CALL TO ACTION
Democracy and the news media are inextricably intertwined, and it is clear that both are in crisis. American democracy suffers not only from a decline of trust in the “other” to govern, but also from a breakdown of our shared concept of citizenship.

The news media face increasing skepticism based on perceptions of bias. Social media are being criticized for insufficiently restricting material noxious to the well-being of the democracy. And local media, while more trusted than “the media” as a whole, are struggling with economic shortfalls that challenge their ability to serve democratic aims.

The 50-year trend of declining trust is now even more pronounced amid increased political polarization, a shortage of quality local information and the rapid change in technology, altering how Americans experience the news.

This Commission envisions a 21st century American democracy that can work at all levels—if we act now. Therefore, the Commission calls for news organizations, media creators and distributors, government, political, business and nonprofit leaders, and every American citizen to do what they can to restore trust in our democracy.

To help guide us all in this journey, the Commission identifies the following values as necessary components of a functioning democracy.

THIS IS A WATERSHED MOMENT.
CALL TO ACTION

RESPONSIBILITY. It is every citizen's responsibility to become literate in civics and to be able to use any medium to access, evaluate and create information. It is the duty of every elected official to foster the positive values of the republic and to resist the temptation to exacerbate polarization, tribalism and discord. It is all business executives' responsibility to serve the broader democracy in the course of conducting their businesses, and to care for their various stakeholders, including, where applicable, their readers, viewers and users. It is every journalist's responsibility to write the truth and to provide proper context for facts. And it is the government's duty to preserve the principles and underlying goals of the Constitution.

FREE EXPRESSION. A basic assumption running throughout this report is the belief that a free society must allow for and protect open and free expression. But speech that is protected under the First Amendment is not always responsible. Those who create and those who distribute information need to attend to both values.

TRANSPARENCY. The Commission believes that transparency breeds trust. We urge all media entities to be radically transparent so that users can understand how they select stories to cover, what sources they are using and how they reach their conclusions. This applies to newspaper stories, to news on cable and broadcast TV and to news feeds on social networks. Transparency extends as well to the technology companies that distribute news and to government organizations and officials.

LITERACY. Having a literate public is critical to the health of the body politic. Abundant information does no good if users are not capable of using that information effectively. In the 21st century, literacy has multiple dimensions: news, media, digital and civic.

INNOVATION. The Commission recognizes that innovation is a continual imperative for both technology and journalism, and that new challenges and new opportunities to respond to them are inevitable. The news business has endured significant disruption. Some of that was self-inflicted, the result of a lack of foresight. Innovation in technology and business models can reinvigorate the news ecosystem in many ways. The Commission suggests a number of areas where innovation will be particularly useful to rebuilding trust, and it calls for more research into ways that technology can serve rather than undermine this goal.

DIVERSITY. Inclusion of diverse stakeholders serves all. Gender and racial diversity are always important in remaining relevant to a broad public and in being fair to all audiences. Rural residents and people from disadvantaged communities need their voices and perspectives heard as well. In calling for greater diversity, the Commission focused not only on journalistic and technological businesses but also on educational institutions and on efforts to bridge the political divide in this country. The concept of diversity also applies to the type of information one receives and the need for those providing it to help individuals escape from their echo chambers.
Building on these values, the Commission calls for a range of efforts involving all stakeholders at all levels.

**For information and news producers**, the Commission advocates becoming far more transparent—what we call “radical transparency”—and engaged with their audiences. By reflecting more of America in the newsrooms and in stories, in spokespeople and in ownership, the media become more accessible. These measures renew trust.

We also call for new resource-sharing partnerships among journalistic entities—local-local, local-regional and local-national—in order to provide more robust news coverage. And the Commission strongly supports expanding efforts to find sustainable business models for journalism rooted in the civic missions of holding power accountable and informing the electorate. Innovative funding approaches such as crowdfunding can apply to for-profits as well as nonprofits. But the Commission specifically calls on philanthropic and other sources to expand support of nonprofit news operations that cover state and local issues.

