contributed by a growing community of users. Underneath the colorful Sochi Reporter logo is the slogan, "The news is me!" The site is boosterish and unrestrained in its enthusiasm for the winter sports festival – a recent Question of the Day was, "What will you wear on the opening of the Olympics?" – but Zolotarev is committed to maintaining the independence of his citizen journalism enterprise. Some in Sochi worry that the seaside resort's beauty may be sacrificed to make way for the Olympic Village and other facilities. Asked if he can risk offending local officials, Zolotarev said, "We are not in bed [with them] but at times we have to flirt with each other." As shown in earlier stages of his young career, Zolotarev has a flair for deal-making and promotions. He landed a free ad on the tray liners that McDonald's uses in several hundred restaurants across Russia after promising the manager of the lone McDonald's in Sochi – which happens to be the most popular Wi-Fi spot in town – to promote a fundraising drive for the Russian version of Ronald McDonald

> SochiReporter is not just about the Olympics. It's about social change.
>
> **Alexander Zolotarev**

Houses for the families of sick children. He's also lured Kodak and Olympus as advertisers, and they've donated cameras and video equipment to students Zolotarev is training. When the U.S. State Department sent a high-powered delegation of tech leaders including Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey and e-Bay CEO John Donahoe to Moscow, Zolotarev got to meet them as well as the actor Ashton Kutcher, who has almost five million followers on Twitter.

Could SochiReporter have happened without the News Challenge grant? Zolotarev draws a blank when he considers where else the money for his community journalism experiment could have been found. In Russia, people only "invest if they understand they can get more money back in a year or two or three," he said. Knight Foundation is working on a longer frame.

Building networks and connections

This is such a new field. There isn't a lot of foundation support. Foundations typically don't get it. Knight gets it.

Katrin Verclas

KATRIN VERCLAS, A PROGRAMMER, social media activist and entrepreneur, regarded herself as a long shot when she applied for $200,000 in the 2009 News Challenge to create tools for professional and citizen journalists to upload video and audio clips to the Web from mobile phones. Verclas, co-founder of MobileActive.org, a global network for those using mobile phones to advance social change, said, "Proposing this was a bit of a whim. I was a little surprised, actually, when we were chosen." With her small, New York-based staff, she is finishing work on the Mobile Media Toolkit, which includes applications for video and audio recording, uploading content to social media sites, and figuring out how to access the Internet and phone networks in different countries.

She's also collaborating with other News Challenge winners working to deliver news over cell phones, including Freedom Fone in Zimbabwe. The Challenge project turned out to be "so synergistic with everything else we do," said the German-born Verclas. It is a small world for mobile activists and "we all know each other," said Verclas, who's been a TED Fellow and a MIT Media Lab Fellow. "This is such a new field. There isn't a lot of foundation support. Foundations typically don't get it. Knight gets it."

The News Challenge has been steadily building its network of journalists, programmers and activists with a common interest in exploring and extending the space for digital experiments in the media world. Some conversations take place on the Knight-sponsored PBS MediaShift website and its Idea Lab blog for News Challenge winners. Mark Glaser, the MediaShift creator and editor, said his site averages 50,000 to 75,000 unique visitors each month, while the Idea Lab draws 15,000 to 20,000 uniques. Glaser, a media critic and freelance producer for PBS, said the audience is "a mix of traditional and new media" people, as well as academics, students and bloggers. Hardly a day goes by that MediaShift, Idea Lab or both aren't posting stories or blogs about the News Challenge.

MobileActive.org

> The News Challenge has been steadily building its network of journalists, programmers and activists with a common interest in exploring and extending the space for digital experiments in the media world.

globalvoicesonline.org

The conversations also take place at the News Challenge's annual Future of News and Civic Media Conference each June at MIT, where Knight's Kebbel spiced things up last year by announcing that the foundation would award $6,000 in prize money for the three best ideas that attendees could come up with over the two days of the conference. First prize went to "TweetBill," a Twitter notification service to let people know when a bill was coming to a vote.

The network that Knight has nurtured includes academics and media innovators with ties to the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School. The center grew out of a law school seminar exploring cyberspace law, commerce, coding and other issues. It brings students, scholars, lawyers, journalists and entrepreneurs together for brown-bag lunches, lectures and international conferences. Its Citizen Media Law Project, led by lawyer and Berkman Fellow David Ardia, got a $250,000 News Challenge grant in 2007 to provide training and tools to citizen journalists, including a national database of legal threats to citizen media. New media pioneer Dan Gillmor was a co-founder of the Citizen Media Law Project. Gillmor directs the Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication. That center, too, got off the ground with a $552,000 News Challenge grant in 2007.

Former Berkman Fellows Ethan Zuckerman and Rebecca McKinnon, a former CNN Beijing bureau chief, in 2004 created Global Voices, which showcases and translates into 15 languages the work of several hundred bloggers and citizen journalists from around the world. Zuckerman received a $244,000 News Challenge grant in 2007 for an offshoot called Rising Voices to encourage and train more people to blog in countries often ignored by mainstream media. That outreach effort is spearheaded by Global Voices' David Sasaki, a prolific and widely read blogger who had been Latin American regional editor for the nonprofit.

Ory Okolloh, the Kenyan blogger, political activist and lawyer and a 2009 News Challenge winner, frequented the Berkman Center during her days at Harvard Law School. Berkman "was and continues to be a critical hub for people like myself," Okolloh said via Skype from Johannesburg, South Africa, where she now lives. "I always had an interest in technology but assumed I'd have to be a coder or have some software programming background" to become seriously engaged. But she credited Berkman with arming her with new skills and savvy in fighting censorship and promoting free expression.

