**Report: AAN/TMC Joint Venture**

**October 2015**

**Summary**

Beginning in 2013, the Media Consortium began exploring a joint venture agreement or partnership with the Association of Alternative Newsmedia. An effort was made in 2015 to bring this agreement to fruition. After a considerable amount of work, both parties determined that the time was not yet ripe for an overarching agreement. Both parties instead have agreed to test specific, pragmatic ways that the two organizations can work most closely together.

**Brief History**

A strategic planning effort in May 2013 led the Media Consortium’s governing body to conclude that a merger with another independent news association might provide the best pathway to sector sustainability. After a round of meetings with Executive Directors of seven different organizations, TMC Director Jo Ellen Green Kaiser proposed a partnership with the Association of Alternative Newsmedia.

In February 2014, the entire membership of the Media Consortium was invited to spend the final day of the organization’s annual meeting working on a strategic plan. AAN Executive Director Tiffany Shackelford was invited to that meeting. The membership voted to pursue a joint venture agreement or merger with AAN at that time. Kaiser then asked Shackelford to take the issue to AAN.

In October 2014, Shackelford invited Kaiser to the AAN’s leadership meeting to present the joint venture idea to the AAN board. The AAN board voted to move forward with an exploration of a partnership. Both organizations agreed to hold their next conference jointly.

In February 2015, AAN and TMC held a very successful joint conference in San Francisco. Held as one conference, there were no announced “TMC” or “AAN” tracks. Conference attendees submitted positive evaluations. Simultaneously, TMC and AAN formed a joint exploratory committee that met at the conference and agreed to meet again to establish a set of rules for a potential partnership.

In June 2015, the joint exploratory committee met. They determined at that time that it was premature to move directly to a joint venture agreement. Instead, they recommended developing a work plan that would produce deeper affiliation and help smooth the way toward a more formal alliance or merger.

**2016 Work Plan**

The exploratory committee suggested a number of ideas for joint efforts, asking Kaiser and Shackelford to prioritize these ideas. What follows is the current plan:

**Services**: AAN and TMC will work together to negotiate joint service agreeements.

* **Chartbeat**. The Media Consortium negotiated a group discount for the professional version of Chartbeat, offered to AAN members.
* **Ad Network**. The Association of Alternative Newmedia has invited Media Consortium members to participate in its new advocacy ad network.
* **Libel Protection**. The Association of Alternative Newsmedia has invited Media Consortium members to join their libel protection plan.
* **Coral Project.** AAN and the Media Consortium are working jointly with the Coral Project on creating a beta test of the new comment tool for our memberships.

**Content**: AAN and TMC will work together facilitate content development between local, regional and national outlets.

* **Editorial Projects-Voting Rights**. The Media Consortium and AAN have agreed to pursue a project on voting rights, anchored with data from electionline.org
* **Funded Editorial Network**. The Media Consortium is working with New America Media on creating regional editorial networks that can be funded by local foundations.

**Networking**: AAN and TMC will work together to create rich events for both memberships.

* **February 2015 Joint Conference**. This was very successful from a content standpoint.
* **July 2015 AAN Conference.** AAN invited TMC members to attend and present at its 2015 Salt Lake City conference; TMC will invite AAN to attend and present at its 2016 Philadelphia conference.
* **January/February 2016 TMC and AAN Digital Conferences**. These will be held separately, but each organization will invite members of the other to partiicpate.
* **Joint Conference 2017**. AAN and TMC are planning a joint conference for 2017, possibly including one other association.
* **Listserv**. The Media Consortium will invite AAN members to join its social media listserv.