The Media Consortium

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

**Theory of Change:**

A networked news ecosystem will be critical to providing Americans with the full range of news they need as citizens in a democracy ([Tow report](http://towcenter.org/research/post-industrial-journalism-adapting-to-the-present-2/), [Pew Research](http://www.journalism.org/2015/03/05/legacy-outlets-drive-the-news-agenda-but-specialty-providers-diversify-the-ecosystem/)).

That networked news system must start with community members as providers as well as consumers of news ([#buildwith](http://buildwith.org)). Working [with community](http://www.poynter.org/news/mediawire/323083/5-lessons-on-diversity-and-journalism-from-dori-maynard/) as well as for community will ensure that the news reflects issues and events relevant to people of color.

Community and Independent news outlets are best positioned to work together to build a networked news ecosystem. Because they are mission-driven, they are able to set aside profit-driven competition in order to build a more sustainable news economy that provides the news communities need.

**Vision:**

By 2025 we will have created a horizontally distributed network of community and independent news outlets that work together to provide the news their communities want and need. This network will be grounded in participatory journalism, working with communities to identify the stories that matter, but will be able to route stories with potential regional or national impact to journalists best able to conduct data-driven analysis, to investigate wrongdoing, to link local stories to national policy and vice versa, and to synthesize stories from many different localities and communities. The result will be rich, comprehensive news available to users from the outlet of their choice.

**First Steps (and possible funding needs):**

1. Train independent news media to see members of the community as well as community media as journalism partners (#buildwith). This step is absolutely essential not only to build a horizontal network but to ensure that such networked news fully represents people of color.

**ASK: Sponsor the next Media Consortium conference,** which will focus on how independent news outlets can work with communities of color as well as diversify their own staff.

**ASK: Provide general support for the work of the Media Consortium** as we develop collaborative editorial partnerships with members of AAN, INN, LION and community media to begin creating this horizontal network.

2. Convince community media that it is not only good for their mission, but good for their economic well-being to work together with independent news media in regional networks.

**ASK: Support a series of regional working groups of community media.** Examples: CUNY’s work in New York, Dodge’s work in New Jersey, Knight’s work in North Carolina, McCormick’s work in Chicago and what we hope will be future working groups in Boston, Seattle, LA, Denver, Miami and elsewhere.

**ASK: Provide general support for those organizations working most directly with community media**: New America Media, CUNY’s Center for Community and Ethnic Media, UNITY, NABJ and NAHJ

3. Develop the tools to promote communication among journalists throughout this network.

**ASK: Consider funding tools like Heather Bryant’s** [**Project Facet**](http://knightfoundation.org/grants/201551185/) **or Bill Densmore’s** [**Information Valet**](http://www.rjionline.org/people/bill-densmore)**.**

**Greatest Challenge**

What will be the glue that will hold this network together?

* Will it be a loose network of strong regional associations affiliated with journalism schools (i.e. CUNY, UNC, Temple, Montclair) and funded by a parallel network of locally-focused philanthropists?
* Will it be a new trade association built by integrating current independent trade associations (like AAN and NFCB) and independent news organizations (like LION, INN and TMC)?
* Will it be a new trusted non-profit like the Information Exchange proposed by Bill Densmore whose only mission is to provide this type of coordination?

This vision will be met with process, not with a project. Because we are building a bottom-up network, we can’t say in advance what the network will look like. But as we build, we can test ideas.