The birth of **Ushahidi**

What I was seeing was not being reflected in the media.

Ory Okolloh

DURING THE ELECTION VIOLENCE in Kenya in 2007-2008, Okolloh grew frustrated with the limited coverage in the country's official media. "What I was seeing was not being reflected in the media. So I started blogging the story quite intensively and then opened up the blog for people to send in their stories in the comments section, or to e-mail or SMS me. I essentially became a citizen reporter," she said. The international media mined her blog for information on the groundswell of protests. It was hard to keep up with all the incidents people were reporting to her, and Okolloh finally posted a suggestion on how to get the information out without relying on herself as the middle person. Why not develop a website with software that could compile and publish these reports automatically? "I said if there were any Kenyan techies who wanted to help me build it, get in touch with me and I'd come up with a name," she recalled. "Ushahidi grew from there."

Ushahidi – the name means "testimony" in Swahili – quickly attracted an international cadre of volunteer programmers from Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Malawi, Netherlands and the United States, and soon there were 45,000 Kenyans watching and contributing to its crowd-sourced maps. The creators won a $25,000 NetSquared mash-up competition and then secured $200,000 in seed funding from a charity, Humanity United, to build a more robust platform. Activists in other parts of the world – the Congo, the Gaza Strip, India and Pakistan – began using the free software to map trouble spots of their own. It was meant to be a tool or application, like WordPress, but when an earthquake destroyed much of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in January, Ushahidi became an important resource, as the Red Cross, the U.S. Coast Guard and other rescue and relief agencies answered cries for help by using Haiti crisis maps created with Ushahidi's open-source code.

Ushahidi won a $70,000 News Challenge grant in 2009 to further its work and Knight is now considering other ways to help. Okolloh said the NetSquared prize and the Knight grant both "were important to validate what we were trying to do. We didn't know if it was a crazy idea to open-source or not." The News Challenge grant "definitely put us on the watch list of the Nieman [Journalism] Lab and other people studying alternative [news] models," she said. "I'm always trying to reach out to other Knight grantees to see if there are interesting ways to use Ushahidi." Crowd-sourcing "will never be a replacement for what you'd call good, old-fashioned journalism. You still need people to stick with a story and tell the investigative pieces," she said. In the meantime, Ushahidi is helping fill the gap in places like Kenya and Haiti where the mainstream media cannot or will not report what is happening.

ushahidi.com

Freedom Fone rings for impoverished Zimbabwe

ZIMBABWE, the former British colony of Rhodesia in southern Africa, is one of the poorest and most poorly run countries on the planet. Its longtime leader, Robert Mugabe, a former liberation fighter, was forced into a power-sharing arrangement with opponents after a discredited election in 2008. While the government controls the official media in Zimbabwe, civil society and human rights groups look for other ways to communicate with people. One resource is Kubatana.net, an online community based in Harare that serves as a bulletin board and repository of information for human rights and civil society groups and activists. Kubatana founders Bev Clark and Brenda Burrell received an $876,000 News Challenge grant – the fourth largest in the contest's history – in 2008 to launch a project called Freedom Fone to give Zimbabweans a way to dial up news and public-interest information on their cell phones. Even in impoverished Zimbabwe, most people have basic mobile cell phones, if not e-mail and access to the Internet. Freedom Fone gives people information about jobs, AIDS prevention, weather reports and other news over an interactive voice-response system in English, Swahili and other languages, which people access over their phones. Some of these "broadcasts" begin and end with pop music and are packaged with celebrity interviews.

kubatana.net

To get around the steep costs of placing calls in Zimbabwe, users can dial a toll-free number, text their number or simply dial, hang up and let the interactive voice-response system capture their number and call them back. Kubatana contracted with a Swedish company to build its telephone tree, and early versions of the free software have sparked inquiries from activists and NGOs in India, Cambodia, Tibet, Australia and elsewhere. Kubatana's staff tutors other NGOs and community organizations on how to set up interactive voice-response systems of their own with a modest investment in equipment. This "opens up an important new channel for two-way communication with the public," the NGO said in unveiling Version 1.5 of the Freedom Fone software this spring. Moreover, these systems "do not require a broadcasting license [and] this type of digital content is not currently subject to censorship."

One early adapter is a Canadian nonprofit, Farm Radio International, that does anti-poverty work with hundreds of African radio stations and saw possibilities in Freedom Fone as an agriculture extension tool. "FRI has been using Freedom Fone for over a year at Radio Maria in Tanzania and for other projects in Ghana," Freedom Fone's media and information officer, Amy Saunderson-Meyer, blogged on Idea Lab. FRI set up a "Kuku Hotline" to meet the demand from Tanzanian farmers for advice on how to raise chickens. And with Zimbabwe currently drafting a new constitution, she wrote, Kubatana itself "is using Freedom Fone to offer a constitutional question-and-answer service in English, Shona and Ndebele." Kubatana calls its system Inzwa, a word that means "listen" in the vernacular. Burrell said 9,500 people in Zimbabwe are on Freedom Fone's call list. The system allows Kubatana to conduct instant polls, and to invite the public to send in comments by text or voice message. When Kubatana asked people what they wanted "in a new Zimbabwe," these were some of the responses it got back:

I desire everything to be in order – no corruption

Freedom to exercise our rights end police brutality

We want the new govt to free the airwaves.

We need proper education for our children. Also to have money not bearer cheques … We want to use coins and proper notes.

