



# AIR TIME

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## AIR OUTLINES A CRITICAL RESEARCH AGENDA

The following essay highlights topics that AIR, Inc. would like to spend some time exploring. These subjects possess local implications, but they often are connected to national trends that are having an impact in other states and communities. Grounded in current realities, the topics all have ramifications for the future of the city and its region.

## The News Media in Transition

The news media is currently in the midst of a major transition period, and this transition raises an important question. If news coverage is critical to citizen participation in the democratic process, then how will the changes that are presently taking place impact this relationship between journalism and the public?

from a daily publication to a weekly magazine format in May. Even the venerable New York Times,

"alternative weeklies" such as City Beat have partially filled the void left by the decline of daily news coverage. Of late, however, City Beat has cut staff and decreased its number of in-depth news stories due to a loss of advertising revenue.

*If news coverage is critical to citizen participation in the democratic process, then how will the changes that are presently taking place impact this relationship between journalism and the public?*

**Applied Information Resources** is a non-profit, public policy research and community information organization dedicated to:

- Citizen education on public issues.
- Assisting human service organizations in evaluating their programs, and
- Providing the best possible information to decision makers responding to changing human and urban needs.

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The biggest change centers on the decline of daily newspapers. Newspapers go out of business at a startling rate, and some pundits predict that daily papers will not survive. The Cincinnati Post stopped operations over a year ago, and the Christian Science Monitor switched

the closest thing that the U.S. has to a national newspaper, is operating with an ever growing deficit.

In recent times,

Meanwhile, local and network TV news seldom produces the depth of reporting once provided by newspapers. Local stations continue to focus on the visual and the sensational, and TV news, with the exception of Public Television, is more and more driven by "entertainment stan-

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## Developing A Citizen Agenda For This Fall's Election

AIR, Inc., utilizing the diverse citizens who are part of "The Citizens' Voice" initiative, proposes developing "a Citizen Agenda" to present to candidates for Mayor and for City Council this fall. Rather than the public merely hearing the platforms of people running for office, the candidates need to hear the ideas and important issues of concerned and involved citizens. The goal is to create a healthy dialogue between candidates and voters as a constructive addition to the traditional season of sound bites and advertising hype.

A constructive dialogue between citizens and candidates for

Mayor and City Council is particularly important due to the current budget crisis and the need for establishing service and policy priorities within the framework of a balanced budget. The proposed "Citizen Agenda" will not be just a wish list of specific spending priorities, but it will include critical policy concerns and questions that need a thoughtful airing if the city is to make progress.

Agenda, but they will help design its framework and format. AIR will also use its WEB-publication, Queen City Forum, to solicit issues and questions for the Agenda. Once the Agenda is drafted, AIR will work with citizens and civic groups to plan meetings, forums, and other venues that use the Agenda as a starting point for healthy dialogues with candidates for Mayor and City Council.

AIR will begin this process by assembling several meetings of "Citizen Voice" participants. Not only will these diverse citizens contribute content for the Citizen

**We would like your thoughts on the four research tasks outlined in the newsletter. As important as we think they are, your comments, endorsement and support are very important. So call, write or e-mail your suggestions-and please consider a contribution. Funding for public policy research is scarce during this period of a recession.**

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dards" and "what sells."

The world of the internet is heralded as the current and future venue for information, and certainly thousands of on-line news sources exist for users to tap. However, this gargantuan on-line resource is subject to few standards pertaining to accuracy, objectivity, or quality.

This leads us back to two questions. How will citizens get their news? And, – will the news be adequate to equip people with the information they need to both vote and participate in community life?

AIR proposes a study that would first present the current status of print, TV, and internet news in Greater Cincinnati. Next,

a series of interviews with journalists and media professionals would be conducted in order to assess their views on the future of news dissemination in this area. Finally, the ramifications of this news transition would be discussed in interviews with diverse community leaders and civic activists.

## The Recent Use of Amendments to the City Charter: An Analysis

In recent years, City Charter Amendments have been used to prevent City Council from taking certain actions. In 1998, The Cincinnati Bengals and other entertainment interests proposed and



successfully campaigned for a Charter Amendment that prohibited City Council from raising the tax on admissions to sports and entertainment events. Last

year, the NAACP and COAST succeeded in passing a Charter Amendment that prohibits the City from using cameras on certain street corners to catch motorists who run red lights or stop signs. This fall will bring yet another Charter Amendment that would bar the City from building a streetcar line without a referendum by the voters.

Some citizen activists praise this approach as a form of direct democracy that allows citizens to involve themselves in determining important local policies. Many students of government question whether such amendments are an appropriate use of the amendment process. They say that charter amendments should

only be proposed when seeking to change the form or structure of city government. Nevertheless, the initiative and referendum are part of the reform tradition that gives citizens the right to directly initiate or repeal laws.

AIR proposes to review this recent trend in Cincinnati. What are the positive and negative impacts of this use of charter amendments? If charter amendments are a poor way to address specific city policies and issues, should an initiative and referendum process be added to the City Charter? What is the proper balance between legislative democracy and direct democracy? These seem to be timely questions to analyze.

## The Least Known Level of Government: Making State Government More Accountable

Major budget crises in states such as California and Ohio have vaulted state governments onto the front page. Most of the time, how-

tures. State government remains the least known level of public life.

Nevertheless, the importance of state government has grown in recent years. It is the primary funder of public education, and many critical health areas and human services in general depend on state allocations. Yet legislators rarely hear from anyone but lobbyists, and citizens are hard pressed to name their state representative.



ever, news media outside of state capitals give very little coverage to the deliberations of state legisla-

functions.

How can people be more connected to their state government? Steps need to be taken to make citizens more aware of both the scope of state government and

how it functions. AIR proposes to launch such a project that will include many interviews, a report, and some public forums.

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**AIR, INC.**

*Public Policy and Research*



**Mayoral Forum**

**Christ Church Community Forum**  
**Thursday, September 24, 2009, Noon**

**Brad Wenstrup**

**and**

**Mark Mallory**