**All Together Now:**

**A Proposal for Progressive News Collaboration and Promotion**

**The Media Consortium**

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

Executive Director, The Media Consortium

415-878-3862 | @tmcmedia

joellen@themediaconsortium.org

The news right now is overwhelming to the point of personal exhaustion. Even if you steel yourself against media consumption, limiting yourself to a few scrolls through your Facebook feed each day, you know what we’re talking about: Each cabinet pick and executive order, every wrong-headed dictate of a right-wing Congress, is laying out a narrative of an America in retreat, an America that’s lost its most cherished values. While the Trump administration masters the mainstream media, the Left remains on the defensive.

This is not the news we most need. And its relentless dominance is destroying our fragile democracy.

We need stories that connect us back to the core values that Americans still hold true: freedom, equality, respect for the land and opportunity for all. These are the values that lead us to support immigrants, address climate change, protect Black Lives and Black votes, and protect women’s right to choose. These are the values that help our communities thrive and make our lives worth living.

Stories that reflect our true values are the stories that are published every day by members of [the Media Consortium](http://themediaconsortium.org), a nonprofit national network of 80 independent news outlets including the Nation, Mother Jones, Democracy Now!, Free Speech TV, Colorlines, and Truthout among others. But the stories that we so desperately need—the voices and perspectives that celebrate the strength of our shared humanity—aren’t those that are breaking through the noise. Why? For one sad, completely solvable reason: The Left does not have the infrastructure around marketing and promotion that the Right has built over decades.

We can fix that—with your help.

**Proposal:**

The Media Consortium proposes a year-long effort to amplify the work of independent news media on four topics:

* Immigration
* Women’s Reproductive Health
* Police Brutality
* Climate Change

Every month, at an equally relentless pace, the Media Consortium will organize a set of multiplatform stories from 20+ outlets on an angle within one of these critical topics (like our overflowing detention centers or the Dakota pipeline). Outlets will publish their stories on the same day and the stories will be pushed out to social media with the same smart-as-hell hashtag. We will employ advance marketing to get reporters and editors on shows with the largest audiences, whether via broadcast TV, youtube, or Facebook Live. John Oliver, here we come. Samantha Bee? Get ready for us.

But it’s not all just big shows with massively engaged audiences. The nitty gritty is just as important: We will cycle through these topics, so that every topic will be pushed at least three times a year; we will also create fast-breaking collaborations when needed on the same topic areas. We will change the news—and also transform the news system.

**The Key Is In the Theory of Change**

This proposal relies on two principles that social scientists agree create impact.

Collective Impact

Unlike simple collaborations where partners join together to achieve a specific end, “collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants.” [Collective Impact Forum](https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-collective-impact).

The benefit of this resource-intensive type of collaboration is that the result is greater than the sum of its parts. That is why this effort will be one in which all the stakeholders have a say in the topics and the content of their stories—it will not be a top-down collaboration but one from the bottom up.

Effective Frequency

The first time a message gets out it is often not heard—but that’s not our biggest problem. We’re progressives, which is to say that we’re used to repeating ourselves—and news must be repeated to be heard. Pushing out news is no different from pushing out advertising. Repetition builds on itself. For that reason, we will use very few topics, and cycle them over and over again with the same hashtags. We will aim to build effective frequency.

**Building on a Record of Success**

Over the past five years, Media Consortium members have experimented with collaborating on storytelling as a way to push stories into the public eye. And these experiments have been successful.

* In 2012, over 60 outlets came together to do joint reporting on Occupy May Day, an effort that changed how those protests were described (report available).
* In 2013, six outlets joined to report on the roll-out of plan B (report available)
* in 2014, nine outlets came together to tell the story of herbicide spraying in Kauai, a story that prompted a mayoral run by a local activist and new rules about herbicide spraying throughout Hawaii. (report available)
* In 2015, 35 outlets committed to partnering on 36 different sets of stories over the course of the year. Three to five outlets partnered on each set of stories. Those stories ranged over 6 different topics, including immigration, climate change, reproductive health and police violence (report available)

These news outlets have been willing to collaborate with each other on collective impact projects because they have seen the positive results—they know that working together is more effective than working apart.

**What We Have Learned**

Having developed collective impact projects over the past five years, we bring to this proposal a considerable number of lessons learned. The key lessons we have learned are as follows:

1. Collaborations drain resources—staff time and funding for other critical work— from individual news outlets. They require extra editing time, extra social media work, and sometimes the hiring of an additional freelancer. It’s easier to get buy-in if outlets are compensated for some of these costs.

2. Collective impact projects require infrastructure and dedicated staff, which means there are hard costs for the organization orchestrating the collaborations.

3. Media Consortium staff are experienced at building collective impact infrastructure and organizing collaborations, but we require more resources, either internal or external, around marketing and PR.

4. Shared measurement is critically important. As the saying goes, if it can’t be measured, it doesn’t matter—and we need this to matter more now than ever before. All stakeholders must agree on benchmarks and measurement tools in advance of a collective impact project. We have worked in the past with Prof. Gary King at Harvard who is developing a sophisticated impact measurement tool. He is interested in working with us again.

**Great Partners**

Because of our record of success, we’ve already lined up a set of great partners who will make the relentless pace of our collaborations possible.

* [The New Economy Coalition.](http://neweconomy.net/) Focused on solutions, we will partner with the New Economy Coalition to highlight stories of communities pushing back against climate change – and creating jobs in the process. The Park Foundation has already agreed to support a small piece of this work.
* [The Black Youth Project.](https://blackyouthproject.com/) Run by Prof. Cathy Cohen, this project will give Media Consortium access to—and the opportunity to help shape-- the Gen Forward surveys of millenials of color. These surveys will provide needed content and background for our collaborations on immigration and police brutality.
* [Project Facet](http://projectfacet.github.io/). Founded by Heather Bryant, this tech project provides new tools for collaboration.
* [Harvard Institute for Quantitative Science](http://gking.harvard.edu/). For our previous set of collaborations, we hired Prof. Gary King to apply sentiment analysis to measure the impact of our collaborations. He is eager to continue that work.

 **Proposed Benchmarks**

Per our commitment to Collective Impact, we will come up with benchmarks once we have all our stakeholders in place. These are the benchmarks we will propose:

1. A minimum of 12 collaborations over a one year period.

2. Participation from at least 40 outlets.

3. Goal of turning each collaboration into a trending topic on Twitter.

4. Goal of bringing at least 4 of the collaborations into mass media.

**Conclusion**

The Trump administration is turning American values on their heads and replacing news with lies. Unless we can cut through the noise, there won’t be a country left to fight for. That’s why this is the moment: We can either collaborate and win or scramble and lose.

To fight back, we have to build a strong network of independent news outlets. Working together, these news outlets will build a stronger, more reliable news system rooted in the values we cherish most. Yes, working together can be complicated—and knowing who to reach out to and how to get a project pushed through when it comes to media is difficult—but we already have the reputation and connections to make this work. The only thing standing between launching this potentially game-changing project tomorrow and never getting off the ground is money. And that’s why we need you.