No political beatings, many newspapers, tv stations, cheap goods, electricity, clean water, hospitals and jobs

Photo: Bev Clark

An alliance with **the inventor** of the World Wide Web

There are very few organizations in the U.K. and globally that do what Knight does…

Martin Moore

IF THERE IS A ROLE MODEL for Knight Foundation's insistence that all News Challenge digital projects be built on open-source code – that is, freely available for all to copy, adopt and improve – it is Sir Tim Berners-Lee. He is the British computer scientist who invented the hypertext code behind the World Wide Web while working as a software engineer at CERN, the European particle physics lab on the French-Swiss border, in 1990. Berners-Lee "didn't even take out a patent because he thought it should be free and universal," Ibargüen notes with admiration. In recent years Berners-Lee, who holds professorships at MIT and the University of Southampton, has expressed growing alarm about the welter of information and misinformation that people encounter on today's Web. He has found common cause between these concerns and Knight Foundation's mission of safeguarding the flow of information that a democracy needs to thrive.

Knight has forged two strong ties with Berners-Lee – first by awarding a $350,000 News Challenge grant in 2008 to his so-called Transparency Initiative to embed code in news stories online allowing readers to see when and by whom it was written. Then Knight provided more than $5 million in seed money for his new World Wide Web Foundation, which seeks to promote universal access to the Internet and to help search engines and individual users sort out good information from the bad.

The spadework for the Transparency Initiative, which also benefited from a $350,000 grant from the MacArthur Foundation, was done by the Media Standards Trust, a British press watchdog group. The Associated Press, the world's largest news organization, has begun experimenting with putting the so-called hNews microformat information in its stories.

> Berners-Lee "didn't even take out a patent because he thought it should be free and universal…"

TownNews.com, which helps 1,500 news websites publish their online editions, AOL News and 250 U.S. newspapers have adopted it as well. Berners-Lee has likened this metadata to "a list of ingredients" for news stories. The data is similar to the trove of information that digital cameras capture – speed, aperture, ISO, flash, time and date, and more – on every shot taken.

hNews is no cure-all for problems of plagiarism and inaccuracy on the Web, said Martin Moore, director of Media Standards Trust, but it provides important information about the provenance of news articles that readers encounter on the Web. It "gives people something to go on when they're trying to assess: Should I trust this guy? What's he written before? Is this an organization I've heard of? When was this published?" he said. Although Media Standards Trust is based in London, U.S. news organizations have showed more willingness than their U.K. counterparts to adopt the microformat. Moore said it was not surprising that his nonprofit had to look overseas for support for this work. "There are very few organizations in the U.K. and globally that do what Knight does," said Moore. "Very few British foundations have within their remit anything to do with promotion of journalism or the free press – in some cases they have freedom of speech – but it's quite an unusual thing in this country for foundations to fund media-type ventures."

Moore, who holds a Ph.D. in media and politics from the London School of Economics and worked in research and development for a decade for the BBC and other major British news organizations, said one selling point for hNews is that it doesn't oblige journalists to add anything to their stories that their computer systems cannot generate automatically. But he describes hNews as just the start. "We haven't finished yet. We're on the cusp of something exciting." Knight chose hNews as one of a half-dozen innovations it spotlighted during a panel at the American Society of News Editors' annual meeting in Washington in April 2010.

mediastandardstrust.org

Printcasting to the rescue?

printcasting.com

PRINTCASTING, AN EXPERIMENT that won an $837,000 award in 2008, makes a bold claim: its Web templates and layouts allow anyone "to be a magazine publisher in five minutes."

This project grew out of the *Bakersfield Californian's* forays into citizen journalism and its extensive online connections with its readership in that city of 330,000 in the San Joaquin Valley, including Bakotopia.com, a place "for the young, hip, and young-and-hip-at-heart." Dan Pacheco, a former reporter and project manager for AOL, wanted a way to help local bands spruce up and print their flyers. Printcasting was the result.

The templates on Printcasting's website allow users to create rudimentary magazines or newsletters from blogs, RSS feeds and other sources of copy. They can add photos and headlines, post the results to the Web, and invite local businesses to place $10 ads in their publication, which can be printed at home or at a copy shop. There are templates for the ads, too, with Printcasting collecting the revenues, keeping 10 percent and sending the rest to the person who put the magazine together. Printcasting has attracted a lot of ink, with a write-up in *The New York Times* and mentions in *Business Week* and *MIT Technology Review*. Pacheco says a newspaper in Puerto Rico, *El Nuevo Día*, is testing Printcasting to produce niche print publications, and *La República*, a major paper in Lima, Perú, is trying it as well.

But Printcasting's model to generate ad revenues still needs work. "To be frank, we haven't seen a lot of interest from the small businesses it was designed for," Pacheco wrote on a PBS Media Shift Idea Lab blog. "One reason is the economy. Many of those businesses either cut their marketing budgets or flat out went out of business in 2009 …. I continue to be a believer in the idea of 'democratizing' print ad publishing, but it will take more time to get the features just right, and attract interest from time- and cash-starved businesses." Pacheco has talked with other potential media partners for Printcasting, but says the rough economy derailed them.

> We're not trying to save print, ….
> I think it's going to be more about companies, organizations and individuals who really care about bridging the digital divide.
>
> **Dan Pacheco**

Many of the user-created publications shown on the Printcasting site look more like newsletters than magazines. Pacheco said in an interview one of his favorite customers is "a sports citizen journalist on steroids" who calls himself AndyNoise and prints newsletters that he distributes at high school track meets around Bakersfield. "If we could attract thousands of different Andynoises, then I'd feel like, 'OK, we have completed our mission.' That's really what Printcasting was designed for," said Pacheco.

