

Letter to Members Sent- 9/15/17

Get ready for Media Consortium 3.0!

At our 2017 Transformative Media Conference, Media Consortium members told us you wanted to form a *media movement*.

We heard you describe a *solidarity network* that would work together to create meaningful impact on key issues.

We heard you ask for help in forming *equitable partnerships* between local media, especially media from culturally specific communities, and national media.

We heard you ask for a network that would *center grassroots communities* while providing opportunities for deep features and investigations at the national level.

Manolia and I heard you and are ready to act on this vision. But doing so will mean radically restructuring, possibly renaming, and certainly relaunching the Media Consortium. Realizing this vision will take time and energy--and money--all of which are in very short supply right now.

That's why I'm writing to you. Like a caterpillar, the old Media Consortium needs to go dormant if a new media movement organization is to emerge. I am writing to share with you the vision we have heard you express for the future; the realities of where the organization is right now; and our plans to work to create the conditions under which the new movement organization can emerge.

The Future Vision

Media Consortium 3.0 will be a network of news outlets dedicated to building a racially equitable independent media ecosystem. Consortium members will center the voices of culturally-specific communities, promote local/national partnerships, and work collaboratively to grow impact.

Imagine: stories originating from Puerto Ricans living in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago; from white tobacco farmers near Springfield, Kentucky; from the Pima people living by the Gila River in Arizona; from Somali Muslims in Minneapolis—these stories will make their way into news hubs and from there to regional and national news.

Decision making in Media Consortium 3.0 will be decentralized, with every outlet choosing what stories to send through the network and what stories to pick up from the network. The flow of stories from grassroots to grasstops will be conducted via partnership agreements that are equitable, respecting and rewarding the originators of the stories. Outlets will work collaboratively, sharing resources and co-marketing content in order to ensure that stories are told by those most impacted and reach those most impacted.

The Reality Today

The Media Consortium has fulfilled its current mission, which was to create a collaborative network of self-sustaining independent journalism outlets. Unlike other news sectors, the progressive news sector is healthy, with only one TMC member going out of business in the past three years even as the membership grew by twenty new outlets. Everyday, Consortium members partner with each other on stories and co-promote content.

Despite this success, the largest journalism funders continue to ignore the Media Consortium, claiming that our content is too “partisan” even as the New York Times ramps up its anti-Trump coverage. Aside from generous grants from Wallace Global and the Media Democracy Fund, our funding has come through project grants which provide little or no overhead money. The annual conference runs a small deficit and member dues amount to less than \$20,000 per year. And the very diversity of Consortium members has made it impossible to offer mission-centric fee for service consulting to the membership.

The budget is awash in red, and we have already made the decision to let Manolia go on September 30; Jo Ellen will leave December 31, 2017. We have run out of options to keep afloat an organization that has already done what it was supposed to do. In short, the current Media Consortium must and should sunset.

What’s Next? And What will TMC Staff Do?

Current Media Consortium staff (Manolia Charlotin and Jo Ellen Kaiser) will leave their staffed positions in order to develop a private, for-profit fee-for-service consultancy to support and develop strong community-centered media hubs across the United States.

Within 18 months to two years, we expect these local hubs will be ready to connect to a national network. That would be the right time for a Media Consortium 3.0 to launch.

Concretely, this new organization would function as a much larger network with hyperlocal and local as well as regional and national members. It would offer a large, robust, revenue-positive national conference; a member portal connecting outlets together, powered by member dues and sponsor fees; a collaborative digital space; and a continued emphasis on foundation-funded reporting projects. Whether Jo Ellen or Manolia or both would come back on as staff, or would bring their consultancy to the new nonprofit organization, would be open questions for discussion.

What Can you Do? What Should You Do?

For some of you, this change will come as a shock. There is much you can do to maintain the network we all have built and relaunch it as an even stronger project.

