PEG ACCESS MEDIA: LOCAL COMMUNICATION HUBS IN A PANDEMIC

AUGUST 2020

CMSi
CENTER FOR MEDIA & SOCIAL IMPACT
SCHOOL of COMMUNICATION
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • WASHINGTON, DC

PATRICIA AUFDERHEIDE
ANTOINE HAYWOOD
MARIANA SANCHEZ SANTOS

cmsimpact.org/PEG

ABOUT THE PROJECT

PEG ACCESS MEDIA: LOCAL COMMUNICATION HUBS IN A PANDEMIC

In the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, communities across the U.S. came to depend on public, educational and governmental (PEG) access operations, which are anchored to their cable service, for crucial local information. Drawing from a nation-wide survey of these community media services, this study documents their role not only in providing community news, but also technical operations support for local governments and schools, and a platform for community events. The transition to virtual provision of services sometimes increased user access. Lessons from the pandemic could strengthen PEG's role in the future.

About the Center for Media & Social Impact

The Center for Media & Social Impact (CMSI) at American University's School of Communication, based in Washington, D.C., is a research center and innovation lab that creates, studies and showcases media for social impact. Focusing on independent, documentary, entertainment and public media, CMSI bridges boundaries between scholars, producers and communication practitioners who work across media production, media impact, public policy and audience engagement. The Center produces resources for the field and research, convenes conferences and events and works collaboratively to understand and design media that matter. www.cmsimpact.org.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patricia Aufderheide

Patricia Aufderheide is University Professor of Communication Studies in the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C. She founded the School's Center for Media & Social Impact, where she continues as Senior Research Fellow. Her books include The Daily Planet (University of Minnesota Press) and Communications Policy in the Public Interest (Guilford Press). She has been a Fulbright Research Fellow twice, and was also a John Simon Guggenheim fellow. Aufderheide's research on PEG was included in the Supreme Court case, Denver Area Educational Tele Communications Consortium (1996). In this case, 1992 law threatening the existence of PEG channels was struck down for First Amendment reasons. She received numerous journalism and scholarly awards, including the International Communication Association's 2010 for Communication Research as an Agent of Change Award.

Antoine Haywood

Antoine Haywood is a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication.
His ethnographic, practitioner inquiry research focuses on understanding virtuous effects of commons-based media-making and PEG access media organizational culture. Prior to Annenberg, Antoine worked as a community engagement director at People TV, Atlanta (2005-2010) and PhillyCAM, Philadelphia (2010-2018). He has served on boards of community media organizations, including Radio Free Georgia and the Alliance for Community Media. Antoine holds a BA in English from Morehouse College, an MA in Media Studies from The New School, and he is a proud native of West Palm Beach, FL.

Mariana Sánchez Santos

Currently a PhD student in the School of Communication at American University, Mariana holds a BA in International Relations from ITAM in Mexico City and a Master of Arts in Political Communication from the University of Leeds, UK. She has also taken courses in City University of Hong Kong, Universidad de San Andrés in Buenos Aires, Stanford University and Oxford University. Her doctoral research focuses in political communication, elections and technology in Latin America.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

In the 2020 pandemic, PEG access media became virtual town halls and public squares. They moved governmental, educational, and community leaders to virtual platforms. They provided essential local news. And they hosted community events, including graduation and holiday celebrations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> **PEG access media provided essential local communication services at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. These services became a community's combination town hall and public square, as well as critical tech support in pandemic isolation.**

As entire communities suddenly sheltered in place for the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, local leaders needed ways to communicate with residents. Government officials, nonprofits, schools and community groups all turned to public, educational, and governmental access media operations-which often became local communication hubs. The lessons learned about providing reliable, consistent access to information and a platform for community engagement may permanently alter the role of PEG access media in the community.

A nation-wide survey of 15% of PEG operations in the U.S., along with practitioner interviews, showed both the strengths and weaknesses in local communication systems, and the value of trusted communication services in crisis.

Finally, innovations will likely continue post-pandemic to provide more integrated and diverse local services than what was offered pre-pandemic.

ACHIEVEMENTS

➢ PEG access media services transitioned quickly from in-person to virtual services, both for their own programs and activities and for those of their partners, e.g., governments and schools.

