

ACM Session Proposal — The Future of the Community Media Archive

Working drafts for an Alliance for Community Media (ACM) session submission. Two complete, paste-ready packages (A = stewardship framing, B = pile-to-library framing), followed by the earlier generic drafts. Speaker bio has [Name / role] placeholders to fill.

PACKAGE A — Stewardship framing

Title: The Future of the Community Media Archive

Subtitle: From Operating the Archive to Stewarding the Record

One-line description (≈38 words)

After seventeen years spent *saving* community media to the Internet Archive, the effort is turning from operations to stewardship. See the vision, the two-month pivot that reframed the work, and how your station can help shape what the archive becomes.

Abstract

Every PEG station carries the same quiet fear: that decades of Public, Educational, and Government access programming — the council meetings, the graduations, the local shows nobody else was recording — will simply disappear when a channel is deleted, a platform folds, or the franchise money finally runs out. For seventeen years the Community Media Archive has fought that fear the only way it could: by getting community media onto the Internet Archive before it vanished, roughly 3.2 million items across some 2,200 collections, one worker machine and one uploaded channel at a time. It was heroic, and it was hand-to-mouth. This session asks the question the Archive is now mature enough to take on: once the work is *saved*, how do we make it *matter* — findable, studied, and defensible?

That seventeen-year era was fundamentally operational: a distributed fleet pulling channels down and pushing them up, driven by the standing anxiety that *that video's not going to archive itself*. The past two months mark a deliberate pivot from operating the archive to stewarding it. We built the connective

infrastructure the field has never had: a plain-language, three-part design that tracks what's being collected now, what's verifiably preserved, and — the new frontier — every U.S. local government whose proceedings *should* be in the record but aren't yet. That last piece speaks directly to government access: we began a first map of who publishes their meetings and where, and the beginnings of an agendas-and-minutes contribution to the Internet Archive's Democracy's Library, extending PEG's civic mission into a permanent national record. (Our forensic tooling also surfaced hard truths — including a measurable class of “meetings” that produced no published record at all.)

Where this heads is stewardship rather than solo survival. It looks like Archive Corps, a volunteer program that lets community members contribute at any scale without a career-sized commitment; like captions and transcripts that turn decades of proceedings into something a researcher — or a neighbor, or a city council — can actually search; and like a coverage map that shows exactly where local democracy is going unrecorded. For ACM members, that map is also an argument: concrete evidence of what community media preserves that no one else does. We'll share the vision, contrast it honestly with the operational era that made it possible, and open concrete ways stations can help steward the record their own work created.

What you'll take away

- **From saving to stewarding** — why preserving PEG programming is only step one, and what it takes to make a station's archive findable, defensible, and enduring rather than just stored.
- **Stewardship infrastructure, in plain language** — a three-part design (collecting now / preserved / *should exist*) plus a map of local government that extends your GATV mission into a permanent civic record through the Internet Archive's Democracy's Library.
- **Concrete ways to steward** — how your content and local knowledge feed the archive, and how the forthcoming Archive Corps volunteer program turns preservation into ongoing community engagement — and into evidence of PEG's value.

Speaker bio (≈40 words)

[Name / role] leads the Community Media Archive and the emerging Archive Corps volunteer program, which preserve PEG and community media on the Internet Archive. After years operating the archive channel by channel, [name]'s

focus is now stewardship — making the record findable, defensible, and enduring.

PACKAGE B — Pile-to-library framing

Title: From a Pile of Tapes to a Library of Local Democracy

Subtitle: Making the Community Media Archive Searchable, Mapped, and Usable

One-line description (≈ 37 words)

The Community Media Archive has preserved millions of hours of local democracy; now it's becoming a library. A look at the turn from preserved pile to searchable resource — and what it means for government access and the field.

Abstract

Community media centers hold a paradox at the heart of their value: PEG access is often the *only* system capturing local democracy at scale — the council votes, the school boards, the public hearings — and yet that record sits in a form almost no one can search, tied to platforms and budgets that keep getting more precarious. The Community Media Archive has spent seventeen years preserving millions of hours of that programming on the Internet Archive, and saving it was rightly the whole job. But a preserved pile is not yet a usable one. This session is about the turn now underway: from a pile of tapes to a genuine library of local democracy.

The last two months shifted the work from archiving the record to making it legible. That meant a three-tense design — what the fleet is collecting now, what is verifiably preserved, and which local governments *should* be represented but aren't — and, most relevant to this room, a real map of government access at national scale: who publishes their meetings, where, and in what form. It also meant beginning an agendas-and-minutes contribution to the Internet Archive's Democracy's Library, and building forensic tools that told us uncomfortable things about the civic record — such as how much of it consists of empty placeholders for meetings that were never documented at all. This is the infrastructure that lets a giant video collection become something communities and researchers can actually use.