But AndyNoise – his real name is Paul Anderson – says he's more interested now in sharing his track photos and stories on Facebook. Printcasting "is a cool thing, but for me it just didn't seem a lot of the things they talked about ever panned out," he said. Few readers subscribed, and the advertisers and revenue sharing didn't materialize.

Still, Pacheco keeps looking for partners and is hatching plans to build Printcasting applications for e-Books, for Apple's iPad and other new devices. "We're not trying to save print," Pacheco said. "I don't necessarily see our future being tied to newspapers. I think it's going to be more about companies, organizations and individuals who really care about bridging the digital divide. Printcasting fits in perfectly with that."

Playing **games** with the news

The News Challenge is about serious news and information, not mere entertainment, but video game research is a serious field of study at several of the journalism schools Knight supports…

FROM ATARI AND NINTENDO to Game Boy, PlayStation and the Wii, several generations of Americans have grown up playing video games, and many keep the habit as adults, too. Games abound on the iPhone and other mobile devices.

So it is not surprising that academics and entrepreneurs have sought to spark interest in news and public policy by devising games for people to play online. The News Challenge is about serious news and information, not mere entertainment, but video game research is a serious field of study at several of the journalism schools Knight supports, and the foundation itself sponsored a Knight News Game Award at a 2009 conference sponsored by a New York nonprofit called Games for Change.

In 2007, the News Challenge's first year, three projects to produce news games won grants. One was a research project called "Playing the News" devised by Nora Paul and Kathleen Hansen of the University of Minnesota School of Journalism and Mass Communication. To test their theory that game playing could whet news habits, they created games intended to help students understand the debate over subsidies for corn-based ethanol. One was like an old school video game (think *King Quest*) in which a virtual legislative aide quizzes farmers, environmentalists and others about ethanol while preparing for a hearing. A second was a throwback to a traditional, roll-the-dice, *Clue*-like board game, which students actually preferred over the video game. The researchers' conclusion, however, was that games were not effective "for delivering serious news content in the way most news consumers want it."

gothamgazette.com/archgames.php

Game Artwork: Kelly Brownlee

Game Artwork: Alex Eben Meyer

THE GOTHAM GAZETTE, an online, nonprofit news bureau covering politics and public policy in New York City and Albany, met with more success with the five news games it built under another $250,000 Challenge grant. Gotham Gazette is an affiliate of the Citizens Union Foundation, a good government group that is itself an offshoot of century-old Citizens Union, which came into existence in 1897 to fight the corruption of Tammany Hall. Editor-in-Chief Gail Robinson says her site draws 100,000 visitors a month. As a former editor once put it, the online news site aspires to be nonpartisan and "non-boring." Twice it has won the Online News Association's Award for General Excellence and last year it gained the distinction of becoming the first organization to win a second News Challenge award (to build a wiki called "Councilpedia" seeking to expose how campaign contributions affect the voting records of New York's 51 City Council members).

Gotham Gazette had prior experiencing creating simple question-and-answer games for its website, but the ones it built under the Knight grant were more sophisticated, although still far from *Grand Theft Auto*. The first was the most popular, the *Garbage Game*, which let New Yorkers play sanitation commissioner and make difficult choices to curb what goes into the stream of waste. In the *Budget Maze*, players went from room to room hunting zombies who held the answer to questions about the budget process. Other games dealt with making budget cuts, how to collect enough signatures to get on the ballot, and how to meet New York's surging demand for electricity.

Those games are still getting hits on the Gotham Gazette site, Robinson said. They have "a very long shelf life, longer than most articles" about policy issues. But like the folks at the University of Minnesota, Robinson found it difficult and expensive to build games that people would bother to play. Some 6,300 played the *Garbage Game* over 26 months.

Robinson came away with a more positive take on games as a way of educating people about public policy issues. Games "provide an informative and engaging way to tell a story," she blogged on Idea Lab, but they may be better suited for community groups seeking to inform members or for use in a civics or political science class, rather than trying to arouse interest in the general public. In an interview, she added, "We never figured out a way to do them that wasn't so resource intensive. I always hoped there would be a way to do games quickly. Frankly, we weren't able to come up with that."

Games "provide an informative and engaging way to tell a story …"

Gail Robinson

The News Challenge also gave Paul Grabowicz, director of the New Media Program at the University of California at Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, $60,000 to create a video game on the heyday and demise of the jazz and blues club scene in Oakland half a century ago. Grabowicz, a former reporter for the *Oakland Tribune*, wrote on Idea Lab that he'd been "frustrated by the limitations of a print story to really give people a sense of what 7th Street was like." Grabowicz employed the Virtual Oakland Blues and Jazz Game in a course he taught, and it is still playable on the Web, but it reached only a limited audience. "We tried promoting it among students, senior citizens and others in Oakland, and also within the gaming community. But the number of people who actually played it is undoubtedly small," he said by e-mail. He tried but failed to find additional support to market the game within the Oakland community. Still, he believes that if newspapers want to bring lost neighborhoods to life, game simulations are one way to do it.

Success and failure
in the Windy City

EveryBlock
in its current
incarnation is
only about
5 percent of
what we want
to do with it.

Adrian Holovaty

everyblock.com

> …the marketplace is supporting some of these ideas we do in the News Challenge …. That's a very good thing.