**For news and information distributors** on the internet, such as search engines and social media networks, the Commission recognizes that the online ecosystem has grown and evolved rapidly and is now contending with issues based on that growth. In particular, these companies, which grew from small startups to global enterprises in a remarkably short period of time, are now facing a unique set of challenges concerning trust of their users. To restore trust, the Commission believes that the principle of transparency should apply to the entire online media ecosystem. It calls for information and data collectors, including information platforms, to adopt a fiduciary responsibility to their users, assuming a duty of care for the personal information they gather.

And the Commission urges even more innovation in the field. It particularly calls for technologists to collaborate on devising metrics to measure healthy civic dialogue online, on building tools to track the spread of disinformation, and on giving users the ability to understand and to modify how personalized algorithms work. It also recommends allowing users to reclaim their data and transfer it to other social networks if they wish.

**For political leaders and individual American citizens**, having a basic understanding of our Constitution, our system of government and our Bill of Rights is critical for our nation's survival. The Commission recognizes that in order to reclaim a shared sense of citizenship, individuals must have both the capacity and the opportunities to do so. Thus it calls for greater civic literacy, with new requirements that our youth graduate from high school with a knowledge of this nation's history and governance mechanisms. High school graduates should have the knowledge to pass the American citizenship test. We recommend, as well, moonshot-like goals for schools and others to teach new-media literacy skills.
Finally, the Commission urges increased efforts to establish a year of voluntary national service for all Americans. And it recommends convening a series of local community dialogues that bridge racial, ethnic, gender, generational, class and geographical differences. Not only are schools and libraries appropriate venues for these efforts, but there is value in supporting these vital and trusted local institutions through such an initiative.

This Commission began, and now ends, with the current crisis in trust. We, as individual citizens of a great nation, need to take measures now, not next year, to maintain the democracy that has developed over nearly two and a half centuries. We need to maintain the free and open press that undergirds American democracy, and to catalyze the citizenry at all levels to engage in their own governance in whatever ways they choose.

This report comes after a year and a half’s effort and is issued in early 2019. But the crisis we address is not a static issue that has a one-time solution. It is an ongoing problem that will require continued attention and action. This report is only a beginning point—a compass, not a map.

WE ARE CITIZEN-SOVEREIGNS.
WE MUST ACT AS SOVEREIGNS,
TAKE RESPONSIBILITY AND
MOVE FORWARD.


6. Federalist, no. 10 (James Madison).


8. Jane Anne Morris’s “Try This at Home” was first published in David Solnit, ed., Globalize Liberation: How to Uproot the System and Build a Better World (San Francisco: City Light Books, 2004). It is also available online at http://democracythemepark.org/try-this-at-home/.


14. Richard Edelman, CEO of Edelman, a global communications marketing firm that conducts this survey, is a member of this Commission.


17. More than 70 percent of the residents of the Netherlands, Sweden and Luxembourg tended to trust their government, while fewer than 20 percent of residents of Greece, Slovenia and Spain did. In a new question added in 2017, the survey also found that just over one-third of EU residents (34 percent) tended to trust the media, while almost twice as many (61 percent) said that they did not trust the media. European Commission, “Perception of Key Institutions,” in Designing Europe’s Future: Trust in Institutions, Globalisation, Support for the Euro, Opinions about Free Trade and Solidarity, Special Eurobarometer 461, April 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/comfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/78720.


25. Comstock particularly targeted any publication that discussed contraception, especially the newspaper published by Margaret Sanger that promoted the use of contraception.


28. Mary Baker Eddy, Miscellaneous Writings, 1883–1896, 7:17–24, https://mbeinstitute.org/Prose_Works/MiscWriting.pdf. “Looking over the newspapers of the day, one naturally reflects that it is dangerous to live, so loaded with disease seems the very air. These descriptions carry fears to many minds, to be depicted in some future time upon the body. A periodical of our own will counteract to some extent this public nuisance.”


