



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Technology
on the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment
November 22, 2011

Good afternoon Chair Cabrera and members of the Council Technology Committee. My name is Rachael Fauss, and I am the Research and Policy Manager for Citizens Union of the City of New York. Citizens Union is an independent, nonpartisan, civic organization which promotes good government and advance political reform in our city and state. For more than a century, Citizens Union has served as a watchdog for the public interest and an advocate for the common good.

Thank you for the invitation to testify today regarding the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment (MOME or "Office"). We greatly appreciate the committee's decision to hold a hearing on this new office, which was created just a year-and-a-half ago by the Mayor, merging the existing Office of Film, Theatre, and Broadcasting with the new entities of NYC Media and NYC Digital, and later prompted the hiring of a Chief Digital Officer. Citizens Union this past summer discussed with the Committee's Chair and Counsel that the Office would be a good topic for a hearing to get a better understanding of its work, and so we thank the committee in recognizing the importance of this Office in promoting transparency of government operations. We also met with the MOME and representatives of the Mayor's City Hall Office in September, and met separately with Chief Digital Officer Rachel Sterne at a meeting of the New York City Transparency Group, of which we are a member, this past summer. Those meetings have informed the recommendations we are making today, which we have already provided to the MOME.

Our recommendations for improving transparency of government proceedings with the NYC Media division of the MOME are as follows:

NYC Media

- 1. Televis City Council Stated Meetings and press conferences in real time or at least the same day on the NYC gov channel and/or broadcast them on 91.5 Radio NYC proceedings.** "The Council" show has typically aired material that is weeks or even months old, greatly reducing its relevance to the public despite recent improvements in timeliness. If there is not adequate airtime for showing government proceedings, blocks of airtime can be created by consolidating similar programs covering places to go/see in New York that are broadcast on the NYC gov channel. Each of these programs, for example, has a specialization, but same overall theme: *Its My Park*, *Daily Beast's "My New York"*, *Only in New York*, *-NYC 4 Free, \$9.99*, *Cool in Your Code*, *That's So New York*, *Toni On! New York*. We understand that the MOME is transitioning to timelier broadcasting of these proceedings, as it is upgrading its facilities and technological capacity, and encourage it to air proceedings on the same day when it becomes possible.

2. **If Council meetings are televised live on NYC gov, they should also be streamed live on its website**, as is done currently for the delayed proceedings (see http://www.nyc.gov/html/media/html/tv/nyctv_gov.shtml). The Council currently webcasts its Stated Meetings, so if NYC gov were to air Council proceedings live, including committee hearings, it should clearly advertise that it has these meetings available in its streaming video.
3. **Televisе on NYC gov and/or broadcast on the 91.5 radio station in real time or at least the same day Council committee meetings and hearings, weekly City Board of Elections and other agency, commission, board and public meetings and hearings on NYC gov.** Ideally NYC gov should provide video of more city government proceedings, which will serve to further inform New Yorkers of the activities of its many agencies, commission, and boards.
4. **Webcast public meetings of all city agencies, boards, commissions, task forces, and other governmental entities.** This can be done cheaply through sites like Livestream, and if the City were to negotiate a contract for all agencies, it could probably stream video at a lesser cost than the already cheap offerings on the site. We have attached a survey Citizens Union completed of major agencies showing their practices regarding webcasting along with other transparency efforts related to their meetings.
5. **Archive NYC gov programs on the Video on Demand website so users can view them online as is done for selected NYCMedia TV shows from its other channels, but not for government video**, except for "City Scoop," which is a two-minute recap of clips featuring some government initiatives each week (see <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycmg/nyctvod/html/home/home.html>). If this is done, **videos, agendas – including as appropriate lists of bills/issues and materials being considered – and transcripts for each program should be archived together.** Again, NYC gov's website should be the central hub of city government video online. To the extent that there is not enough airtime to broadcast all city government proceedings on NYC gov, online video may provide an alternate means of providing additional video to the public.
6. **Post the schedule for NYC gov programming on all relevant websites.** For example, advertise on the Council's homepage "The Council" show by linking to the NYC gov channel's schedule.
7. **Create podcasts for shows on NYC gov** (see <http://www.nyc.gov/html/media/html/radio/radio.shtml>).
8. **Use Radio NYC, an on-hold public announcement system currently available on over fifty thousand New York City agency phones, to remind New Yorkers to register to vote or obtain an absentee ballot just before deadlines to do so for each election, or to register as a lobbyist or report periodic filings with the City Clerk's office** (see http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycmg/74/media/audio/radio_nyc_56k.aspx).

NYC Digital

- 1. Create or allow for the private creation of apps to provide more information about the workings of the City Council, citywide elected officials, borough presidents, and city agencies modeled on the one for the Mayor which is done for NYCMedia programs (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/nyc-media-app/id433177943?mt=8>). Tools such as this could be used to inform users of activities of the City Council and city agencies, and notify users about when hearings, meetings, or press conferences will be held, and when they will be aired on NYC gov. The federal government is opening up its data and allowing for the creation of applications in coordination with Facebook to better shed light on the legislative process of the Congress, as reported in the New York Times last week.¹**
- 2. Add Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Flickr, and Wordpress government pages for the Council, individual Councilmembers, citywide electeds, and borough presidents to the “Official City of New York Social Media Sites” page. Invite quasi-city agencies like the City Board of Elections to participate as was done for the Department of Education.**

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to testify regarding Citizens Union's recommendations for the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. Together, we believe these recommendations will enhance the Office's efforts to provide greater transparency of government proceedings and to consolidate the video offerings of city government, both online and on the NYC gov channel. We encourage the Council and the MOME to work together to think of creative ways to better inform New Yorkers about the activities of city government.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

¹ <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/11/17/house-leaders-plan-facebook-hackathon/?pagemode=print>