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Promoting a Youth Civic Culture in the Digital Landscape

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In the short time since it entered the mainstream of American life, the Internet has created new opportunities for civic communication that were not possible with traditional one-way media such as television. In the process, new online communities have been formed, and many “real-world” civic institutions and organizations have had opportunities to establish a new and vital presence in the online environment. “The most important aspect of community networks,” observes Douglas Schuler, one of the pioneers in the civic networking field, “... is their immense potential for increasing participation in civic affairs, a potential far greater than that offered by traditional media such as newspapers, radio, or television.”ⁱ

The civic potential of the Internet is particularly important for youth, who are coming of age in the digital era. As “early adopters” of new media, this generation is already actively engaged in the use of these new technological tools in much more participatory and innovative ways than most adults. “Generation Y,” the nearly 60

million youth born after 1979, represents the largest generation of young people in the nation's history, and the first to grow up in a world saturated with networks of information, digital devices, and the promise of perpetual connectivity.ⁱⁱ

The Center for Media Education (CME) has been conducting an analysis of online youth media, focusing principally on the rapidly developing commercial marketplace.ⁱⁱⁱ While our findings document that online media content for children and teens is already dominated largely by commercial providers, there also is evidence of an emerging genre that could be loosely called "youth civic media." Such Web sites embrace activities that involve thinking about and participating in political, cultural, and civic life, with the goal of working for the common good. Though fragmented and not always in the foreground of the emerging media culture, the nascent online civic culture is nonetheless a significant development. A healthy youth civic culture positioned prominently in the new-media foreground could support young people in the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, experiences, and values needed for active democratic participation in their adult lives. An active electronic youth civic culture also might condition the young to *expect* a media system designed to serve individuals not just as consumers, but also as citizens.

Unfortunately, however, there are no assurances that these services, scattered across the World Wide Web and often undertaken by undercapitalized organizations and well-intentioned individuals, will be sustained over the long run. If a youth civic media culture is to become a prominent part of the new-media landscape, a concerted effort needs to be made in the next few years to develop the technological and policy infrastructure for sustaining and promoting it.

In the following pages, we will discuss some of the current trends in the development of online media by and for youth, and outline a strategy for ensuring the survival and growth of a healthy youth civic media in the digital landscape. This paper is based on the findings from two studies, one that is being completed and the other that is

only in its early stages. Because we believe the results of our research are of critical importance to the policy and public advocacy communities, we are summarizing them now in the hopes that they will help create a framework for a broad movement on behalf of a healthy civic media sector in the new media landscape.

Youth as Defining Users of New Media

From 1993 to 1999, the number of Americans connected to the Internet grew from 3 million to 80 million. In 2000, Internet penetration in the U.S. passed the 50 percent mark.^{iv} Families with children represent one of the fastest-growing segments of the population using the Internet. By the end of 2002, some 58 percent of U.S. residents are expected to access online services from the home via a wide range of devices (in addition to the traditional PC and newer, more affordable models), including digital TVs, game consoles, portable devices, and next-generation digital cable set-top boxes.

Traditional and new electronic media already play a significant role in the lives of children and teens, many of whom enjoy access to their own personal media devices. Among children ages 6-17, for example, 86 percent have access to a VCR (23 percent in their own rooms), 70 percent have a video game system at home (32 percent in their own rooms), 50 percent have a TV in their own rooms, 40 percent have their own portable cassette/CD player, and 35 percent their own stereo system.^v While TV remains the dominant media pastime for children (who watch an average of 17.2 hours per week, along with another 5.5 hours watching videotapes), the time spent in front of that screen is declining, while the time spent in front of the computer is going up. However, as a study by the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania points out, “Rather than displacing television as the dominant medium, new technologies have supplemented it, resulting in an aggregate increase in electronic media penetration and use by America’s youth.”^{vi} A recent Kaiser Family Foundation Report emphasizes the

ubiquitous nature of media for children and the fact that for many children media use often occurs in the absence of parents.^{vii}

Youth are in many ways the defining users of the digital media. According to online industry assessments, 44 percent of teens (age 13-17) were online by the end of 1999.^{viii} Teens spend more time online than adults, and they surpass other age groups in their use of chat, instant messaging, and other new forms of electronic communication.^{ix} As one industry trade publication put it, “teens and college-age young adults (age 16-22) have not just adopted online technology, but have internalized it.”^x

