

*Continued from the third page.*

- A component that allows residents to get wanted and relevant information from city officials

Through various communication strategies we hope to inform and involve as many residents, community leaders and business owners as we can to be “news” contributors to the site. For example, we are working with local youth interested in journalism who have been significant contributors in the early stages of the project. The students have already increased their own civic engagement by attending city meetings and writing stories for the site.

Another innovative feature of our project that we hope to carry out is a civic engagement survey conducted shortly before and two years after the official launch of our website. In other words, we want to conduct evaluation research to measure our success in achieving our goals — this is rarely, if ever, done with respect to other community websites.

We think that our community-driven strategy reflected in the form and content of a website and our plan to evaluate its success could be put forward as a best practice that may influence other attempts to deploy new technologies in the service of civil society.



# Metamorphosis

For more information on what Metamorphosis has been doing and the projects we are currently engaged in, please visit our Web site:  
<http://www.metamorph.org>.

If you have questions or comments, please contact  
The Metamorphosis Project via  
e-mail at [meta@metamorph.org](mailto:meta@metamorph.org) or  
via telephone at  
(213) 740-1260.

USC  
ANNENBERG  
SCHOOL FOR  
COMMUNICATION

## WHAT IS the Metamorphosis Project?

The Metamorphosis Project was born in 1992, in large part as a result of the uprisings that shook Los Angeles. Dr. Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach, the developer of Metamorphosis, knew that as a communication researcher, she should have something to contribute to policymakers and practitioners trying to bring about social change that enables stronger communities.

*The Metamorphosis Project—Transforming the Ties that Bind*, was officially launched in 1998 at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California (USC). Metamorphosis has conducted research on African Americans and Latinos in Greater Crenshaw and the South Figueroa Corridor; Anglos on the Westside and in South Pasadena; ethnic Chinese groups in Greater Monterey Park; Koreans in Koreatown; Latinos in East LA, Pico Union, Huntington Park, Cudahy, and Southgate; and Anglos, Latinos, and Armenians in Glendale.

Volume 1.6 • 2010

# Metamorphosis

## Creating Community Engagement with a Local News Website

A community works best when there is frequent communication between residents, local media and community organizations about shared concerns and interests. This is the essence of what we call a strong local storytelling network. Our research shows that a strong storytelling network enhances civic engagement. So how does a city with limited connections become one with a solid storytelling network that promotes community involvement? To help illustrate the process, we look at Alhambra, a city neighboring Los Angeles in the San Gabriel Valley region that has a reputation of being a nice place to live given its relatively low crime rate and many parks.



Although the ethnic make-up of Alhambra has changed over the years, the city is still a great example of the diversity seen throughout California. During the 1990s, Alhambra's Anglo population dropped by 40%, the number of Asians in the city grew by about 31% and Latinos remained nearly constant. Today, Alhambra has approximately 85,000 residents. Of those, 11% are Anglo, 36% are Latino and 51% are Asian.

Alhambra's diversity adds character to the city and creates advantages to residents like the availability of a variety of goods and services. But this diversity can also have disadvantages. Previous studies have found that diversity in a neighborhood is negatively related to its residents' levels of civic engagement. Our own research suggests that Alhambra is a city lacking many of the connections needed to create a belonging community — one where people feel positive about and deeply attached to their residential area, and also act on those feelings by engaging in neighborly behavior.

For more than a year, the Metamorphosis Project and the Local News Initiative at the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Communication & Journalism have conducted research in Alhambra to assess the needs and wants