➢ Universal design features in virtual services sometimes increased usership; government meetings drew increased attendance, new users came to virtual trainings, and new partnerships were formed to create programming for newly isolated residents.

➢ Services were integrated across online, cable, radio and social media, leveraging different media for their capacities ad ensuring that residents with differing access and ability could get access.

➢ PEG media became one-stop-shopping for public health information and sometimes launched community news services. Some government officials called PEG media essential local communication services.

➢ PEG media became platforms for landmark community rituals such as graduation, Memorial Day commemorations, and summer arts festivals.

➢ Staffers strategically designed technical communications solutions across agencies and organizations as well as providing technical support to government and educational leaders and to the general community.

➢ PEG media supported K-12 educators in the transition to virtual teaching, and offered online learning services to the general community.

PROBLEMS

➢ Access to broadband and wi-fi greatly affected success. Quality of broadband access varied greatly, even among staffers working from home. Some community members had no broadband access, and some officials lacked robust enough access to participate in public meetings. The crisis revealed that universal, high-speed broadband access is essential; inconsistent, inadequate access worsens inequalities.

➢ PEG media operations were typically under-resourced, with staffers working long hours under tight deadlines to innovate solutions. Such high-stress working conditions are unsustainable.

➢ Some PEG operations were hampered by lack of access to buildings controlled by governmental or educational entities.

PEG ACCESS MEDIA: LOCAL COMMUNICATION HUBS IN A PANDEMIC

Patricia Aufderheide
Antoine Haywood
Mariana Sanchez Santos

www.cmsimpact.org/PEG

IN A PUBLIC HEALTH crisis, local communication is key. Yet in many places local news sources have dwindled in recent years. As well, in many smaller, exurban and rural communities, access to broadband is inadequate. In the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, government officials, nonprofits, schools and community groups all turned to public, educational and governmental (PEG) access services to solve communication needs. Indeed, these operations often became local communication hubs. The lessons learned about providing reliable, consistent access to information and a platform for community engagement may permanently alter the role of PEG in the community.

For over 40 years, more than 3,000 U.S. communities have used access operations, anchored to a cable service. PEG exists in communities where local or state governments have granted cable companies franchises, including community-based benefits such as a basic-cable channel, production capacity, and operational and capital funds. Some such operations have developed into community media centers. They allow local residents to exercise free speech, observe official school board business and sometimes get educational services, and watch and participate in local government processes.

PEG operational response to the pandemic was assessed from a survey sent in late May and early June to members of the Alliance of Community Media (ACM) and National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA) members,[1] reaching a representative geographic and functional range of operations.[2] The survey responses were bolstered with ten practitioner interviews.

PEG sometimes expanded service and access in the pandemic. What PEG access media leaders learned about providing reliable, consistent access to information, and a platform for community engagement, may permanently alter the role of PEG in the community.

PEG Response to the Pandemic

Every channel was immediately affected, whether facilities were open to the public or not. Staff had to work from home, improvising procedures and connections. Leaders urgently negotiated with new vendors for personal protection equipment and sanitation products, while developing new technical procedures, solutions and workflows. They worked under intense deadline pressure, particularly those working for government channels where officials--themselves often ignorant of technological requirements, and needing training-- sought immediate access to the public. "I am so tired," one survey respondent wrote simply.

The change affected every service the PEG operations provide. Some 93% percent cancelled some services, especially programs users usually made in the studios, and training. 86% also started doing new things because of the pandemic. The most universal of these were livestreaming of events and working with new partners.

Community Response to PEG services

Although the changes were profoundly disruptive, survey respondents almost universally (with one sole exception) reported receiving gratitude--from public officials, from audiences, from producers, and from other partners. Public officials sometimes shifted their perspective on the services, coming to see them as critical assets. In the exurban township of West Bloomfield, Michigan, Executive Director Dave Albery noted that officials were "ecstatic over the opportunity to communicate timely information immediately and effectively."

More people used and even discovered the services. Use of social media-- particularly Facebook Live and YouTube--and online streaming through websites vastly increased public access to content. In one case, a respondent reported a "50-fold increase."

