

## Decoding the Distribution of Data for Democracy

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LAB D is a research and design lab whose mission is to support the free flow of news and information to the public through journalism. It is the fusion of four components that work together to increase, support and sustain the flow of information through the practice of journalism, to educate and inform the public, thereby strengthening their engagement in the democratic process.

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### **Research**

Understanding the landscape of mass communication and educating the public about its history, structure and role in society

- Conducting research in mass communication, journalism and democracy

### **Advocacy**

creating awareness of the importance of an informed public and lobbying for changes to strengthen the foundation of mass communication

- lobbying to strengthen distribution of information to the public
- Education programming in journalism and democracy

### **Archiving**

Collecting a body of information that will help support ongoing research and development

- Design and development of digital archive
- Supporting research and design efforts

### **Design**

Creating new tools and strategies in support of the flow of content to the public

- Strategy and design for advancing journalism

Through LAB D these four pillars will work to underpin the free flow of knowledge through mass communication by way of journalism, with a goal of strengthening the public's role as active citizens in our democracy. LAB D would be best served in a university or a similar institution with the means to pull all the parts discussed together into a whole with the funding to support its continued growth.

## WHY LAB D

There's been growing concern over the state of our democracy. This concern exist within all sectors of the public's social, international and security interest. Each day we hear concern over our national security and/or the state of our education system. We hear about the dire straights of our economy, our race relations and our strained healthcare structure. These are just a few of the conversations that make their way into our homes. Without the journalism industry we, the public, would be ignorant to the magnitude of the issues weighing on the country. Yet, in spite of its importance the institution of journalism has been stretched of late both finically and culturally.

## THE PROBLEMS

During the past two decades, changes in the way the public engages news media have presented major challenges to the industry, particularly in the area of investigative research and explanatory reporting. Some examples of change:

- A. **Technology:** This shift away from traditional news sources have had a big impact on radio and newspaper over the last decade, with a dramatic drop in their audiences between 2004-2006 and with the advent of mobile devices they have continued spiraling downward.
- B. **Economics:** A drop in ad revenue led to a 30% decline in newsroom staff with the sharpest drop happening in 2006. With less staff news organizations pulled back on the level of investigative journalism projects; which underpins the source material for the entire news industry.
- C. **Media Culture:** Nearly one-third—31%—of people say they have deserted a particular news outlet because it no longer provided the news and information they had grown accustomed to. Changes in consumer sentiment, shifting online user habits, the introduction of social media, and varying forms of citizen

This is a time of major transition. The way in which we communicate with each other has evolved rapidly over the past two decades. No longer are we simply citizens of our local communities we have become a part of a massively networked national and international community. Now more than ever it is important that our individual and community voices are heard. However, these voices need to be informed and vigilant to insure our democratic liberties as we cross the threshold of these changing times.

This is not a new theme there are many conversations, debates, initiatives and products that are working to insure our liberties. However LAB D wants to create a diverse robust environment where the problem can be viewed from multiple angles: Research, Advocacy, Archiving, and Design. Creating a collaborative environment that will foster exciting new possibilities and insights.