

# Community Access Media in the U.S.



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# My introduction to community access media



People TV



Ben Hill Recreation Center

Atlanta, GA  
(2002 - 2010)

# Philadelphia Community Access Media (PhillyCAM)



[phillycam.org](http://phillycam.org)

# Community access television roots

- **Local origination** (CATV, closed-circuit cable, 1950s)
- **Video art and activism** (Portapak, 1960s)
- **Participatory community documentary filmmaking** (Challenge for Change and NYU's Alternate Media Center, 1960s and '70s)

FCC's 1972 Cable Report & Order codifies PEG TV infrastructure.

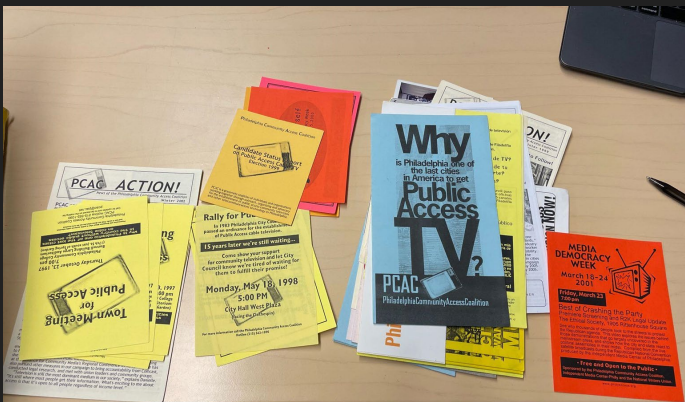
“The philosophy of public access, with its tenets of decentralized communications and participatory democracy, lies at the heart of many today's digital projects” (Drew 2013, 70)

# Philadelphia Public Access Corporation History

Councilman John C. Anderson



December 28, 1983 - October 23, 2009  
3 waves of grassroots media coalitions fought to establish public access television in Philadelphia



# PEG Access Political and Economic Structure



Private commercial use of public rights-of-way



Local Franchise Authority (LFA)  
authorized by the **1984 Cable Act**.

Local governments can request a rent  
payment and access to local  
communication resources in exchange  
for **commercial use of public rights-of-  
way** (poles, streets, sidewalks).

# Community Access Media Distinctions

Characteristics that distinguish public access media from public broadcasting media (like PBS).

- **Political and economic structure**
  - Relationship between the cable industry and local governments
  - Local franchise agreements and cable fees
- **Participatory local production**
  - Local origination
  - Community made, volunteer produced
  - Geographically situated audience
- **Public access culture**
  - Freedom of expression
  - Localism
  - Media education
  - Civic engagement



# U.S. Community Access Media

**HEYDAY (1980s and '90s)**

2500 PEG access channel operations  
nationwide.

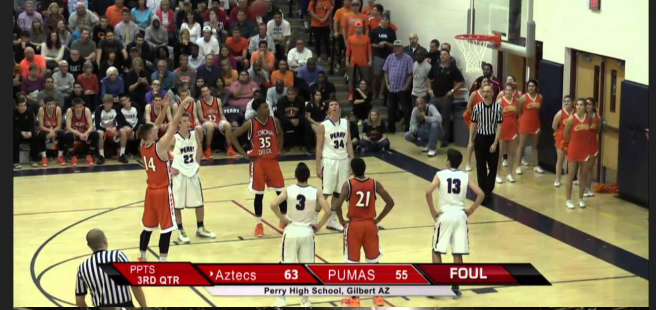
**PRESENT**

1600 PEG-based community media  
entities currently operate 3,000  
channels in the U.S.

Alliance for Community Media

<https://www.allcommunitymedia.org/>

Search the online Community Media Database!





Why do we need  
PEG access media  
when there's  
YouTube?



# Threats to PEG-anchored Media

- Declining cable subscription revenues.
- 1984 Cable Act only gives local governments authority to regulate coaxial cable technology, not fiber broadband.
- Deregulation trends that give cable industry (NCTA-Internet & TV Association) leverage to expand business without regulatory hampering.
- Unclear relevance of PEG-based media in the digital age.



