

## Summary of Public Access Channel Request for Information/Comments

### Introduction

The City and County of San Francisco, California (“City”) oversees the operation of two public access cable channels, known as “Access SF.” Access SF channels appear throughout San Francisco on Comcast and Astound Broadband cable television services, and on AT&T’s U-verse video service.<sup>1</sup> Since 1999, these channels have been operated by San Francisco Community Television Corporation (“SFCTC”) under a Grant Agreement with the City.

The Access SF channels face at least two major challenges over the next 12 months. First, the current channel Grant Agreement will terminate on June 30, 2009. Second, the channels face the loss of operating funding under new state video franchise laws.

Between June 26 and August 12, 2008, the City’s Department of Technology (“DT”) conducted a comprehensive information gathering process to develop proposed recommendations to address these challenges. DT completed the following tasks:

- Reviewed the history of Access SF performance metrics to determine compliance with the grant agreement and identify trends;
- Issued a Request for Information/Comments (“RFI/C”) and distributed it to the Access SF community, local nonprofit and commercial video/film industry leaders, educational institutions and other interested parties;
- Conducted an online survey with current and former public access viewers, producers and training workshop attendees;
- Conducted public meetings on July 14 and August 12, 2008 to solicit comments from Access SF Producers and the public.

DT has posted this report, as well as all responses to the RFI/C and Online Survey on the web at <http://sfgov.org/publicacesstv/>

Part One of this Report provides a summary of the results of a review of SFCTC’s compliance with the provisions of its Grant Agreement with the City. Part Two provides a summary of the online Producer Survey. Attachment I includes letters from Access SF Producers with concerns about channel policies and operations. Attachment II includes the formal responses of SFCTC and others to the RFI/C. Attachment III provides a summary of the comments made during the two public meetings. Attachment IV includes a “case study” of the Denver, Colorado public access facility, Denver Open Media, which has developed a successful model to respond to problems similar to those of San Francisco.

DT’s proposed recommendations will be released under separate cover.

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<sup>1</sup> Public access channels differ from “public broadcasting” or PBS channels. PBS channels operate under a non-commercial broadcasting license issued by the Federal Communications Commission, and are available to viewers as an over-the-air channel, as well as on cable and most DBS satellite services. Public access channels are available only on cable services.

## **Part One: SFCTC Compliance with Grant Requirements**

Since 1999, San Francisco Community Television Corporation (“SFCTC”) has operated the public access channels under a Grant Agreement (“Grant”) with the City. The Grant establishes various terms and conditions required to be met by both parties, as well as a “Grant Plan,” setting minimum operating requirements for administration, outreach, training, production/facilities/equipment services and programming/playback.

The Grant Plan provides two variations of the scope of services requirements, one for operating with an annual budget of \$678,000, and the second for annual budgets between \$678,000 and \$811,000. While SFCTC received funding in excess of \$678,000 for a portion of the grant period, the City limits review at this time to these less stringent benchmarks established for the lesser budget. In addition, the City has limited its review to the most recent five years of the Grant (2002-2007).

As a preliminary matter, SFCTC deserves acknowledgement for achieving a number of significant milestones during the Grant term:

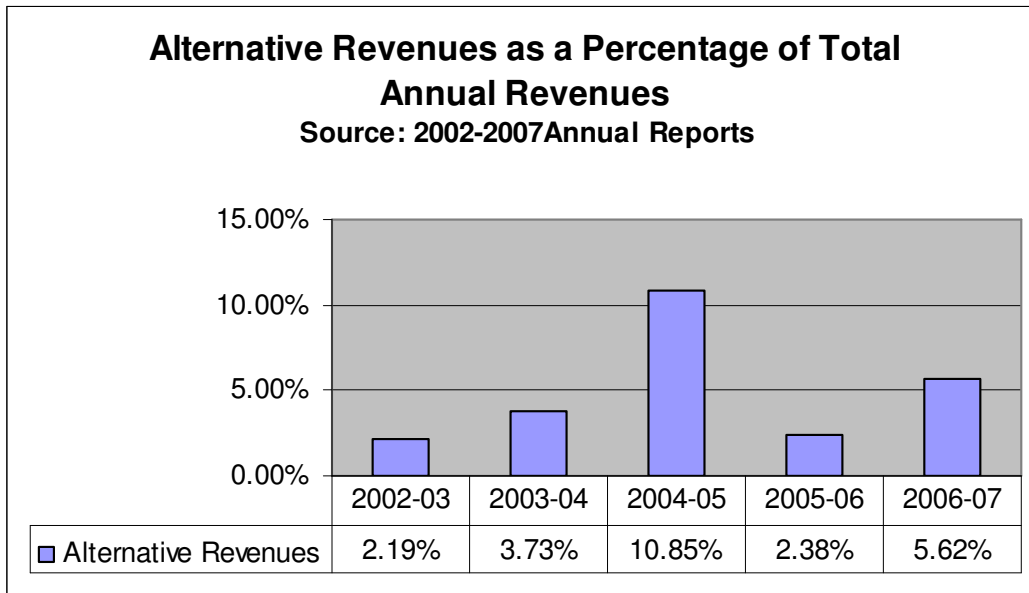
- Managed the construction of a \$1.7 million public access television production facility, completed in 2002;
- In partnership with the League of Women Voters of San Francisco, provides quality, non-partisan media coverage in advance of each local election since 2003;
- Launched an individual membership program in 2003;
- Expanded to oversee a second public access channel in 2007;
- Developed a nonprofit outreach and membership program in 2006;
- Provided production services to nonprofit groups and government agencies to publicize numerous public interest issues;
- Recognized with numerous awards, including a WAVE award for the in-house talk show, The San Franciscans.

SFCTC has met or exceeded many of the requirements established in the Grant and the Grant Plan, with several notable exceptions, described below.

Public Access to Meetings. Section 13.4 of the Grant Agreement provides that SFCTC shall hold open board meetings in the manner set forth in Sections 12L.4 and 12L.5 of the City’s Administrative Code. Chapter 12L.4(1) provides, among other things, that SFCTC must designate and hold at least two meetings each year that are open to all members of the public, and that during at least one designated public meeting the public shall have an opportunity to address the Board of Directors on membership on the board and to propose candidates for membership on the board.

However, SFCTC’s Board meetings are not entirely open to the public because they are held in the AccesSF facilities, and certain individuals have been suspended due to violation of AccesSF rules and are prohibited from entering these facilities. Chapter 12L contains no exceptions or limitations for individuals who are suspended or otherwise under sanctions by the nonprofit entity (although anyone who fails to follow the meeting rules and decorum may be ejected from that particular meeting).

