



# Re-Sourcing the News: Citizen Media

Excerpt 4 of 7: Assessment of the  
**Knight News Challenge**, 2007-2008

June 2011

Prepared by **LFA Group: *Learning for Action*** for **John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**



LFA Group: *Learning for Action* enhances the impact and sustainability of social sector organizations through highly customized research, strategy development, and evaluation services.

# Re-Sourcing the News: Citizen Media

## I. Introduction

Modern technologies (e.g., the Internet, smart phones, flip cams, etc.) have lowered barriers to the production and distribution of citizen-generated news and information. In this context, the Knight News Challenge in 2007 and 2008 awarded grants to eight efforts that sought to expand citizen voices in the development of news and information. The overarching goal of the efforts was to increase access to news and information in a way that better served communities to improve their individual and collective lives. Anticipated outcomes ranged from increasing the diversity of voices in the international blogosphere, to trying a “video volunteer” approach to spreading news and information in rural villages and slums in India. While many projects were concerned primarily with supporting user-generated news and reporting, others were focused on engaging citizens in media production as a way to catalyze broader social change. Additionally, several of the projects focused on communities that traditionally have had limited access to media and communications platforms.

This report was completed as part of an interim review of the Knight News Challenge focused on the early winners (2007-2008). The project clusters that serve as the organizing principle for the interim reports were created through the process of conducting data analysis for this assessment; these categories were not organizing principles for the competition at the start. This report is based on: a review of project reports, websites and other materials; key informant interviews with winners, key partners and field experts; and facilitated review and structured reflection with Knight Foundation staff.

### Key Learning Questions

- What strategies are most effective for continued engagement of citizen journalists?
- Can innovative tools facilitate citizen media efforts?
- What factors affect the success of citizen media projects?

<sup>1</sup> Source of all Internet and mobile phone usage statistics: International Telecommunication Union

## Overview of Citizen Media Projects: 2007-2008

The foundation invested in eight citizen media projects in 2007-2008: half of the targeted communities were in the United States, two were based in India, one in Russia, and one had global reach. Projects focused on innovative ways to elevate unheard voices, produce untold stories from the community perspective, or engage a community. The following table provides a summary of the eight projects.

	<b>Boulder Carbon Tax Tracker (2007)</b>	<b>Chi-Town Daily News (2007)</b>
Grant	<p><b>Winner:</b> I, Reporter</p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$90,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 1 Year</p> <p><b>Year Awarded:</b> 2008</p>	<p><b>Winner:</b> Chi-Town Daily News</p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$340,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 2 Years</p> <p><b>Year Awarded:</b> 2008</p>
Idea	<p><b>Track the implementation of the nation's first municipal carbon tax:</b> Develop a participatory, easy-to-use website to engage community members in a dialogue on how the tax revenue is being spent</p>	<p><b>Provide neighborhood-level news and information to 9.8 million Chicago residents:</b> Develop an all-local nonprofit news website that exclusively focuses on the Chicago area</p>
Innovation	<p>Innovative use of inexpensive and free web tools – e.g., <a href="#">Wordpress</a> publishing tools, <a href="#">vBulletin</a> online forum software, social bookmarking sites – to facilitate an online dialogue about a niche topic</p>	<p>Develop a sustainable news organization by training community members as volunteer citizen journalists to provide original, no- or low-cost reporting at the neighborhood level</p>
Output / Reach / Impact	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of inexpensive, easy-to-build template for a participatory community website</li> <li>• 2 face-to-face workshops involving stakeholders and community members to discuss the carbon tax</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited online dialogue on the website</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None documented</li> </ul>	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 200 citizen journalists trained</li> <li>• At its peak, managed 70 citizen journalists representing 35 out of 77 Chicago neighborhoods</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20,000 to 25,000 unique visitors per month (at project's closing)</li> <li>• 10 to 20 articles posted weekly, half written by volunteers (in June 2008)</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited sustained impact on the Chicago news ecosystem</li> </ul>
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leave enough time for engaging community, and use traditional community-building techniques, if necessary</li> <li>• If key government information, such as carbon tax revenues or expenses, are not forthcoming, open government advocates need to be effectively engaged to obtain it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retention of a dispersed network of volunteer citizen journalists requires significant community engagement effort</li> <li>• Mismatch of scope and what was doable – the resources were insufficient for the scale of the approach being used.</li> <li>• Limited investment in marketing and technology will affect a projects long-run sustainability</li> </ul>

	Community Radio in India (2008)	Media Mobilizing Project of Philadelphia (2007)
Grant	<p><b>Winner:</b> University of Waterloo</p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$200,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 3 Years</p>	<p><b>Winner:</b> Media Mobilizing Project</p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$150,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 2 Years</p>
Idea	<p><b>Increase opportunities for participatory media by facilitating the establishment of community radio stations in rural India:</b> Develop an affordable way to start and run radio stations that allow for local media activism and address issues of equality</p>	<p><b>Build a community media infrastructure for people who are disenfranchised from mass media:</b> Train immigrants and low-income communities on the use of digital visual technology to generate their own community-driven media</p>
Innovation	<p>Develop a single user-interface that can make and receive telephone calls, allow for easy archiving of programs, stream content online, preview programs, schedule broadcasts and record live transmissions</p>	<p>Use media to connect and organize low-income communities working for social change so that they can promote better living conditions locally and beyond; develop one portal through which community members can be connected and contribute to multiple media platforms</p>
Output / Reach / Impact	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the GRINS software, a single user interface</li> <li>• Development of the Indian Community Media Network to connect stations and showcase work</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GRINS incorporated into 14 radio stations: 11 are NGO-based; 3 are university-based</li> <li>• Estimated 25% of residents in the broadcast areas of each radio station that adopted GRINS</li> <li>• One radio station's estimates: ~50 calls from listeners between 8:30am and 5pm; ~50,000 listeners on an average day</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased cost for community radio station set-up</li> <li>• Increased listener involvement in sharing stories</li> <li>• Police commissioner acted on complaints regarding police brutality and corruption targeting migrant workers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainings for immigrants and low-wage workers from diverse backgrounds and age groups</li> <li>• Built a Drupal-based website which serves as a home base for MMP's various media outlets (e.g., 3 radio shows, 1 TV news show, SMS) and videos produced</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~100 people per year trained, of whom 25% are foreign-born</li> <li>• Coalition includes leadership body of 200 people who meet quarterly</li> <li>• 100 people typically turn out for a rally, organized by MMP</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diverse, low-income communities (e.g., cab drivers, low-income students, Head Start parents) who experience shared struggles are connected to advocate for their rights</li> <li>• Policy win: Federal reauthorization of Pennsylvania's Head Start funding informed by MMP video</li> <li>• Mobilized cab drivers won court case that threw out unjust rules and regulations</li> </ul>
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having a team with diverse strengths both to develop and market the technology to get platforms incorporated into community radio stations is critical</li> <li>• Training and technical assistance should accompany new tools for users to ensure adoption</li> <li>• Adapting the budget to respond to unanticipated costs for IT equipment is an important consideration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital and media literacy training can be popular components of citizen media efforts in disenfranchised communities, especially when the "new voices" are immediately engaged in a community issue</li> <li>• Strong partnerships with local organizations are central to ensuring a community's buy-in</li> <li>• Building a foundational infrastructure (e.g., administrative) is important for innovative efforts</li> </ul>

