

**2009 Activities and Progress Report**

**The Media Consortium, a project of the Foundation for National Progress**

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In 2009, The Media Consortium (TMC) implemented important initiatives that expanded our members’ audience and impact. While many organizations lament the death of journalism, we are helping our members work towards a sustainable future. The following report outlines our progress in 2009 under each of the above strategic principles.

The Media Consortium "...echoes the low-cost, high-reward forms of online organizing that liberal groups excelled at in the 2008 election," wrote Harvard University's Neiman Journalism Lab in a July 2009 article about the network.

In August, The Media Consortium’s Coordinating Committee approved small updates to TMC’s mission statement and an added a new strategic principle. The updated mission and strategic principles are:

*The Media Consortium is a network of the country’s leading, progressive, independent media outlets. Our mission is to amplify independent media’s voice, increase our collective clout, leverage our current audience and reach new ones. We believe it is possible and necessary to seize the current moment and change the debate in this country. We will accomplish this mission by fulfilling our five strategic principles.*

* *Foster Collaboration and Coordination*
* *Build and Diversify Media Leadership*
* *Focus on Audience Development*
* *Bring Money and Attention into the Sector*
* *NEW: Support Innovation in Journalism and Business Models*

**Foster Collaboration and Coordination**

*The Media Consortium creates critical space for networking and collaboration among independent media outlets. We also connect our members to critical information and outside experts to guide them through changing political and media landscapes.*

Over 60 individuals traveled across the country to attend our **February all-member meeting** in Washington, DC. The meeting melded one-on-one member networking, small and large group discussions, network initiatives on the future media landscape and conversations with special guests. The Media Consortium provided travel stipends to ensure that as many members as possible could attend.

In late 2009, TMC staff began organizing for its February 2010 member meeting, which will kick off a year of incubation, experimentation and rapid prototyping around moving into mobile, editorial collaboration, audience engagement, and revenue generation models.

With the support of The Arca Foundation, The Media Consortium hosted an **economic strategy retreat** in April 2009. The meeting was a huge success. Immediate editorial results came shortly after the event, including several articles that ran in *Mother Jones*, the *Nation* and the Washington Independent, plus a video series that ran on *GritTV*. This meeting is the basis for a potential editorial collaboration around economic issues developed by a small group of TMC members. TMC is facilitating the evolution of this project, currently known as “Follow The Money” for a 2010 launch.

In 2009, the consortium also developed and launched the **Editorial Tipsheet**. The project fosters a clear pipeline of communication between journalists and organizations on the ground. Launched as a beta test in July 2009, the program connects issue experts from leading non-profits, think tanks, advocacy organizations and government offices to journalists, producers, reporters and editors within the consortium.

In addition, The Media Consortium expanded its membership in 2009, welcoming several new organizations into the fold, including Campus Progress, Care2 and Inter Press Service. We are working on a new membership strategy for 2010 to increase diversity and reach amongst TMC’s membership body.

**Build and Diversify Media Leadership**

*The Media Consortium is working to increase media diversity within organizations and move a young, diverse set of media makers affiliated with TMC members into the mainstream.*

The consortium launched its **Independent Media Internships** program in May 2009 with five talented young media makers selected from a pool of 190 applicants. These interns were placed with MC member organizations for a three-month, full-time, paid editorial internship. The second round of interns began in September 2009 and interns for Winter 2010 are already being placed.

While the internships focus on bringing in fresh talent to the sector, it’s also important to support mid-career independent media makers. In 2009, TMC explored the development of “**Creating the Next Generation of Media Darlings**.” The program will promote, publicize, and connect up-and-coming journalistic talent to establishment media and targeted audiences. TMC is developing this program for a 2010 launch.

**Focus on Audience Development**

*The Media Consortium works to leverage our members’ content in order to expand their audiences and lists (email, twitter, Facebook, etc.) and to increase the impact of their reporting on the public and political dialogue.*

With our **Media Wires project**, the consortium is delivering our members’ reporting to new audiences using a variety of social media tools and external partnerships. All Media Consortium member content (articles, video, audio) related to the economy, environment, health care and immigration is aggregated on our hub sites: The Audit, The Mulch, The Pulse and The Diaspora. The Media Wires project delivers between 75,000 and 85,000 new visitors to MC member content every month, and the numbers keep growing. Consortium staff will continue to actively cultivate new partnerships to increase the branding, recognition and impact of our members’ journalism in 2010.

