

On December 20 and 21, 1990, a small group gathered in a borrowed conference room in Washington D.C. to launch an initiative I call, at least provisionally, the "Cultural Environmental Movement." The agenda for that meeting, a draft mission statement, and the list of those who attended are enclosed. At the conclusion of the meeting, the participants agreed to form a Steering Committee for strategic planning.

I am writing to ask you to join that Committee and to share in the leadership of this movement. We should end up with an international group of about 30 members representing varied interests (including media professionals and creative workers) but a common concern about our mass-produced symbolic environment.

Several foundations thought to be friendly to the idea of media activity found our proposal for a small grant to bring a core group together in Washington, D.C. "outside their scope." We decided to go ahead anyway. The disadvantage was that we could only invite those in or near Philadelphia or Washington D.C. (where most of the group live). The advantage is that we start with no dependency of any kind. (Let me hasten to add that the virtue of such independence is born more of necessity than of principle. We will need to raise some money as we proceed.)

At the December 20-21 meeting we spent most of the time going around the table expressing ideas, advancing suggestions, raising questions, discussing alternatives. Here are the main points that came out of our meeting.

\*Grass roots effort and much more specificity are needed. Develop examples of successful and desirable activities.

\*Regional meetings ("hearings?") should bring together local organizations. A consortium of existing organizations is needed to support local effort.

\*The main task should be coalition-building and constituency-building to support policy initiatives. Should CEM be a membership organization or a coordinating mechanism for local organizations, or both?

\*The mission statement, while generally good, is too abstract for grass-roots work. Make concrete policy suggestions. Define what is dysfunctional and what alternative visions might be offered. (On the other hand, the need for more policy discussions and development was also stressed.)

\*We are not yet ready for a large conference. The Steering Committee (or a smaller coordinating group that can meet easily) should develop and propose a strategic plan, an organizational structure, an approach to funding, and a timetable.

\*Existing local and national organizations should be contacted with a "survey" to test interest and elicit information about experiences with media, suggestions for goals and policies, examples of successful (and not so successful) activities, willingness to join a consortium or loose confederation, ability to contribute, interest in a national (or international) conference, etc.

I am asking you to reflect on this initiative, the name, the statement, the suggestions and questions, the idea of a conference, the organizations that should be approached if the last suggestion is supported, and on specific projects and policies. New and different ideas, alternatives, objections, and cautions are welcome. I know that this is an ambitious and perhaps presumptuous request. But I know of no better way to launch this movement. And I trust that in the long run we will find the investment worth while.

We need your advice, contributions and expression of willingness to collaborate in this effort. The work can be as much or as little as you can give. Representation of your interests, concerns, experience, and ideas are the crucial ingredients. I look forward to hearing from you and will keep you informed.

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner  
Professor of Communication and Dean Emeritus  
Tel: 215 898 6776 Fax: 215 898 2024  
Internet, Bitnet: FGG@ASC.UPENN.EDU