The Media Consortium

2012 Year Summary

The theme of the Media Consortium’s October 2011 meeting was “Harnessing our Collective Power.” At this meeting, over 130 staffers from Media Consortium outlets agreed that the key to creating impact was to **foster collaboration** and to coordinate marketing and social promotion. Through 2012, we have experimented with new ways to collaborate, with high impact results and a lot of new learning.

The Consortium as a whole is working more closely with sister associations to **leverage our collective strengths to support innovation in journalism** and business models that will benefit the entire sector. Our Community Journalism Training Institute, launching with pilot projects this December and more fully in early spring, will not only provide a path to sustainability but fulfill **our goal of building and diversifying media leadership**.

**I. Foster Collaboration**

Through three large-scale projects and numerous micro-collaborations, through face-to-face meetings and social media interactions, the members of the Media Consortium increasingly work together to amplify their collective voices.

* **Media Policy Reporting and Education Project (MPREP)**—Supported by the Media Democracy Fund for a second year, this project enabled six TMC members to scale up their reporting about media policy by seeding high-quality coverage via conference calls with experts in the field. Quantitatively, the program created a drumbeat of media policy reporting as reporters produced over 30 pieces of feature reporting plus 40+ radio shorts, for a total of over 70 stories.

Qualitatively, reporters like Alice Ollstein of FSRN learned how to identify and report on media policy stories independently—six of the 30 feature stories were created on the reporter’s own initiative, stories they would not have been able to write before the project. Finally, these stories were picked up and used by our media policy and advocacy partners:

*Being able to work directly with journalists and independent media to frame media policy stories as human interest or social justice deepens and broadens our reach and impact. Whether on the issues of prison phones, or the potential impacts of cuts to the low income programs of the Universal Service fund, we were able to help journalists shape a story that described the real harm in understandable terms that didn't bury the story in a hard to access tech blog.—*amalia deloney, Center for Media Justice

**The MPREP project has been so successful that we plan to launch a Labor Reporting and Education Project in 2012. This is a model for creating high-impact reporting that can scale. A report on the 2012 MPREP project is available.**

* **Occupy May Day—**Media Consortium members watched with excitement as the Occupy movement grew. We also noticed that corporate media consistently missed the real story of Occupy: that this was a national movement of everyday people protesting student debt, home foreclosures, the Citizens United ruling, and more. We saw that May Day would be the showcase for the movement, and decided to collaborate to report on it.

TMC staff organized 32 outlets to pool their reporting for May Day. To demonstrate the national reach of the movement, we created an embeddable, interactive map showing where actions would be happening. That map was staffed on May Day with interns who also recorded arrests made. To demonstrate the nature of the protests, we catalogued where TMC reporters would be, and arranged for them to appear on a four hour livestreamed special show created by Free Speech TV. Finally, through May Day, TMC staff and volunteers created a storify to sum up the tweets from the day. We ran the map, the TV show, and the storify on our own transmedia site, [www.mediaforthe99percent.com](http://www.mediaforthe99percent.com) , offering all three tools as free embeds.

Sixty five outlets embedded at least one tool. Total reach of participating outlets was 22 million homes and 21 million web users. We changed the frame for the day. A Reuter’s report calling May Day a “dud” at 6am ET was updated by noon ET to a story about the national spread of the day. A meme developing in the right-wing press early in the day about Occupiers as terrorsts never gained traction after we began vigorously pushing out a different frame emphasizing the peaceful nature of the day.

**The May Day effort took too many resources to be duplicated without targeted campaign funding, but demonstrated the power of the independent media to move the mass market when we work together. A report on May Day is available.**

* **Natural Gas Reporting Project—**The October 2011 annual meeting had featured affinity groups, including one on the environment. In June 2012, the members of that group approached TMC staff, asking us to help them create a large-scale collaborative project. We convened a set of discussions that led to the Natural Gas Reporting Project.

The idea behind this project is to create a long-tail transmedia approach to the story of fracking. A journalist will be accompanied by a producer as s/he follows the story. The story will then be turned into digital content (via Truthout and Earth Island Journal), print content (via Earth Island Journal), radio content (via Making Contact), one or more TV shows (via LinkTV), and eventually a book (via Chelsea Green). This content will be accompanied by a vigorous social media campaign featuring YouTube video (shot by Specialty Studios), educational shorts (Specialty Studios) and petition drives (Care2).