44. This provision is Section 230 of Title V of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which is known as the Communications Decency Act (CDA). It states: “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider” (47 U.S.C. § 230). For an analysis, see Electronic Frontier Foundation, “CDA 230: Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act: The Most Important Law Protecting Internet Speech,” https://www.eff.org/issues/cda230. The first major change to Section 230 came in 2018 with the passage of FOSTA (Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act), which limits the immunity of online service providers who knowingly host content that promotes or facilitates sex trafficking.

45. In addition to the exemption for facilitating sex trafficking content contained in FOSTA, copyright violations are subject to the notice and takedown provisions of the 1998 Millennial Copyright Act.


47. Although Apple has sold tens of millions of iPhones, Google’s Android operating system now holds a dominant 87 percent share of the smartphone market. Statista, “Global Mobile OS Market Share in Sales to End Users from 1st Quarter 2009 to 2nd Quarter 2017,” https://www.statista.com/statistics/266136/global-market-share-held-by-smartphone-operating-systems.


53. Anderson and Jiang, *Teens, Social Media and Technology*.


55. Gillespie, *Custodians of the Internet*. 

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57. E.g., Roger McNamee, an early investor in Facebook, has been critical of the company. See, e.g., https://www.bizjournals.com/sanjose/news/2018/01/16/roger-mcnamee-facebook-criticism-fb.html.


62. See, for example, Siva Vaidhyanathan, Anti-Social Media (Oxford University Press 2018) and Adam Alter, Irresistible (Penguin Press 2017).


72. Richard Edelman, CEO of Edelman, is a member of the Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy.


97. Matsa and Shearer, News Use Across Social Media Platforms.


102. Gillespie, Custodians of the Internet.


105. See, for example, the list of transgressions Fox News anchor Chris Wallace mentions in his 2017 award acceptance speech to the International Center for Journalists, https://www.icfj.org/chris-wallace-accepts-2017-icfj-founders-award-excellence-journalism.


107. Gallup/Knight Foundation, American Views.

108. Gallup/Knight Foundation, American Views.


115. Wardle and Derakhsham, *Information Disorder*.


120. See, e.g., “‘We are not going to go away.’ US Senators Rail Against Facebook, Google, Twitter Execs” in Fortune, Nov. 1, 2017, http://fortune.com/2017/11/01/senators-facebook-google-twitter/.


127. “76 percent of Americans across the political spectrum have ‘a great deal’ or ‘a fair amount’ of trust in their local television news, and 73 percent have confidence in local newspapers. That contrasts with 55 percent trust in national network news, 59 percent in national newspapers and 47 percent in online-only news outlets.” Lakshmanan and Edmonds, ‘Finally Some Good News.’


134. At the turn of the 21st century newspapers were making triple the profit of the average American business but were seriously cutting state house bureaus. Gene Roberts, Thomas Kunkel, and Charles Layton, eds., Leaving Readers Behind: The Age of Corporate Newspapering (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001).


137. Lakshmanan and Edmonds, “Finally Some Good News.”


143. The text of President Trump’s tweet was “The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBC News, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) are not my enemy, it is the enemy of the people.”


146. A 2018 CBS poll found that while 91 percent of “strong supporters” of the president said they trusted him to provide them with accurate information, only 11 percent of them said the same thing about the “mainstream media.” Anthony Salvanto et al., “Trump Backers Stand by the President in Face of Russia Criticism—CBS Poll,” CBS News, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-backers-stand-by-president-in-face-of-russia-criticism-cbs-poll/?ftag=CNM-00-10aabb&b&linkId=54882667.


160. The Trust Project’s eight trust indicators are:

- **Best Practices:** What are your standards? Who funds the news outlet? What is the outlet’s mission? Plus, commitments to ethics, diverse voices, accuracy, making corrections and other standards.
- **Author/Reporter Expertise:** Who made this? Details about the journalist, including their expertise and other stories they have worked on.
• **Type of Work:** What is this? Labels to distinguish opinion, analysis and advertiser (or sponsored) content from news reports.

