



Wachovia Financial Center, Suite 3300
200 South Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, Florida 33131-2349
www.knightfoundation.org

News Release

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Contact: Marc Fest, Vice President of Communications, 305-908-2677

Media and Information Projects to Better Inform Communities Nationwide

John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Grants to Fill Information Voids

(Miami, January 14, 2009) Twenty-one innovative ideas that will help residents lead informed lives have received \$5 million from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

The projects are the first winners of the Knight Community Information Challenge, a five-year, \$24 million initiative to help community foundations support creative ways to use new media and technology to keep communities engaged.

“At Knight Foundation, we firmly believe that you cannot effectively manage the affairs of a community in a democracy without the free flow of information. That’s why we believe that information is a core community need, as critical as any to a healthy community,” said Alberto Ibargüen, Knight Foundation’s president and CEO. “Our goal at Knight is informed and engaged communities. Community foundations were established to meet core community needs, so they are logical partners.”

The winning projects include:

- A hyperlocal news site staffed by professional journalists and citizen contributors in the five ethnically diverse towns of Connecticut’s Lower Naugatuck Valley – which have lost their newspaper and local radio station over the last decade. The site will be modeled after an online news source in nearby New Haven.
- “Story-stations” in underserved communities throughout San Diego, including the region’s 18 Indian reservations. The reports will be produced and distributed through a

newly created digital news network spearheaded by the local start-up voiceofsandiego.org.

- A state-wide competition in Minnesota to come up with the best solutions to community problems. Residents will identify priorities through community listening sessions in conjunction with Minnesota Public Radio. Winning ideas will become a reality, thanks to grants from the Minnesota Community Foundation and its partners.

The projects will reach thousands of people with varied backgrounds and interests. For example, seniors in South Carolina will be trained by college students to create content for an online hub that caters to their needs and interests. An effort in Boulder, Colorado aims to reach 18 to 30-year-olds who haven't attended college. There, researchers will experiment with ways to use new media to engage them in civic issues.

Knight Foundation launched the challenge, a matching grant program, to encourage community foundations to fund information projects. The challenge is premised on two strongly held beliefs: 1) in a democracy, information is essential for a community to function properly; it is a core need, and 2) since community foundations are established to meet core community needs, they are logical partners in meeting the information needs of communities.

To help community foundations identify opportunities and craft plans, Knight has created teams of "circuit riders" – specialists who offer access to resources and expertise. Also, Knight, in partnership with the Council on Foundations, is hosting its second Media Learning Seminar February 16-17 in Miami to help community foundations learn more about the information needs of communities in a democracy.

The Knight Community Information Challenge is one of six Media Innovation Initiatives created by Knight. They include:

- The Knight News Challenge, an international contest that funds ideas that use digital media to deliver news and information to geographically defined communities (www.newschallenge.org);
- The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, in partnership with the Aspen Institute, which will propose public policy that will facilitate meeting those needs (www.knightcomm.org); and
- The Knight Center of Digital Excellence, a nonprofit consultancy, that helps communities across the United States ensure digital access for every citizen (www.knightcenter.info).

For or a full list of winners and their projects, visit www.informationneeds.org.

For a video conversation with challenge winner The Park City Foundation, visit www.KnightPulse.org.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes excellence in journalism worldwide and invests in the vitality of the U.S. communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation supports ideas and projects that create transformational change. Visit www.knightfoundation.org

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