	Mobile Youth Journalism (2007)	Rising Voices (2007)
Grant	<p><b>Winner:</b> MTV Department of Strategic Partnerships</p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$700,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 2 Years</p>	<p><b>Winner:</b> Global Voices/<a href="#">Berkman Center for Internet and Society</a></p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$244,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 2 Years</p>
Idea	<p><b>Coverage of the 2008 Presidential election by and for young people:</b> Recruit, train, and deploy 51 young citizen journalists, one in every state and D.C., to create news reports on the 2008 elections</p>	<p><b>Bring new, underrepresented voices and new languages to the global conversation:</b> Provide resources and fund local groups reaching out to and training underrepresented communities to engage in participatory media</p>
Innovation	<p>Use of mobile media and "live-to-mobile" to uncover the untold or underreported political stories that mattered most to young people in their respective states as a way to increase political and civic engagement, boost voting rates among this demographic, and learn more about how young people consume news on mobile devices</p>	<p>Target communities that don't have digital media or traditional media community production and provide citizen media training; cultivate a network of passionate citizen media activists who share news and information from the community perspective</p>
Output / Reach / Impact	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curricula developed and training conducted</li> <li>• New WAP mobile site developed</li> <li>• Partnerships for dissemination formed</li> <li>• Report created on young people and mobile news consumption</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 51 young (18-29) citizen journalists trained</li> <li>• More than 2,000 different pieces of media content</li> <li>• 250,153 page views on mobile site</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulated use of live-to-mobile approach at MTV News</li> </ul>	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$110,000 disbursed to a total of 24 microgrants</li> <li>• Introduction to Citizen Media published in 7 languages</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~1,200 new bloggers trained</li> <li>• ~10% continue to blog</li> <li>• 11 languages represented</li> <li>• ~12,000 blog posts</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased sense of community and connectedness among new bloggers to others in the blogosphere</li> <li>• Replication of training model</li> </ul>
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing direction and/or mentoring to citizen journalists on their stories is important to those who are new to journalism</li> <li>• Maintaining motivation and momentum for a geographically-dispersed team of journalists requires intensive effort</li> <li>• Aggressive marketing is important in the early phases of the project to draw in an audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliable, easy access to the Internet, feeling tied to a broader community, and not having competing priorities contributed to consistent blogging</li> <li>• Importance of building in a media literacy component to build demand for new content</li> <li>• Global Voices, a well-known international blogging community, helped to amplify new voices in the blogosphere</li> </ul>

	SochiReporter (2008)	Video Volunteers (2007)
Grant	<p><b>Winner:</b> CUNY School of Journalism/M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University School of Journalism</p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$600,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 3 Years</p>	<p><b>Winner:</b> Video Volunteers</p> <p><b>Grant Amount:</b> \$275,000</p> <p><b>Timeframe:</b> 2 Years</p>
Idea	<p><b>Help the residents of Sochi better prepare for the Olympics:</b> Inform the media about the city's issues, and use discussions about preparation for the Games as a way to improve life in Sochi</p>	<p><b>Empower disadvantaged communities to advocate on their own behalf:</b> Promote local leadership and community ownership by training citizen journalists to produce content that bridges the digital divide</p>
Innovation	<p>The first multimedia archive about the preparations of a host city for the Olympics; use of Drupal to create a website that allows the community to track how planning for the Olympics is changing life in a community and provide opportunities to participate in decision-making processes</p>	<p>Use of community video – a form of citizen media for communities with low levels of literacy – to bring out the voices of rural, unheard communities where there is little or no Internet and a lack of news outlets</p>
Output / Reach / Impact	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Russian-language, Drupal-based, multimedia platform developed</li> <li>2-day training, "Web and Journalism: The New Trends" conducted</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~100 students participated in training</li> <li>~40% are constant contributors</li> <li>~1000 users visit the website daily (as of Feb 2011)</li> <li>~800 registered users</li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Replication of website in Sochi and Moscow</li> <li>Replication of training model and use as earned revenue generator</li> <li>Increased awareness of issues affecting residents</li> <li>Increased attention by local media in Sochi to citizen journalists' posts and articles</li> </ul>	<p><b>Output</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 Community Video Units (CVUs) set up; 12 continue to run</li> <li>~200 community producers trained; 100 currently working</li> <li>50 community correspondents (CCs) trained; 35 actively working</li> </ul> <p><b>Reach</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CVU: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>~3,000 screenings attended by ~300,000 people in over 300 villages and slums in India</li> </ul> </li> <li>IndiaUnheard: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More than 220 videos published over 10 social issues by CCs</li> <li>~155,000 complete viewings online</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community participation in local government affairs</li> <li>Community producers are local leaders</li> <li>Improved living conditions where screenings have taken place</li> </ul>
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simplicity is important in the incubator stage and minimizes administrative tasks</li> <li>Local community bloggers are a great source of local news/ information for the traditional media</li> <li>Building a new community is challenging and takes a long time</li> <li>Deep commitment and tenacity of the winner was a contributing factor to the project's visibility and adaptive strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investing in communities, not just in the technology, is essential</li> <li>Retention rates among women and those who are poorer are higher</li> <li>Trainings is key to enabling the poor to have a voice in the country's public life</li> </ul>

## II. Grant Implementation, Reach and Impact

The eight grantees in the Citizen Media cluster followed vastly different trajectories. Four projects (Media Mobilizing Project, Rising Voices, SochiReporter, and [Video Volunteers](#)) are currently expanding their scope, one (Community Radio in India) is sustaining their work, two (Chi-Town Daily News and the Boulder Carbon Tax Tracker) are closed because of implementation challenges, and one ([Mobile Youth Journalism](#)) completed its activities following the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election.