• **Citations and References:** For investigative or in-depth stories, access to the sources behind the facts and assertions.

• **Methods:** Also, for in-depth stories, information about why reporters chose to pursue a story and how they went about the process.

• **Locally Sourced?** Lets you know when the story has local origin or expertise. Was the reporting done on the scene, with deep knowledge about the local situation or community?

• **Diverse Voices:** A newsroom’s efforts and commitment to bringing in diverse perspectives. Readers notice when certain voices, ethnicities, or political persuasions are missing.

• **Actionable Feedback:** A newsroom’s efforts to engage the public’s help in setting coverage priorities, contributing to the reporting process, ensuring accuracy and other areas. Readers want to participate and provide feedback that might alter or expand a story.

https://thetrustproject.org/faq/#indicator

161. We note that the White House Correspondents’ Association appears to be doing that for 2019.


165. See, for example, “Listen to America: A HuffPost Road Trip,” *HuffPost*’s initiative, founded in 2017, to travel throughout America and hear directly from its audience. To date, this initiative has interviewed over 1,700 Americans. More information can be found at https://www.huffingtonpost.com/feature/listen-to-america.


172. Penelope Muse Abernathy, The Rise of a New Media Baron. For an interactive map of news deserts, see https://cchisholm.carto.com/builder/d74181a0-3a7e-11e7-a896-0e233c30368f/embed?state=%7B%22map%22%3A%7B%22layer%22%3A%5B18.879259903433023%2C-192.26953983306885%5D%2C%22sw%22%3A%5B74.6553651725243%2C-2.777523330688476%5D%2C%22center%22%3A%5B55.51867953743768%2C-97.52344608306885%5D%2C%22zoom%22%3A3%7D%7D.


175. For example, Sandler family for ProPublica, Craig Newmark for Markup, H.F. Lenfest for Lenfest Institute.


180. A number of witnesses and writers have suggested that new relationships are appropriate between journalism entities and technology companies. For example, some have proposed that technology companies create an endowment for journalism or devise some other form of compensation from technology platforms back to the news sources that they redistribute. The Commission has not gone down this route. We encourage experimentation in new funding models and applaud any reasonable sources of funds for local quality journalism, but we cannot presume here to resolve complex compensation relationships between news entities and platforms.


183. A handful of successful CNOs established in the past decade—some focused on particular communities, some that cover specific beats—are responsible for most of the revenue in the sector. They include Bridge Magazine (Michigan), ChalkBeat (education news in seven cities and states), The Free Press Action Fund in New Jersey, Marshall Project (criminal justice), MinnPost, ProPublica (investigative journalism), the Texas Tribune and The Voice of San Diego.


187. The Commission acknowledges the contribution of John Thornton, a member of the Commission, and Elizabeth Green in the development of this recommendation.


192. For additional information on collaborations currently operating across the country, please see https://www.cpb.org/rfp-tags/collaboration.


194. Mizell Stewart, a member of this Commission, is employed by Gannett.


199. Eric Newton, “The ‘Teaching Hospital.’”


216. In response to criticism related to the negative impact of social media, the leading social media platforms have begun to articulate their mission in larger terms. For example, during testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee, Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey stated that the “purpose of Twitter is to serve the public conversation” and that it is committed to improving the service by encouraging “more healthy debate, conversations, and critical thinking on the platform,” as well as by seeking to eliminate “abuse, automation, and manipulation.” Foreign Influence Operations’ Use of Social Media Platforms, Hearing before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, 115th Cong. (2018) (statement of Jack Dorsey, Chief Executive Officer, Twitter), https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-jdorsey-090518.pdf.


219. The 2018 FOSTA-SESTA (Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act—Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act) forbids online services from carrying content that supports prostitution or other illegal sexual activities. See https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1865.


