

# Crowd-Funded Journalism Comes to L.A. as Spot.U.s Partners with USC Annenberg's School of Journalism

Contacts:

David Cohn, [David@spot.us](mailto:David@spot.us)

Geneva Overholser, [geneva@usc.edu](mailto:geneva@usc.edu)

(Sept. 22, 2009) LOS ANGELES – Spot.U.s, the community funded journalism project founded less than a year ago in San Francisco, announces it is expanding to Los Angeles through a collaboration with USC Annenberg's School of Journalism. The USC Annenberg partnership, which will integrate Spot.U.s' innovative news delivery method with the journalism academy and strengthen ties to the local media community, is made possible by additional funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, one of the original backers of the project. Among other things, the grant will fund local staff to coordinate freelancers and publications in the LA area and further site development.

"We've had a lot of success in the Bay Area, and we want to be a network for community journalism, not just a single city site," said Spot.U.s founder David Cohn. "We are committed to civic journalism because that is what has been hit the hardest, and to really cover civic issues, you have to be local. The partnership with USC gives us the perfect opportunity to work in another city taking all we have learned and built in San Francisco."

A pioneer in community-funded journalism, Spot.U.s is the only "crowd-sourced" Web site that focuses on local, long-form reporting. Visitors to the site may choose to donate money to support investigative reporting into an issue of their choice. Once completed, the reports are solicited for distribution through local media outlets – If no outlet is found, the story is posted on the Spot.U.s site. If wider distribution is found, the story is sold to the outlet and the donation is refunded. By encouraging partnerships with other news organizations, the project expanded the readership of its stories beyond the site, collaborating with national news giants like The New York Times and local organizations including The Oakland Tribune and radio station KALW.

Launched in November of 2008 after being selected a winner of the Knight Foundation's "Knight News Challenge," over 800 people have funded more than 30 projects on Spot.U.s with an average donation of just over \$40. The site has also received support from local foundations like the Full Circle Fund. "The Knight Foundation funded – and continues to fund – Spot.U.s because it uniquely combines local investigative journalism with Web 2.0 technology," said Gary Kebbel, journalism program director at the Knight Foundation.

Stories funded by Spot.U.s cover the gamut of community concerns, from environmental to budgetary to cultural. "Breaking the Wall of Silence" is an investigative report into the civilian oversight of police in Oakland. A story from the City Budget Watchdog series, "A Tale of Two Zip Codes," examined diminishing anti-poverty programs in the Tenderloin neighborhood. One popular story, "Follow the Trash," which details where a local community's recycling goes after pick up, turned into a collaboration with San Francisco magazine, allowing those who helped fund it to reinvest their money in other stories.

"With traditional journalism models facing economic challenge, it's clear that we must find new ways to

support the critically important work of journalism. Spot.Us represents a new way to ensure that communities get the stories that matter most to them," said Geneva Overholser, director of the USC Annenberg School of Journalism.

**Links:**

<http://spot.us/>

<http://annenberg.usc.edu/>

<http://blog.spot.us/>

<http://la.spot.us>

<http://knightfoundation.org>

<http://www.fullcirclefund.org>

<http://newschallenge.org>

**About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Since 1950, the foundation has granted more than \$400 million to advance quality journalism and freedom of expression. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote community engagement and lead to transformational change. For more, visit [www.knightfoundation.org](http://www.knightfoundation.org).

**About the USC Annenberg School for Communication**

The Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California was founded in 1971 with generous support from Ambassador Walter H. Annenberg. Its strategic location in Los Angeles enables it to foster dynamic synergies and multidisciplinary approaches to the study of communication and journalism through unparalleled access to the nation's and the world's entertainment, media and technology industries. Today, with more than 80 full-time faculty members, more than 1,900 undergraduate and graduate students, and dozens of research and public interest projects and programs, including the M.A. degrees in Journalism, Specialized Journalism and Specialized Journalism (The Arts) and the Knight Digital Media Center, USC Annenberg has become a center for discussion among scholars and professionals in journalism, communication, public policy, media, and education. [annenberg.usc.edu](http://annenberg.usc.edu)