The dynamic nature of the Internet, including interactive and multimedia content and the ability to be part of a virtual community with a certain degree of anonymity, makes the online environment a natural outlet for teen communication, expression and experimentation. The proliferation of teen-created Web pages, electronic bulletin board postings, and the popularity of instant messaging among teens reveal that teens use chat, e-mail, and bulletin/message boards more frequently than adult users. As *Teens and the Future of the Web*, a report released in 1999, states, “Just as in the real world, the most popular activities for teens online involve social interaction. Top activities for both males and females include emailing friends, instant messaging and hanging out in chat rooms.... In addition, 74% of respondents described the Internet as ‘mainly an important connection to their friends.’ Surprisingly, while teens do shop on the Web, they do not see e-commerce as its major function.... Given these findings Internet sites, e-commerce and software developers have an opportunity to incorporate socially interactive features such as chat, telephony or real-time video into their technologies.”^{xi}

Teens may be more likely than adults to try a new product or service without much hesitation, and they may also be more likely to sign on to a service that a peer uses. “They are the early adopters—those who are often the first to try out new ideas, products, services and technologies before these innovations reach popularity in the mass market,”

in the words of one marketing publication.^{xii} Online companies have devised a number of innovative marketing strategies tailored specifically to youth. For example, “viral marketing,” sometimes defined as “network-enhanced word of mouth,” is a method of marketing that promotes products or services by including product information, such as a clickable URL, with every communication sent from one user to another. E-mail services, such as Hotmail, and instant messaging services have used this strategy to build their businesses.^{xiii} Experimentation with new ways to target children and teens online is an ongoing effort as the commercial Web evolves.

The Commercial Web

We know that the Internet for children and teens embodies a predominantly commercial worldview—one that privileges consumer-related communication and activities. CME’s research on Internet content for teens reveals that not only is advertising widely present in sites for teens, but that collection of personal data for marketing purposes is widespread, e-commerce is abundant, and merging of editorial and advertising content is a common practice.^{xiv}

Because of the newness of the medium and the difficulty of studying it, there is very little academic research on Internet content for youth.^{xv} However, market research on this age group has grown significantly over the past several years, a measure of the increasing value of this demographic as consumers. Spending among teenagers has been increasing steadily over the past several decades, and rising even more dramatically in more recent years. According to the marketing group Teenage Research Unlimited, teen spending increased by \$11 billion from 1998 to 1999, an 8.5 percent rise. In 1998, teens spent \$94 billion of their own money. In 1999, teen spending increased to \$105 billion.^{xvi} In 2000, that number is expected to rise to \$150 billion.^{xvii}

According to Nielsen/Net Ratings for December 1999, Web sites designed specifically for teens, such as react.com, bolt.com, mtv.com, and iturf.com, top the list of sites visited by youth aged 12 to 17.^{xviii} In addition, a handful of teen sites have made their mark on overall Web site audience lists. In May 2000 snowball.com, an Internet network comprised of a series of teen sites, ranked thirty-first among the top 50 digital media/Web properties in the U.S., with over 7 million unique visitors.^{xix}

Startup Web sites are often fueled by venture capital, corporate investments and IPOs, however, the long-term viability of a Web company will, at some point, depend on revenues and profits. CME's analysis of Web sites targeted at teens identified four dominant revenue streams—advertising, sponsorship, market research, and e-commerce. None of the Web sites examined in the analysis included paid subscriptions as a primary method for creating profit. Our study also found that banner advertisement, links to commercial Web sites, and corporate sponsorship are the dominant methods of advertising on both commercial and noncommercial teen Web sites (among noncommercial sites that included any form of advertising). Powerstudents.com, for example, part of the Snowball network, offers advertisers an array of sponsorship opportunities. For \$30,000 a month (in the Spring of 2000), advertisers received a sponsorship package that included ad logos, branded buttons, editorial links, customized polls, exclusive banner ad rotation, and e-mail blasts.^{xx}

While advertising and sponsorship have served as traditional revenue streams for Web sites, a new trend has emerged in the last few years focusing on the feasibility and profitability of online market research. The shift from revenue drawn from advertising and sponsorship to market research is evident in the transformation of one the Web's most popular teen sites, bolt.com. As David Titus, Bolt's head of business intelligence, explains, "I can imagine research providing a very large revenue stream. Our information will be very accurate because it's behavioral data. I can watch what people

do, where on the site they go.”^{xxi} Using data collected from the polls and surveys hosted on the site, along with information provided by teens in Bolt’s numerous message boards, bolt.com determines the latest trends in the teen market and sells this information to advertisers and marketers.^{xxii}