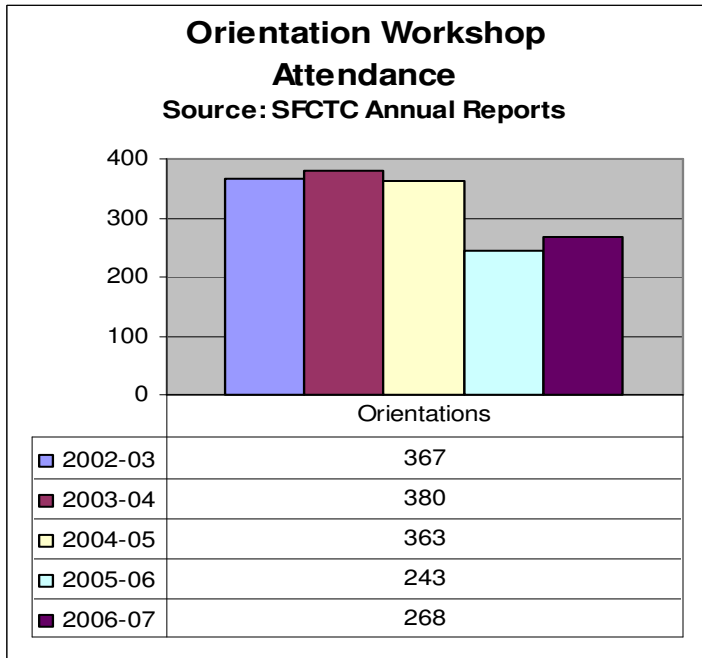
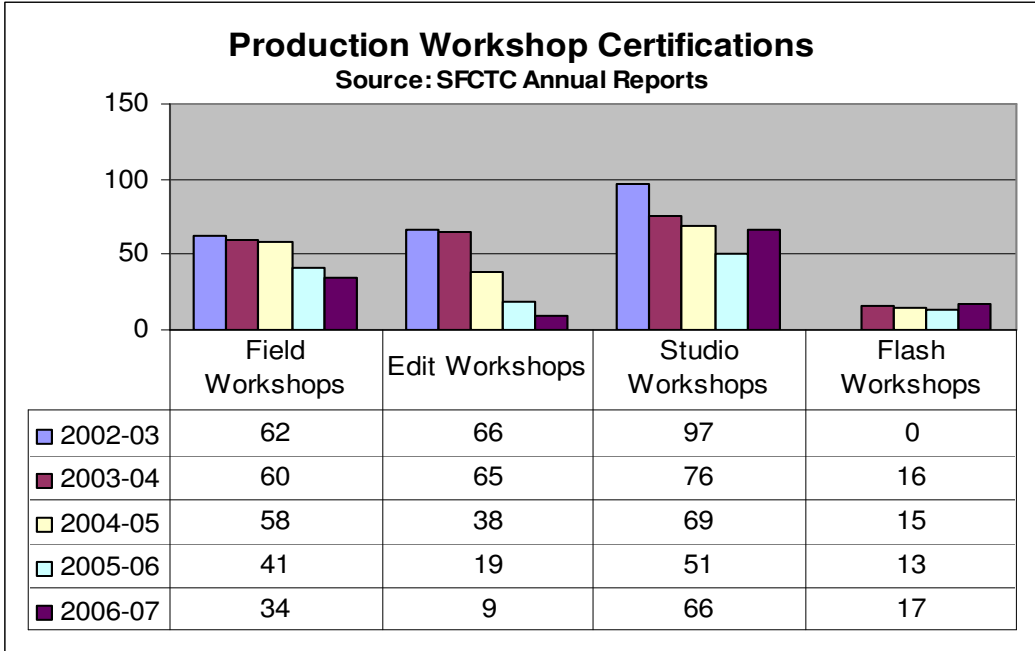
Administration Minimum Requirements. SFCTC has failed to meet the following administrative requirements: 1) developing and conducting revenue-generating activities, including grant writing, development of underwriting support, and other activities; and 2) developing and implementing a five year plan designed to provide the equivalent of 15% of the operating budget from alternative revenue sources to enhance or expand services by increasing operating budget. Over the past five years, SFCTC has exceeded 10% in annual alternative revenues only once. In 2006-2007, SFCTC raised only 6% of its budget in alternate revenue sources (\$46,074 of the \$820,074 budget).



Moreover, SFCTC provides little documentation of grant or underwriting development in its Annual Reports, reporting the receipt of only one grant for \$12,000 from J-LAB, the Institute of Interactive Journalism over the past five years.

Outreach Minimum Requirements. SFCTC generally has met the minimum requirements for outreach. However, declining demand (see below) for AccesSF training and production services suggests that these outreach efforts have not been effective.

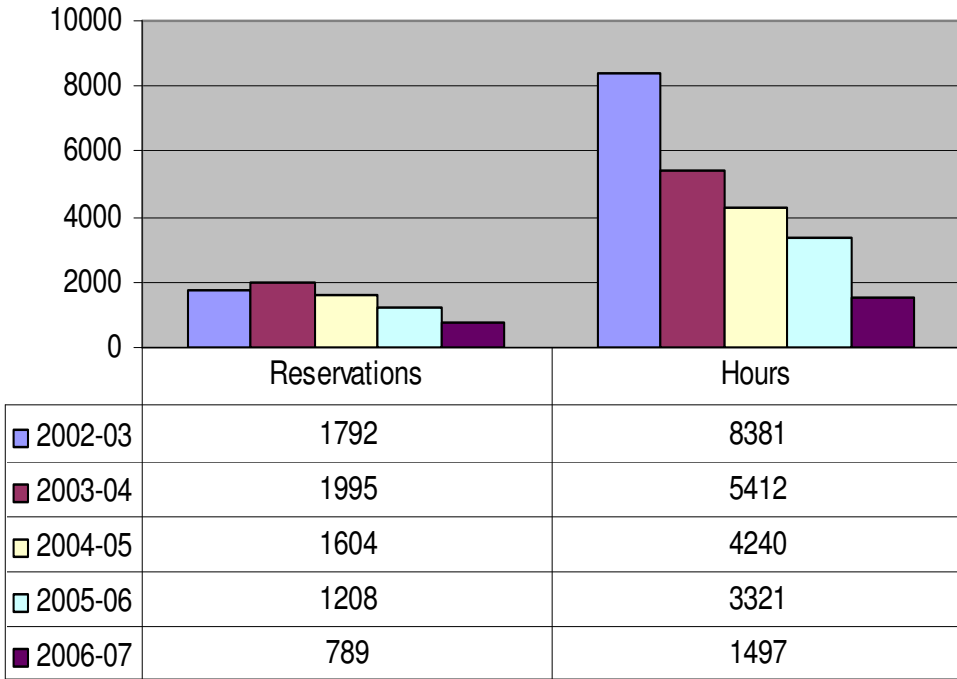
Training Minimum Requirements. In 2006-2007, SFCTC did not meet the annual enrollment minimums for field production (40), editing (40) or flash studio (18) workshops, and only exceeded the studio workshop minimum by two attendees (64). SFCTC has never achieved its required minimum for flash studio attendance. Training attendance has been generally declining for the past five years, as demonstrated below:



Production/Facilities/Equipment/Services Minimum Requirements. SFCTC appears to have met the minimum qualifications for this category. However, according to its Annual Reports, usage for Edit Systems and Main Studio has declined over the past five years. See the charts below.

