

Summary of the FCC Initiative on the Future of Media and Information Needs of Communities in a Digital Age

On Jan. 21, the Federal Communications Commission released a public notice announcing a new initiative on the "**Future of Media and Information Needs of Communities in a Digital Age**."

The FCC describes the initiative this way: "The objective of this review is to assess whether all Americans have access to vibrant, diverse sources of news and information that will enable them to enrich their lives, their communities and our democracy."

The FCC inquiry is taking a holistic look at our media system, weaving together public media, journalism, media ownership and Internet policy. It calls on citizens to report on the quality of their local media and imagine what a better media system might look like. The Future of Media project at the FCC is an opportunity to envision the media we want to see.

The deadline for public comments is May 7, 2010.

This is not a rulemaking or regulatory proceeding, but rather a fact-finding mission. The Future of Media project will "produce a report" and "make policy recommendations to the FCC, other government entities, and other parties." But we should not underestimate the importance of this document: The FCC has jurisdiction over a number of issues related to the future of media in America, and this effort dovetails with a number of other open dockets and proceedings already underway at the agency.

The FCC's public notice is a whopping 11 pages long and includes more than 40 detailed questions on which the agency seeking feedback. We have created this brief summary in hopes of giving people a roadmap to the issues the FCC is investigating and empowering more people to make their voice heard in this important proceeding.

How to Get Involved

The FCC has provided a variety of ways to participate in this project. All contributions will be made part of the public record. As part of this project the FCC has launched a new Web site and blog. Interested parties can comment on blog posts, weigh in using one of the site's forums, or submit longer formal documents via the agency's formal electronic comment submission tool.

Blog: <http://reboot.fcc.gov/futureofmedia/blog>

Forum on Media in Your Community: <http://futureofmedia.uservoice.com/forums/37784>

Forum on Government Policy: <http://futureofmedia.uservoice.com/forums/38396>

Forum on Media Companies: <http://futureofmedia.uservoice.com/forums/38402>

Submit formal comments electronically using ECFS, at: <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/ecfs>. Be sure to reference GN Docket No. 10-25.

The FCC may also hold workshops or public hearings as part of this process but none have been announced.

What the FCC Wants to Know

Below is a summary of the issues on which the FCC is seeking feedback. For more details, see the original public notice: http://hraunfoss.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/DA-10-100A1.doc.

Information Needs of Communities & Citizens

What are the information needs of communities during emergencies and crisis? What are the educational needs of children and youth? What should the role of libraries, government transparency and gov2.0 strategies be? What differences are there in media consumption and engagement in diverse communities? How is the shift to niche information sources affecting communities? How are community information and media needs best measured?

Business Models and Financial Trends

What models are threatened by changes in media, what models are emerging, and what makes media organizations successful in the new media environment? How are trends in advertising impacting media? What are American's spending habits on media?

Commercial Broadcast TV and Radio, Cable and Satellite

The FCC is seeking feedback on the state of broadcast news, labor issues, the impact of debt and consolidation, competition from the Web, public interest obligations, impact of past deregulation, and measurement of needs and access to news.

Noncommercial and Public Media

How should public media differ from commercial media? How should public media be financed and what changes need to be made to the Public Broadcasting Act? How can policy help foster more nonprofit media? What is the role of LPFM stations and public access stations, and what new policies would better support them?

Internet and Mobile

What's working in mobile news and information delivery? How is citizen journalism leveraging the Web and mobile technology? What's the future of online ads? How are games and social networks part of new news ecosystem? Do people of color use mobile and web differently than other media?

Newspapers and Magazines

What are the trends in staffing, budgets, impact of ads and economy, taxes, postal rates, circulation trends, ownership structures, competition and innovation?

Research and Further Questions

What further questions need to be asked? What research is already out there that the FCC should consider?

Want to discuss these issues or need help filing your comments? Contact:

Josh Stearns at Free Press, 413-585-1533 x204 (jstearns@freepress.net)

Candace Clement at 413-585-1533 x203 (cclement@freepress.net)