

**A SUMMARY OF COMMUNITY IDEAS**  
Summit on New Media and Change in Richmond  
Event Date: March 23, 2010  
ConnectNetwork

**KEY FINDINGS.**

**Big Ideas.**

The following information summarizes the **four** big ideas that resulted from table discussions in response to the **question: what should an informed Richmond look like?**

**1. Increase online and offline access to information.**

- Free/affordable broadband access should be available to every citizen.
- The government should disseminate data and information to enhance community awareness and promote transparency.
- Social media should be used to broadcast in real-time political debates, campaigns and other community meetings.
- Internet access for all will increase diversity and buy-in from our communities, providing a more holistic voicing of opinions and interests. Minority populations need access to information that is credible and easily obtainable. These fringe groups need to be reached where they are and in a way that establishes trust, understanding and comfort.
- Not only do citizens need access to computers and other resources, but they must be equipped with the knowledge and skill of how to use these resources.
- Access to information should not solely exist in the form of online resources. Groups need to meet fact-to-face to discuss issues at community centers, libraries, etc. as not all citizens are online (cultural groups, low-income populations, etc.)

**2. Build community knowledge of the larger issue, technology resources, citizens' needs and digital literacy.**

- Evaluate community needs and interests first. What do citizens value? What information is important? A "Get Connected" campaign was suggested to obtain answers to these questions from a diverse cross-section of the Richmond population.
- Connect individuals with technology skills to those lacking knowledge, particularly the older generation and low-income individuals.
- Open conversations are necessary to discuss local issues and share knowledge. Moderators of various types are needed to ensure these discussions promote diversity and are civil, respectful and positive. They are also needed to vet information, promoting accuracy and reducing occurrences of misinformation as well as allowing citizens to find useful information quickly and easily instead of feeling inundated.
- Connect people around passions and interests. Should this be accomplished by connecting groups with similar interests first or should we start with the community as a whole? Some tables discussed holding a large social media

summit with various groups and then creating tracks for those with similar interests/skills. Other tables discussed the need to start with existing groups (e.g., the Latino community) then find a way to better engage them with the community.

### **3. Strengthen information and media infrastructure.**

- Increase Internet access: Free or affordable broadband access for everyone is essential for citizens to participate in their community. Recent talks of the Google Fiber network opportunity for Richmond opens a realm of possibility for universal access.
- Employ a variety of methods/platforms: There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to information infrastructure. In order to reach citizens where they are, a multi-pronged approach must be used. Offline access points, such as libraries, community centers, radio, etc., must be improved, and in-person meetings cannot be undervalued. This is especially important for immigrant groups and low-income citizens, who lack access to the skills, resources or knowledge to engage online. Access points such as community blogs, computers, etc. are equally important in promoting civic participation. Ideally, a mix of both offline and online resources is necessary to reach all citizens since each individual will have a preference for how to receive information. For example, in-person meetings should incorporate live tweeting to engage the online community and social media should be used to initiate or amplify community meetings and face-to-face conversations.
- Resources to develop or improve upon:
  - Community information center: citizens would have the ability to call in to receive information only found online (potentially housed in a library).
  - Mobile technology: as the more affordable and accessible option for lower-income populations, mobile technology should be utilized to make information access easy and convenient.
  - Social media summit: connect diverse groups and individuals already online to one another and identify a common theme among individuals.
  - Content aggregator: create an aggregator of local media and information relating to the community.
  - Open dialogue: provide opportunities for citizens to engage in candid yet respectful dialogue with moderation.
  - Community blogs: better utilize local blogs to disseminate pertinent community information.
  - Libraries: utilize libraries to increase access to information and educate/train citizens on how to use these tools.
  - Transportation: improve the transportation system to allow citizens access to public learning spaces. Incorporate free WiFi or scrolling local news blurbs on prompters located on buses.
  - Role of businesses: encourage businesses to play a greater role in creating a more affordable and accessible Internet.

- Digital literacy: strengthen education around Internet use, especially among low-income areas, minority populations and older communities as well as in schools.
- Churches: better utilize churches as resources to promote civic engagement and computer training. Provide safe places for citizens to learn while reducing fear of privacy and Internet safety issues.

