Dear TMC Members,

In Chicago, over 40 TMC members met for two days to work on a strategic direction for the Media Consortium. This email constitutes an interim report. The contents of this email are NOT PUBLIC. You may share them, however, with your staff.

**The question that has guided our strategic planning has been, what is the Media Consortium’s unique value?** We asked this question in a survey that 63 people answered and in a series of focus groups and interviews with funders, founding member organizations, advocacy allies and self-selected members.

The answer to our question was surprisingly uniform: you clearly defined who we are now, and agreed on a vision of who we can become.

**Definition: We are a peer network of independent, progressive media outlets.**

**Vision: We aspire to grow the impact of individual members’ work and of the independent, progressive media sector as a whole.**

At our strategic planning event, we turned to the question of how to support this vision. We met over two days, working with a facilitator and using a democratic process called “dotmocracy.” Members learned that the Media Consortium has struggled with long-term financial sustainability. Member dues currently only provide 7% of our total funding, and foundations are increasingly unwilling to provide general support. So I suggested we seek a solution by looking to other stakeholders who value our impact enough to help us support our work.

**The solution our members overwhelmingly chose was to explore a joint venture opportunity with the Association of Alternative NewsMedia.**

We strongly believe such a partnership will add strength to strength. The Media Consortium has become a national leader in editorial collaboration and impact metrics. Our members are experts at grassroots funding through donors and crowds. The alternative media, which began as for-profit print weeklies, really need our knowledge.

Likewise, the alt-media offer a lot to us: alt-media are experts at basic business practices, ad revenue, and syndication. They offer our national outlets access to increasingly high quality local reporting. They are older and richer as an association, with three fulltime staffers, two conferences, and both a 501c6 and 501c3—we can benefit from their infrastructure.

To be clear, no deal is done, which is why this letter is confidential. Our goal at the start is to see what we can do jointly, while maintaining our unique cultures and identities. Each organization is concerned about a clash of cultures (alts vs. progressives) and how much we will gain—or lose—by a partnership. That’s why we need your input and, if possible, your involvement.

Here are the next steps:

* **March 19 at 3pm ET and March 21 at 1pm ET: Q and A**

Jo Ellen will be on a google hangout to answer questions. Join the google hangout by addiing [joellen.tmc@gmail.com](mailto:joellen.tmc@gmail.com) to your google+. I will also open up a conference call line if you can’t hangout: call

* **April, May, June: Due Diligence**

Exploratory Committee meets to gather due diligence on AAN (their budget, members, etc)t, to research legal issues and terminology, and to locate grant money to cover expenses if we decide to move forward. Communications team meets to communicate to members and to create a media strategy around a possible partnership

* **July 7-10, Nashville.: AAN Annual Meeting**

The AAN board meets on July 7 to vote on whether to pursue a possible partnership. The AAN annual meeting occurs July8-10. Members of the Exploratory and Coordinating Committees should attend.

* **January 2014: Joint Conference with AAN in San Francisco.**

Let’s get everyone together and see what happens.

* Vote by TMC members on partnership
* An implementation committtee will form to hammer down the logistics of a joint venture or partnership, which could begin with a simple MOU

If you have questions, please get on one of the conference calls; or email Jo Ellen at [joellen@themediaconsortium.com](mailto:joellen@themediaconsortium.com).

Please consider volunteering for a committee:

* **Strategic Planning**: An umbrella committee to guide the process—good for big thinkers (regular meetings April 2014-February 2015)
* **Exploratory Committee**: good for researchers and those who like concrete to-dos (email check-ins and occasional meetings, April 2014-September 2014)
* **Communications Committee**: willing to use day-job skills to help TMC? (periods of inactivity followed by intense activity, April 2014-April 2015)
* **Negotiating Committee**: looking for seasoned negotiators—experience needed (intense activity July 2014-October 2014)

I’m so excited for us once again to be on the cutting edge of collaborations, this time on an association-wide scale. Looking forward to your input!

Sincerely,

Jo Ellen

P.S. To arrive at this decision, we employed the services of facilitator Craig Spargimino and used the Dotmocracy process. The dotmocracy process on Saturday showed a significant interest in an AAN partnership, but that members had many questions. On Sunday, we invited AAN Executive Director Tiffany Shackelford to answer questions about AAN, and we talked about AAN with her out of the room. After an in-depth discussion, 92% of those present chose to explore a partnership with AAN.

Please see attachments re: Dotmocracy

P.P.S. My presentation laid out the case for the different pathways I believed we could take. It is also attached.