Over the past year, Media Consortium staff and members conducted a 360 of our organization. The results were positive: we found we had accomplished many of the goals we set out at our founding in 2006:

Our 80 plus members are relatively stable—most are growing, and very few are shrinking. In the past five years, only one member outlet has gone out of business.

Media Consortium members have developed a deeply collaborative culture. When we receive outside funding, we are able to pull together mutli-outlet collaborations as we did in 2017 in Chicago. We are thrilled that we will be launching such a collaboration in 2018 focused on campus sexual assault.

With stability and collaboration have come a renewed focus on journalistic excellence. Many outlets that once specialized in analysis, like Yes! and Bitch, are now hiring full-time reporters. The Media Consortium continues to support the development of journalistic excellence with a project that trains journalists in the new economy beat, funded by Park and co-organized with the New Economy Coalition.

Finally, we have taken positive steps towards racial equity. Members are using Race Forward’s rubrics to evaluate their organizations, hire more people of color in all positions, and rethink who they aim to reach with their content. We hope to survey members to track advances in equity this year.

With all this positive momentum, we should be able to celebrate success; instead, we find ourselves facing a new reality that requires a new direction for the organization.

News outlets are facing a two-front war on media. On one front is the U.S. government, led by a President who is proud of his war on the news. While Obama was no friend of journalism, under Trump journalists are being arrested for simply asking questions of government officials. An increased surveillance regime at the federal, state and local level is already leading to journalists’ phones and equipment being searched without warrants.

Meanwhile, a second war is being waged by large telecom and “social” media platforms to create monopolies over news distribution. Ajit Pai, the current chair of the FCC, seems prepared to push through the telecom dream of an unregulated internet in which ISPs can require payment for content providers to reach consumers. Meanwhile Facebook and Google have defacto control over how users find new content.

A significant number of policy organizations work in the areas of government surveillance and net neutrality. However, aside from the new Open Markets Initiaitive, no organization is focused on the danger of platform monopoly distribution. Many news associations are unable to work in this area since they receive money from Facebook and Google. Clearly, fighting to ensure that users can access whatever content they choose is a fight we want to help lead.

Taking on the platforms is one fight; another is how independent news outlets see their role in this new environment. How to news outlets that have found sustainability by appealing to a particular niche make impact outside of that niche? How can outlets work together with community-based organizations to break down the boundaries between media that is consumed by white people and media consumed by people of color; between media consumed by urban residents and by rural residents; between media consumed by the economically privileged and the economically underprivileged?

In other words, even as we focus right now on simply keeping distribution channels open for independent media, how are we thinking long term about the task of informing and educating the widest public possible.