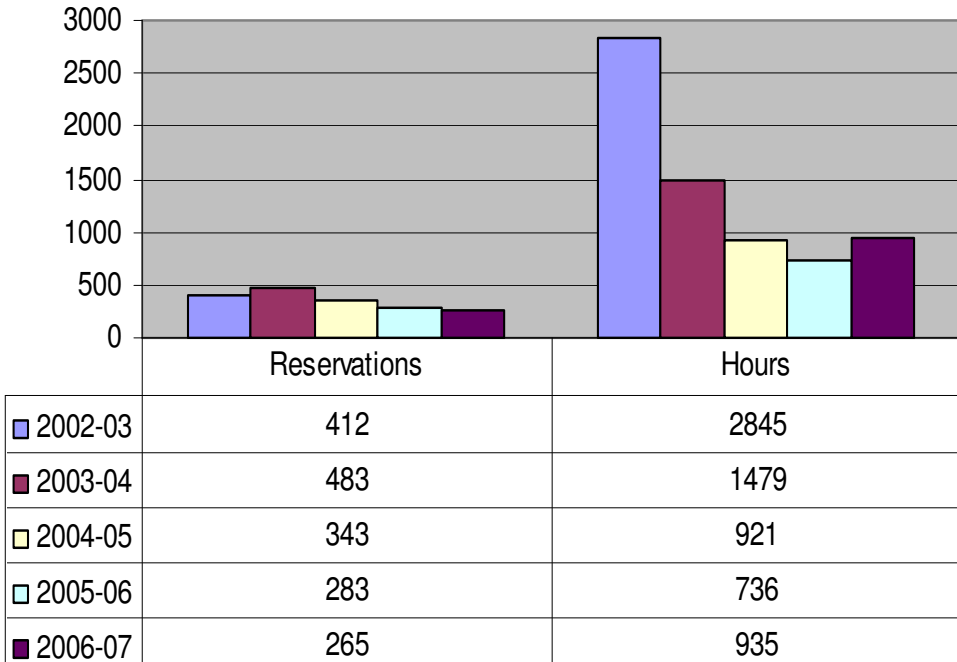
### Edit Equipment Usage

Source: SFCTC Annual Reports

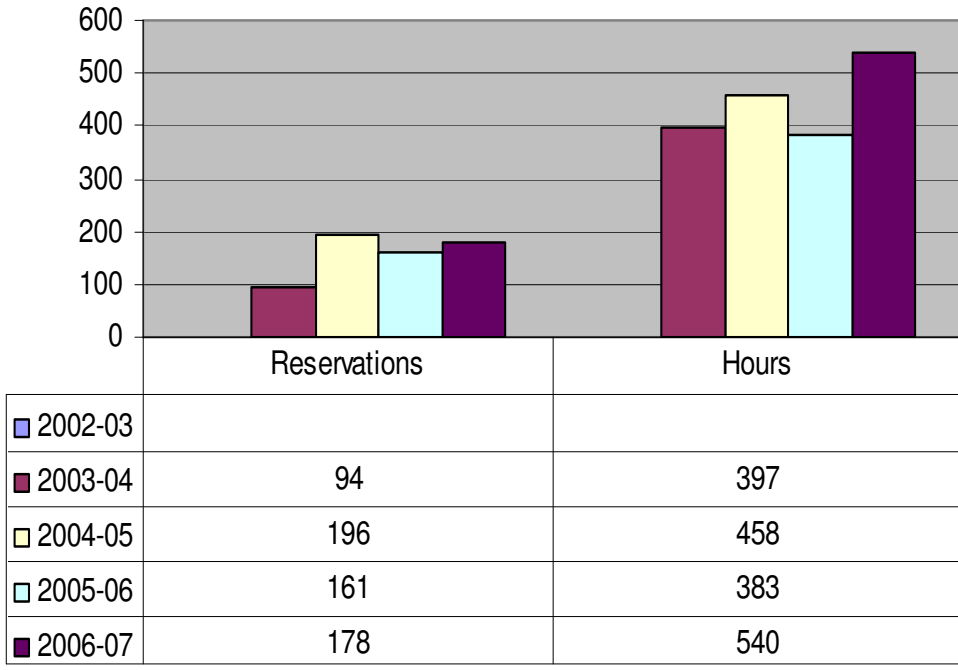


### Main Studio Usage

Source: SFCTC Annual Reports

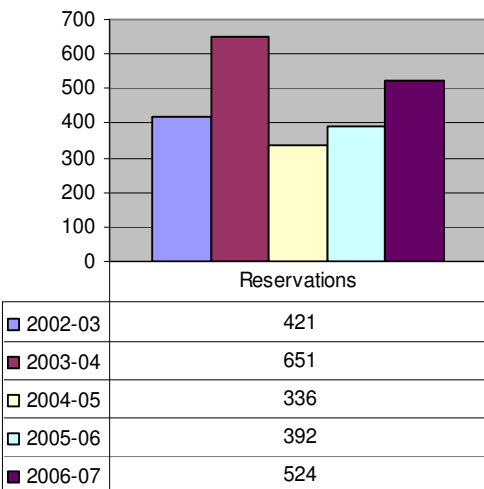


### Flash Studio Usage Source: SFCTC Annual Reports

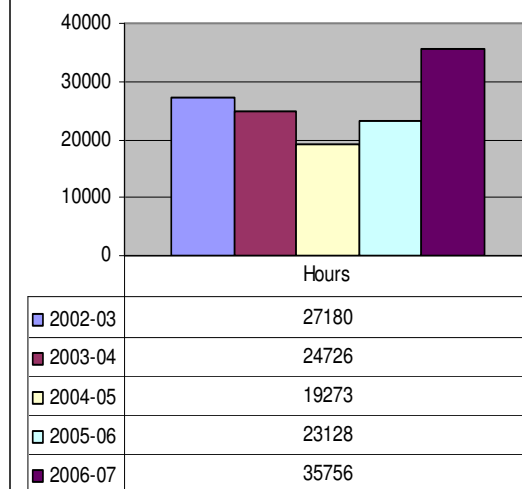


\*No Flash Studio usage reported in 2002-03

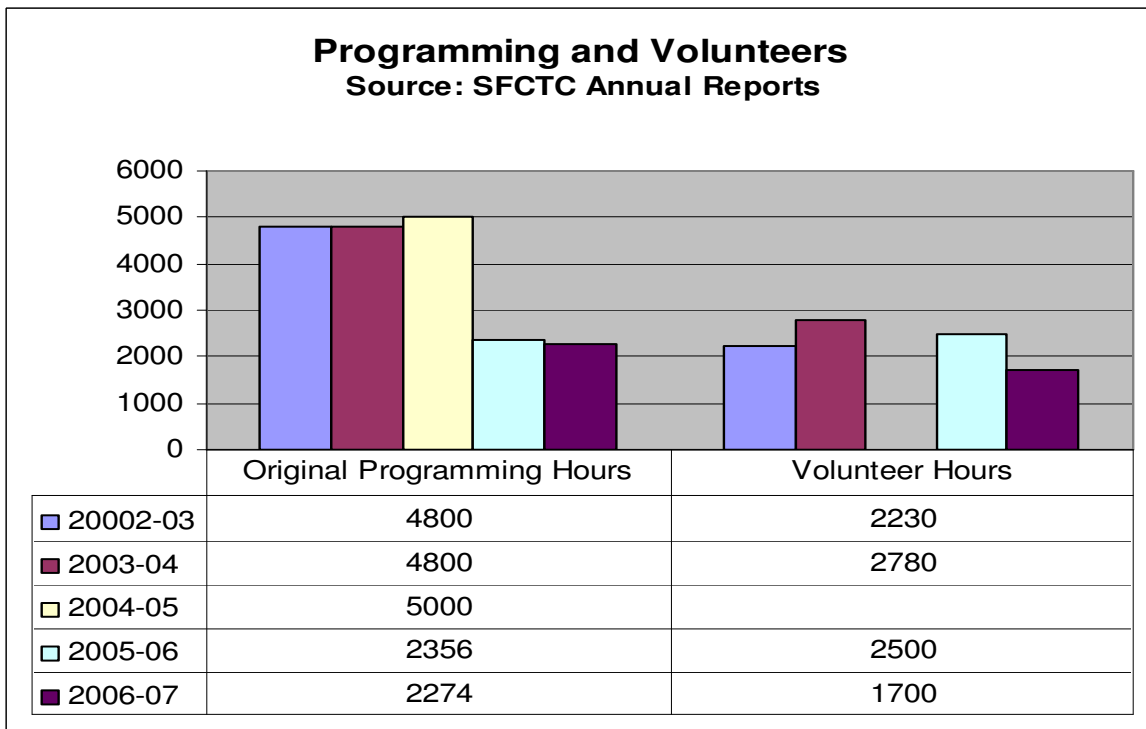
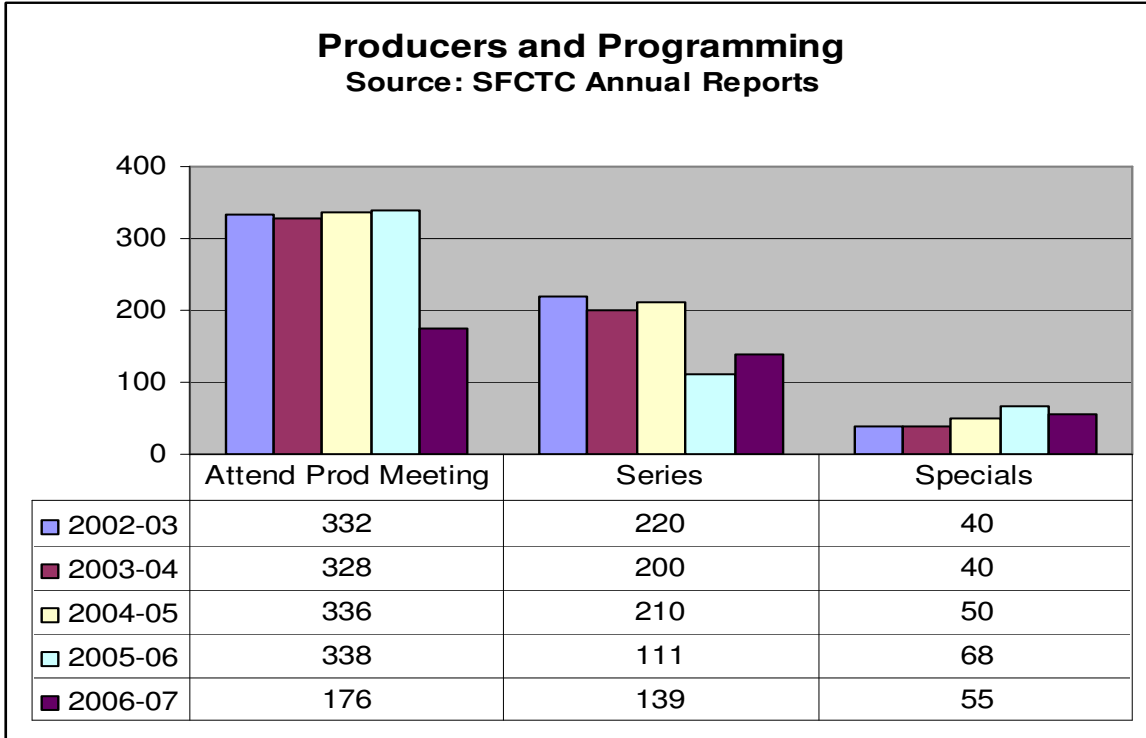
### Field Camera Reservations Source: SFCTC Annual Reports



### Field Camera Hours Source: SFCTC Annual Reports

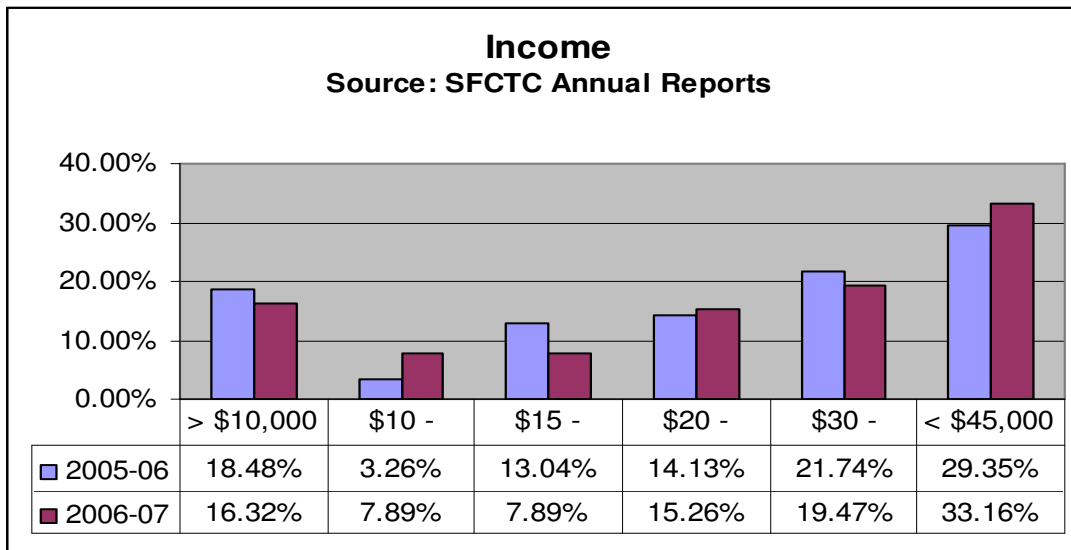
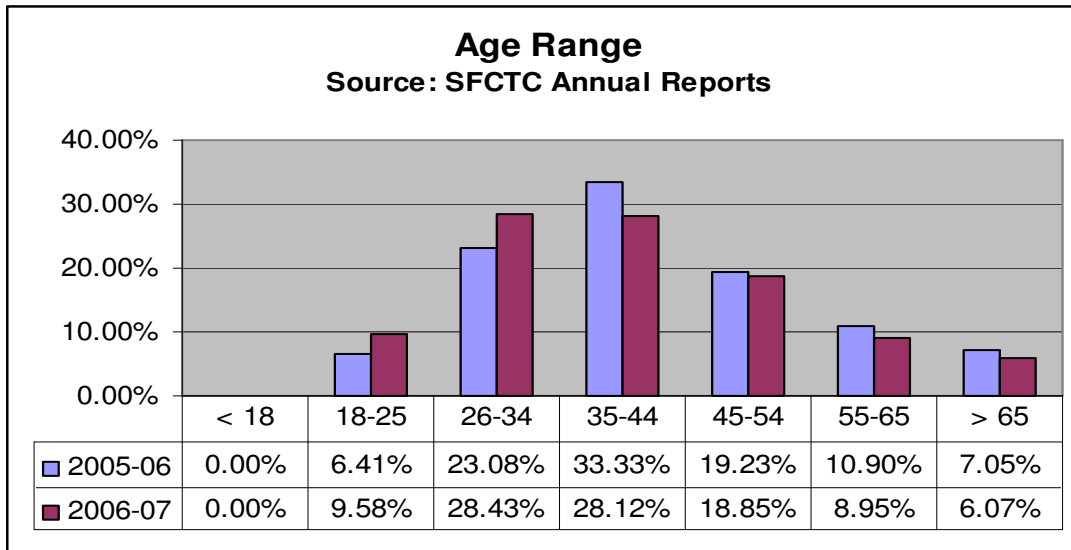


Programming/Playback Minimum Requirements. SFCTC has generally met the minimum qualifications for this category. Again, however, demand for most services