



Center for Social Media

Thank you Pat for your leadership and inspiration. And, thank you Ann Williams and Bree Bowman for organizing this conference to fulfill the urgent mission of the Center for Social Media, media for public knowledge and action.

The work of the Center for Social Media cuts across the three academic programs of the School of Communication: film and media arts, public communication and journalism. The School of Communication brings documentary makers, investigative journalists and media strategists together around the values that inspire American University, values of social justice, human rights and democratic participation.

For 3 years Making Your Documentary Matter has provided a forum on social documentaries and on the public media environment that supports them. Makers, users and funders of social media have made the conference a showcase for the best practices of audience engagement, for media that motivates and frames public debate. And, together, we have set high expectations for the impact of this work in a changing technological environment.

There is no easy map for the digital landscape, but as new forms of technology emerge and mutate, we have to create a shared vision of a vigorous and inclusive public culture.

MYMM and the field of endeavors it represents are indebted to the funders who have embraced our work and helped shape it. The Ford Foundation's public media initiative provides core funding for the Center and this conference. And, the Surdna Foundation's program on Nonprofit Sector Support has helped us involve nonprofit communication practitioners.

Many of the successful projects viewed and discussed at this conference result from the marriage between a skilled producer with an independent artistic vision and the leadership of an organization with a cause, an agenda and a constituency. Nonprofit organizations have valuable assets to deploy in the digital environment-- knowledge and content, trust and brand, audiences and social networks. How do media makers partner with nonprofit organizations, communities and coalitions, where is the fit in a social campaign, in the context of politics and news?

Making Your Documentary Matter has evolved into Making Your Media Matter. A few years ago, the topic of social gaming that opens the conference this evening would have been at the margins of the conference program. The tail is wagging the dog, and that's good. The question is no longer how can digital media serve documentaries, but how do all the tools for representation and interaction engage and equip social networks for democracy?

The success of this conference is measured not just on the quality of the panel presentations, the screenings or the roundtable discussions, but most importantly on the alliances and working relationships that come out of it. So let's bring nerve and imagination to building our collective intelligence, let's work across professional disciplines, let's get smarter together.