Along with advertising, sponsorship, and market research, e-commerce has become an integral revenue stream for many of the leading teen sites. Whether by direct sale of merchandise through their own site, or through partnerships with other online retailers, companies are incorporating e-commerce opportunities into their sites to capitalize on the fact that over a third of teens have used the Internet to aid them in the purchase of a product.^{xxiii}

Shopping opportunities for teens online vary. Popular teen sites such as bolt.com have launched their own e-commerce stores, while other teen sites like teen.com have made arrangements with stores such as JC Penney and J Crew to offer a virtual shopping mall.^{xxiv} Other e-commerce outlets include traditional catalogue sites, such as delias.com and alloy.com, along with new shopping portals, such as doughnet.com and icanbuy.com, that not only present users with purchasing opportunities, but also provide them with the financial mechanism for purchasing products without a credit card.

Clearly, the Web has become a highly commercial medium for young people. It is heavily laden with branded environments, advertising, opportunities to shop, and efforts to collect personal information for marketing purposes. The blurring of commercial and editorial content is a growing trend on teen sites. However, it is clear that while the market is the dominant theme running throughout the Web for young people, there are other forces at work on the Web for and by young people.

The Civic Web

In the shadow of the glitzy commercial kids online media, an alternative culture is also emerging on the World Wide Web, one that offers a different vision and a different possible future for children's new media. Rather than involving young people in popular culture and consuming, these alternative pockets of electronic activity have a more serious focus—one that emanates from a desire to work for the common good.

Loosely termed “youth civic sites” these projects are likely to arise from existing associations, institutions, and organizations that make up civil society for youth, but they also may grow out of private-sector initiatives, government programs, or combinations thereof. Most are nonprofit Web sites and services that emphasize community building, collaboration, and active participation. Some sites, taking advantage of the boundary-less nature of the Net, connect children from around the world in an effort to promote dialogue and action on international issues.^{xxv} Many promote activities that involve thinking about and participating in political, cultural, and civic life. Volunteerism and other forms of social engagement are also prominent features of these sites, many of which are created for and by young people. They include faith-based organizations and efforts on all geographical levels to provide young people with information and to involve them in their own problem-solving and thinking about a range of socially significant issues. Online youth journalism and writing about issues of importance to young people is beginning to flourish among these sites.

The following are several examples of youth civic sites that CME has identified:

- HarlemLive (www.HarlemLive.org) is an Internet publication space for Harlem’s youth initiated in 1996. Its purpose is the empowerment of “youth of color to be productive, creative and thoughtful leaders who will be responsible caretakers of our future.”
- Children’s Express, a nonprofit organization that enables children and teens to engage in journalism, has developed an online news service (www.cenews.org) produced by and for children.

- Youth Radio (www.youthradio.org) is designed to promote young people's intellectual, creative, and professional growth through training and access to media. Based in the San Francisco Bay area, Youth Radio is dedicated to bringing a youth perspective to the airwaves, and helping teens refine their communication skills, as well as broader "life skills" for prospering in the world of work beyond high school.
- UNICEF's Voices of Youth Web site (www.unicef.org/voy) provides online forums for children as well as global learning projects for classroom use. UNICEF is also preparing to launch a "Young People's Media Network," designed as a "space" for dialogue and information exchange among youth in Central and Eastern Europe.

Through our research of teen Web sites, we already have some observations that could contribute to a set of hypotheses for understanding the nature of these civic sites for youth. We believe that many of them are marginalized in the emerging media landscape. We have found that they:

- comprise a minority of content and activities available for children and youth;
- are not easy to find (through browsers or portals) without knowing a specific Web site address;
- are less likely to have the technological whistles and bells that make some commercial Web sites fun and attractive for young people;
- tend to encounter ongoing financial struggle and uncertainty with regard to their continued existence.

Our efforts to identify noncommercial and civic-oriented sites took us down very different search paths than with the commercial sites. Not a single noncommercial site was included on the list of top teen sites in 1999.^{xxvi} We found sites through search engines, personal referrals, newspaper articles, and links from the sites themselves. While reading the sites off the Net has given us a certain idea of the forces coming into play, it

is the conversations we have had with the people behind some of these sites that have been the most informative, and that are adding weight to our arguments for the necessity of policy and funding to support these efforts.