Video-on-demand services also increased viewership. Viewers sought out news and information on cable as well. Northampton (MA) Open Media's Al Williams reported, "The community has also become more interested in government proceedings and attendance of them has actually increased online." Area residents joined the operations as members, to take online training. Staffers embraced a range of communication services, including low and full-power radio, web-based streaming and social media platforms, both to broaden access and provide redundancy. While Facebook Live and YouTube were important ways to reach locals, PEG access media also livestreamed on their own websites. In some places, radio reached out to exurban and rural communities. In Philadelphia, PhillyCAM also used StreamYard and its low-power radio station WPPM-LP, 106.5 FM, and Davis Media Access (DMA) leveraged its reach with its low-power radio station KDRT-LP, 95.7 FM, to share urgent pandemic news. DMA director Autumn Labbe Renault recalled the creation of "Covid-19 Community Report," which featured interviews with 50 people and produced 27 episodes:

➢ "I remember going home March 13 and thinking, how are we going to continue to provide some services and remain relevant? I thought, I'm just going to go on KDRT, our LPFM [low-power radio], and start a show all about this COVID thing. We needed to hear local voices and having an LPFM was the easiest way to get out there in front of it."

This multiplatform integration--the combined use of radio, television, social media, video on demand--seems to have overcome a common fear that leaving the cable platform would dilute the argument for the utility of the cable access service. Jay April, President and CEO of Akakū Maui Community Media, argued for integrating platforms "so that they fit like a glove" and learning how to respond to community needs.

But the fact that cable TV anchored the experience was important. For some in the community, cable was their primary or even only source of community information. Senior citizens often lacked adequate broadband, and/or technical knowledge or equipment to use online services. The cable access center typically served as a kind of switchboard connecting a range of other services.

Universal-design and accessibility features available in virtual platforms made PEG and PEG-enabled services more available to all. More residents took online trainings, more citizens participated in governmental meetings, and both audiences and social media engagement grew.

Zoom meetings were livestreamed and also cablecast. Karen Henderson, general manager of Westborough TV (MA) noted, "Some churches have the ability to broadcast online, but many congregants do not have the ability to watch things online, so having services broadcast on TV where they can watch from the comfort of their family room has been greatly appreciated."

Respondents welcomed some changes as possible permanent additions. Universal design turned out to be a bonus; some operators plan to continue captioning for key events. City council members discovered recordings of government committees was an aid to taking minutes and citizens appreciate the increased transparency afforded by access to recordings.

Online training reached some people who had trouble going to their community media center in person. Interactive features that PEG staff added to governmental meetings engaged community members in new ways, encouraging more dialogue with officials.

Newly adopted planning features, such as the event-planning app Trello, have been integrated into back-end logistics. New programming, including types from religious organizations and community groups, may continue. "Our news product is changed forever," wrote an access media staffer in Grand Rapids, MN, "We had been planning on going to an update rather than weekly set up and the pandemic pushed that ahead by a year. I think when we slow down we will solidify the process and go that route."

But this success is being achieved in spite of chronic underfunding, staff shortages, lack of personal protective equipment (PPE) and crisis needs, making stress a daily reality. Furthermore, some respondents noted the uncertainty of forthcoming budgets.

We found four categories in which PEG operations acted as critical communication hubs at the outset of the pandemic. They offered technology expertise, provided timely news and information, functioned as a platform for important community events, and provided educational support.

PEG Staff as Communication Technology Experts

When Covid-19 hit, many community members, including public officials, were unfamiliar with technologies to provide virtual experiences. PEG staff often became de facto tech support for government officials, for producers and even for audience members. While seniors commonly needed abundant hand-holding, government officials did, too, usually on deadline. PEG practitioners installed digital security measures in the communication flow. The work was often done under tight deadlines, as one respondent, who requested anonymity, recalled:

"On the Sunday night after the lockdown began, I was given 14 hours' warning by the Town about how they would be holding their first remote committee meeting via GoToWebinar at 8am the following morning, and I needed to find a way to broadcast and record it. I worked all night and made it happen, then spent the following two days refining the process and teaching the other staff at the station."