EVERYBLOCK IS WIDELY REGARDED as one of the News Challenge's conspicuous success stories after its quick sale to msnbc.com and commercialization shortly after it finished its two-year, $1.1 million News Challenge work. EveryBlock is built on computer algorithms that can sift through public records – crime reports, house sales, restaurant violations, building permits, liquor license applications, road tie-ups and even film shoots – and aggregate them on a website with news and blogs to keep people up to date on their neighborhood and city. Its creator, Adrian Holovaty, is a 29-year-old web developer and journalist. After graduating from the University of Missouri School of Journalism, he worked with Rob Curley at the new media-pioneering Lawrence Journal-World and LJWorld.com in Kansas, and later at washingtonpost.com. In 2005 he reverse-engineered the Google Map application to build a site called chicagocrime.org displaying the Windy City's crime statistics. That feat won Holovaty the $10,000 Grand Prize in the 2005 Batten Awards for Innovations in Journalism. The talented Holovaty co-created Django, an open-source platform that helps programmers harness databases for websites.

Knight Foundation placed a large bet – only the second million-dollar grant in the News Challenge's history – that Holovaty had more up his sleeve. He did not lack confidence. Explaining his plan in 2007 for a Knight video, Holovaty quipped, "I'd like to start with a couple of cities, and then branch out and, in the ideal case, take over the world."

The quality and quantity of EveryBlock's data varies from city to city. Its Chicago Web page recently listed 18,489 crime reports over the past 30 days, while New York City's EveryBlock showed just 76. Still, if someone learns on EveryBlock that the corner pizza parlor was just closed for a roach infestation, that provides a powerful incentive to return to the site and type in their zip code again. In an era of downsized newsrooms, the notion that important news and information can be harvested by computer has intrinsic appeal to editors and publishers.

But is it journalism? Robert Niles posed that question to Holovaty in an *Online Journalism Review* interview in February 2008. "People can define 'journalism' however they'd like," replied Holovaty. "At EveryBlock, what we're interested in exploring is what sort of frequently updated information consumers want at the block level, and how they'd like to receive it. Whether this is called 'journalism' or not is strictly academic." But "it's hard to argue against calling it 'news.'"

In an interview conducted by e-mail, Holovaty said the original EveryBlock code is being used in bits and pieces "rather than the whole stack" in various places around the globe. He said the News Challenge grant "gave me the freedom to leave my job at washingtonpost.com and work on EveryBlock" full-time. He'd worked on chicagocrime.org, EveryBlock's precursor, "just for fun as a side project." The Knight money allowed him and his small team to work full-time on EveryBlock for two years. Could it have happened without Knight? Very possibly, he said, "because I had been talking to other funders, such as venture capitalists, before I was awarded the Knight grant."

When the sale was announced, Holovaty blogged that it "gives us the resources to turn EveryBlock from a cool, useful service into something much bigger." He said that "EveryBlock in its current incarnation is only about 5 percent of what we want to do with it. We're now in a position to make this happen."

Kebbel said no one at Knight expected EveryBlock to be as "wildly successful" as it turned out. It shows "that the marketplace is supporting some of these ideas we do in the News Challenge …. That's a very good thing." But Knight is reworking the News Challenge grant contracts to include a pay-it-forward proviso that if a project is sold, some proceeds will go to support non-profit news and information efforts.

Tough sledding for not-for-profit news site

IF EVERYBLOCK WAS the News Challenge's biggest hit, the Chi-Town Daily News was one of its misses. Former Chicago Tribune investigative reporter Geoff Dougherty received $340,000 in 2007 to further develop a small, online news site he had started two years earlier. His pitch was that he would "recruit and train a network of 75 citizen journalists – one in each Chicago neighborhood"– and, under the guiding hand of professional editors, turn out a daily news report. "If we're successful," he told Knight's cameras, "this could serve as a model for improving local news coverage across the country." Chi-Town's avid amateurs would birddog the Chicago Housing Authority and Chicago Transit Agency beats and leave City Hall to others. The concept generated buzz and led Dougherty to boast that Chi-Town was becoming known "as one of the most progressive new media operations in the country." Washington Post media critic Howard Kurtz featured it in an April 1, 2009, story on how news start-ups were jumping in as Chicago's bankrupt dailies faltered. "By the big, brawny, tough-guy standards of Chicago journalism, Geoff Dougherty's modest Web site might seem little more than a blip. With four reporters, four freelancers and 100 unpaid contributors, [it] is pioneering a new form of low-cost, street-level reporting," wrote Kurtz on the day the *Chicago Sun-Times* filed for bankruptcy.

But five months later, Dougherty laid off his last three staffers and folded Chi-Town Daily News. He told readers he'd be back soon, but as a for-profit enterprise. So mark down Chi-Town Daily News as a News Challenge flop?

"Hell, no," said the brassy Dougherty, who plays in a punk rock band. "We provided the people in Chicago with four years of really great journalism …. I think we showed that citizen journalism is not just a bunch of Yahoos sitting around in their pajamas or some guy who happens to have his cell phone out and snaps a picture when he walks by a car wreck." Non-profit news sites are working in places such as Minneapolis and San Diego, he said.

Not all would agree that Chi-Town delivered great journalism. But Don Heider, dean of the School of Communications at Loyola University Chicago, credits Dougherty with being "ahead of the curve. For a long time it was one of the most successful user-generated content news sites. Everything was edited. He wasn't just throwing stories up there." The Loyola dean, some of whose students interned for Dougherty, added, "We learn from failures. Part of why newsrooms haven't been able to move faster" to reinvent themselves is the fear of failures.

Dougherty subsequently rehired three reporters for a website and companion monthly paper called *Chicago Current* that is distributed free to aldermen and other city officials. Dougherty hopes to sell ads to interest groups and lobbyists the way that Politico.com, the high-flying political news site, does with the print edition it distributes several times a week on Capitol Hill.

What does the future hold for the Knight News Challenge?