For instance a site called the Diary Project, provides a wonderful resource for young people to share their stories, worries, and problems. The site itself did not provide any information about how it is funded. It has a simple design, but is deep on content. A conversation with the project's founder was enlightening.

Founded in 1995, the Diary Project is designed to give young people a resource to use dialogue as a way of supporting each other, and for sharing their secrets. While the site is not expensive to keep up, it is a "labor of love" for its founder and the volunteers who monitor the site. Better finances would make it feasible to improve the look of the site and to pay the young volunteers, but the founder has a difficult time with the idea of making money on the project, thinking it would compromise its integrity. She worries about what might be given up in terms of integrity when crossing the line from noncommercial to commercial. According to her view, it is the passion behind such a project that makes it so valuable. Her view supports the notion that the work of "artists, dreamers, and visionaries" has a vital role to play in our society and culture. These projects are serving young people, changing their lives, and in some cases saving their lives. For such projects, she suggests, there should be easily accessible federal funding, foundation grants, and corporate partnerships so that they do not have to exist on a shoestring. ^{xxvii}

Our work in looking at civic sites and noncommercial enterprises on the Web for young people has lead us to conclude that if we are to create an atmosphere is which a diversity of voices can be heard, there will have to be mechanisms in place to support a variety of business models. Of utmost importance, is the support, through policy-making and funding, of noncommercial , grassroots sites. Freedom from the profit

motive can allow such sites to make a unique contribution to the public conversation, and in turn to strengthening democratic principles. A trend we expect to see taking off involves the collaboration between nonprofit and civic groups. They will most likely have to decide to either partner or compete both with commercial enterprises and each other.

Save the Children's YouthNoise is a recent example of a project that involves creative partnering between nonprofit organizations and corporations in an effort to involve young people in helping children through volunteering, philanthropy, and public policy. Based on research into best practices for online organizing, YouthNoise aims to create actionable, dynamic content to support young people's volunteer work on behalf of young children. YouthNoise represents a new model in civic organizing for and by young people in that it is being developed with the goal of using lessons that have been learned through the commercial sector online.^{xxviii}

Hybrids on the Web

Some of the major commercial content providers on the Web have incorporated "youth civic media" content into their portals and Web sites. For example, bolt.com, a very popular teen "community" site, contains an area on "Activism," featuring such topics as animal rights, volunteerism, student rights, free speech, the environment, HIV and AIDS, and the death penalty. On react.com, another popular teen site, a section called "Take Action" encourages teens to volunteer and offers an annual award for getting involved. MTV/Viacom operates chooseorlose.com, which is an outgrowth of the Rock the Vote campaign.^{xxix} Other commercial Web sites also actively seek the participation of youth by adding civic elements, although it is not always obvious whether such features are offered as a public service or rather in an effort to create the

kind of “sticky” content that captivates young eyes on behalf of advertisers eager to reach this market.

A number of nonprofit youth civic media providers, meanwhile, have found it necessary to form alliances with commercial online ventures in order to secure funding and visibility in cyberspace. For example, “e-teen” (www.e-teen.net) describes itself as “a website for responsible community-minded teens who want to be challenged and to be heard.” The central premise is to build a dynamic online global teen community, a place “where YOUth get connected.” While the Web site has links to Youth Service America, YMCA, Girl Scouts, and Amnesty International, it also has a recently added link to the “Awesome Mall,” which allows teens to shop and market to other teens. These trends raise important questions about the nature and quality of civic content in the new media. Are there qualitative differences between Web sites that emerge out of social-activist roots and those that are created by commercial entities? What happens to a noncommercial site when it takes on a for-profit business model?

Several technological, economic, and institutional trends are likely to influence the continued growth and ultimate survival of these new forms of civic media. Although the Internet began as a noncommercial, publicly funded medium, in recent years the business model of advertising and e-commerce has become dominant, raising serious questions about the continued viability of truly noncommercial content and services.^{xxx} As marketing and advertising become more and more pervasive on the Internet, the lines between commercial and noncommercial content are blurring.^{xxxi} The increasing dominance of the commercial model in the digital media is evident in our initial survey of Internet-based youth civic media.

Political Socialization of Youth and the Web

Can these kinds of content and services contribute to a more engaged electorate?