While the film *Gasland* and dedicated stories at ProPublica and other outlets have made fracking a household term, the practice continues and many stories remain untold. This transmedia strategy will allow us to “surf the wave” of public interest, enabling our outlets to respond immediately using their social media tools to foreground relevant content and drive audiences to action. We are currently in proposal stage with Park Foundation and Fledgling on this project, and expect to launch in January 2013.

**Documentary filmmakers need transmedia content to create impact for their films. This project shows how to bake that content in from the start. We will work with Media Impact Funders, sister association NAMAC, and a range of filmmakers to develop similar projects through 2013. The funding proposal for this project is available.**

* **Micro-collaborations**—TMC-inspired editorial collaborations continue, triggered by connections at meetings, messages on our listserv or by TMC staff contacting outlets with the suggestiion they work together. This year, for example, the Nation and Colorlines began a high-impact collaboration around immigration reform. AINN has worked with RH Reality Check on stories about reproductive health. Free Speech Radio News began an ongoing relationship with the Real News Network, and Yes! built a strong relationship with Berrett-Koehler books.
* **Member Meetings--**TMC continues to provide opportunities for members to learn from each other through face-to-face and digital interaction. There was no annual meeting in 2012 because of the election. To resolve that issue, future annual meetings will be held in February, ensuring they will really be “annual.” Set your calendar for February 6-8 in Baltimore!

Meanwhile, TMC continued to hold regional meetings in New York (Jan), Denver (Feb), Minneapolis (Netroots June), and Chicago (July). Members consistently tell us that such face-to-face meetings are one of the key benefits they gain from their Media Consortium membership.

* **Ongoing Social Media Cross-Promotion**--In February 2012, the Media Consortium hired a 10hr/wk social media curator, Debi Mason, to promote social media content across Media Consortium members. We also set up a social media listserv designed expressly for members to share big stories with each other.

**II. Support Innovation in Journalism and Business Models**

In order to further our mission of creating an independent media sector, The Media Consortium must ensure that our members have the technological and business support they need to flourish. We are meeting those needs through our collaborative fundraiser, our Incubation and Innovation Labs, and our How it Works series. In 2012, our focus moved to collaboration within the innovation sector, as we sought both external and internal partnerships to enhance the Consortium’s ability to support each member.

* **Collaborative Fundraiser—**Our 2011 Revenue Generation Lab led the Media Consortium to experiment with a collaborative fundraiser in February 2012. Seventeen outlets participated in a significant way in the fundraiser, which was supported with a $10,000 grant from the Harnisch Foundation. Over 1408 unique donors gave $69,924, which fell far below Media Consortium staff’s expectations; however, it met member expectations, with 14 outlets meeting or exceeding their goals for the day. The Media Consortium itself raised over $1885.

We learned that member outlets are indeed willing to fundraise for each other, with members actually encouraging their donors to give to other outlets. In fact, 20% of donors (279) gave to more than one outlet. We also learned to our surprise that many of our nonprofit outlets did not have a vigorous individual donor program in place. This fundraiser spurred their efforts.

**Most Media Consortium members are still learning how to cultivate individual donors. The collaborative fundraiser is a great tool to increase that learning, as well as draw the sector together. A fact sheet and brief report on the fundraiser is available.**

* **Fall 2012 Long Form Journalism Lab**—News outlets have all gone digital. The question they now face is how to best monetize their digital assets. The long form journalism lab has focused on whether members can repurpose content (text and audio) into Kindle Singles and other short-ebook formats. Nine outlets signed up for the lab, a sign of the increased interest in advanced digital products.

The lab offered one-hour talks with five experts who explained the production of ebooks, the platforms available (Kindle, Nook, Apple, etc), case studies, and the market and audience for ebooks. The lab is still in progress, but will probably conclude with an ebook produced jointly by participants. We are currently seeking a corporate sponsor for that ebook.

**Keeping up with technology is critical to being able to grow audience.**

* **Fall 2012-Fall 2014 Metrics Lab**—The Media Consortium is laser-focused on creating impact. This lab, which we discussed in our report last year, is designed to measure impact by mapping whether and to what extent editorial collaborations can change societal “narratives” in the digital space. In other words—when we collaborate, do we change how mass media and/or the public talk about the issues.