*Continued on next page.*



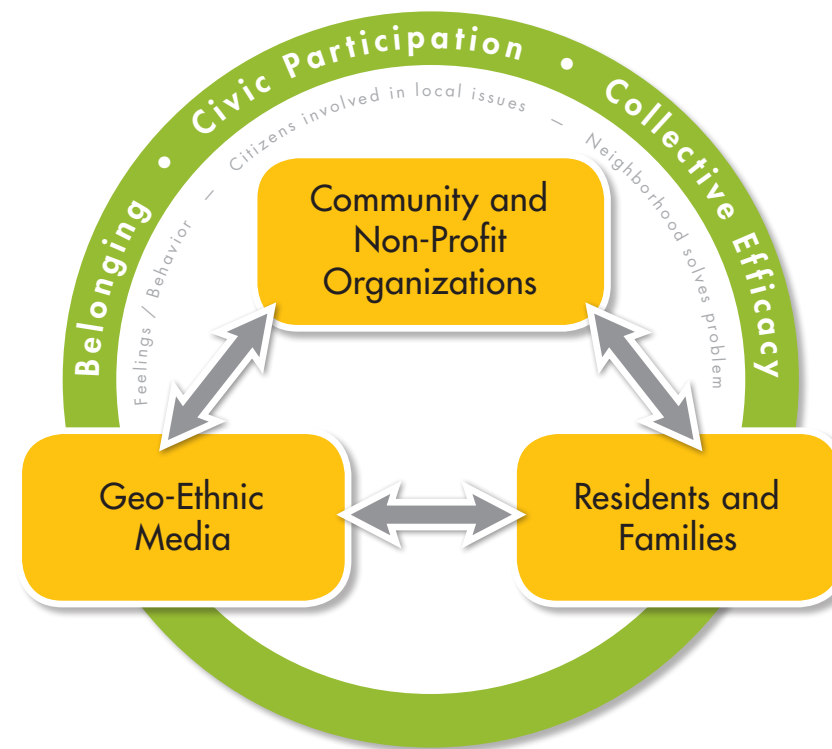
Continued from front page.

of residents and key stakeholders. Our research unveiled some underlying issues that contribute to the lack of connectedness in Alhambra. Among them:

- Limited news coverage by regional media, which includes the *Los Angeles Times*, *Pasadena Star-News*, *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, and about a half dozen ethnic newspapers
- *Around Alhambra*, a monthly newspaper published by the city's Chamber of Commerce, is printed in English and is the only Alhambra-based news source dedicated solely to covering the city
- Limited interaction among ethnic groups due to linguistic barriers and because they do not share connections to the same media and community organizations

Our research also indicates potential opportunities for connection. These include:

- Residents, regardless of ethnicity, share the same concerns about their community, such as traffic, parking and safety
- Residents, regardless of ethnicity, indicate a desire for more information about events and opportunities in Alhambra



The lack of a widely accessible and up-to-date information source in Alhambra is consequential. Research tells us that local news is essential to community building and civic participation. Without knowing what's going on in their city or that they share similar concerns as their neighbors, different ethnic groups tend to lead separate lives. Also, without a common local news source, community organizations struggle to inform residents about their services and causes.

With no frequent supply of local news that can be accessed by both English- and non-English-speaking residents, it is difficult for Alhambra to develop a connected and robust storytelling network that promotes belonging, civic participation, and the collective belief that "we, the residents of Alhambra, can come together to improve our community."

# How does the Metamorphosis Project and Local News Initiative go about creating a connected Alhambra?

We believe what is missing in Alhambra is a local news source, a place where all residents — regardless of ethnicity or language spoken — can go to tell stories as well as receive information about their neighborhood. From this belief emerged the Alhambra Project, a joint communication and journalism initiative at USC. Project objectives include:

- Developing a participatory platform for local storytelling
- Developing a common news source that is accessible to all community residents
- Incorporating linguistic tools to facilitate conversation across ethnic groups
- Serving as a model for local media outlets in ethnically diverse communities

Our ultimate goal: to construct a website that will serve as a shared storytelling network for all residents and stakeholders and, thereby, increase the level of civic engagement.

Through our research — focus group discussions, media monitoring, and interviews with office holders, school officials, business owners and others — we learned that the lack of local news was considered to be the top barrier

to civic participation. We also learned that the Internet was the preferred way to receive such information. So to fulfill our goal, Alhambra Source ([www.alhambraresource.com](http://www.alhambraresource.com)) was developed.

In creating Alhambra Source, one of our key challenges is to come up with innovative ways to construct ethnically inclusive storytelling networks that enable strong community formations. From here, residents can come together in common cause to improve the conditions of their everyday lives and, in doing so, be a building block of civil society.

Ideally, the website will include the following elements:

- Daily aggregated stories from Spanish, English and Chinese media; eventually each story, in full or summary, will appear in all three languages
- Originally reported stories from professional journalists, students and user-generated coverage
- A multi-ethnic calendar of events
- Multi-media stories generated by students and parents that visually narrate Alhambra residents' lives and concerns

Continued on next page.

## ALHAMBRA SOURCE

PLATFORM:	COMMUNITY:	BRIDGING ETHNICITY:	INTEREST GROUPS:
Open-source Drupal	Discussion Forums Individual Blogs Comments "Ask a local official" feature "Suggest a topic" feature	Multilingual Translation Capabilities Visualization Community Mapping Tools	Local Residents Parents High School Students Local Businesses
CONTENT:			
Editorial Aggregated User-generated News			