At this point, we do not know. Clearly there is a need for research to assess systematically what role civic media can play in the lives of young people. However, we can draw some inferences from the current body of research on youth political socialization and the very scanty, yet significant, literature on the role of media in the lives of adolescents.

There is a substantial tradition of research on the political socialization of youth, which is reviewed in a 1998 article by Constance A. Flanagan and Lonnie R. Sherrod. According to the review, between the ages of 14 and 25, young people's political attitudes are more open and flexible than in adult years. It is during this developmental period that "...societies typically focus on the civic preparation of the next generation. Likewise, because identity consolidation is a core developmental task of the adolescent and young adult years, psychologists have argued that adult personalities are shaped in part by the way people grapple with and resolve social issues of salience during this developmental period.... Thus, young adults' grappling with political issues becomes an important aspect of understanding the persons they come to be."^{xxxii}

In light of globalization, Flanagan and Sherrod point out the changing nature of how citizenship and nationality will be defined in the future, wondering how children will develop civic loyalties and a sense of community membership and ownership of community values. This is important because not only is civic involvement in adulthood traceable to experiences of group membership and engagement in the adolescent years, membership in communities and the obligations that entails strengthen the adolescents' ties to the broader polity.

According to Mary Hepburn, conceptualization of the socialization process as it was developed from the research of the 1960s and 1970s viewed media as one of several

“agents” that contributed to the civic development of young people. However, the influence of media was considered less important than other agents, such as the family. Today, the story has changed. “In the 1990s,” Hepburn observes, “research shows the electronic media to be intricately involved in socialization from early youth on. Along with civic news and family entertainment, the electronic media flash vibrant ads, lively colorful animations, violent fearful crimes, shocking explosions, and hours of programming on celebrities in life and even in death. We are in need of an up-to-date conceptual framework to motivate inquiry into our socialization.” We need to “...address the interconnection of socialization agents and their interaction with social background factors in a psychological field abuzz with electronic media.”^{xxxiii}

In a recent review of media and civic socialization of youth, McLeod points out that research on the development of active citizenship has been reinvigorated by a view of adolescents as active and engaged participants in interaction with adults and peers in their social environment and media.^{xxxiv} Recent research, according to McLeod, centers on “... dynamic aspects of civic socialization, including studying intervention programs and strategies that would stimulate and deepen the level of civic engagement among youth. If successful, these programs may not only improve community life, but also benefit the moral development of the young people involved.”^{xxxv} The argument is made that while voter turnout is lower among young adults, volunteering for community activities among adolescents is high. It may simply be that the form of civic participation is shifting. These are processes that need to be understood to guide work toward the enhancement of youth political socialization and, in turn, civic life. A 1999 study found that although young people were in general much less likely to seek out political information than older cohorts, they were more likely to use the Internet as their preferred means of access.^{xxxvi}

David Buckingham makes important contributions to thinking about media and political socialization in his recent study of television news and political socialization, *The Making of Citizens: Young People, News, and Politics*. Arguing that the notion of political socialization is highly functionalist in that it frames young people as passive recipients of adults' efforts to mold them and views childhood as a mere rehearsal for adulthood, Buckingham stresses instead the active participation of children in their own identity construction. This is a view of young people that allows one to think about resistance and negotiation of mediated communication. It also allows for taking historical context into account when thinking about young people and their relationship with the public sphere.

While Buckingham focuses on television, his theoretical framework is also useful to consider when studying young people, the Internet, and civil society, suggesting a cultural studies approach to questions about young people and citizenship:

Rather than attempting to measure the effectiveness of news in communicating political information, we should be asking how it enables viewers to construct and define their relationship with the public sphere. How do news programmes 'position' viewers in relation to the social order—for example, in relation to the sources of power in society, or in relation to particular social groupings? How do they enable viewers to conceive of the relations between the 'personal' and the 'political'? How do they invite viewers to make sense of the wider national and international arena, and to make connections with their own direct experience? How, ultimately, do they establish what it *means* to be a 'citizen'?^{xxxvii}

The Internet is a far more interactive and participatory medium than television, yet these questions are of interest in thinking about our research as well. In addition to being *receivers* of content, as with television, with the Internet young people are also active content *producers*. So, in addition to the questions raised by Buckingham, we must also consider the ways in which young people construct themselves as creators of content, and the possible implications of these actions.