The lab is being lead by Harvard professor and Crimson Hexagon founder Gary King, with support from the Deutsch Foundation, two anonymous donors, and the EBS companies. It soft-launched in September 2012 with preliminary lab work, and will fully launch in December 12 or January 13.

**Measuring impact is the key to creating impact—we need to learn how to evaluate failure and build on success.**

* **Sister Assocations--**Media Consortium Executive Director Jo Ellen Kaiser approaced INN director Kevin Davis and AAN director Tiffany Shackleford to create partnerships in areas where our members have mutual interests. We three directors have begun meeting every two weeks. By the beginning of 2013, we hope to roll out a number of programs that will benefit our collective members.

INN is reviewing the possibility of offering its health and media liability programs to TMC and AAN members; AAN is looking at opening up its syndication system to INN and TMC members; and TMC is setting up a Lab on Mobile Strategy that would be open to members of all three associations.

**Pooling resources between associations benefits members, benefits funders, and also benefits staff who no longer have to duplicate programs done better elsewhere.**

* **How It Works Series**—Often, outlets need a quick look at a new technology, a mini-tutorial on a business application, or an introduction to a new way of thinking about providing services. The How it Works Series, put together by TMC staff, provides TMC members with monthly one-hour talks by experts on a range of business and technology issues.

In 2012, experts and topics have included: Michelle Minkoff on creating Interactive Maps; Gus Spheeris on rules for nonprofits; Bruce Lawson on the features of html5; Eric Jackson on the future of Facebook, Brad de Graf on social media aggregator News Junkie; Greg Lindahl on search engine Blekko; and Peter Meredith on cultivating online donors.

**III. Build and Diversify Media Leadership**

Fostering strong, civically-minded, diverse media organizations and leaders is key to building an independent media sector. This year, in addition to developing and diversifying Media Consortium membership, we reached out to begin training community journalists.

* **Media Consortium Membership—**The Media Consortium continues to grow according to a deliberate strategy of encouraging diversity of platforms and audiences. In 2012, we were pleased to continue to diversify our membership with the Utne Reader, The Thom Hartmann Show, High Country News, Public Eye (Public Research Associates) and Dissent, as well as associate members LA Progressive, Greg Palast.com, and News Taco. Four of these organizations have women managers (Hartmann, Public Eye, LA Progressive and Dissent). Two are headed by people of color (LA Progressive and News Taco).

**Of 58 Media Consortium members, 32 or 55% employ women in the #1 or #2 management spot, and 9 or 15% employ a person of color in the #1 or #2 management spot.**

* **Community Journalism Training Institute—**Media makers increasingly see members of the public [taking on an important role](http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2012/jun/11/rise-of-citizen-journalism) in documenting breaking news. The Community Journalism Training Institute will increase public access to rich information about local communities by training members of the public to produce high quality video and audio of local news events.

The Media Consortium began working with community journalists in our Community and Journalism lab. Opportunities to connect with the community expanded with the Occupy movement. Needing a way to get information on the movement, TMC Director Jo Ellen Kaiser began a weekly press briefing call with Occupiers in November 2011. On that call we discovered that Occupiers wanted to produce their own media, but often lacked very basic knowledge, such as how to hold a camera phone steady, how to frame a shot, or how to get quality audio.

After six months of planning, the Media Consortium is responding to that need by launching The Community Journalism Training Institute. CJTI will enable members of the public to create video and audio content that they can put out themselves via social media but that is also high quality enough to be picked up by professional media outlets. It will thus serve journalists and news outlets that need local content as well as the community members themselves.

The Institute may also provide the Media Consortium with external revenue that supports our mission. Our business plan calls for advocacy and policy organizations to pay to train their activists and volunteers. That way, the Media Consortium can offer high quality training, and organizations can support their volunteers and get content for their own sites. CJTI fits perfectly into our mission, as the primary aim of the program is to broaden and diversify the news by adding the work of community journalists to the mix.

**The Community Journalism Training Institute will launch pilot projects in late 2012, and should be up and running by mid-year 2013. A business plan will be available by November 15, 2012.**