Other accounts typical of the technical services across platforms include:

➢ "Our technical support for Zoom meetings (and anything virtual) has been vital. Everyone doing virtual meetings has relied on us for support." (Peabody, MA)

➢ "Elected officials and government administrators have been able to use facilities and our engineering expertise to communicate with constituents." (Brooklyn, NY)

➢ "Our Council Chambers and Video Control Room were already set up to provide live production/ integration of Zoom. We were able to maintain a relatively high production value when all of our city meetings were required to transition to Zoom." (Cupertino, CA)

➢ "They desperately needed our technical help to produce remote meetings to fulfill Open Meeting Law changes. We have been active in all aspects of emergency and ongoing communications. Schools are extremely grateful as they are requiring our assistance for graduation, music, guidance presentations that they desperately need." (Northborough, MA)

➢ "We are being enlisted to help develop more free open public wifi access - engaging with community anchors, esp. libraries…" (Eureka, CA)

In some cases, PEG staff moved beyond the role of crisis tech support, to become co-strategists of the community's local communication technologies for community and civic life:

- ➢ "We are more widely recognized as an essential communications asset across sectors. And, beyond reaching communities directly via cable TV, radio and online, folks appreciate that we also support our entire information ecosystem, effectively sharing timely content across all the local media outlets." (Eureka, CA)
- ➢ "Our 62 nonprofits that we are serving through our Media Capacity Grants say what we did has been an invaluable support" (Washington, DC)
- ➢ "Training our 15 cities and the county to host video conferences and to set up video conferencing on their computers. Monitoring of the LIVE cable channels and LIVE web streams for the video conferencing of remote city meetings. And adding many extra committee meetings for our cities so they could maintain open meetings requirements" (Covington, KY)

Respondents in some cases also indicated that their newly identified role to provide more IT and tech services for the community would continue when the pandemic subsides.

PEG as News and Information Providers

PEG services shared important public health information for the community, becoming a pandemic-information hub:
- ➢ "At first we were the only ones getting info out to our community; even the local newspaper was lagging behind in coverage. We became THE place to go to for information in the first month, leading to many reaching out to get us info to share and for remote interview opportunities." (Lynn, MA)

- ➢ "Our viewership has actually increased substantially due to the fact that we are the sole source of public health information." (Eagle County, CO)

- ➢ "People appreciate our channels as a venue for reaching the community with important health and civic information." (Lowell, MA)

Residents turned to these resources in greater numbers than PEG operators had expected. In Salem, OR, a record 10,000 viewers watched a committee meeting about the shutdown. In Northborough, MA, residents asked for more meeting coverage in the future. Some PEG channels started providing news themselves. In Torrance, CA, the cable access channel has produced dozens of daily news reports, under the "Covid-19" rubric, and housed them among other places on YouTube.[3] The staff plan to make it a daily live news program. Another respondent wrote, "We initiated 'The Daily Breaking.' It's a live show which airs at noon Mondays through Thursdays. We showcase social service organizations, school teachers, students, local public transportation officials, and more to share some of the stories behind the BIG story." Akakū Maui, in Maui, HI, immediately began producing a daily news story, with members throughout the island as stringers, reporting hyperlocal events. The center's executive assistant became the show's anchor, and as a Maui native of Filipino descent, she became the face of the island's pandemic response.

In Philadelphia, the existing program "PhillyCAM Voices" reported both on Covid-19 issues and protests. PhillyCAM's bilingual news program, "Atrévete," has carried stories specific to the Latinx community there. In Grand Rapids, MI, as in many places, while initially Covid-19 bulletins led the initial five-days-a-week news provision, as protests grew the news included those as well. Respondent universally noted that news provision increased viewership and engagement.

One respondent noted, "Some of these videos were our most watched, ever."

As well, once protests began in the wake of George Floyd's murder, news coverage expanded to include these topics. A new rush of users appeared in many communities, to leverage community media's curbside equipment loans, online training and public access, contributing to hyperlocal news.[4] Community media staff also worked with other organizations to expand programming. In many places,producers learned how to use Zoom and their phones, to transfer files remotely, and to use editing services remotely. More people and organizations than previously came to PEG to use remote services to create programming relevant to the pandemic and to reach their communities. For instance, a tech company owner in Philadelphia launched a series, "Talking Tech with Wayne," to help people with tech questions during the switch to virtual, two brothers launched a discussion among young people in their neighborhood, about responding to the pandemic crisis.

In Gresham, OR, a MetroEast member created a series on health-and-safety tips for pandemic living. MetroEast also launched a "Covideo" contest, teaching locals how to use their iPhones to make mini-movies. The contest yielded a range of shorts, featuring individual and family stories of how they are managing their newly isolated worlds. Some sang, others shared tips, and at least one person celebrated.