Clearly, the participatory nature of the new digital media offers great potential for engaging young people in civic life. Now we turn to the issue of preserving the electronic space to serve that purpose.

The Future of Digital Media and Sustaining Civic Space

An issue that must be addressed now is whether the digital media will be able to continue sustaining civic youth enterprises in the future. The Internet itself is undergoing a major technological transformation that will have a significant impact on the future of both civic media and noncommercial content. With the introduction of “broadband” technologies (e.g., cable and DSL modems) that make audio and video delivery more feasible, the Internet is taking on many of the features of television. The merging of television and the Internet into one seamless package of services using a digital set-top box on TVs or computers (best exemplified today by WebTV) will very likely become the standard communications appliance in American homes. The danger, however, is that the gains we realize in the speed and simplicity of the new broadband platforms may be more than offset by constricted choice, as network owners create “walled gardens” of proprietary content.^{xxxviii}

As *The New York Times* critic Frank Rich recently asked, “If you believe that the Internet is the greatest explosion of free expression and cultural resources of the past century, what happens when it is merchandised as a mass-market product by the biggest corporations in history?”^{xxxix} Internet scholar Gary Chapman, director of the 21st Century Project at the University of Texas at Austin, has offered a sobering answer to Rich’s query. “Instead of thinking of the Internet as a universal, public infrastructure used for democratic dialogue, diversity and building society,” wrote Chapman in the *Los Angeles Times*, “we’ll tend to think of it as a consumer service like cable TV, complete with updated, digital analogues of MTV, home shopping, Jerry Springer, infomercials, product

tie-ins, cooking channels and all the rest. Citizenship will once again be overwhelmed and eclipsed by consumerism.”^{xi} What are the prospects for a healthy civic sector in such a highly commercialized media system?

Finally, despite the rapid penetration of the Internet into American homes, there remains a troubling “digital divide” that threatens to leave many youth behind in the technological revolution of the twenty-first century. Even though programs such as the “e-rate” are making it easier for less-advantaged schools and libraries to gain affordable access to the Internet, the rapid introduction of broadband technologies may undercut the positive impact of these policies.^{xii} More youth may have access as Internet penetration continues to grow, but the quality of that access may suffer in comparison to new premium services that are being introduced. As a result, a new digital divide might emerge, separating those with rudimentary, dial-up access from those who enjoy sophisticated, state-of-the art communications. The content of the new broadband universe, moreover, will reflect these inequities. One recent study, for example, suggests that many minorities are marginalized not only with relation to new technologies, but also to the content and services of the online environment.^{xiii} If a civic media culture becomes a significant part of the new broadband media infrastructure, it may not be universally accessible.

A Policy Framework for the Future of Online Civic Space

Precisely because this new digital media system is still in its early, formative stages, we have an opportunity to influence its future direction. This will only happen if the public is fully informed of what is actually at stake. Therefore it is vital to assess its development, and to gauge, in particular, where concerted efforts on the part of the nonprofit community might in some measure offset the growing commercialization of the Internet.

While the basic framework for the new digital media may already be moving into place, there are critical public policy choices to be made if we are to harness the full potential of these technologies to serve American society and, in particular, to exert a positive influence on the lives of young people. The goal of creating a quality democratic media culture for children and youth must be placed at the forefront of public policy debate. Groups and individuals with a direct stake in youth civic media must be made aware of both the opportunities and the threats. Youth-serving organizations that have not yet developed a digital presence should be encouraged and enabled to do so. The issue must be placed prominently on the public agenda, encouraging a national dialogue with policymakers, industry leaders, and key nonprofit officials. Successful efforts now could ensure a lasting legacy for generations of youth to come.

In order to gain visibility we should look for portals or other points of entry to these kinds of materials. These sites are still not easy to find and will only become so through the effort of informed and active citizens to bring them to the forefront.

Nonprofits may need to form partnerships with corporations in order to have a viable and sustainable presence in the new digital media landscape. However they must also be wary of arrangements that could ultimately undermine the civic purpose of the content. For example, PBS-like underwriting sponsorships, with unobtrusive icons at the bottom of a site, could easily morph into a kind of “branded civic space,” where the marketing and data collection purposes end up shaping the content.