The majority of projects achieved impacts at the individual, community, and field levels as revealed through anecdotes shared by citizen journalists and project staff, as well as through other documentation of results. Projects defined success along a continuum ranging from increasing new voices in the international blogosphere to governments taking action to improve the quality of life in rural, often-forgotten communities.

Most strikingly through Media Mobilizing Project and Video Volunteers, but also demonstrated in other projects (e.g., SochiReporter and Community Radio in India), communities have used new media platforms and skills developed through the Knight News Challenge to advocate for change to improve their quality of life. Whether through the Internet, a new web-based platform, or a video camera, access to and training on technology provided marginalized communities with platforms to disseminate their message to a wider audience. In the cases of SochiReporter and Media Mobilizing Project, projects established new trends in reporting among the targeted communities.

For many citizen media projects, unintended positive consequences included individual-level outcomes, observed by project staff or their partners, including increased confidence in media production skills and increased leadership development. Project staff at Video Volunteers, Rising Voices, and Media Mobilizing Project observed increased confidence among trained citizen journalists as they gained skills and comfort in using technology as a tool to share their stories.

Another key indicator of success for the citizen media field is whether or not a project model has been replicated by others. Five of the eight citizen media grants have been replicated.

### Boulder Carbon Tax Tracker

Boulder Carbon Tax Tracker aimed to engage community members and stakeholders in a dialogue about the implementation of the nation's first municipal carbon tax, passed by voters in Boulder, CO. Adam Glenn and Amy Gahran developed a participatory, easy-to-use website to pilot a model for citizens to discuss how the government is spending the tax revenue as a form of accountability. Boulder Carbon Tax Tracker encountered early challenges to implementation as they struggled to generate community participation. Although community members initially expressed a high level of interest in the project, this did not translate into robust participation in the online discussion. A significant blow to the project came when the [City of Boulder](#) did not release public data relevant to the carbon tax program. Additionally, due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic, experts were reluctant to speak openly about their views and initiate dialogue on a public forum. Glenn and Gahran tried a different tactic to engage the community and found success convening meetings of stakeholders and inviting the public to participate.<sup>1</sup>

During these workshops they conducted video interviews with participants to capture stakeholder perspectives and posted them on the project website in hopes that it would spark additional dialogue. This conventional journalistic approach was more amenable to those who did not feel comfortable initiating conversation on an online forum.

Despite efforts to facilitate discussions, the Boulder Carbon Tax Tracker concluded without contributors to the site or online discussion and ceased publishing content in September 2008. However, the platform developed remains an inexpensive, easy-to-build template for a fully participatory community website that can be run by individuals with limited technical expertise.

<sup>1</sup> Number of attendees was not documented

## Chi-Town Daily News

Geoff Dougherty of [Chi-Town Daily News \(The Daily News\)](#) attempted to develop an all-local nonprofit news website, focusing exclusively on the Chicago area, in response to shrinking local news coverage and unstable news organizations. His goal was to recruit one citizen journalist from each Chicago neighborhood to provide comprehensive local news coverage.

Throughout the project, Dougherty had difficulty recruiting and retaining a cadre of volunteer citizen journalists from all 77 neighborhoods in Chicago. When street-based recruitment did not result in a high response rate, the Daily News staff turned to online outreach and introduced trainings. They trained approximately 200 citizen journalists, 108 of whom wrote at least one article. The expectation that each volunteer would produce three to four articles per month was not realized, with even the most productive volunteer journalists writing only about one story per month due to competing family and work commitments. Rather than generating content for a broad range of topics, as the project concept called for, Dougherty found that volunteers were typically interested in a narrow range of topics (e.g., arts and music); consequently, the Daily News supplemented volunteer journalist articles with articles written by freelance reporters in order to expand the range and volume of news content. At its peak, the Daily News managed 70 citizen journalists, representing 35 out of 77 Chicago neighborhoods, and had 65,000 unique visitors. At the close of the project, it had approximately 20,000 to 25,000 unique visitors per month with minimal dialogue between the journalists and their readers.

In addition to misjudging the requirements for recruiting a volunteer cadre of citizens to produce a steady stream quality journalistic content, Dougherty struggled to generate the necessary philanthropic and advertising resources to sustain the project at the scale and cost structures it was originally designed. While Dougherty envisioned a long-term revenue model composed of advertising, individual contributors, and foundation grants, he was unable to secure sufficient revenues from advertising or individual contributors before his initial foundation funding (which made up 94% of his budget in 2008) ran out. Dougherty's lack of familiarity with and connections to the Chicago community – along with that of his leadership team – put the Daily News at a significant disadvantage in terms of attracting both advertising dollars and individual contributions. Having to spend more time than planned on recruitment and training of volunteer journalists further restricted the Daily News' ability to invest time in marketing and outreach.

Ultimately, limitations in leadership and staff capacity, inability to attract sustained revenue of any kind, a mismatch of scope with resources, and lack of

understanding of the community (e.g., potential donors, readership) resulted in the Daily News closing down in September, 2009. In November of the same year, Dougherty launched a for-profit venture – [Chicago Current](#) – which focused only on city politics; this model was not sustainable either, and it closed in July 2010. The Daily News website was hand-coded by Dougherty, and therefore cannot be easily adapted by another developer or replicated.<sup>2</sup>

## Community Radio in India

The belief that radio is a powerful medium for democracy at the local level drove [Community Radio in India's](#) efforts towards developing a low-cost radio platform. The project emerged on the heels of a new policy in India that allowed nonprofit organizations to apply for licenses and set up radio stations. Community Radio in India – a project of [Gram Vaani](#) (meaning “voice-of-the-village”) – developed Gramin Radio Inter-Networking System (GRINS), a single user-interface with robust functioning and interactivity that allows for communities to have a voice in one of the most common forms of media in India. Unique aspects of GRINS include:

- 1) Built-in interactivity through the support of a telephony system so that people can call in to the radio and share reports, updates, and stories;
- 2) Archival system that allows for storing program content;
- 3) Previewing audio and listening and talking to callers while other programming is on the air; and
- 4) Low setup cost (~\$1,000).