> I think we showed that citizen journalism is not just a bunch of Yahoos sitting around in their pajamas or some guy who happens to have his cell phone out and snaps a picture when he walks by a car wreck.

Geoff Dougherty

The **next** chapter

…we're a lot closer now to the better world we hoped for than when we were first imagining this might be an interesting idea.

Eric Newton

THE SPRING 2010 MEETING of the the nation's leading newspaper editors, the American Society of News Editors (ASNE), provided a showcase for such Knight grantees as DocumentCloud, hNews, Printcasting and others to demonstrate how newsrooms already are putting their digital news innovations to good use.

One such tool is the Sunlight Foundation's "Politiwidgets," which allow reporters and bloggers an easy way to insert in their stories information on how individual lawmakers voted, bills they sponsored and earmarks they obtained. The Sunlight Foundation originally submitted a News Challenge proposal, but Knight pulled the idea out and awarded it $565,000 as a freedom of information grant to create tools giving the public more information about their representatives in Congress. Another grant recipient, NewsCloud, makes Facebook applications aimed at generating interest in news among young audiences – and letting the news organizations build loyalty and drive revenue.

A third innovation, SnagFilms, supported by a $210,000 grant and subsequent investment, is allowing *The Miami Herald* and others to embed widgets in news stories that connect to 1,150 free documentaries from PBS, National Geographic, the Sundance Channel and other filmmakers.

Printcasting's Dan Pacheco, Martin Moore of the Media Standard Trust and hNews, and Eric Umansky and Amanda Hickman of DocumentCloud all made presentations, along with NewsCloud's Reifman, Bill Allison, the editorial director of the Sunlight Foundation, and Rick Allen, the CEO of SnagFilms. All the software developed under the News Challenge's umbrella is open sourced and free for news organizations to employ for their own sites.

Anthony Moor, lead local editor at Yahoo! and former deputy managing editor/interactive at *The Dallas Morning News*, thanked the panelists effusively, saying,

"This is pretty amazing. You guys are building the future for us."

For Knight's Newton, the ASNE session was more than a coming-out party for these particular News Challenge innovations. It was a ratification of the approach Knight has taken to seed innovation in delivering digital news to local audiences. When the News Challenge started, "we had no idea whether this was going to work at all," said Newton. Already it has demonstrated that it is possible to do "open-sourced research and development that is not merely academic but is actually used in newsrooms and that therefore changes the news and information people consume," he said.

It still is not known whether these digital innovations will, at the end of the day, "lead to better informed and more satisfied readers," Newton said, "but we're a lot closer now to the better world we hoped for than when we were first imagining this might be an interesting idea."

Many of the News Challenge projects are still underway and it remains to be seen how many will have staying power or lasting impact. But Ibargüen said, "If you told venture capitalists you'd funded 50 projects in three years totaling $15 million and had four successes, they would say we're Babe Ruth."

The Challenge's impact extends beyond the immediate list of grant winners. Knight has awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars through other channels to digital news innovators, including not-for-profit news enterprises that have sprouted up in San Diego, Minneapolis and Austin. ProPublica, the investigative reporting enterprise, got $1 million last year to develop a sustainable business model; this spring it shared a Pulitzer Prize with *The New York Times* for its probe of how patients died inside a New Orleans hospital after Hurricane Katrina.

Sustainability is the biggest hurdle now facing the News Challenge's experiments, said Kebbel, who is departing Knight Foundation this summer to become dean of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln College of Journalism and Mass Communications. "I think the News Challenge has entered a new phase in its life cycle. We're no longer just giving grants and experimenting and throwing things on the wall," he said. "Now is the time to pull back a little bit and perhaps make some educated bets or guesses and to also try to figure out how to sustain and help make sure they are more widely distributed."

> Now is the time to pull back a little bit and perhaps make some educated bets or guesses and to also try to figure out how to sustain and help make sure they are more widely distributed."

> What the Knight News Challenge does… is throw open the door for people who otherwise wouldn't think about starting their companies or projects.

newschallenge.org

Eduardo Hauser, the DailyMe publisher, Knight Journalism Advisory Committee member and past judge, agreed. "Hopefully, one of the next outcomes of the Challenge will be a longer life span for these experiments," he said. "A lot fail; that's the nature of the process. But those that don't need to find a sustainable home. They need to stand on their own legs, either independently or through a partnership."

Sasaki, the blogger who runs the Rising Voices project and who helped review the 2010 applications, said the News Challenge has prized innovation above all else, but with so many experiments underway, "maybe we actually need a little bit less innovation and more people working on projects for longer than a year or two. You have all these new and revolutionary ideas coming out, but then there's no clear step for how they can scale up and become institutionalized."

Knight has decisions to make about the News Challenge, Ibargüen said. A number of projects, like Spot.Us, have reached a point where "they did the experiment, they proved the concept and now they've got to make it a business. As a foundation we are not really staffed for that, nor are we structured to do that sort of financing." But Ibargüen called this "an interesting, welcome challenge for us."

He said the foundation also has gotten "some push back" from those who chafe under the open-source requirement and think entrepreneurs should be given more latitude to profit from their ideas. While

Ibargüen speaks with great pride about the open-source requirement, he said Knight needs to stand back and assess whether it is moving the mission forward or whether "there is another initiative we can do that will allow us to play in that different market."

Ibargüen also said he'd be willing to look at other changes, including the possibility of requiring that News Challenge applicants be incorporated and have at least a two-year track record. But one thing will not change: Knight Foundation's commitment to digital news. Whatever lies ahead for the News Challenge, "people should expect Knight to be even more engaged in the field we waded into when we started with the Challenge," said Ibargüen. "There is no plan to retreat from this activity."