As the new media landscape evolves, it will be critically important that nonprofits, youth-serving organizations, and youth themselves define the new civic media culture, and set the conditions to enable it to flourish. In order to do that, there must be a clear policy agenda. What we offer now is a framework for developing that agenda that includes:

- Policies and mechanisms for sustainable funding that will preserve the integrity and vitality of civic media for and by youth.
- Policies for ensuring that civic sites are placed in the foreground of the digital media experience for youth, that they are built into the foundation of the new interfaces in digital television, and other digital media, and not forced into the margins.
- Policies to ensure inclusivity, access, and diversity in youth civic media. There is a danger that only the most mainstream and “safe” youth-serving organizations, those with sufficient funds and corporate connections, will be viable in the emerging digital media landscape. Particularly nonprofits that serve minorities, low income, and underserved communities, many of whom may not even have the wherewithal now to be online, must be assured a place in the new media system.

None of these policies will be put in place unless there is a broad-based movement of all the groups and individuals who have a stake in ensuring a vital civic media sector for the future. We need to weave together the various strands of “e-democracy”—from community networks to public-access media centers to voter-education Web sites—and to build a broader coalition involving other parts of the nonprofit sector (including children’s advocates, social service agencies, libraries, and cultural organizations) that have equally as much at stake in the transformation of the media system.

The movement for a youth civic media in the digital landscape should only be part of our goal. It is vitally important to ensure that civic discourse, political activism, and other kinds of content that the marketplace may not automatically produce and support, be afforded a presence in the new media.

Now is a particularly important time to launch a campaign on behalf of such a civic sector in the new digital media. During this important period of transition, the opportunity exists to foster broad public debate and to advocate for the necessary support structures. There is a particularly strong need to draw together the various strands, public

and private, commercial and noncommercial, that already contribute to the digital civic sector. For today's young people are tomorrow's adults and we must ensure that we create for them a media system that will promote and support our democracy and serve everyone as citizens as well as consumers.

ⁱ Douglas Schuler, *New Community Networks: Wired for Change* (New York: ACM Press, 1996), 25.

ⁱⁱ E. Neuborne and K. Kerwin, "Generation Y," *Business Week*, 15 Feb. 1999.

ⁱⁱⁱ Center for Media Education, *Teens and Digital Media*, (Washington, D.C.: CME, 2001, forthcoming).

^{iv} Stacy Lawrence, "Internet in Media Time" *TheStandard.com* 1 May 2000)

<http://www.thestandard.com/research/metrics/display/0,2799,14571,00.html> [21 September 2000].

^v Roper Starch Worldwide, "Today's Kids—Especially Teens—Are Wired to the Hilt, Gender Gap Still Exists" (24 November 1998) <http://www.roper.com/news/content/news93.htm> [1999, May 19].

^{vi} J.D. Stanger and N. Grindina, *Media in the Home: The Fourth Annual Survey of Parents and Children* (Washington, D.C.: The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, 1999).

^{vii} Kaiser Family Foundation, *Kids and Media @ the New Millennium*, 1999.

^{viii} R. Vesely, "Kiddie Kash," *Business 2.0*, May 1999.

^{ix} Newsbytes, Apr. 10, 1999.

^x From Youth Markets ALERT, Sept. 99:

^{xi} Cheskin Research and Cyberteens.com, *Teens and the Future of the Web* (Redwood Shores, CA: Cheskin Research, 1999).

^{xii} Mary Beth Solomon, "Marketing Research in Cyberspace."

www.cyberdialogue.com/resource/data/white_papers/1998/marketing_cyberspace.html [15 Sept. 2000].

^{xiii} Solomon.

^{xiv} Center for Media Education, *Teens and Digital Media*.

^{xv} Clay Shirky, "The Toughest Virus of All," *Business 2.0*, 25 July 2000: 87.

^{xvi} Youth Market Alert, Research Notes, February 2000.

^{xvii} Wendy Bounds, "Buying Gen Y: Rushing to Cash In on the New Baby Boom," *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 August 2000: B1.

^{xviii} Strother, Neil. "Hook Teens With Multiple Channels and Music," *ZDNet* 21 Jan. 2000

www.zdnet.com/anchordesk/story/story_4378.html [2000, February 9].

^{xix} "Media Metrix Top 50 US Web & Digital Media Properties for May 2000."

www.mediametrix.com/data/thetop.jsp [2000, July 18].

^{xx} Taken from advertising literature provided by snowball.com.

^{xxi} Philip Connors, "...Entertain the Teens," *The Wall Street Journal Interactive Edition*. 6 December 1999.