News programs sprouted up around Covid-19 bulletins, and existing programs expanded coverage.

Some access media operations, such as PhillyCAM, Akakū Maui, Davis Media Access, and Grand Rapids Community Media Center (GRCMC) have staff with journalistic expertise. In other places, the challenge of creating curated news flows is a new one, with new challenges. In our interviews, no one reported facing a misinformation challenge. But in one case the web-based news site "The Rapidian," a program of GRCMC, assigned a "commentary" opinion tag to the Kaufman Interfaith Institute's "nonprofit dispatch" posted on May 25. The article claimed that Covid-19 recovery needed faith as well as science: "We just have to demonstrate to God that we learned the lessons and are making sincere efforts to progress and change." It generated controversy, with readers commenting "this is gross," "this is not the take anyone needs," "this is embarrassing and it isn't journalism," and "not what I would expect from The Rapidian."

If PEG media continue to offer news, they will face the challenges traditional journalistic editors face in curating and vetting content. This will be new territory for those community media operations that previously have either served specific governmental and educational functions or been an open platform for the public.

PEG as Convenor and Public Square

Beyond providing news and informational programming, community media became the virtual public square and convenor of a quarantined community.

Community media sustained communities by hosting marking events. These included graduation, scholarship/award celebrations, Memorial Day, and Pride Flag raising. In Davis, CA, low-power radio also became the audio yearbook for the junior high and high school's graduating class. It began with a request, recalled Autumn Labbe Renault:

"Local school officials came to us and asked, 'Can you help us do kind of an audio yearbook and we'll have signs saying tune in to 95.7 and people can be listening to this as they drive through?' They gave us audio clips of a lot of students, teachers, coaches, even some parents, offering their congratulations to students, their acknowledgment that it had been a really weird year, and their best wishes. And then they gave us a playlist of music that felt important for this moment in time and we put together a two hour show. We played that live on the radio station from 10 to noon, while the celebration was unfolding. And then they held up the signs, 'Tune in to KDRT 95.7 FM.' We were out there getting footage so we put together a video piece of it afterwards."

Memorial Day moved many community members to reach out and thank their access center. One such message, received from a town clerk and member of the Republican Town Committee, read in part:

➢ I just want to let you know what a beautiful job you did for our Memorial Day celebration. I cried through half of it. I rarely miss a Memorial Day, so this was just as good if not better than being there in person. It was nice to hear all the words of all who spoke and see faces up close, which sometimes doesn't happen in the midst of a crowd. The music and sky views were amazing as well. Please let your staff know how lovely this tribute was. (Westborough, MA)

PEG channels innovated and initiated programming to meet community needs:

➢ "The new Gardening 101 classes that are usually at the library came to us for live stream online and used to replay on the TV channel thus we have new audiences that have not watched the channel before." (Show Low, AZ)

➢ "They enjoy the fun videos and film festivals "All in it Together" video festival, storytime bear hunts, Graduation montages, and more." (Westborough, MA)

➢ Somerville Community Access TV and the Somerville Museum launched, for the July 4th holiday, a reading by community members of Frederick Douglass' speech, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" The program won national coverage on CBS.

➢ Athol-Orange [MA] Community TV conducted a fundraiser for emergency food needs in the community, raising $46,000.

➢ In Goffstown, NH, the access channel GTV simulated a girls' basketball game in fantasy-sports mode, complete with play-by-play, and hosted a virtual awards show for local high school sports. The channel also re-broadcast audio from a famous 1974 boys' state basketball championship, with accompanying archival images.

PEG became a public square and convenor of quarantined communities, hosting events such as graduation and poetry slams.

These events, respondents believed, had a community-building effect. In Northampton, MA, community media serves a relatively dispersed community, often with the arts, noted Northampton Open Media's executive director, Al Williams:

> "We're sort of a cultural hub for Western Massachusetts. We usually do a Seven Day Film Sprint, where you can give people prompts, and they have a week and they make a film. So we did that this year, remotely, and we had funny isolation-related prompt like "World Solitaire Champion." We had the biggest turnout ever for it, and the most people completing projects. We had an online viewing party, and we had more chat on our livestreams that we've ever had before for that project."

