

an open letter

to Our Public Media Colleagues

AS 2009 BEGINS, we call on our colleagues to reflect on our public telecommunications mandate and work together to realize its unfulfilled promise: a public media system that truly serves the diverse nation we have become. Unprecedented demographic changes are transforming every aspect of the United States. African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans make up half the population of the nation's largest cities and constitute its fastest growing market segment. Latino and Asian immigrants are putting down roots in rural and suburban America. Pacific Islanders are on the forefront in our increasingly pan-Pacific economy and culture. Native Americans are flexing their political and economic muscle, and America has elected its first African American president.

Caught up in a cyclical struggle for survival, our public media institutions have not kept pace with these changes. If we don't address the diversity gap in our system, we risk failure or irrelevance. Our system suffers from:

- A lack of diverse voices where decisions are made about the present and future of public broadcasting;
- Underemployment of people of color by the nation's public broadcasting institutions, stations, and major content producers;
- A lack of authentic and relevant programming created by diverse producers;
- A resulting lack of diversity among public television and public radio audiences.

In the language of the U. S. Constitution, we strive for political equality where no citizen's interest is disregarded because of race, religion, sex, age, political beliefs or place of birth. Our public media system is the nation's communications public square. It must be open to the full span of community voices, worldviews, narratives, frames, and lenses.

Many of us entered the broadcast field to heed a public service calling articulated by the Public Telecommunications Act of 1967. Let us consider the vision:

- Public media shall serve the instructional, educational and cultural needs of the entire nation.
- Public media shall involve creative risk and address the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities.
- Universal access shall be guaranteed through all appropriate distribution technologies.
- Freedom, imagination and initiative are necessary to the development and expansion of excellent and diverse programming.

These founding principles guide today's call to action. They set forth goals and objectives that are renewable, inspirational and attainable. We now have the bandwidth to build a public media system to serve America's increasingly diverse demographic while remaining vital and relevant to our core audiences. Reaching out to new constituencies while serving existing audiences is the imminent business challenge of the next decade. The challenge is more than a moral imperative: What's at stake is our ability to not just survive, but to thrive in the new media market.

Diversity=Sustainability

Up to now, we have operated via a centralized broadcast system providing content to local stations, which in turn serve local communities. Geography has been definitive. As our system restructures to reflect the changing media landscape, new constituencies will be based on other criteria: generational, linguistic, cultural, instructional, and yet-to-be-defined niche audiences. The delivery systems we develop must reflect this evolving landscape.

The commitment to embrace diversity as a core principle of our work requires that we engage more deeply with its complexity. In addition to race and ethnicity, diversity includes perspectives and identities generally underrepresented in our mainstream media due to geography, income and education levels, physical disability and sexual preference. We must identify and target the following sectors, whose dynamism and fluidity exemplify public media's future audiences.

Patricia Boero
Patricia Boero
Latino Public Broadcasting

Ruth Bolan
Ruth Bolan
Pacific Islanders
in Communications

Stephen Gong
Stephen Gong
Center for Asian American Media

Florence Hernández-Ramos
Florence Hernandez-Ramos
Latino Public Radio Consortium



CENTER FOR
ASIAN AMERICAN MEDIA



America's younger and more ethnically diverse audiences are public media's great, untapped resource. Young viewers and listeners are multilingual and multicultural, passionate bloggers and voracious content seekers. The increasingly commercial Internet positions them primarily as consumers, but they are hungry to exercise their power of choice as global citizens and generators of media content in the new digital landscape. For example, young African American adults, especially college educated, are avid Internet users. They frequent alternative news sources online and download digital content, including radio and television programs, podcasts and interactive media. Our public media system must target these savvy post-broadcast audiences and provide a civic public interest sector in emerging broadcast systems, mobile media and on the web.

At the same time, the digital revolution has yet to make good on its potential to remove barriers. A large percentage of people of color, immigrants and low-income groups remain disadvantaged by the digital divide. Our public media system has a special responsibility to provide universal access to underserved, technologically disenfranchised communities that have not yet benefited from the new delivery platforms. Furthermore, we must develop user-friendly tools to optimize their involvement in public media services. Digital technology offers flexibility to incorporate the linguistic, geographic, and ethnic diversity of America. A revitalized public broadcast system will be based on a more inclusive grid of stakeholders, and play a pro-active role educating diverse constituencies and audiences about how to participate in the new media.

The paradigm shift we describe is cultural and attitudinal as well as demographic. Public media's core audience is comprised of Sixties generation baby boomers who have seen the world and are hungry for global perspectives and diverse viewpoints in the media they consume. Public media must also provide fresh and original content representing the full range of traditions and cultures that make up our American mosaic.

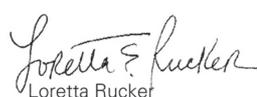
To meet the complex challenges ahead, we must transform not only how we create and provide content. We need a new spirit of inclusiveness and collaboration that engages our ethnically diverse colleagues and taps the broadest range of intellectual and creative capital in our industry. Envisioning the future of public media requires flexibility, imagination, leadership and courage.

To address the new demographics on a strategic scale, we propose the following steps:

- People of color must participate in executive, visionary and creative decision making throughout the public media system.
- Program support and content must reflect our nation's full diversity, broadening the representation as well as perspective of all of public media's content.
- Diversity must be a core component in recruitment, hiring, training, and retention at all employment levels, but particularly in management and leadership positions.
- Effective strategies for the efficient redeployment of resources must meet the criteria of diversity, innovation and inclusion.
- Measurable standards with specific goals must be instituted, including an annual report card to evaluate and reward diversity and innovation in content, programming and delivery.
- Best practices must be developed and disseminated for cross-cultural community engagement and programming strategies.

We call on our colleagues to revitalize our public telecommunications mandate and make common cause to advance this blueprint for change. We commit to a sustainable vision of a public media system that fosters **excellence** and **innovation**; embraces **diversity** as a core principle in services and perspectives at every level of **content** (programming and production), **engagement** (education and outreach), and **human resources** (leadership, training, and management).


 Jacquie Jones
 National Black Programming Consortium


 Loretta Rucker
 African-American Public Radio Consortium


 Jaclyn Sallee
 Koahnic Broadcast Corporation


 Shirley Sneve
 Native American Public Telecommunications


 Loris Taylor
 Native Public Media