**“Neo-liberal media regimes”**  
(Brian Caterino, 2020)

# What's the relevance of community access media infrastructure in the digital age?

- Promoting localism (Ali 2017; Fuentes-Bautista 2014)
- Fostering liveness and sense of place (Ali 2014)
- Building social capital among historically marginalized communities (Chen et al. 2013; Crittenden and Haywood 2020)
- Shaping civic communication and participation (Rhinesmith 2016)
- Facilitating collective growth and community care (Haywood 2024).



How does PEG  
access media fit  
into this new  
video distribution  
landscape?



# PEG Media Digital Platforms & New Tech

- **Social media platforms**
  - Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, and Snapchat
  - Audience development, connecting with content producers, and general social awareness.
- **Streaming media platforms**
  - YouTube, Vimeo, Roku, Apple TV, Facebook Live, Amazon Fire TV
  - Soundcloud, Tune In, Podcasting sites - growing interest in podcasting.
  - Websites - live channel stream and on-demand video.
  - Increasing value in being accessible on multiple platforms, reaching a broader and younger audience, and maintaining relevance.
- **Digital archives**
  - Community media content sharing network on the Internet Archives.
  - Community Media Review journal on the Internet Archives.
- **XR tech innovation**
  - Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and 360 Video (cross-reality tech) are new frontiers that a cadre of PEG organizations are beginning to explore. PhillyCAM, Public Media Network, and CreaTV are all on board with this migration. This movement is being lead by Brookline Interactive Media in Brookline, MA.



# Keeping Communities Connected in a Pandemic



Greenfield Community Television  
Greenfield, MA (Photo in *Greenfield Recorder*)



Lockport Community Television  
Niagara Falls, NY (Photo in *Niagara Gazette*)

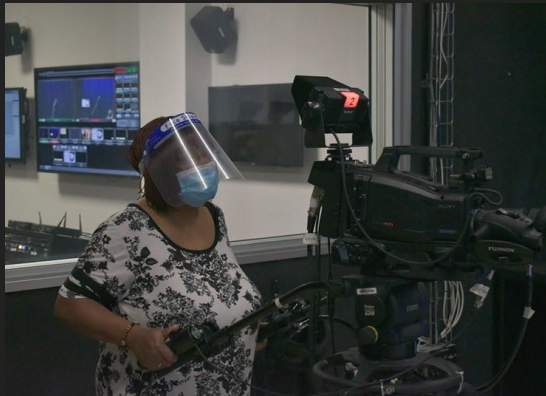
# PEG-anchored Community Media in a Pandemic

1. Communication technology experts.
2. News and information providers.
3. Community convener and public square.

PEGs helped their communities  
pivot to virtual life.

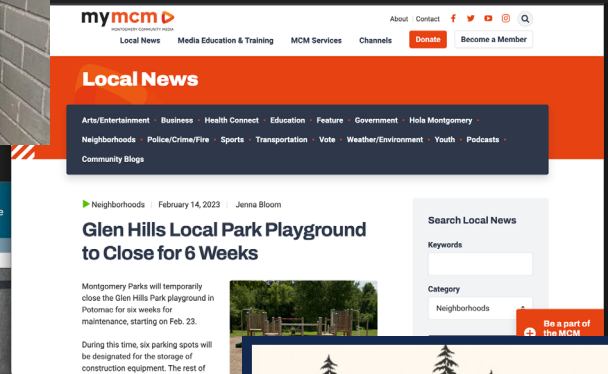
<https://cmsimpact.org/report/peg/>

Full academic paper that was published  
in *Javnost - The Public* can also be  
found on SSRN



# CMCs providing local journalism and civic information services

- PhillyCAM (Pennsylvania)
- Public Media Network (Michigan)
- Akakū Maui Community Media (Hawaii)
- Montgomery Community Media (Maryland)
- Boston Neighborhood Network (Massachusetts)
- Greater Northshire Access Television (Vermont)
- Access Humboldt (California)
- Bronxnet (Bronx, NY)
- Community Media Access Collaborative (California)
- Davis Media Access (California)





# PhillyCAM Year in Review 2023