Seniors, who were especially vulnerable to isolation, notably embraced virtual community events:

> "When a local nursing home could not have live entertainment, we recorded (using good social distancing) their regular performer who played to his nursing home audience, but also to the entire community. Nursing home residents tuned in to the performance at their regular time but now on local TV." (Belfast, ME)

> "We have received thank you notes for creating the new 'senior block' of programs which runs early in the morning. (6am-9am)" (Piscataway, NJ)

> "Especially from the seniors, they are very appreciative of having new programming on cable TV because they do not have access to computers." (Swampscott, MA)

> "The senior community has been grateful for expanded exercise classes and religious services." (Medford, MA)

PEG as Educator and Educational Support

With the shutdown, practitioners pivoted to providing online educational services to its producers, which stimulated demand. PhillyCAM, in Philadelphia, PA, adopted its field production and editing curriculum to an online format. Others forged partnerships to facilitate virtual exercise classes. In Bedford, MA, members sometimes got remote one-on-one support. In other locations:

> "We held our first virtual workshop - introduction to creating video/ audio at home. We had many new faces that we've never seen before join us." (Easthampton, NJ)

> "Our attendance at events has doubled. We know there is a factor of these classes being free and people are stuck at home, but we also see it as overcoming a transportation barrier and introducing new software and topics that we were not able to cover because we were too busy offering our traditional programming." (Gresham, OR)

> "Members network group appreciates our online webinars and the new Zoom kits made available to them." (Newton, MA)

> "We have had an influx of new members due to the pandemic, all taking class offerings that we have moved online." (Northampton, MA)

In some cases, PEG operators provided access to K-12 educational resources and trained local teachers:

> "Ninety six teachers attended a Zoom training session to produce videos for their students yesterday" (Alexandria, VA)

> "Deep appreciation for helping school boards continue to reach the public via remote meetings. Also appreciation for the training series we have developed.[5] (Burlington, VT)

Online training brought in new members, and local teachers used PEG services to switch to virtual learning.

> "We were recently awarded a Mass Humanities grant to create a Teachers Guide for High School Students studying about the Holocaust, to be used in conjunction with our already produced 35 minute video documentary. The final project will be offered to all schools in Mass. for free." (Amherst, MA)

> "I think there is expanded awareness of our distance-learning capabilities, and expect more utilization from our school district." (Truckee, CA)

> "DC Public Schools staff were extremely positive about the excellence of our expertise (which included writing a licensing agreement they could use with third party distance learning services to expand online services to be televised; developing a system for submitting programming easily and responsive to their short turnaround times and scheduling complexities; developing the written protocols for them) and ease of working with us. (We thought their entire distance learning team were heroes, working day and night to create content so the students could stay connected to their teachers-- especially important for the young ones.)" (Washington, DC)

Moving forward, PEG staffers expect to continue to provide online training, to encourage online file submissions, provide remote tech support, and offer more classes online.

Opportunities

The learnings from pandemic response suggest ways to build on the strength demonstrated in crisis.

FOR PEG SERVICES:

➢ Build on what worked to provide greater access to civic life, expand access to production with online training and remote services, and expand community engagement.

➢ Leverage awareness of PEG media among official as an essential service, to incorporate PEG routinely in strategic communication planning, solidify that support and to increase investment.

➢ Position and promote PEG staff as communication technology experts in their community, and thus amplify the community serving function of their partners.

➢ Expand or create new streams of revenue, with expanded online capacity, e.g., online training services, partner, member, and production fees.

➢ Make digital security robust, as online work becomes ever more integrated into PEG functions.

FOR PARTNERS:

➢ Governments can leverage the capacities of PEG to integrate official communication services throughout the locality, with appropriate payment for capital and operational expenses. Governments can increase funding for content generation and journalistic staff, to assure reliable hyperlocal information flow.

➢ Governments can encourage PEG's use of multiple modes of communication--cable, broadband, radio--with the public.

➢ Ensure that PEG services can continue even when their institutions are closed and unable to provide in-person services. Develop contingency plans to maintain these essential services in such situations.

➢ Governments at all levels can treat local communication services as interlinked essential services. The pandemic revealed that television and broadband were both critical communication technologies. Whatever the source of funding for the different communication technology services, in crisis they cannot serve the local public well without linking to each other.

➢ New federal and state legislation can support local governments in getting community reinvestment payments from broadband, cable, and streaming media service providers. These reinvested funds can build enhanced, community-managed communication infrastructures, which have proved to be essential during the pandemic.