#### **4. The state of local media and information needs to be reviewed in terms of quality and quantity.**

- Local media should reflect issues of importance to the community. Voices from traditional sources as well as new media, such as blogs, should be representative of the population.
- Local media quantity and quality needs to be increased to account for issues not covered and voices not expressed.
- Journalism students from local universities should be given the opportunity to engage in investigative journalism and community news to help fill the lack of local news stories.
- Local media needs to be more participatory offering ways for citizens to interact, share opinions and collaborate.
- Our region needs a content aggregator of all news and information pertinent to the community.
- Online and offline media sources are best used to complement each other to reach a diverse audience. Large news papers like the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* have more online readers and therefore use print to amplify online content and conversation. Smaller community papers like the *Richmond Free Press* is only in print and perhaps, could be strengthened by an online presence; however, their audience often includes the low-income, minority populations who do not have access to online resources, so print publications may be sufficient.
- Does social media unite or divide us? Table discussions reflected contradictory opinions. Some felt that social media connects groups and individuals of diverse interests; a central online location for community engagement would strengthen and unite us as a community. Others felt that social media widens the gap between various interest groups as they tend to bring their biases and niches to online communities. Additionally, social media leaves out a majority of citizens who either don't have access and/or aren't educated on how to use it and the benefits.

#### **Action Steps.**

The following information summarizes the **five** action steps that resulted from table discussions in response to the **question: what action steps can we take to create a more informed Richmond?**

##### **1. Assess community assets, needs, and gaps in access and information.**

Before the community begins developing new resources, we first need to assess existing information gaps and the wants/needs of all citizens: who's not being served? Who doesn't have access? What information and resources do various populations and

neighborhoods value? What resources and information do they want to better have their personal and civic needs met? By first taking the time to better understand our constituencies, we can better learn how to engage and include them in the process.

One group recommended conducting a “Get Connected” campaign to ask the very questions stated above. A variety of mediums would be needed to reach citizens, as populations identify with certain types above others. Information collection would ideally involve new and traditional media as well as on-the-ground interviewers. This initial step of assessing community needs would ultimately allow a community to set its own agenda and bring a diverse, representative citizenry to the table. Along these lines, it was also suggested that a local research initiative analyze and identify local assets and gaps.

## **2. Promote free/affordable broadband access.**

As a community we need to aggressively promote access to the Internet for all groups and begin discussing what universal access for the city would look like. We need to identify and take advantage of community computer labs and similar resources as well as work with programs and organizations that specialize in providing in-home, affordable computer access. Civic leaders and neighborhood groups should embrace practices that make access and use of technology self-sustaining, which would further demonstrate the financial viability of businesses/government investing in extended access for low-income populations. Additionally, we must keep a close eye on new resources and tools that may promote greater access; for instance, the use of mobile technology is rapidly engaging more and more low-income populations with the Internet and engagement.

## **3. Teach digital literacy, provide trainings and utilize emissaries.**

Internet access is meaningless if citizens do not possess the knowledge and skills to utilize technology. Community groups (libraries, civic associations, nonprofits, etc.) should provide on-going, free public trainings focusing on digital literacy, including how to use the Internet and new media as well as basic computer skills and safety. Trainings would employ the use of technology emissaries, that is, younger generations and those highly skilled in technology to assist and educate the older generations, low-income populations and cultural groups who may not be as familiar or comfortable with technology. Innovative means of encouraging the younger generation to participate may include video games tied to social justice. This would encourage them to expand their technology use a productive way.

## **4. Strengthen the existing information and communications infrastructure and offer opportunities to meet face-to-face.**

- *Strengthen existing resources:* Our community should invest in and partner more with libraries. Further, organizations need to commit to partnering more frequently to improve the quality and quantity of community information available (e.g., broadcasting political debates via new media, hosting community forums). Additionally, because much of government data is still lacking in transparency and availability, we need to hold officials more accountable for providing this information and perhaps consider a JLARC model for the local community. One group suggested convening a social media summit inclusive of

all community groups to focus on themes that unite us and emphasize collaboration and empowerment. Lastly, local universities must be better utilized to strengthen civic participation.

- *Offer more community meetings:* Find and use local venues for face-to-face dialogues with an emphasis on including socio-economic and cultural diversity. We must go out of our way to meet these underserved groups continuously and engage them on their terms. Collaborative workshops should educate and inform the general population of new media and civic engagement.

##### **5. Strategically utilize local media, technology and information to ensure a healthy community.**

Our community needs to acknowledge that technology will not meet all our challenges or solve all our problems. We should employ a combination of online and offline methods to engage citizens and use new and traditional media to amplify and validate each other depending on the audience and their knowledge and information accessibility. Media collaboration should be a focus; we need to find a way to better link/aggregate local information and media (including new media).