As a major step this year, The Media Consortium is working with Catalist to explore **list-building opportunities** for our members. Catalist houses one of the most comprehensive databases of 250 million voter-aged in the country. In 2009, Catalist worked with 15 TMC members and provided free modeling analysis and database access that details demographic overlays that compare audiences not only to other Media Consortium outlets, but to the nation as well.

In a September 2009 TMC survey, members overwhelmingly noted they wanted support in individually and collectively building their e-mail and social networking lists. Using both the information cultivated by its work with Catalist and new initiatives in the following year, TMC will work with members in 2010 to accomplish that goal.

**Bring Money and Attention to the Sector**

*The Media Consortium works to support the sector by documenting the need and impact of our members’ reporting and foster entrepreneurial efforts by our members to develop new streams of revenue that will support long-term sustainability.*

In 2008, The Media Consortium supported and organized research for the development of an **online advertising network for independent media**. Four consortium members, including Air America, *The Nation, Mother Jones* and AlterNet are the founding partners of this network, now called Ad Progress, which is in its initial launch phase. TMC is working with other members of the consortium to identify new revenue generating opportunities for a collaboration of members.

In October 2009, TMC released our yearlong study on the future of journalism called ***[The Big Thaw: Charting a New Future for Journalism](http://www.themediaconsortium.org/thebigthaw).*** It is a comprehensive, definitive examination of how the media landscape has changed and how independent media can boldly lead a new future for journalistic enterprises.

Four key recommendations for independent media emerged from the study:

1. **Change internally:** The first and deepest change is to rethink how media organizations and formal networks are structured.
2. **Increase experimentation:** Journalism organizations must increase their capacity to innovate with new technology, journalistic practices and business models. Funders must invest in the long-term sustainability of journalism by investing in greater experimentation among both new and existing players.
3. **Leverage unique role of a consortium:** The more that independent media-makers leverage their collective power, the more they can negotiate deals, influence public policy and build journalism’s new ecosystem.
4. **Building audiences as communities:** Media organizations must create platforms for users to participate in the journalistic process, work with each other on projects and build their own online communities.

Josh Stearns wrote for Savethenews.org that “*The Big Thaw …* is refreshingly different from every other report published this year. Whereas most reports focus on what went wrong with journalism in America and consider new models and experiments currently under way, *The Big Thaw* delves into the future. … It reads less like a report and more like a travel guide of what’s to come, giving the reader a glimpse at an exciting new landscape.”

TMC is using findings from *The Big Thaw* to structure our Innovation and Incubation Labs, which will launch in 2010.

**Support Innovation in Journalism and Business Models**

*Media Consortium members can shift their organizations out of crisis mode and take advantage of the tremendous opportunity the digital revolution provides—but only if they understand the tone, pace, technology, and unique editorial products that thrive on the web and can lead to sustainability. The Media Consortium is strategically supporting members as they develop and deepen critical new capacities and skills.*

One of the most important specific recommendations from *The Big Thaw* was for The Media Consortium to support members in conducting rapid prototyping as a low-cost way to test new business, technology and content development models at a scale that they would not be able to achieve alone. Throughout the latter half of 2009, TMC laid the groundwork for the 2010 launch of its **Innovation and Incubation Lab** (II Lab), an ongoing program.The II Lab combines one-on-one consulting and ongoing lab environments to accomplish this goal.

The II Lab will help TMC members research, discuss and experiment with new business, publishing and editorial models that take advantage of the new, web-enabled reader/publisher relationships. Members will not only discover the best strategies for their organizations, but how to implement them—a critical component of ongoing success.

Thanks to the support of the Arca Foundation, TMC has been able to effectively build out the impact and audience of progressive, independent media. We have identified new opportunities to help these organizations survive and thrive for years to come. TMC laid a lot of groundwork in 2009 look forward to making 2010 a year of blockbuster successes.