has declined in recent years. In particular, original programming, producer attendance at meetings and volunteer participation has declined significantly:



\*No volunteer hours reported in 2004-05

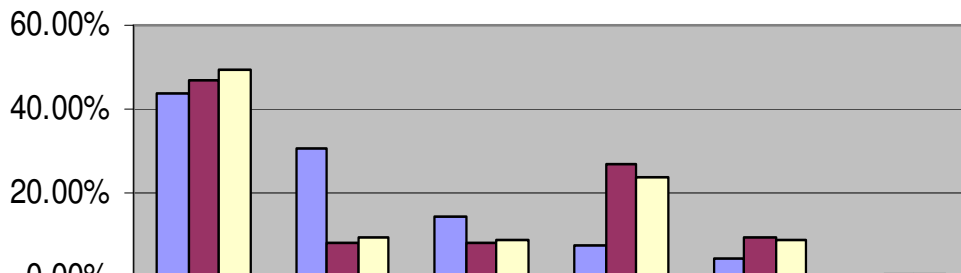
Demographics and Diversity. SFCTC conducts a demographic survey of its clients each year. The results for the past two years indicate that over half of SFCTC's clients surveyed are between the ages of 26-44, and two-thirds earn under \$45,000 per year:



When the ethnicity of surveyed users is compared to San Francisco's overall population, SFCTC is lagging in participation by some ethnic groups, particularly Asian and Latino ethnic groups. Also, SFCTC clientele is overwhelmingly English-speaking. Non-English speaking populations are nearly non-existent.