APPENDIX

PEG Access Media: Local Communication Hubs in a Pandemic

Topline results, minus open-ended answers (offered under promise of confidentiality)

What is your role in access?

#		Answer	%	Count
1		Executive Director/President/CEO	50.00%	143
2		Program Manager	20.28%	58
4		Public Information Officer	2.45%	7
5		Communications Director	2.80%	8
6		Board Member	1.75%	5
7		Volunteer	1.75%	5
9		Cable Officer/Policy Advisor	2.45%	7
10		Other	18.53%	53
		Total	100%	286

What kinds of access channels do you operate? (Click all that apply)

#		Answer	%	Count
1		Public	32.28%	205
2		Educational	25.67%	163
3		Government	36.54%	232
4		Local Origination	3.94%	25
5		Other	1.57%	10
		Total	100%	635

In what type of community is your service located?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Small town/rural	24.74%	71
2	County	8.36%	24
3	City	37.63%	108
4	Suburb	20.56%	59
5	Other	8.71%	25
	Total	100%	287

What state are you located in?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Alabama	0.00%	0
2	Alaska	0.00%	0
3	Arizona	1.93%	4
4	Arkansas	0.00%	0
5	California	9.18%	19
6	Colorado	4.35%	9
7	Connecticut	1.45%	3
8	Delaware	0.00%	0
9	District of Columbia	0.48%	1
10	Florida	0.48%	1
11	Georgia	0.00%	0
12	Hawaii	1.45%	3
13	Idaho	0.00%	0
14	Illinois	1.45%	3
15	Indiana	0.97%	2
16	Iowa	0.00%	0
17	Kansas	0.48%	1

18		Kentucky	1.45%	3
19		Louisiana	0.48%	1
20		Maine	2.42%	5
21		Maryland	2.42%	5
22		Massachusetts	26.09%	54
23		Michigan	2.90%	6
24		Minnesota	2.90%	6
25		Mississippi	0.00%	0
26		Missouri	0.00%	0
27		Montana	0.00%	0
28		Nebraska	0.00%	0
29		Nevada	0.00%	0
30		New Hampshire	6.76%	14
31		New Jersey	5.31%	11
32		New Mexico	0.97%	2
33		New York	3.86%	8
34		North Carolina	0.48%	1
35		North Dakota	0.00%	0
36		Ohio	1.93%	4
37		Oklahoma	0.00%	0
38		Oregon	0.97%	2
39		Pennsylvania	1.93%	4
40		Puerto Rico	0.00%	0
41		Rhode Island	0.00%	0
42		South Carolina	0.00%	0
43		South Dakota	0.00%	0
44		Tennessee	0.48%	1
45		Texas	3.86%	8
46		Utah	0.00%	0
47		Vermont	3.38%	7

#			%	Count
48		Virginia	2.90%	6
49		Washington	3.86%	8
50		West Virginia	0.00%	0
51		Wisconsin	2.42%	5
52		Wyoming	0.00%	0
53		I do not reside in the United States	0.00%	0
		Total	100%	207

What range is the budget for your PEG operation?

#		Answer	%	Count
1		Under $250,000	32.46%	87
2		$250,000-499,000	33.58%	90
3		$500,000-$1,000,000	21.64%	58
4		Over $1,000,000	12.31%	33
		Total	100%	268

How many equivalents of full-time employee (FTEs) does your staff, both part- and full-time add up to? (For example, 8 FTE + 4 PTE = 10 FTEs)

#		Answer	%	Count
1		None	5.68%	15
2		1-3	41.29%	109
3		4-10	38.64%	102
4		11-20	12.12%	32
6		More than 30	2.27%	6
		Total	100%	264

Where does the core or main funding for your PEG operation come from?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Government	18.66%	50
2	Contract services to government	4.85%	13
3	Cable franchise fees	69.78%	187
6	Other	6.72%	18
	Total	100%	268

Do you have facilities that normally are open to the public?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	82.77%	221
2	No	17.23%	46
	Total	100%	267

Did you stop doing some activities because of the pandemic?