^{xxii} In November 1999 Bolt.com launched a strategic partnership with the Ford Motor Company, creating a relationship based on advertising, sponsorship and market research. Creating a co-branded Web site – bolt.com/cars – Bolt and Ford Motor Company forged an alliance that will provide Ford with market research about the vehicular interests of today's teens, while providing bolt.com with editorial content and advertising and sponsorship revenue. Bolt Inc. (1999, November 19). *Ford and Bolt Align For Strategic Partnership to Reach The Next Generation*. Press Release – Bolt.com.

^{xxiii} 37% of teens have used the Internet to research or buy products –

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- ‘Teen E-Commerce Not So Tiny: Selling to Youth Online May Be Huge Opportunity,’ *ABCNEWS.com* www.abcnews.go.com/sections/business/TheStreet/teencommerce.html [20 July 2000].
- ^{xxiv} “Teen E-Commerce Not So Tiny: Selling to Youth Online May Be Huge Opportunity,” *ABCNEWS.com* www.abcnews.go.com/sections/business/TheStreet/teencommerce.html [20 July 2000].
- ^{xxv} Center for Media Education, *Teens and Digital Media*.
- ^{xxvii} Personal communication, Judy Shils [10/19/00].
- ^{xxviii} Jason Scott, “To what end?” A brief Report on Principles and Best Practices in Online Organizing, March 14, 2000.
- ^{xxix} www.mtv.com/nav/intro_shooseorlose.html
- ^{xxx} According to a 1999 study by researchers at the University of Texas, the Internet generated approximately \$300 billion in U.S. revenues in 1998, a figure approaching that of the automobile industry. Additionally, the study reported that “business-to-business commerce alone is likely to swell thirty-fold, from \$48 billion last year to \$1.3 trillion in 2003, according to technology consulting firm Forrester Research. Forrester estimates that consumers spent \$8 billion buying computers, books, CDs, clothing and other items on the Internet last year. Mark Leibovich, Tim Smart, and Ianthe Jeanne Dugan, “Internet’s Economy Gets Real; New Business Math Gains Solid Ground,” *Washington Post* 20 June 1999, A1.
- ^{xxxi} Kathryn Montgomery, “Digital Kids: The New Online Children’s Consumer Culture,” in D. Singer and J. Singer, eds., *Handbook of Children and the Media* (Newbury Park: Sage, forthcoming).
- ^{xxxii} Constance A. Flanagan and Lonnie R. Sherrod, “Youth Political Development: An Introduction,” *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 54 No. 3 (1998), 448-49.
- ^{xxxiii} Mary A. Hepburn, “The Power of the Electronic Media in the Socialization of Young Americans: Implications for Social Studies Education,” *The Social Studies*, March/April, 1998, [p. 74].
- ^{xxxiv} Jack M. McLeod, “Media and Civic Socialization of Youth,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, vol. 27, no. 2, supplement (Aug. 2000), 45-51.
- ^{xxxv} McLeod, 45.
- ^{xxxvi} Putnam, 169
- ^{xxxvii} David Buckingham, *The Making of Citizens: Young People, News, and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 18.
- ^{xxxviii} Jeffrey Chester and Gary O. Larson, “Song of the Open Road: Building a Broadband Network for the Twenty-first Century” (Washington, DC: Center for Media Education, 1999).
- ^{xxxix} Frank Rich, “Two 21st Century Foxes Elope,” *New York Times*, 15 Jan. 2000: A19.
- ^{xl} Gary Chapman, “AOL-Time Warner Merger Could Steer Internet Down Wrong Road,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 Jan. 2000, C1. Chapman also raised a question of his own, one that is pertinent to the issues at hand: “In a decade, what will the Internet be for young people? A display of rich human diversity, free expression and admirable cultural achievement, or another boring and all-too-familiar mall?”
- ^{xli} Andy Carvin, “The E-Rate in America: A Tale of Four Cities” (Washington, D.C.: Benton Foundation, Feb. 2000).
- ^{xlii} Children’s Partnership, “The Digital Divide’s New Frontier: Online Content for Low and Underserved Americans,” www.childrenspartnership.org/. The study identified various kinds of content that children and youth of the targeted populations want. These include participation and self-expression, high-impact packaging with interactivity, multimedia, and youth-friendly tutorials. Additionally, the study found that both adults and youth want easier searching and usability, encouragement, and involvement.