The future is the part worth gathering around. Captions and transcripts can make decades of GATV text-searchable, so a resident can find every mention of a

rezoning or a budget line across years of meetings. A civic coverage map becomes both a preservation to-do list and an advocacy asset — showing, community by community, where local democracy goes unrecorded and where PEG has and hasn't reached. And an Archive Corps volunteer program invites the people who know these places — a retired clerk, a longtime producer, a student — to add the context automation can't. We'll present the vision, contrast it with the operational era that built the foundation, and discuss what a legible archive of local democracy means for the sustainability and the case for community media.

What you'll take away

- **Why a preserved pile isn't yet usable** — what “legibility” adds (transcripts, full-text search, mapping) that turns decades of GATV into something a resident, researcher, or council can actually find.
- **Government access at national scale** — the emerging map of which governments publish their meetings, plus the agendas-and-minutes contribution to Democracy's Library, and how a civic coverage map doubles as an advocacy asset for community media.
- **Concrete ways to plug in** — how your center's content and local knowledge, together with the Archive Corps volunteer program, help make millions of hours of local democracy searchable and studyable.

Speaker bio (≈40 words)

[Name / role] leads the Community Media Archive and the Archive Corps volunteer program, preserving community media and local-government video on the Internet Archive. The current work turns a preserved collection of millions of hours into a searchable, mapped library of local democracy — and a case for the field.

APPENDIX — Earlier generic drafts (pre-ACM tuning)

Kept for reference; the packages above are the ACM-tuned versions.

Generic Version A — “From Operating the Beast to Stewarding the Record”

For seventeen years, the Community Media Archive has been an act of operational devotion: getting the video record of our community media centers — the council meetings, the school boards, the public-access shows, the local programming — off fragile channels and onto the Internet Archive before it vanished. That work built something remarkable, roughly 3.2 million items

across some 2,200 collections, one worker machine and one uploaded channel at a time. It has also been hand-to-mouth, driven by the ever-present anxiety that *that video's not going to archive itself*. This session is about a different question the Archive is now old enough to ask: not just how much more can we preserve, but what does this collection want to become — and who gets to shape it?

The past two months mark a deliberate step off the operational treadmill and onto the underdeveloped parts of the mission. Rather than only feeding the archive, we began making it *legible and extensible*: a federated design of three plain-language databases — what the fleet is doing now, what is preserved for certain, and what *should* exist but isn't archived yet — plus a first map of every U.S. local government and whether it publishes its meetings online, and the beginnings of an agendas-and-minutes contribution to the Internet Archive's Democracy's Library. Along the way, forensic tooling surfaced findings the operations era could never see — including a large class of “documents” that turned out to be placeholders for meetings that never posted an agenda at all, a measurable record of civic silence.

The future this points to is stewardship rather than solo operation. It looks like Archive Corps — a volunteer program that lets community members contribute at any scale without a career-sized commitment — and like enrichment (captions, transcripts, search) that turns millions of hours of proceedings into something a researcher, or a neighbor, can actually find. We'll share the vision, the two-month sprint that reframed the work, and concrete ways community media practitioners can help steward the record they've spent their careers creating.

Generic Version B — “From a Pile of Videos to a Library of Local Democracy”

The Community Media Archive holds one of the largest and least-studied records of American local life: millions of hours of city councils, school boards, public hearings, and community programming that exist almost nowhere else. For seventeen years the job was simply to *save it* — a distributed fleet quietly pulling channels off dying platforms and uploading them to the Internet Archive, building a collection of some 3.2 million items. Getting it preserved was the whole mission, and it was enough to fill every hour. But a preserved pile is not yet a usable one. This session is about the turn from pile to library.

Over the past two months, we shifted from archiving the record to making it *findable*. That meant a three-tense data design — present (what the fleet is doing), past (what's verifiably preserved), and future (every local government whose proceedings *should* be in the record but aren't) — and the first real map of who

publishes their meetings and where. It also meant beginning an agendas-and-minutes contribution to the Internet Archive's Democracy's Library, and building forensic tools that told us hard truths about the corpus, such as which "documents" are empty shells for meetings that never happened on paper. This is the connective tissue that lets a giant video collection become searchable and studyable.

Where it's headed is the part worth gathering to discuss: captions and transcripts that make decades of proceedings text-searchable; a civic map that shows exactly which communities are missing from the record; and an Archive Corps volunteer program so the people who know these communities — a retired clerk, a longtime producer, a student — can add the context machines can't. We'll walk through the vision, contrast it honestly with the operational era that made it possible, and open the floor on what a genuinely legible archive of local democracy and media could do for the field.

General 3-bullet takeaways (first pass, before per-version tailoring)

- **A new frame for your station's archive** — how the effort is shifting from the operational grind of *saving* community media to *stewarding* it: making decades of PEG programming findable, searchable, and defensible, not just preserved.
- **Government access as national infrastructure** — how the emerging map of which local governments publish their meetings, plus the agendas-and-minutes contribution to the Internet Archive's Democracy's Library, extends your GATV mission into a permanent civic record — and doubles as a coverage map you can use to make the case for community media's value.
- **Concrete ways to plug in** — how your center's content and local knowledge feed the archive, and how the forthcoming Archive Corps volunteer program lets community members contribute at any scale, turning preservation into ongoing community engagement.