### Ethnicity Compared with 2000 San Francisco Census

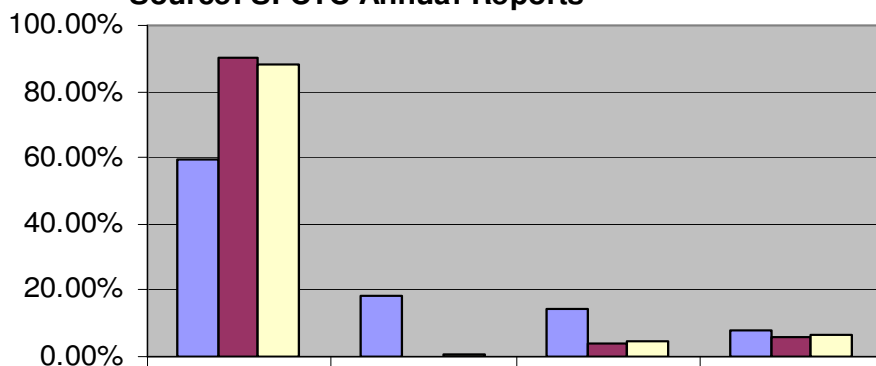
Source: SFCTC Annual Reports



	White	Asian	Latino	Black	Other	Native
■ 2000 Census	43.60%	30.70%	14.10%	7.60%	4.10%	0.30%
■ 2005-06	46.86%	8.37%	7.95%	26.78%	9.21%	0.84%
■ 2006-07	49.25%	9.14%	8.77%	23.51%	8.58%	0.75%

### Primary Language

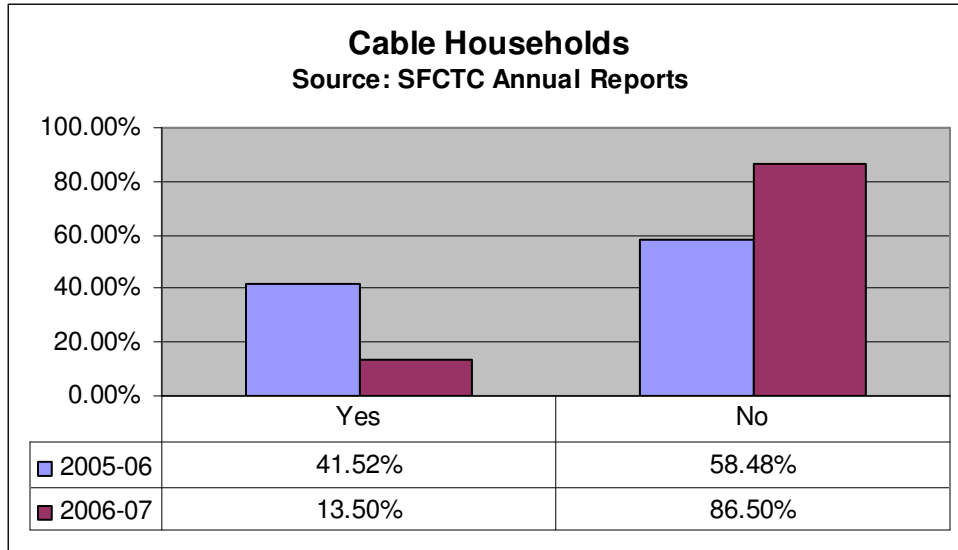
Source: SFCTC Annual Reports



	English	Asian	Spanish	Other
■ Language Spoken at Home*	59.71%	18.53%	14.13%	7.62%
■ 2005-06	90.21%	0.00%	4.20%	5.59%
■ 2006-07	88.18%	0.68%	4.39%	6.76%

\*Source: University of Michigan "CensusScope," <http://www.censuscope.org/index.html>

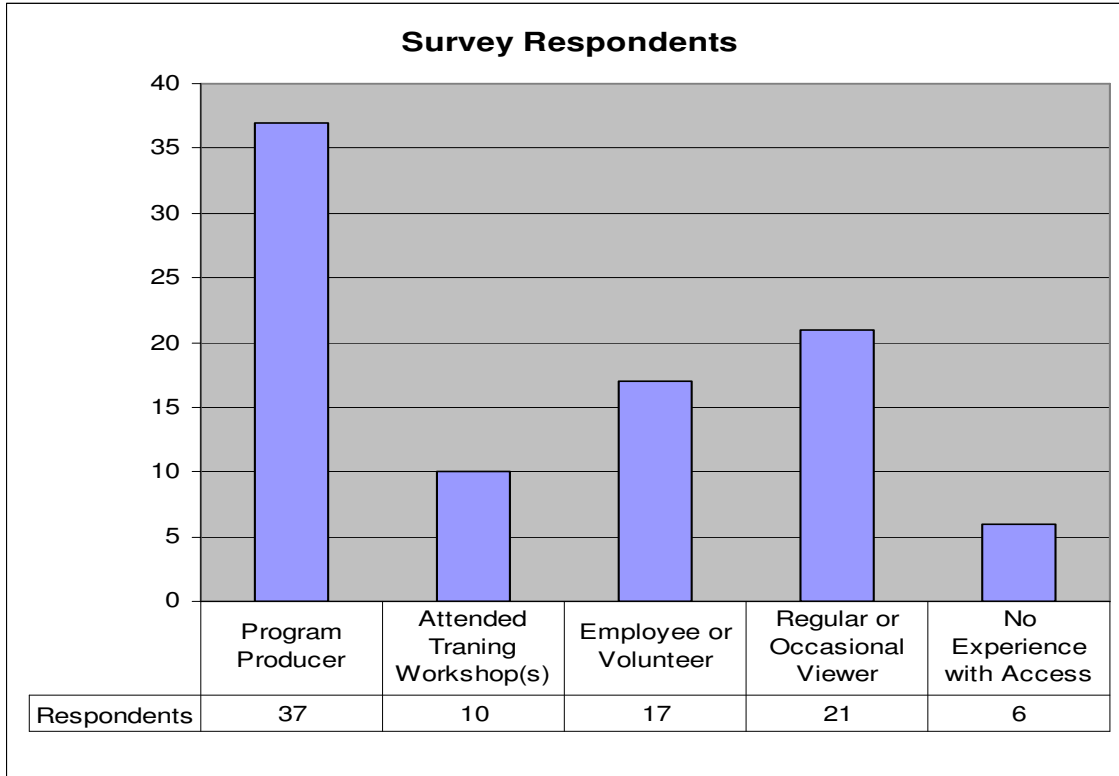
Notably, in 2006-2007, over 85% of SFCTC's clients are not cable television subscribers, indicating that those who bear the cost of funding the channels (though cable fees) do not widely use the facilities.



