**Opportunities in a TMC-AAN affiliation**

**EXPANDED REVENUE OPPORTUNITIES**

* Foundation funding. Having a more extensive network of media outlets, spanning both media with national reach and media with concentrated readership in metro areas around the country, should increase the appeal of special editorial projects to philanthropic funders and increase access to foundation funding for both groups. This funding would benefit both individual members and the 501c3 AAN/TMC org.
* Sponsorships. Increasing the number of outlets in our association will make exhibiting and sponsoring conferences more appealing to companies. Our joint conference in 2015 sold out exhibitor space.
* Revenue Models. Many TMC members have expertise in creating successful membership programs and cultivating foundation support; many have been successful in building digital businesses that generate revenue and have great reach and profile within their communities. AAN members have expertise in putting on profitable events and other entrepreneurial business development. An association between the two organizations should create more opportunities for sharing mutually beneficial expertise.

**EXPANDED MEMBER BENEFITS**

* Services. AAN and TMC offer different services to members. AAN has an ad network and is developing a mobile ad network. TMC has brokered inexpensive access to PR databases and a sophisticated email marketing system (WhatCounts). Potential of negotiating for other services such as Chartbeat. There would be a value to members in being able to access services from both organizations.
* Grants. TMC has for the past 5 years consistently given out over $100,000 per year in grants to members. We anticipate that adding metro weeklies will increase foundation interest in a combined organization and lead to more money to re-grant.
* Joint conferences. The joint 2015 Digital Conference seemed to be successful in terms of content and connections. It’s our impression that members of both groups found value in being together. This could be built on substantially.
* Advocacy. AAN employs an attorney to respond to help shape response to problematic legislation; as a 501c6 AAN can lobby on behalf of members. TMC, currently under a 501(c)(3) organization, has become a leader in media policy and an advocate for independent media in policy discussions. Combining these two strengths should result in an organization with more power to advocate effectively for the health of the independent press.
* A presence on both coasts. East coast and West coast offices would make in-person meetings with members, funders, sponsors, advertisers, and members more feasible.

**SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IMPACT**

* Content share. If TMC and AAN were affiliated, we could establish more sophisticated systems for coordinating content sharing, e.g., through an editorial list serve and/or the AAN syndication service.
* Increased Reach. AAN outlets would be able to partner with national outlets and broadcast outlets to give their stories greater reach. TMC outlets would be able to ensure that stories with place-specific content reach readers in that place.
* Collaboration. There is an opportunity to work together to cover complex stories. Charter schools, for example, exist locally but are part of a national conversation involving families, teachers, politicians, and state/federal data. To really cover these stories we need local journalists, national beat journalists, investigative data journalists, and info graphics talent. (There is a track record of successful collaborations … TKTKTK)
* Impact measurement. TMC has a special focus on impact measurement and is at the forefront of developing tools to do so. (Assessments of impact are of increasing interest to philanthropic funders.)

**OTHER EFFICIENCIES?**

* Staffing. Both AAN and TMC appear understaffed for what they need to do. The two AAN staff members (plus a management company) produce three annual conferences, manage an ad network, maintain sponsor relationships, communicate weekly with members, negotiate deals for new services, etc. TMC’s 1.25 staffers run a conference, coordinate editorial collaborations, create promotional news feeds for members, negotiate for new services, etc. While a merger or affiliation would not add staff, it could allow for greater efficiency in getting things done, relieving duplication and taking advantage of complementary skill sets.

**BACKGROUND ON THE MEDIA CONSORTIUM**

Strengths

* The Media Consortium has grown from 40 to 75 outlets over three years.
* TMC has ended each year since 2011 with a positive fund balance.
* Over 85% of members pay dues ranging from $75-150 per year for associate members to $250-1000 per year for full members.
* With foundation support for its efforts, TMC has been a pioneer in the field of impact measurement. The organization has a reputation for influential collaborations such as 2015’s #BlackSpring coverage.
* TMC’s Exec Director has been effective at negotiating group rates for services that benefit TMC members such as the Cision PR database, Chartbeat web analytics, and WhatCounts email marketing. Further expansion is possible.
* The Media Consortium's Executive Director is increasingly invited to small retreats where policy governing the independent news ecosystem is made. Most recently, she helped organize a 30-person retreat on the future of independent media at the Rockefeller Brothers Fund’s Pocantico Center.

Concerns about TMC’s future

* The Media Consortium's income relies heavily on funding from three foundations. Beyond funding from those foundations and member dues, we have not been able to diversify our revenue streams.
* The Media Consortium is understaffed (and that staff is underpaid) for what it is asked to do. Total budget for personnel is under $100,000/ year.
* The Media Consortium is still a project of the Foundation for National Progress (the non-profit parent of Mother Jones). That limits our ability to take out loans, sign onto legal briefs, and recruit board members.

Concerns about a merger

* Questions about whether the “cultures” of the two organizations would mesh
* Some concerns/questions about the AAN ED
* Questions about structure, governance and, more generally, how to ensure that combining forces would actually result in a stronger organization and the materialization of the “on paper” benefits