Despite interest from nonprofits in setting up a radio station, the lengthy government application process, challenging requirements, and capital and operating expenses caused delays in getting official government approval to set up radio stations. These delays affected the deployment of GRINS. After pilot-testing with two

*“Around the time of the 2010 Commonwealth games, for security reasons, authorities started forcing migrant workers from villages out from Gurgaon, a twin city of New Delhi. [...] People are supposed to carry identity cards but many people who come from villages do not have these identity cards. [...] People would call the station and would tell them stories of how they had to pay bribes to police officers and how they would beat them up. And the station aired the stories. People heard the stories and contacted the police commissioner, who acted upon these complaints.”*

**Aaditeshwar Seth**  
Chief Technology Officer, Gram Vaani

<sup>2</sup> Source: Hempel, Mark. Case Study: *The Chi-Town Daily News: Creating a New Supply of Local News*. The Berkman Center for Internet and Society. 2008.

sites, Gram Vaani expanded integration to other radio stations. As of March 2011, GRINS has been incorporated into 14 community radio stations, of which 11 are run by nonprofits and three by universities. According to Arti Jaiman – Station Director of Gurgaon Ki Awaaz Community Radio – the number of listeners was estimated to be 50,000 based on the number of people who called in over a 16-month period. Jaiman reported that GRINS has increased community participation in programming by having individuals share local updates (e.g., traffic, events) on the station’s live morning broadcasts. On the technology side, Jaiman commented: “The simplicity of the interface makes it easy for our very technology-unsavvy group to manage it.”

The project’s impact on communities is too early to assess presently due to the slow rate at which radio stations have gained experience with this new platform for reaching out to communities and incorporating content generated by them. One effort, which is still in progress, aims to collect stories from listeners of multiple stations on a particular topic (e.g., the right to employment, the right to food), connect the stations with an organization that has expertise in that area, and broadcast these stories via media outlets that have a larger audience.

Community Radio in India continues to operate with Knight’s original funding, which was stretched beyond the original budget timeline by implementation delays and decreased staff salaries. The project has joined a collaborative that is trying to stimulate demand for community radio stations by raising awareness about the role that radio can play and conducting trainings on journalism, and operating a station. They are also conducting outreach to nascent community radio stations to promote GRINS and share information about how to lower costs for operating a station. To enhance the uptake of GRINS, Gram Vaani has created partnerships such that, when a licensed nonprofit or university is interested in setting up a radio station and hires a systems integration company, GRINS is part of the package. Finally, Gram Vaani is considering commercializing GRINS and expanding into different community media (e.g., cell phones, videos) as a way to strengthen its long-term sustainability.

## Media Mobilizing Project of Philadelphia

The mission of Media Mobilizing Project (MMP) is to “build the media and communications infrastructure for a movement to end poverty, led by poor and working people, united across color lines.” Their central principle is that cultivating strong connections among poor communities via electronic communications platforms will empower these communities to create change. The underlying approach to all activities is to start where communities are; that is, to have the communities bring forth the issues that are most meaningful to their lives. To date, MMP has evolved into a powerful voice represented by and for low-income communities.

*“When working with cab drivers, it makes sense to start a radio station because cab drivers want to reach each other when they’re in the cab. [...] That’s actually the reason why we are a founder of the Labor Justice Radio, and we have three shows on there.”*

**Todd Wolfson**  
Founder, Media Mobilizing Project

In partnership with *Juntos/La Casa de Los Soles* – a Mexican community organization – MMP developed and implemented *Our City, Our Voices: Immigrant Newscasts in the Digital Age*, an eight-week bilingual training program to build the necessary skills for immigrants and low-income individuals to create their own media and better understand how media can be used as a tool to effectively communicate one’s stories toward a particular end. Over the course of 18 months, *Our City, Our Voices* trained 82 students, 51 of whom were immigrants and 75 of whom lived near or below the poverty line. An additional 14 individuals started but did not complete the training program. MMP recruited effectively by partnering with organizations that provide services to immigrants and low-wage workers. Participants received training on basic web and computer skills, audio and video production, investigative journalism, and photography. In response to student demand, MMP developed a “master class” for more in-depth training on media production and journalism. Through *Our City, Our Voices*, students produced 25 videos ranging from two to ten minutes each. A subgroup of 45 students received the basic tools (e.g., computer, Internet access, computer training) to participate in online dialogue on poverty and related social issues.

The MMP’s programs include other media production, trainings, and communications platforms, all of which organize low-income people in the Philadelphia region. MMP trainings reach approximately 100 people per year, up to 95% of whom are from low-income communities, and an estimated 25% of whom are foreign-born. Trainings have provided an opportunity for diverse immigrant and low-income communities to build relationships and build community cohesion. Many graduates have remained involved with MMP by continuing to contribute journalistic content and serving as trainers.

In addition to trainings and video production, the project produces three monthly radio programs and a monthly public access television program that address labor issues, the struggles of immigrants and citizens, and efforts to provide community members with healthcare, housing, and dignified work. The project’s Drupal-based website – [www.mediamobilizing.org](http://www.mediamobilizing.org) – serves as a nexus for MMP’s varied activities and showcases videos produced by students. MMP has convened constituents who lack Internet access to publicly screen videos and facilitate discussions on various issues. When the *City of Philadelphia* failed to develop a previously planned city-wide Wi-Fi

network, MMP advocated for its creation and, in doing so, established a digital inclusion coalition to ensure that all Philadelphia residents have access to the Internet and media production tools to tell their stories. The coalition received \$18 million in federal stimulus funds, of which MMP will receive \$1.3 million over two years.

Through their trainings and media productions, MMP has connected communities that share common struggles related to poverty, oppression, and discrimination. As a result, participants and audiences have gained awareness about the link between policy and social issues and generated ideas about how their environments can be changed. Todd Wolfson, MMP founder, shared an example of this type of movement-building that led to taxi drivers winning a case regarding unfair pay, insurance coverage, and workers compensation. As a result of three years of progressive engagement with MMP, Wolfson reported that videos produced by taxi drivers helped them convince state representatives to pass legislation overturning unjust policies regarding worker's compensation. Another example is Congress' reauthorization of the Pennsylvania's [Head Start](#) program, which according to Wolfson was influenced by a 20-minute video produced by MMP on the value of the program.

Participation in MMP also provides leadership opportunities for participants. Community journalists<sup>3</sup> trained by MMP now serve as its cohort of trainers, and lead many of the projects' various organizing efforts. MMP has a leadership council composed of both community members and other stakeholders to keep it firmly grounded in the community.