Correspondence from Producers. DT has received several letters and other communications from Producers with concerns about the operations and governance of the facility. Several recent letters are included in Attachment I as samples of this feedback.

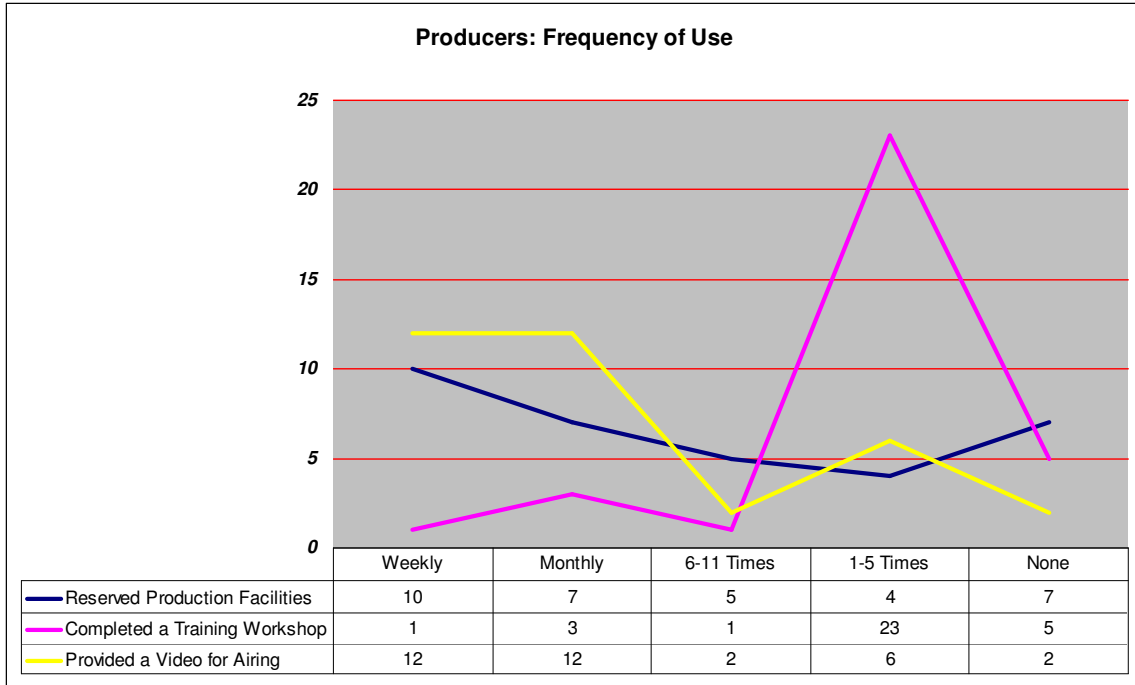
## Part Two: Summary of Public Access Producer Survey Results

The Department of Technology (DT) developed an online survey to collect data about service use, viewing preferences, and needs and interests from public access producers, training participants and viewers. The survey includes responses collected between June 26 and August 13, 2008. We sent out two notices about the survey to the AccesSF email list of approximately 2,800 email addresses. A total of 91 valid responses were collected during the time period, including 37 respondents who categorized themselves as Producers.



We filtered all responses by Program Producer, to identify any trends specific to that subset of respondent.

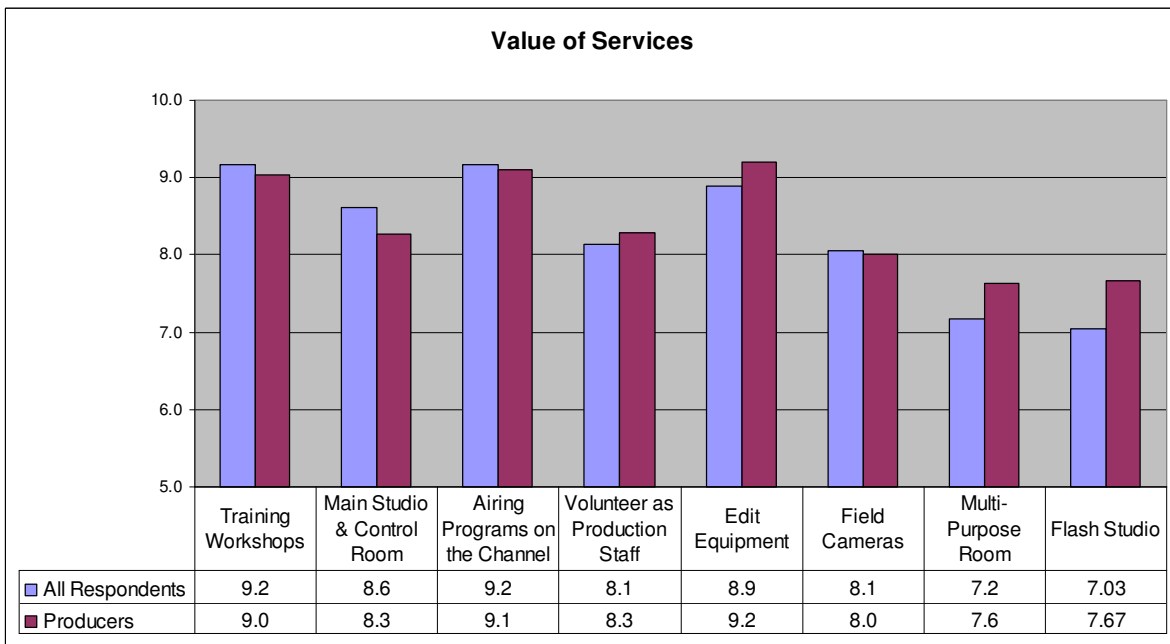
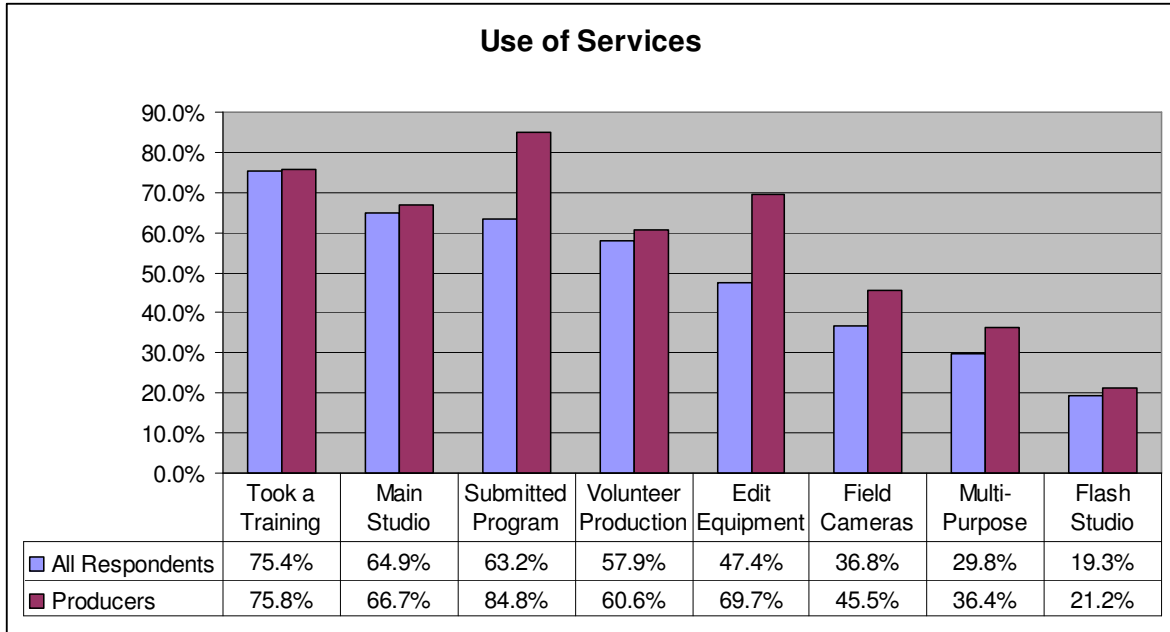
Frequency of Use. We asked how often, over the past year, Producers (1) reserved production facilities; (2) completed a training workshop; and (3) provided a video for airing. Seventeen Producers indicated that they reserved production facilities at least monthly, and 24 Producers provided a video for airing at least monthly. Twenty-Eight Respondents completed a training workshop at least 1-5 times in the last year. Seven Producers did not reserve production facilities and five did not take training.