The News Challenge has altered the way Knight approaches its journalism mission. Once it worked almost exclusively with academic elites and established news organizations; now it casts the net much wider.

"What the Knight News Challenge does," summed up contest judge Jennifer 8. Lee, "is throw open the door for people who otherwise wouldn't think about starting their companies or projects. It opens the door to the foundation world which historically, everywhere, has been the sole purview of nonprofits and universities. A normal person doesn't know to apply to Knight for a grant. It's a very opaque process." But now they know how to apply – and they know that Knight is listening. ∎

Christopher Connell is a freelance journalist and former assistant Washington bureau chief for The Associated Press. He writes regularly for foundations about education and other public policy issues. He wrote the cover story for the Fall 2009 Carnegie Reporter on News21, part of the Carnegie Corporation of New York-Knight Foundation Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education. His e-mail is cvconnell@gmail.com.

Knight News Challenge Winners 2007 - 2010

2010

CityTracking   **$400,000**
To make municipal data easy to understand with software that allows users to transform Web data into maps and graphics
Eric Rodenbeck

The Cartoonist   **$378,000**
To engage readers in the news through the creation of cartoon-like current event games
Ian Bogost, Michael Mateas

Local Wiki   **$350,000**
To help people learn and share community news and knowledge through the creation of local wikis
Philip Neustrom, Mike Ivanov

WindyCitizen's Real Time Ads   **$250,000**
To help online start-ups generate revenue and become sustainable by creating enhanced software that produces "real-time ads"
Brad Flora

GoMap Riga   **$250,000**
To inspire residents to become engaged in their community by creating an online map where people can browse and post their own local news and information
Marcis Rubenis, Kristofs Blaus

Order in the Court 2.0   **$250,000**
To foster greater citizen access to the judicial process by establishing best practices for digital reporting from courtrooms
John Davidow

Front Porch Forum   **$220,000**
To help residents connect with others and their community by creating open-source software for neighborhood news
Michael Wood-Lewis

One-Eight   **$202,000**
To study the impact of social media on large institutions by chronicling the military's new use of social networks
Teru Kuwayama

Stroome   **$200,000**
To simplify the production of video news by creating a collaborative, online video editing platform
Tom Grasty, Nonny de la Peña

CitySeed   **$90,000**
To inform and engage communities through a mobile application that tags ideas for improving neighborhoods
Retha Hill, Cody Shotwell

PRX StoryMarket   **$75,000**
To boost public radio's local news coverage and engage listeners by providing a way for the public to pitch and pay for producing stories
Jake Shapiro

Tilemapping   **$74,000**
To help residents learn about local issues by creating a set of easy-to-use tools for crafting hyper-local maps
Eric Gundersen, Ian Cairns

2009

Document Cloud   **$719,500**
To enrich investigative news reports by creating an easily searchable, free, public online database of public records
Eric Umansky & Scott Klein, ProPublica;
Aron Pilhofer & Ben Koski, The New York Times

Media Bugs   **$335,000**
To create a neutral environment where the public can report, track, discuss and help resolve errors in news coverage
Scott Rosenberg

Councilpedia   **$250,000**
To inform and engage New Yorkers around local issues by creating a publicly accessible wiki devoted to local legislators' voting records and campaign contributions
Gail Robinson, Gotham Gazette

Data Visualization   **$243,600**
To create a suite of online tools that make community news and information easy to visualize
Aaron Presnall, The Jefferson Institute

Mobile Media Toolkit   **$200,000**
To help media organizations and citizen journalists around the world easily find the mobile devices and applications they need to create and broadcast local news reports
Katrin Verclas, MobileActive

The Daily Phoenix   **$95,000**
To help commuters on Phoenix's new light rail system use news, games and social networking to learn about their city
Aleksandra Chojnacka, Adam Klawonn

Crowdsourcing Crisis Information   **$70,000**
To strengthen the reporting and understanding of breaking news events by creating a free Web map and timeline that combines and plots reports from citizens and journalists
Ory Okolloh, Ushahidi

Virtual Street Corners   **$40,000**
To broadcast on street corners video newscasts about two disparate neighborhoods as a way to spur discussion among the residents of those very different neighborhoods
John Ewing

CMS Upload Utility   **$10,000**
To save media organizations both time and resources by creating a quick way to convert and load multiple newspaper files to a website
Joe Boydston, McNaughton Newspaper Group

2008

Freedom Fone   **$876,000**
To test a phone-based information system in rural areas
Bev Clark

Printcasting   **$837,000**
To create free computer software to help neighborhood publishers create niche publications
Dan Pacheco

The News Is Coming   **$630,400**
To create equal access to news for a racially and geographically divided city in South Africa
Guy Berger

Sochi Olympics Project   **$600,000**
To create an interactive website to help a Russian city cope with hosting the Olympics
Alexander Zolotarev

Tools for Public Access TV   **$380,000**
To develop new software so that community television stations can easily create and network their websites
Tony Shawcross

Transparent Journalism   **$350,000**
To create a "meta-data" system to help the public find quality news sources
Sir Tim Berners-Lee, Martin Moore

Spot.us   **$340,000**
To test a new way to fund local, investigative reporting
David Cohn

Radio Engage   **$327,000**
To create free software that radio stations can use to create multimedia websites
Margaret Rosas

News on Cellphones   **$325,000**
To develop a way for people to receive news using text messaging on cellphones
Joel Selanikio

Community News Network   **$275,000**
To create free software for a new kind of community-networked college newspaper
Dharmishta Rood, Anthony Pesce