MMP has grown from a \$150,000 project solely funded by the Knight News Challenge grant to an organization with a 2011 budget of \$1.2 million that includes private funding, federal funding, earned income, and individual donations. Through a coalition of government and community agencies, they are participating in an \$18 million project to bridge the digital divide and engage communities that historically have not had access to the Internet. MMP is now a member-based organization with 200 members who pay between \$5-\$50 per month in dues based on capacity to pay. They plan to expand membership to 400 by 2012 and 1000 by 2014.. Additionally, three groups

*"The line of communication that is most important to us now is that a cab driver – who is telling [his] story about what it's like to make what the Philadelphia parking Authority estimates as \$4 per hour [...] to a high school student who is fighting about educational equity... To build the bridge where they're talking to each other."*

**Todd Wolfson**  
Founder, Media Mobilizing Project

in Vermont, Maryland, and Pennsylvania are building a program modeled on MMP.

## Mobile Youth Journalism

[Mobile Youth Journalism](#) – a project of MTV – aimed to cover the 2008 Presidential election through the perspectives of youth, as a way to increase political engagement among young people and test the potential of citizen-generated news content via mobile reporting. Mobile Youth Journalism achieved moderate success in terms of generating buzz amongst their traditional demographic around political issues related to the 2008 election. The project did not produce a model of mobile news reporting that has been sustained at MTV or elsewhere.

The project used a combination of online social networking sites and college film and journalism programs to recruit a diverse, talented group of young citizen journalists from across the nation. Through an elaborate 14 week recruitment process that included submission of a documentary on a local political or social issue, the project selected a cohort of 51 youth in the age range of 18 to 29 years old (with a few exceptions) who were designated the [Street Team '08](#). Citizen journalists participated in a two-day, three-night "journalism boot camp" at the MTV New York headquarters at which they received basic training in journalism, legal information, video production and other technical tools.

From January through November 2008, the [Street Team '08](#) produced weekly reports on a local or national issue, which included 1,896 blog posts, 800+ video stories, 400+ photos, 20+ audio (only) stories, for their target audience – primarily young or first-time voters. [Street Team '08](#) covered a variety of under-reported issues related to the environment, immigration, young veterans, the economy, education, and local and national political candidates. The most popular [Street Team '08](#) video was streamed 5,278 times and the top blog received 2,875 views (the average blog post had about 45 views). Content was distributed through online and television networks, utilizing outlets such as iTunes (for podcasts), the [Associated Press Online Video Network](#), and the [US State Department](#). [Street Team '08](#) was made a central part of MTV's [Choose or Lose](#) campaign, started in 1992 to encourage young people to vote.

The project design of Mobile Youth Journalism offers some important lessons for the future viability of mobile-based reporting. It selected five major "tentpole moments" around which to focus its news reporting: Super Tuesday, the Fourth of July (highlighting young veterans), the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, and Election Day 2008. On Super Tuesday (2/5/2008), the [Street Team](#) conducted the first-of-its-kind live, phone-to-web broadcasts about the primary or caucus in their state. The project utilized a youth-oriented WAP (Wireless Access

<sup>2</sup> Media Mobilizing Project refers to their trained journalists as "community journalists" recognizing that not all are citizens.

Protocol) mobile site – created specifically for this grant - which distributed content from *Street Team* members about the election and generated 250,153 page-views. These “tentpole moments” proved to be an effective strategy for generating audience, as the mobile video medium lends itself to an event reporting format much more effectively than to general political reporting or commentary.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the project demonstrated the effectiveness of the mobile video reporting medium. The WAP site traffic generated by the phone-to-web broadcasts around “tentpole moments” was substantial. There is only anecdotal evidence (based on exit surveys with *Street Team '08* participants) about the positive impacts on the youth journalists, and, although MTV attempted to do so in its grant report, it is not possible to assign any causality between this project and the increased youth voter turnout of the 2008 election.

The grantee cited several core challenges:

- 1) Technical issues with the online platform resulting in strained relationships between *Street Team '08* members and staff;
- 2) At the time of project execution, limited access amongst target populations to video-enabled mobile devices and prevalence of lower-bandwidth actions such as text messaging and sending photos on most mobile phones;
- 3) Management and continued engagement of a geographically-dispersed team of journalists with varying degrees of maturity and experience;
- 4) Helping youth journalists understand and adhere to journalistic practices; and
- 5) Competition with the high volume of other media coverage of the election.

While mobile phones can be a vital tool for generating or distributing news content, in the 2008 election the Internet was still the most common place for people to go for information about political campaigns.<sup>4</sup> Mobile Youth Journalism also reported that it was extremely challenging to promote traditional journalistic objectivity in the reporting conducted by young citizen journalists, particularly in the political realm, where participants tended to hold – and often refrained from holding back – strong political opinions.

Now, more than two years after the 2008 election, the archived stories are no longer accessible on the MTV website. According to Ian Rowe, formerly of Mobile Youth Journalism, based on the project’s experimentation with this platform, *MTV News* now uses the “live & mobile”

approach frequently,<sup>5</sup> albeit often for purposes such as streaming behind-the-scenes video of music celebrities for consumption by their fans.

## Rising Voices

*Rising Voices*, – an outreach initiative of *Global Voices*,<sup>6</sup> – was established to promote the widespread use of citizen media tools. At the time it launched, *Rising Voices* was a leader in efforts to promote media literacy on an international level, a significant component of which is training citizens in new media techniques.

Every six months, *Rising Voices* organizes a competition that awards grants of \$1,000 to \$5,000 for new media training projects. To date, *Rising Voices* has disbursed \$110,000 to a total of 24 grantees. Each grantee has trained an average of 50 individuals for a total of 1,200 new bloggers representing 11 languages (English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Malagasy, Russian, Mongolian, Serbian, Romanian, Aymara, and Bangla). On average, there have been ten blog posts per new blogger, amounting to an estimated 12,000 blog posts.

Many of the communities targeted by citizen media projects largely have not had access to the Internet community and have had limited peer networks. *Rising Voices* addresses this by cultivating a peer community of international bloggers and grantees which serves as a support system for these emerging journalists. According to staff estimates, approximately 10% of trained bloggers continue to blog. Key factors facilitating the continued engagement of bloggers include: infrastructure (e.g., having consistent computer and Internet access); audience engagement (e.g., comments on blog); and sense of community with other bloggers.

While formal evaluation activities were not conducted as a part of the *Rising Voices* project, former and current directors David Sasaki and Eddie Avila shared the following examples to illustrate how the project has had an impact on individuals’ lives and on the community:

- Trained bloggers who were part of a Malagasy-English language club in Madagascar started blogging to establish relationships with Malagasy living abroad and in Diaspora, and to accurately portray Madagascar as a country. When interviewed by the *BBC* about the political turmoil of 2009, Sasaki commented that the bloggers “conceived of themselves as reporters, rather than as people who belonged to [a certain] language club.”