Usage and Value of Services. We asked two questions designed to estimate the overall usage and value of eight services provided by AccesSF: Training, Main Studio, Airing Programs, Volunteers, Edit Equipment, Field Cameras, Multi-Purpose Room and Flash Studio.

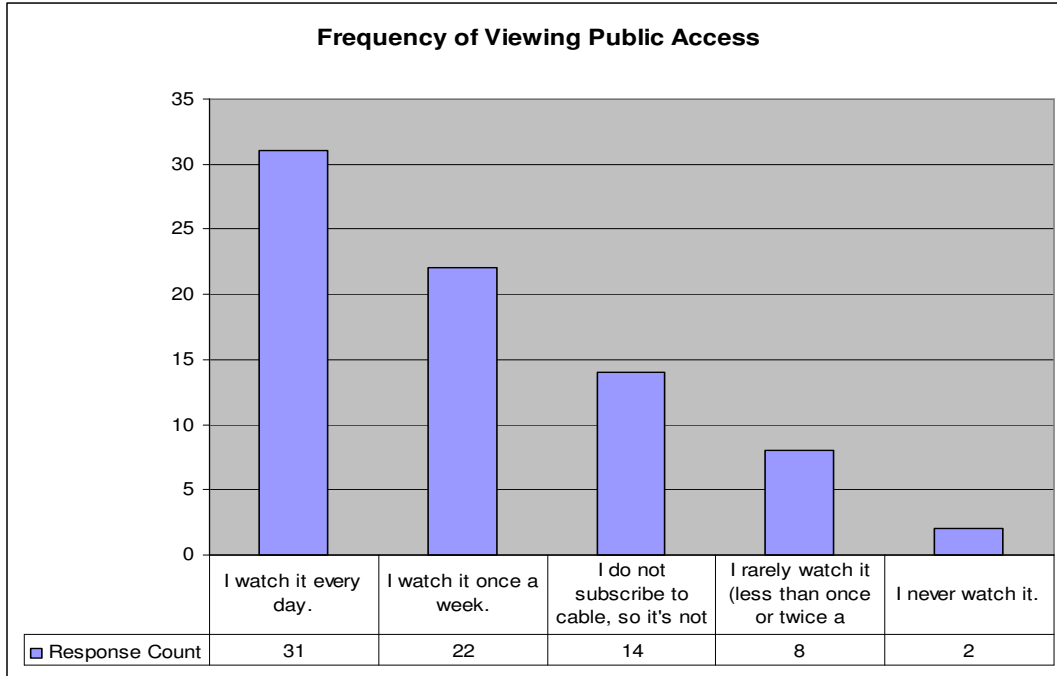
Among all respondents, Training achieved the highest scores in both usage and value, followed by Airing Programs, Main Studio and Edit Equipment (Volunteering scored higher in usage but lower in value).

Among producers, Airing Programs scored highest in usage, followed by Training and Edit Equipment. Those three services also were statically tied for highest value among producers. Field Cameras, Multi-Purpose Room and Flash Studio all scored lower in both usage and value among all groups.

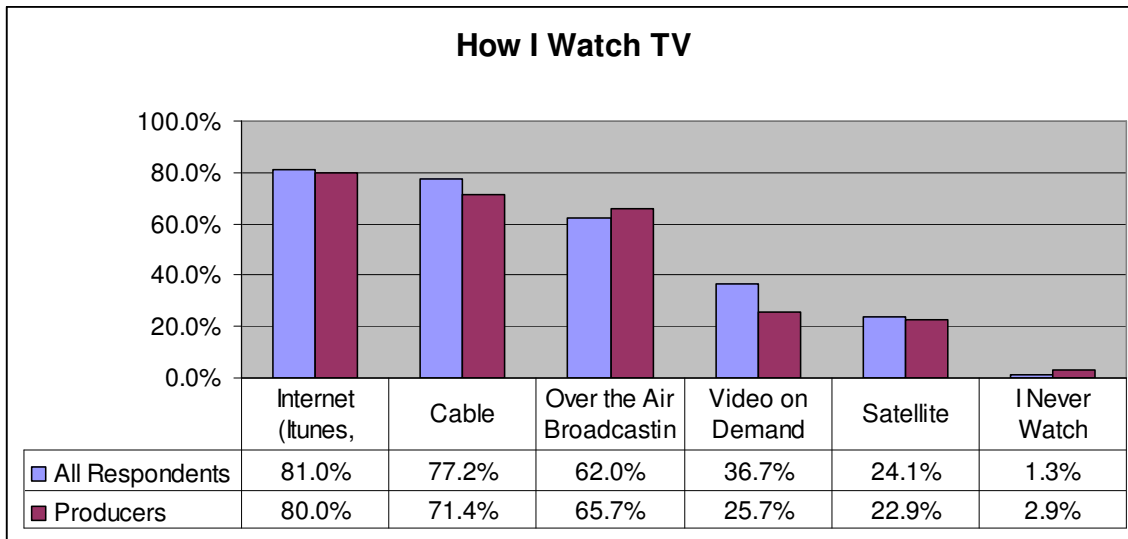


Viewing Preferences.

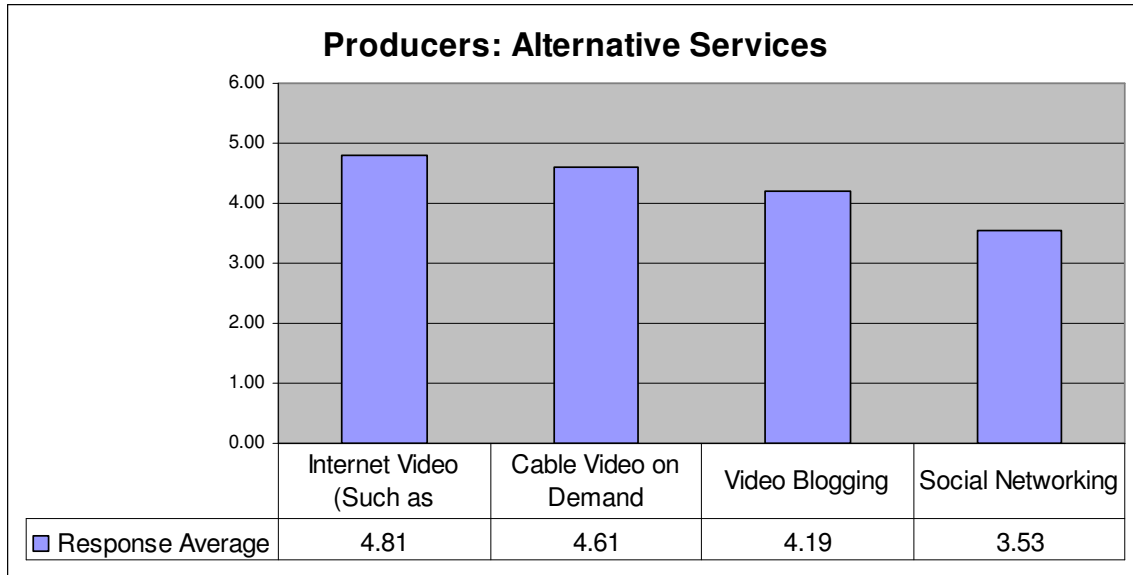
1. How often Public Access is Viewed. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they viewed AccesSF at least weekly. Fourteen respondents are unable to view the channels because they do not subscribe to cable services.