#	Answer	%	Count
4	Yes	93.26%	249
5	No	6.74%	18
	Total	100%	267

Which activities did you stop doing? (check all that apply)

#	Answer	%	Count
1	In-person visits/classes/training	23.04%	200
2	Equipment checkout	15.21%	132
3	Program production	12.44%	108
4	Hard-copy content submission (files, thumb drives, DVDs, etc)	7.03%	61
5	In-person computer lab use	15.21%	132
6	Public use of studios	20.51%	178
14	Other	6.57%	57
	Total	100%	868

Have you provided new services or developed new partnerships because of the pandemic?

#	Answer	%	Count
4	Yes	86.09%	229
5	No	13.91%	37
	Total	100%	266

Which activities did you start doing for the first time because of the pandemic? Check all that apply.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	online video file-uploaded services	10.00%	62
2	online training materials (e.g., how-to guides)	7.90%	49
3	online training (live or on-demand video)	10.81%	67
4	livestreaming or hosting of events and community meetings we hadn't done before	28.23%	175
5	new partnerships (describe the partnerships, if so)	18.87%	117
6	making software available remotely	3.71%	23
7	offering tech support/helpdesk-type services we hadn't before	11.94%	74
8	Other	8.55%	53
	Total	100%	620

Have you extended or expanded services or relationships because of the pandemic?

#	Answer	%	Count
4	Yes	82.19%	203
5	No	17.81%	44
	Total	100%	247

Which activities did you expand/extend for the first time because of the pandemic? Check all that apply.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	More livestreaming of meetings/events with the same partners than we previously had	38.75%	174
2	Expanded our tech support/helpdesk services	14.92%	67
3	Made more of our training materials available online than we had before	11.80%	53
4	Deepened/expanded our relationships with existing partners (please explain which partners, if so)	27.62%	124
5	Other	6.90%	31
	Total	100%	449

Have the opinions of your institutional partners, such as funders, local government, or the cable company about your service changed?

#	Answer	%	Count
4	Yes	52.05%	127
5	No	47.95%	117
	Total	100%	244

END NOTES

[1] We issued a survey, with the assistance of the Alliance for Community Media, the national association representing PEG channels. Before issuing it, we received an exemption from the Institutional Review Board at American University. Nonetheless, we gave participants the choice for anonymity or not, and in all cases of breaking anonymity or employing a direct quote, we checked with the respondent before using. We also interviewed 10 PEG operators. We selected our interviewees on the basis of geographic representation--the South, Northeast, Midwest, West, Northwest and Hawaii; public, government and educational operators; and to include both heads of organizations and program staff (which have direct contact with the public). In those cases, we gave them an informed consent form. We offered this level of transparency because we hoped that respondents would feel comfortable providing frank answers about their problems and experiences.

The survey call was issued 3 times, between May 22 and June 16, 2020. We received a total of 286 responses, of which 230 were completed. In comparing the completed with incomplete surveys, we found patterns to be virtually identical. This represents perhap 15% of the universe of community media/PEG organizations (the ACM website uses a rough estimate of about 1,500 organizations or 3,000 channels).

[2] Respondents often were leaders in their organizations. The different kinds of PEG channels were well represented: public (32%), educational (26%) and government (37%). (A few fell into other categories.) Most commonly funding came from franchise fees (70%), with another 19% coming from government. 83% have facilities normally open to the public. Responses came from all sizes of communities, most popularly city (38%), small town/rural (25%) and suburban (21%). Respondents answered from 29 states. Budgets were diverse. Small budgets (under $250K) accounted for 33%, lower middle (under $500K) for 34%, upper middle (under $1M) fpr 22%, and over $1M 12%. Correspondingly, a few had no employees, a few had over 30 employees. The most common number of employees was 1-3 (41%) and 4-10 (39%).

[3] https://www.youtube.com/user/TorranceCitiCABLE

[4] However, as this study was issued and some respondents completed the survey before they began, results only partially reflected community media's information about them.

[5] See more here: https://www.mediafactory.org/program/work-what-you-got"

PEG ACCESS MEDIA: LOCAL COMMUNICATION HUB IN A PANDEMIC

PATRICIA AUFDERHEIDE
ANTOINE HAYWOOD
MARIANA SANCHEZ SANTOS

CMSi
CENTER FOR MEDIA & SOCIAL IMPACT
SCHOOL *of* COMMUNICATION
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY • WASHINGTON, DC

www.cmsimpact.org