<sup>4</sup> Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: Internet’s Broader role in Campaign 2008. Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. January 11, 2008. <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/384.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Blueprint Interview with Ian Rowe, July 2010.

<sup>6</sup> *Global Voices* is a community of more than 300 bloggers and translators around the world who work together to bring reports from blogs and citizen media everywhere, with an emphasis on voices that are not ordinarily heard in international mainstream media. From: [www.globalvoicesonline.org](http://www.globalvoicesonline.org)

*“...A comment here, a comment there, is important for a blogger who is writing about his/her HIV status for the first time, especially in a place like Kenya where it’s taboo. When you think about the impact that it’s had, you have to go down to the individual level for impact.”*

**David Sasaki**

Former Director, Rising Voices

- Sasaki reports that the municipal government of Medellín, Colombia allocated education funding for digital literacy based on a newfound recognition of the importance of institutionalizing this support – particularly in consideration of the small amount of international funding it receives.

Rising Voices’ relationship with the more established international blogging community of Global Voices helped amplify the voices of its grantees through outreach and dissemination of the new blogs. A key resource produced by Rising Voices – an outreach guide that explains the fundamentals of citizen media to a non-technical audience called *Introduction to Citizen Media* – is available in seven languages, including English. Sasaki reported that the guide is applicable for communities that don’t yet have a blogging community or advanced citizen media activity. Rising Voices has sustained its operations through continued funding and is now led by a former grant recipient. At least three Rising Voices’ grantees have expanded their training to new areas beyond their original focus. For example, [HiperBarrio](#) in Colombia originally proposed and ran workshops in neighborhoods of Santo Domingo and La Loma in Medellín; it has since incorporated as a nonprofit and is now running workshops in several additional Medellín neighborhoods including Ituango. Similarly, [Voces Bolivianas](#), another Rising Voices’ grantee, originally started in El Alto but expanded to other areas including Santa Cruz, La Paz, as well as immigrant communities in Washington, D.C. and Buenos Aires metropolitan areas.

## **SochiReporter (Sochi Olympics Project)**

[SochiReporter](#), the first multimedia archive focused on the preparations of a host city for the Olympics (Sochi, Russia), was created five years in advance of the 2014 Games. The project used Drupal to create a website that enables the community to track and debate the changes happening in Sochi during the five-year build-up to hosting the Games, and ultimately to contribute to the decision-making processes associated with preparation for the event. The concept – the viability of which will be measured in terms of increases in website traffic

and citizen contributions (as well as other indicators of engagement) as the Games approach – is to engage the 300,000 residents of Sochi in discussions about the Games as a way to improve life in Sochi.

One of SochiReporter’s first tasks was to develop a website using Drupal, which had not previously been translated into Russian. At the start of the project, Founder Alexander Zolotarev recognized the importance of reaching out to the community to get residents involved in the project, both as citizen journalists and as consumers of local news and information. Zolotarev targeted students in five Sochi-based universities, distributed cameras, and announced a contest for the best citizen story, picture or video clip. Zolotarev invited contestants to participate in a two-day, hands-on training called “Web and Journalism: The New Trends.” Approximately 100 students participated in the training.

SochiReporter is now one of the first citizen media platforms to track the transformation of a city in preparation for a large international event. Since the launch of the site in the fall of 2009, Zolotarev partnered with McDonald’s and the [Knotavr Film Festival](#) – the largest national film festival in Russia – to raise local visibility and draw readers to the site, and has partnered with journalists in Sochi and Moscow to cover the project.

As of February 2011, the site has approximately 1,000 daily visitors, of whom 600 are registered as users and can upload content. The site has struggled to build an active community, and as a result there are few comments posted in response to reports. Initially, a core group of approximately 15-20 trainees continued to contribute content to the site, and according to Zolotarev, this number has increased over the past year. The content focuses on sports, arts and culture, and other “soft” stories and stays away from politics and business, on account of the political context in Russia where websites run the risk of being shut down based on content. Zolotarev estimated at least 12 reports on the project site were picked up by other media outlets.

The full impact of SochiReporter on the community is yet to be realized with the Games still to come, although some successes have been achieved. At the individual level, students who have been trained are using the website as an opportunity to shape the changes occurring in Sochi as part of the Olympics preparation. At the community level, a 200-year old historic building that local authorities wanted to destroy to build a business center was preserved through an online campaign facilitated by the website. SochiReporter has raised awareness about the importance of having Olympic facilities that are accessible to disabled individuals. In another story, SochiReporter highlighted that Olympic Park construction workers had not been paid for over three months, which Zolotarev believes contributed to President Medvedev’s decision to open a case against

<sup>7</sup> The Jefferson Institute provided technical and administrative support to Zolotarev and his team.

*"The innovation that Alex brought forward is: he transported an existing package of ideas to a new and entirely unlikely place."*

**Aaron Presnall**

Director of Studies, Jefferson Institute

the construction company in charge. According to Aaron Presnall of the Jefferson Institute,<sup>7</sup> SochiReporter has made a pronounced impact in the journalism industry in Russia as an example of how local news can be done on online platforms.

Zolotarev's efforts in gaining publicity both in Sochi and beyond have resulted in strategic partnerships for promotion as well as revenue streams for the project. The project currently has a staff of eight that includes a designer, an editor, and a moderator. SochiReporter anticipates increased citizen participation and advertising revenue as the Olympics draws near. Three Drupal websites have emerged in Sochi since SochiReporter launched, and Zolotarev is in the process of developing an analogous site in Moscow (Moscow Reporter) with support from Kodak. Zolotarev is replicating their training model, and recently organized a two-week course for students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Journalism and Mass Communications to visit Moscow and Sochi. He is also launching a SochiReporter Citizen Journalism School with his partners.

## Video Volunteers

Established in 2004, Video Volunteers used the Knight News Challenge grant to scale an existing model and experiment with a second model of citizen media, with the aim of eliciting best practices and applying lessons learned. Co-led by Stalik K., a well-known filmmaker and human rights activist in India with strong relationships with the Indian NGO community, Video Volunteers uses community video as a tool for empowering the unheard voices of disadvantaged communities.

The Community Video Unit (CVU) model engages NGOs to host CVUs in their region and is typically run by eight to ten community members who are trained to produce video magazines on social issues selected by a community editorial board. Video magazines are screened in the communities of focus and end with a call for action. Video Volunteers provides 12-18 months of full-time training on site, which includes camera operations, research methods and interview techniques, effective storytelling, public speaking and activism, and use of video for advocacy. At the time that Video Volunteers received Knight funding,

the organization was running six CVUs. To date, of the 15 CVUs that were established, 12 continue to run. The CVUs have conducted approximately 3,000 screenings reaching at least 300,000 people in over 300 villages and slums in India, with an average of 250 attendees per screening.