222. Mark R. Warner, “Potential Policy Proposals for Regulation of Social Media and Technology Firms” (DRAFT, 2018).


225. As defined by Wardle and Derakhshan, *Information Disorder*, 5:

- Misinformation, when false information is shared, but no harm is meant.
- Disinformation, when false information is knowingly shared to cause harm.
- Malinformation, when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere.

226. We note that as of this writing, Europe has an extensive legislative scheme for data protection, as do some individual states in the United States, including California, the locus of many online company headquarters. In addition the FTC has addressed privacy standards including through consent decrees such as that reached with Facebook in 2011. See FTC Press Release, https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2011/11/facebook-settles-ftc-charges-it-deceived-consumers-failing-keep.


232. The following example illustrates a hypothetical breach: “If Waze told me that the ‘best route’ somewhere just so happened to pass by a particular Burger King, and it gave that answer to get a commission if I ate there, then Waze would be putting its own interests ahead of mine,” Zittrain, “How to Exercise the Power.” See also Jonathan Zittrain, “Facebook Could Decide an Election Without Anyone Ever Finding Out,” *New Republic*, June 1, 2014, https://newrepublic.com/article/117878/information-fiduciary-solution-facebook-digital-gerrymandering.


245. The Commission recognizes that there can be a conflict between strategies that promote a healthy civic dialog (e.g., expose users to a variety of viewpoints) and the wishes of individual users (e.g., just show me the stuff that support my own viewpoint). As in other areas, care will be required to balance these different values.


259. A 2018 Freedom Forum survey had a similar result, and another third of the population could only name one. In addition, only one person out of 1,009 surveyed could name all five freedoms. Freedom Forum Institute, “The 2018 State of the First Amendment,” https://www.freedomforum.org/institute/first-amendment-center/state-of-the-first-amendment/.


266. Shapiro and Brown, “The State of Civics Education.”


272. Baseline survey questions could include queries from the U.S. Citizenship Exam and items such as those from the Pew Research Center survey on citizen knowledge.


274. For example, CivicAmerica suggests the following metrics:
   - The number of states that make civics a requirement for graduation (or the percentage of students participating in civics classes before graduation);
   - The percentage of students who are proficient on key indicators of civic knowledge and skills; and,
   - The percentage of students who are active, engaged participants in democracy, including voting and serving in their communities and nationally.


277. The Commission recognizes the contribution of Eric Newton, Arizona State University, to this recommendation.


282. Additional local efforts include (but are not limited to) City of Austin’s Design, Technology, and Innovation Fellows program (https://cityofaustin.github.io/innovation-fellows/); NYC Civic Innovation Lab & Fellows Program (https://beta.nyc/programs/civic-innovation-lab/).

283. Additional federal efforts include (but are not limited to): New America’s Public Interest Technology Fellowship Program (https://www.newamerica.org/public-interest-technology/public-interest-technology-fellowship/); TechCongress (https://www.techcongress.io/what-were-looking-for/).


286. For examples, see the DML Research Hub, https://dmlhub.net.

287. For example, Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org) and the National Association of Media Literacy Educators (NAMLE) (www.namle.net) have ample resources available for downloading.


292. Deb Roy, a principal in this project, is a member of this Commission.


296. For example, at the beginning of the 1980s, “alcohol-impaired driving fatalities accounted for nearly 50 percent of the total motor vehicle traffic fatalities in the United States.” In response, the Ad Council and NHTSA launched its “Drunk Driving Prevention” campaign in 1983. By 1999, the rate of alcohol-impaired driving fatalities had reduced to 30 percent, and as late as 2005, approximately 94 percent of Americans reported awareness of the campaign’s tagline: “Friends don’t let friends drive drunk.” For more information, see https://www.adcouncil.org/content/download/1909/17291/version/1/file/CaseStudy_BuzzedDriving.pdf.