1. **Volunteer.** Staff will leave the organization with enough money to run the website and member portal for about a year and to hold a network gathering in June. But volunteers will have to step up to keep things going:
 - Treasurer: FNP handles the books; you liaison with FNP (2 hrs/mo)
 - Web upkeep: Cividesk maintains the site: you liason with them (2 hrs/mo)
 - Communications: Be great to send out a monthly enewsletter (4 hrs/mo)
 - Database: Cividesk maintains the dbase: you keep it current (6 hrs/mo)
2. **Attend.** The current Coordinating Committee is planning a one-day network meeting in June (details t/k). The focus will be on next steps--should you keep the old Media Consortium alive until a new organization is birthed? If so, what would that take? Plan now on attending.
3. **Participate.** No matter what, the google groups listserv will stay. Participate on the listserv. Connect to each other. Keep in touch!
4. **Join.** You are encouraged to join other associations. The new organization we envision will not provide business or technical support. Get that kind of support from INN (if you are nonprofit), LION (if you are local/for profit), ONA (everyone).

Members of this network that we have built and nourished will continue to work, continue to collaborate. We will only get stronger together.

If you have any questions, please contact one of us:

- Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Executive Director: joellen@themediaconsortium.org
Or call me at 415-878-3862 after 12 ET please
- Julie Falk, Coordinating Committee Member, julie@b-word.org
- Rachel Kenison, Coordinating Committee Member, rachel@rethinkingschools.org

This letter has been approved by the current TMC Coordinating Committee:

Manolia Charlotin, TMC Associate Director, Julie Falk (Bitch), Caitlin Hendel (National Catholic Reporter), Steve Katz (Mother Jones), Rachel Kenison (Rethinking Schools), Jim Miller (Brave New Films), Steven Oh (The Young Turks), Ivan Roman (freelancer), Carla Wills (Democracy Now).

Practical Matters: A FAQ

Q. When will Manolia and Jo Ellen leave as paid Media Consortium staff?

A. Manolia's last day is September 30, 2017. Jo Ellen's last day is December 31, 2017. Note that Jo Ellen will be on vacation November 20 to December 12, 2017.

Q. Who will run the Media Consortium after December 31, 2017?

A. You will. The Coordinating Committee will serve as a functional board. The current Committee needs volunteers to step up to fill the following positions:

President: Hold monthly CC meetings; inform membership of any TMC news; authorize payments;

Treasurer: Work with FNP staff to code revenue/expenses; provide quarterly report on budget to CC;

Secretary: Take notes at CC meetings; Provide monthly updates on CC to membership via mailchimp newsletter;

CiviCrm Liaison: Work with CiviCrm on web/database issues. Note, it would be great if a second person would be willing to volunteer to update the contents of the database on a regular basis.

Q. What will the annual conference look like?

A. There won't be a regular annual conference. Staff recommend creating a network day in conjunction with another conference, and have left enough funds in 2018 to hire a manager for that day.

Q. Will the Media Consortium run any projects during 2018?

A. The Media Consortium may continue to run a few projects that were already in the grant pipeline during the summer of 2017.

Q. How will Media Consortium members stay in touch?

A. The TMC listserv is free. The Secretary and President are tasked with keeping the membership informed via Mail Chimp. The new Member Portal, running off CiviCrm, will be paid for through 2018. Members can use all these tools to keep in touch.

Q. If the Media Consortium disappears, where is my outlet going to find help with business and technical issues?

A. We strongly suggest Media Consortium members join other associations that are focused more heavily on business and technical issues.

INN: nonprofit news

LION: for profit local/regional news

NFCB: radio/podcasts

ONA: ONA has local groups that provide support

We know that some Media Consortium members don't fit easily into any of these associations.

We suggest you form self-run peer groups via the Media Consortium member portal. The same networking tools that support editorial collaboration can support self-run peer groups.

Q. Are we going to be asked to pay dues in 2018?

A. No.

Q. What actually will happen in 2019?

A. That is entirely up to you. Media Consortium 3.0 will spring from your vision.