Approximately 200 community producers (i.e., citizen journalists) have been trained, of whom more than 100 work full-time and are salaried. The community producers represent Indian minorities and the voices of unheard communities: 25% are Dalit; 25% are Muslim, 25% are Tribal; and more than half are women. In response to community producers' request, video magazines are posted on [www.ch19.org](http://www.ch19.org), an online forum that enables producers and the global audience to connect through community videos.

Trained citizen journalists are acquiring skills through Video Volunteers that are being directly applied to advocacy. In "Power to Voice: Field Stories from Community Video Units,"<sup>8</sup> Video Volunteers shares examples of impact that community videos have made. In one example, a short film produced by [Apna TV](http://ApnaTV.com) in Mumbai shows the prevalence of sexual harassment experienced by women. A hundred policemen attended a screening of the film and agreed to establish a dedicated helpline – reachable on any phone in Mumbai by dialing 103 – that women can call if they are harassed.

*"As people see local successes being projected, they will start to shift in mindset from thinking, 'the government has to solve everything' to 'we can solve problems on our own.' [...] We see people believing more in the CVU, more excited the following month when something interesting has happened the month before. It's an indication that people are processing this whole idea of community-created change."*

**Jessica Mayberry**

Founding Director, Video Volunteers

According to Mayberry, Video Volunteers assesses program impact anecdotally from community producers. Although they have feedback forms for community producers to complete, the majority of data gathering occurs during monthly calls with the communications staff and during site visits where they conduct half-day debrief meetings to discuss successes, challenges, and strategies for improvement. Impacts are specific to each community's issues, but have common threads:

- Increased awareness and knowledge about one's rights and the law;
- Increased community ownership through greater local management of CVUs, increased attendance at screenings, and participation in editorial meetings;

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.videovolunteers.org/wp-content/uploads/Video%20Volunteers%20Book.pdf>

## Spotlight on the Community Level Impact of Video Volunteers

Dominic D'Souza is the Associate Director of Laya, an NGO partner in Andhra Pradesh that hosts the Community Video Unit (CVU) Manyam Praja Video. Laya is a rights-based organization focusing on indigenous people. Dominic has observed personal and professional growth among community producers and believes that their videos have had a significant impact on the communities where they have been screened.

Community producers have had minimal education compared to what might typically be expected in non-rural areas. According to De Souza: "They are literate, but they had very little skills that one would expect at that level of education elsewhere." Many had never seen a computer prior to Video Volunteers. As a result of training and participation in the CVU, community producers have improved their communication and learned video production and computer skills. with data on non-working borewells. This resulted in the sanctioning of new borewells and the repair of non-functioning ones.

Manyam Praja Video has produced 21 films as of March 2011. The following are examples of community impact resulting from their older films.

- A video screening in 34 villages on the negative effects of forced migration prompted some villages to halt migration; others decided to educate community members in surrounding villages about the effects of migration.
- A video magazine was produced conveying the importance of nutritious food for children below five years and pregnant and lactating women. After viewing the video, villages demanded the monitoring of a public distribution system that provides food materials as per ration cards to those below the poverty line. They also successfully advocated for the establishment of preschool childhood centers where children can receive health care as well as nutritious food.
- A video magazine covering the importance of access to drinking water and how to repair non-functioning drinking water borewells motivated a village to approach the water supply department with data on non-working borewells. This resulted in the sanctioning of new borewells and the repair of non-functioning ones.

- Increased belief among individuals in rural villages in the power to effect change in government (as demonstrated by the increased attendance at meetings); and
- Improved living conditions resulting from communities demanding what is within their rights and governments responding to these demands.

Improving the CVUs' sustainability and reducing their reliance on NGO and funder support continues to be a work in progress. Video Volunteers recognizes the important role that NGOs play in providing financial and technical support to CVUs. Collectively, NGOs have invested \$600,000 over the last four years into CVUs, augmenting the \$1.3 million that Video Volunteers has

raised. Video Volunteers receives frequent inquiries from NGOs regarding the establishment of CVUs, demonstrating the ongoing demand for community media as a vehicle for supporting social change. A longer term step toward CVU sustainability is to increase capacity for generating earned revenue, which would facilitate full community ownership of videos produced. The organization has partnered with the Indian Institute of Management on a research project to develop business plans for two CVUs and apply lessons to other CVUs. Some CVUs are able to generate earned income by producing – and charging for – videos for their host NGOs or for other NGOs. Mayberry also indicates that Video Volunteers' plans to increasingly produce shorter video clips that are more marketable to mainstream outlets.

To test a different model for community media, Video Volunteers developed a lower-cost, more scalable model of citizen media during its second project year. [IndiaUnheard](#), a community news service, is a network of community correspondents (i.e., grassroots reporters) who produce stories on issues that affect their communities. Through their network of NGOs, Video Volunteers recruited from a pool of volunteer activists from disadvantaged backgrounds and trained 50 community correspondents representing 24 out of 28 Indian states. Thirty-five correspondents have continued to produce news, sending at least one video per month, and work directly with Video Volunteers as fellows. Stories are pitched and reported by phone, raw footage with time-coded script is mailed to Video Volunteers, and senior staff edits and posts the stories online. In many cases, community correspondents are not able to see their edited film online because they do not have access to the Internet.

As of April 2011, IndiaUnheard had published 237 videos evenly spread over ten social issues (e.g., caste and identity, conflict, corruption, education, environment, gender) and received approximately 155,000 online views (defined as viewing an entire video). IndiaUnheard distributed the videos through social media sites and featured them on its web series and a half-hour weekly program on Indian television.

Video Volunteers will continue to assess the sustainability of the community news service model and plans to experiment with modifications to identify best practices for retaining community correspondents. One of the organization's goals for the next two years is to identify a low cost CVU model that incorporates the best of the Community Video Units and IndiaUnheard. Videos could both be screened in the villages and used to inspire action-taking locally, while also being usable by the mainstream media. With lowered costs, it is the organization's hope that greater revenue can be generated through partnerships with mainstream media and corporate organizations who are interested in grassroots advertising, and through revenue earned from NGOs and businesses purchasing video productions. It is Video Volunteers' hope that such a model would be truly scalable and empower citizen journalists within the world's slums and villages.

