November 2, 2015

Media Consortium Coordinating Committee

In Attendance: Jo Ellen, Lisa, Maya, Rory, Maureen, Sharon, James, Antoinette (?)

Absent: Steve, Joseph

Notes: James Trimarco

**ITEM 1: BUDGET**

Jo Ellen: In 2016 we’ll start out with about $57K. $15K of that is restricted money from a $25K Media Democracy Fund grant we received in July 2015.

In terms of new money:

Voqal has promised us $8K after completion of Metrics Project to create a report around the project. I expect to get another $25K grant from Media and Democracy Fund in summer 2016. I don’t know about McCormick. We’re working together to see if we can get an entry-level grant of about $30K.

In any case, I put in another $30K as a placeholder because we’re starting to move and we might be able to get more money.

Media Consortium has been the premier organization thinking about impact. But now we’re trying to spin that so that it’s about impact and equity. We want to say, “We are the organization that can bring together outlets from different communities—community media, alt weeklies, and others—so we can have a more diverse news ecosystem.” We can create richer information for all communities, and that is being reported on by diverse communities. We’re the place for that and we’ll do that work.

Maureen: What’s McCormick’s interest in this?

Jo Ellen: They’re now funding things in Chicago only and they’re having trouble getting everyone to work together. We have experience organizing outlets, but we’re not sure if they could fund that.

The Media Consortium needs to go big. INN changed directors and their leadership is wary. The alt weeklies continue to lose members. People are pretty shaky in this world, except for us. Well, we’ve always been shaky but nothing has really changed much. Our members have been growing your organizations. This is the time to go bigger, and it’s our 10th anniversary. Plan is for the founders of TMC to each commit to a $5K sponsorship.

The contract for the conference is $24K. We wouldn’t go under without the sponsorships, but we need to go there. That’s the earned-revenue side.

Rory: Do have you have anything you might be looking for in sponsors, what they might get?

Jo Ellen: I do. I’ll share it with you guys. I’ll have a real website for the conference this year, up by 11/6 or so. That’ll help in getting sponsors.

On the expense side, I’m still thinking that Manolia’s going to be a contractor. I’m estimating that the total cost of the conference will be about $32K. Between sponsorship and registration, we should earn about $33K. In the end we’ll start the 2016 with $63K. About the same as starting 2015. If the conference is successful we’ll have many more funders wanting to give us money and we can adjust.

This is a conservative budget. If the sponsorships don’t come in, we’ll still be in the black.

Lisa: What are the major differences between this budget and the last one? Also, if we had more money, where would you put it?

Jo Ellen: Biggest change is the amount of money spent on the conference. In the past it was usually about $15K, this year it’s twice that. You’ll see I’ve also impoverished the project spend. Usually I’ll have more money to spend on projects. But we’ve spent down some of the bigger projects we’ve had.

In terms of what I would spend money on if I had more of it, I would spend money on Manolia and hire her full-time. I would have her working on membership and I would like to go all-in on the collaborative work that we’re doing and on bringing in other organizations. Having more staff is what we need in order to look bigger. Then I could write and speak and connect with people.

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**ITEM 2: CONFERENCE PLANNING**

Jo Ellen: It’s our 10th anniversary, and I want to start it off with a thank you to the folks who started the Consortium. That’s a look at our past.

But I want most of it to be looking at our future. I understand that we have to cover business issues. I feel strongly that we can’t go forward unless we talk about the people we reach and how to reach more diverse audiences. When Ferguson happened, we realized we didn’t have folks in the community. How do we diversify ourselves, our staffs, the kinds of topics we’re focusing on, and how we deal with different communities?

I’ve become convinced that it’s a business conversation. It’s not a moral conversation about “Why are we so white?” It’s about how we can have donors and supporters and accurately cover the news in a country that is changing.

It’s not just about adding a staff person here and there. It’s about changing culture. So the conference is going to be a little bit different, but I think it’s going to be a lot richer and a lot more exciting.

Sharon: I was off the call and I heard you say it’s about a business decision. But what about just being fair?

Jo Ellen: The reason I’m framing it in that way is that the Consortium talked about diversity five years ago and it didn’t really go anywhere. I think that the moral argument should be made, but it’s not as effective in creating change as one that’s grounded in pragmatic business issues.

Sharon: Maybe we should talk about how it didn’t work last time. What we’re talking about is a cultural shift. It’s hard when people aren’t talking about the underlying issues that are blocking the cultural shift. Why did it fall by the wayside? Can we use this as an opportunity to explore deeper?

Jo Ellen: I’ve invited Keith Woods because he helped them do it at NPR. I asked him if he would lead our discussion on Thursday. He’s aware of the different barriers that people feel, even if they don’t need to be there. You’re right. When you look at organizations that have made this kind of change—gone from a mostly white staff to a more diverse staff, or from a mostly white audience to a more diverse audience—they’ve gone through a difficult change. Some managers have had to fire people. I’m going to have people come in to facilitate those kinds of conversations. Let’s also go beyond conversations to look at solutions and models.

Sharon: I applaud you for attempting to do this. It’s extremely difficult and there are few successful models out there.

Jo Ellen: Black Lives Matter has shaken things up and given us an opportunity to engage in these deeper conversations. The time is right.

Sharon: Are the people you’re bringing in steeped in critical race theory?

Jo Ellen: Yes.

Maya: We might want to move away from talking about “diversity” because it makes it sound like “we just want you to hire a few people of color.” But the underlying power structure doesn’t change. This is about a culture shift and it is about questioning some of the principals that our media is based on.

Jo Ellen: If you have suggestions for things I should read, that would be helpful.

Lisa: It’s not just a cultural moment but a technological moment. The changing tectonics of journalism. Audiences and communities are being engaged, but looking at that landscape of blogs and podcasts.

Jo Ellen: If anyone has information about how different communities are using podcasts, that would be awesome.

This idea about technology is why I’m starting the conference with engagement. What journalism means is changing. It’s positive. It’s not about white guilt, which leads to choosing a model black person.

I can’t put this one together on my own.

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**ITEM 3: THEORY OF CHANGE**

Jo Ellen: I’d like to work together with you folks on this statement and then be able to publish it and celebrate it as part of how we’re moving forward.

Maureen: I like it, Jo Ellen. I think it’s hard to get media to look at each other as partners rather than competitors. Maybe we can set a deadline for comments and edits on this document.

Jo Ellen: Let’s make that the focus of our next meeting on December 7.