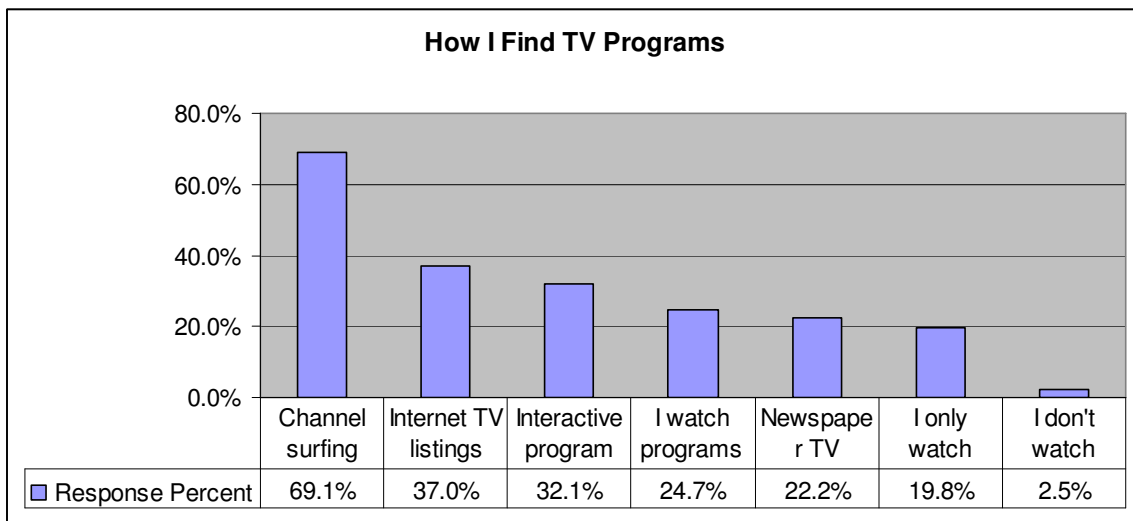
2. Video Distribution Channels. We asked respondents how they watched television. Surprisingly, a slight majority of respondents indicated that they watched video over the Internet than via cable service. This majority was more pronounced among producers. Slightly over one-third of respondents and one-fourth of producers indicated that they watched cable Video on Demand programming.



3. Producers: Value of Alternative Sources. We asked Producers to rank alternative video distribution channels. Internet Video alternatives scored highest in this category, followed by Cable Video on Demand.



4. How Viewing Choices are Made. We asked respondents how they find programs when watching television. The majority indicated that they found programs by “channel surfing.”



Open Ended Responses. We asked three open ended questions designed to elicit thoughts and ideas for improvements that could be made to existing services, alternatives for continuing channel operations, and any additional comments. Responses were generally supportive of continuing/expanding current services and opposed to scale-back of operations. A sampling of responses is included below (All responses are available on our web site: <http://sfgov.org/publicaccesstv>).

**“Please identify any other communications tools or innovations that may be employed to help reduce the cost of public access in San Francisco.”**

- Make the station commercial and offer to sell advertising spots
- Why reduce the cost? Why not think about how it can best be used by the community and as a tool. Continuation of public access is essential as a communication tool and there shouldn't be any alternatives to it rather there should be additions, like creating a real nonprofit with video blogs, that would involve social networking, cable on demand, internet video, it could be a real communication tool that links nonprofits of the city of San Francisco with Access SF in a very productive way.
- Outsource production services at competitive commercial rates. Initiate a "paperless" operation. Administrative offices share space with another non-profit organization, the open property can be rented at a competitive rate for "internet" production with multiple, hourly rated production modules for internet production.
- A greater investment by the City of San Francisco; i.e. the local government and/or any local organization whose job it is to celebrate the diversity and lifestyles SF has to offer should get involved in helping to fund Access SF on an ongoing basis. This support could be in the form of an annual fundraiser/gala/benefit, or it could be each of these organizations raising ongoing awareness and support by placing a donation button on their sites which in turn will directly fund the station.

**“Describe in detail any changes or improvements that would make Access SF programming more appealing to viewers.”**

- If people knew it existed, they would watch more. More community involvement from neighborhood and nonprofit or NGO's would be a good start.
- I would love it if public access was able to partner with others in the public media community and improve the quality of its programming. I think better/more outreach would encourage more community involvement.
- Community outreach to non-English speaking community groups.
- Create block programming on specific nights that are grouped by theme and interest then marketed in ways that build audience awareness. More programming by and about nonprofits. More programming that is based in the neighborhoods or in partnership with neighborhoods. More programming that is distance learning based. More coverage of local merchants. Develop an interactive community bulletin board that is real time and web based. Community coverage of local events not covered by mainstream TV.

**“Please provide any other comments and suggestions for improving Access SF services.”**

- Pay the staff more money, because they are the heartbeat and brains of that operation. If that company cannot offer competitive and live-able wages for its full time staff then it is useless, and should be shut down. Make the management or

the directors enforce the rules. Staff is to underpaid to deal with enforcing rules on a clientele that consists mostly of the mentally ill, and the disenfranchised. Enable that operation provide video productions services(Remote and studio) to all of the public, or charge money to use the studios, to earn the money to pay for the staff.

- The use and access of equipment might be opened up to people who aren't just committed long-time producers of the shows or the staff's friends, but any San Francisco resident who wants to submit a tape or content. Right now it seems there is a huge process one must go through to borrow equipment that very few people have access to, which doesn't seem very "public". Instead of having a couple of very expensive cameras that no one can borrow, why not invest in some low-end but decent video equipment and computer editing suites with computers for editing and make it available to folks to make their shows, music videos and movies. It could be a workshop with support and critiques from peers, and regular screening events. Events help bring in the community.
- Develop workforce partnerships with targeted agencies that can use the television station as a training resource for youth and adults, especially during daytime hours when the facility is available. Develop higher education partnerships with community colleges and universities that result in station programming. Develop partnerships that promote citizen journalism. Develop the station's website in the direction of Local Youtube style portal for content that is already online and can be aggregated in ways that build audience, foster partnerships, etc. Develop business & technology partnerships that use the station as a platform for community use of new technologies. Develop a sales force that can sustain a paid underwriting/advertising model for nonprofits and local businesses that gives them affordable "air time" on public access channels as well as on the station's website.
- This place is an amazing group of kind and knowledgeable people who are giving the gift of media to so many people who otherwise would truly have no or little access to it. It supports so many different aspects of our community, it's really a jewel. The best way to improve services would be to give it more \$, and perhaps investigate the leadership of Zane Blaney, who appears to not have the support of much of the staff or producers. I personally have very little experience with him, but the complaints I've heard are pretty consistent and harsh. Perhaps with new leadership, especially in development, Access SF would thrive and these issues of funding not as pressing...