### III. Lessons and Learning Opportunities

The experiences of the eight citizen media projects offer many valuable lessons regarding both project concept and implementation that can be instructive for future efforts in this space. Many of the findings are consistent with the themes emerging from current literature on citizen media efforts. The following insights provide guidance as to how citizen media projects can be strengthened in ways that effectively engage users and build vibrant online communities.

#### Strengthening the Concept

- **The reporting skills of individual citizens can be overestimated, making training a critical component of citizen media projects.** Across all eight Citizen Media cluster projects, over 2,400 community members received training on media and journalism. Although retention in citizen media varied from estimates of 10% to 85%, these citizen journalists have acquired a range of skills to enable their participation in the creation of news. For five projects, training was (and is) a key element in their model to recruit, retain, and expand the cadre of citizen producers of media. At a minimum, these projects trained communities on how to use various technologies and platforms that were new to them and how to use these tools to share news and information to a wider audience. SochiReporter, Rising Voices, Video Volunteers, and Media Mobilizing Project have capitalized on the scalability of their training models to expand the reach of their own projects or to jump start new ones. Trainings are also opportunities for building peer communities of media-producing citizens that can serve as resources for support and sharing strategies. In the case of Rising Voices, an estimated 10% of trained bloggers continue to blog. Included among the factors that contributed to retention were: 1) feeling connected to a community; 2) enjoying writing and communicating; and 3) having access to computers and the Internet.
- **Targeted community-building activities are essential for engaging users on an ongoing basis.** Engaging users takes time and is a long-term investment. Prior to launching SochiReporter, Alexander Zolotarev promoted his project and gained visibility through a contest to submit a citizen story, picture or video clip to be featured on the site. Media Mobilizing Project covered the poor working conditions of taxi drivers and developed trust with this community prior to their participation in trainings. Video Volunteers has a consistent presence in select communities where CVUs conduct screenings, as a way to build community and trust. Reflecting on Rising Voices, former director David Sasaki commented that focusing more on the “demand” side by building in a media literacy component for the audience may have helped enhance reach.

*“We should not... get totally enamored with the technology. It’s not about the technology. It’s about the people using it. [...] It’s about investing in those communities.”*

**Jessica Mayberry**  
Founding Director, Video Volunteers

*“People who are going to be doing what we call citizen journalism... many are craving some guidance, not direction... because the principles of journalism are not obvious to everybody.”*

**Dan Gillmor**  
Citizen media expert  
Director, Knight Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship

Community Radio in India underestimated the need for training recipients of the GRINS software, and realized that providing the tool alone was not sufficient for utilization. Chi-Town Daily News failed in part because it overestimated the skill level of citizens they were recruiting to produce news content, and had to dedicated a much higher level of project resources than they had originally budgeted to supporting the citizens – and it still did not result in content being produced at a level necessary to support their model.

- **Sustaining citizen media continues to be a challenge.** Although five of the eight projects have maintained or expanded their operations to date, long-term sustainability has yet to be established. Both financial sustainability and community demand are factors contributing to overall sustainability. Many projects developed or are developing earned income strategies as a way to shore up their business model. SochiReporter has evolved the training model developed for the Knight News Challenge to earn revenue through teaching citizen media to students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s College of Journalism and Mass Communications, as well as through a SochiReporter Citizen Journalism School. Video Volunteers has facilitated the investment by NGOs of \$600,000 over the last four years into CVUs, and receives ongoing inquiries from NGOs about how to establish them or purchase their services, demonstrating the ongoing demand for community media as a vehicle for supporting social

change. Video Volunteers is also working to develop a business plan model that CVUs can use on a wide scale as a basis for generating revenue from videos produced for their host NGOs or for other NGOs. Lastly, Media Mobilizing Project has developed a membership model as a vehicle for sustainability, charging annual dues of \$170 with plans to increase to \$500 by the end of 2011.

*"[This] remains an open question. [...] The social capital that comes out of this is immeasurable. To answer the question if this is sustainable, it becomes a debate of how we can make it sustainable and how we define it."*

**Dominic D'Souza**  
NGO Partner for Video Volunteers

## Strengthening Implementation

- **Citizen media projects that demonstrate a unique value and are responsive to a community's most pressing needs are most likely to be effective.** Media Mobilizing Project attributes their success to understanding and meeting the needs of its constituents. Their model is predicated upon convening low-income communities around their common struggles and providing them with tools to advocate for systemic change. Their trainers come from immigrant and low-income communities, and are given leadership positions in a manner that builds community ownership. Video Volunteers employs a similar approach: community producers and correspondents build trust with the communities in which they screen videos, and in turn produce stories that are relevant to their daily lives. Video screenings through Video Volunteers have become a new venue for women to voice their opinions and be heard in communities where they historically have had little decision-making power. Ensuring that the stories being produced are directly relevant to the daily lives of community members contributes to the higher retention rates experienced by these projects.

*"Everybody knows that it is these people that they're working for. They know the locations; they know the people in every one of these areas. As time goes on, they really depend on [community members] to bring the stories to them. [These community members] are local champions."*

**Jessica Mayberry**  
Founding Director, Video Volunteers

- **Engaging strategic partners helps ensure successful implementation.** Establishing partnerships that have strong ties to targeted communities contributes to successful implementation and sustained citizen media efforts. Video Volunteers, Media Mobilizing Project, and Rising Voices partnered with – or developed partnerships with – organizations and people who had direct access to communities of interest. In the case of Video Volunteers, staff observed strong NGO partnerships contributed to the continuation of CVUs, but also, at times, created challenges with exchanging shared ownership with shared goals.
- **Given the challenges of engagement and retention of citizens in media production, consideration of scale, focus, and the existing media ecosystem are paramount.** SochiReporter, Video Volunteers, Media Mobilizing Project, Rising Voices, and Community Radio in India focused on tight geographic communities as the target audience for citizen-generated content. They provided content that was not otherwise in the news and information stream. A few micrograntees of Rising Voices expanded after early successes at the local level. Similarly, Media Mobilizing Project scaled and expanded their trainings after having conducted two rounds of Our City, Our Voices, and having recruited a cadre of trainers from the community. One of the key lessons of Chi-Town Daily News was the mismatch between the scope and timeline. They began with an ambitious goal of providing broad content to a large, media-rich urban city (Chicago) by recruiting citizen journalists from each of the 77 neighborhoods. Starting with a smaller number of neighborhoods, incorporating lessons learned and expanding on early successes may have been a sustainable strategy for this new endeavor.