Video Volunteers   **$275,000**
To create a video network using citizen journalists to inform a large, rural population
Jessica Mayberry

Community Radio in India   **$200,000**
To experiment with low-cost community radio in India
Aaditeshwar Seth

Beanstock'd   **$40,000**
To test a news-based environmental game at a university campus
Angela Antony, Sandra Ekong

Bloggers:

Signcasts   **$15,000**
To explore the digital communication needs of deaf people
Brein McNamara

The Includer   **$15,000**
To discuss ways to disseminate digital information in rural areas without Internet or wireless capabilities
Andrius Kulikauskas

Reporting On $15,000
To encourage journalists across the country to openly discuss story ideas and topics
Ryan Sholin

2007

Center for Future Civic Media $5 million
To create the Center for Future Civic Media, a leadership project designed to encourage community news experiments
Chris Csikszentmihályi, Henry Jenkins, Mitchel Resnick, MIT Media Lab

EveryBlock $1.1 million
To create, test and release open-source software that links databases to allow citizens of a large city to learn civic information about their neighborhood
Adrian Holovaty

VillageSoup $885,000
To create an open-source version of VillageSoup's successful community news software
Richard Anderson, VillageSoup

MTV/Knight Street Team 2008 $700,000
To cover the 2008 presidential election with 51 Knight Mobile Youth Journalists
Ian Rowe, MTV: Music Television

New Media Scholarships for Computer Scientists $639,000
To create an academic program blending computer science and journalism
Rich Gordon, Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University

Taking Radio 'Out of the Box' $600,000
To improve a city's awareness of its arts and culture by bringing more diverse voices to WNYC public radio
Alex Villari, WNYC Radio

Knight-Kauffman Center for Media Entrepreneurship $552,000
To support digital media entrepreneurship through establishment of a center at Arizona State University
Christopher Callahan, Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication, ASU

Chi-Town Daily News $340,000
To recruit and train a network of 75 citizen journalists – one in each Chicago neighborhood
Geoff Dougherty, PublicMedia, Inc.

Citizen Media Law Project $250,000
To create a set of online resources for citizen journalists
David Ardia, Citizen Media Law Project, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard Law School

Gotham Gazette $250,000
To develop games to inform and engage players about key issues confronting New York City on Gotham Gazette
Gail Robinson, Gotham Gazette

News Games $250,000
To create a simulation environment that lets citizens play through a complex, evolving news story through interaction with the newsmakers
Nora Paul, Institute for New Media Studies, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Minnesota

Rising Voices $244,000
To introduce readers around the world to the voices of bloggers from developing nations
Ethan Zuckerman, Global Voices, Berkman Center for Internet and Society, Harvard Law School

Digital News Incubators $230,000
To create 'incubators' at seven academic institutions to foster creative thinking about solutions to digital news problems
Dianne Lynch, Roy H. Park School of Communications, Ithaca College, with six co-winners: Angela Powers, Miller School of Journalism and Mass Communications, Kansas State; Ann Brill, William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Kansas; Ardyth Broadrick Sohn, Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies, University of Las Vegas; Jane Briggs-Bunting, School of Journalism, Michigan State; Kimberly Sultze, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Saint Michael's College; Pam McAllister-Johnson, School of Journalism & Broadcasting, Western Kentucky University

Placeblogger $222,000
To make it easier for people to find hyper-local news and information about their city or neighborhood
Lisa Williams, Placeblogger

Media Mobilizing Project of Philadelphia $150,000
To develop online digital newscasts for Philadelphia's immigrant community and distribute them via the new citywide wireless platform
Todd Wolfson, Media Mobilizing Project of Philadelphia

Boulder Carbon Tax Tracker $90,000
To create a citizen/professional journalism project using innovative Web tools and citizen journalism practices
Adam Glenn and Amy Gahran, co-founders of I, Reporter

Oakland Jazz Scene Game $60,000
To re-create Oakland's once-vibrant jazz and blues club scene as an online video game and virtual world
Paul Grabowicz, University of California - Berkeley

Ideal Newsroom $50,000
To plan an 'ideal newsroom' for the digital news era and create an online resource for student newspapers and other news organizations
Chris O'Brien, The Chronicle, Duke University's student newspaper

Bloggers:

Related Items (Drupal) $15,000
A blog about Related Items, a module for Drupal, the community-oriented and open-source content management system
Benjamin Melançon, Agaric Design Collective

Giving Individuals a Voice $15,000
A blog about giving all individuals a voice within their local and global communities though a Web-based news system that involves GPS tagging
Dan Schultz, Carnegie Mellon University

Maintaining Diversity In Digital Media $15,000
A blog about creating and maintaining diversity in digital media
Dori J. Maynard

Paulding.com $15,000
A blog about making Paulding.com a financial success, from discussing practical aspects of building its revenue base to sharing technical and strategic successes
G. Patton Hughes, Neomaxcom, LLC

Community Media Toolset $15,000
A blog about a toolset that will provide publishers, editors and developers with easy-to-use citizen media tools
J.D. Lasica, Ourmedia.org

Beat Reporters and Social Networks $15,000
A blog about how beat reporters can work with social networks to improve their reporting
Jay Rosen

Interactive Community Spaces $15,000
A blog about the Interactive Community Spaces project, which uses GPS tracking to inform people through mobile media
Paul Lamb and Leslie Rule

The Ideas Factory $15,000
A blog about The Ideas Factory, which will generate and share big ideas from the world of citizen engagement online
Steven Clift

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote informed and engaged communities and lead to transformational change.

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