**Media Democracy Fund Organizational Self-Assessment**

**The Media Consortium**

December 13, 2013

Completed by Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

Executive Director

**Financial Health (1-2 paragraphs)**

In 2011, the Media Consortium lost a significant set of philanthropic funders, dropping our annual budget from $400,000 to $120,000 from 2010 to 2011. All of these funders changed the direction of their strategic giving and have not returned. In the intervening three years, we have developed a new funding stream based around projects. This stream is not as robust as the previous general support funds we had received, but seems steady, at about $175,000 per year. In addition, we have worked to increase our earned revenue stream to approximately $50,000 per year, for an annual budget that is holding steady at $225,000.

To be effective, however, the Consortium should be a 2.5 employee organization, which means we need to grow our budget back to $350,000. To do this, we will probably need to diversify our revenue, which means primarily developing earned revenue streams—difficult when we are under capacity already. In addition, to further our mission, we should become independent from our parent organization, the Foundation for National Progress—however, that too, will require more capacity and thus more funding than we currently have.

**Governance and Advisory Committees (1-2 paragraphs)**

Because the Media Consortium is a project of FNP, we have an coordinating committee (CC) instead of a board, and this committee is made up of our member organizations. The CC does a thorough job of scrutinizing our budget and evaluating the Executive Director’s performance. CC members also weigh in on the overall direction of the organization.

However, the CC members do not have the capacity to donate money to the organization, nor do they often have the capacity to give a significant amount of time to governance. Because they are all members of the organization, they also sometimes lack the kind of outsider perspective that can be valuable to an Executive Director. If the Media Consortium were an independent organization, our board would probably still be composed primarily of members, but we would be able to bring on these outside voices.

**Leadership and Staffing (1-2 paragraphs)**

The director is writing this! I’ve been director since 2011, and expect to continue. My performance reviews have been positive. I have been asked to become more of a public presence, and to represent the Media Consortium more forcefully in public venues.

My morale is good, but I need another staffer to meet our goals. I do not have the time I need to connect with funders, academics and other influentials in the space—instead, I have to devote my time to the project management required for many of our grants, and to tending to member needs. I also spend too much time on admin work. I would like to be able to hire a full-time staffer as a membership director, and a part-time admin.

When we seek new members for our coordinating committee, we specifically seek out individuals who bring diverse personal experiences, as well as staff from a wide range of member outlets. As director, I will often specifically reach into our membership to vett new policies with individuals and member organizations that work with marginalized communities. Finally, on a personal note: I took a cut in salary when I came on in order to keep the Media Consortium in business. I now am underpaid compared to my peers—and that, for me, is not so much a morale issue as it is a feminist issue that I and my board would like to fix.

**Communications Capacity (1-2 paragraphs)**

Communications are vital to our mission of growing the impact of our members. We use our social media feeds (currently 4,372 fans on facebook and 3000 followers on twitter) primarily to promote member content. In 2013, we hired a part-time social media curator, Teddy Wilson, to work these feeds. Increasingly, even with Teddy on the job, we have found facebook to be ineffective—despite experimenting with just about every trick in the book, we can’t get our relatively small audience to engage with our feed. So in 2014, we are planning to start a Tumblr –we believe this will help us reach a younger and more engaged audience.

We do not use our own website for communications, mainly because we don’t have the staff to maintain it—I would love to send out a monthly newsletter, but also find I don’t have the time to do that work. Instead, we have been creating “pop-up” websites for each of our projects, and asking members to cross-promote these. This technique has been extraordinarily effective—our [www.whereisyourplanb.com](http://www.whereisyourplanb.com) site was seen by 20,000 people within its first week up, and resulted in a 5% increase in conversations about reproductive health on the twitterverse (as measured via our Crimson Hexagon metrics project). So we plan to continue to use these microsites to reach beyond the choir.

**Security (1 paragraph)**

We have begun an initiative to teach data/source/communications security to our members, but we are not concerned about secure communications for the Media Consortium. All of our communications systems are in the cloud—using Google and Dropbox—which actually gives us some protection from warrantless surveillance.

**Role in the Field (2-4 paragraphs)**

The Media Consortium has entered a strategic planning process to redefine our place in our field. As nonprofit, point-of-view, and community-focused news organizations are increasingly recognized as being the equals (or betters) of commercial legacy media; as new organizations like INN and ONA enter the field; and as the economics of news have changed entirely; the Media Consortium has had to rethink our role within what is now a more robust independent news media sector.

What is unique to the Media Consortium is our embrace of point-of-view journalism; this is journalism which, as Dick Toffel explains, starts with a point-of-view but then follows the story wherever it may lead. By embracing a progressive point-of-view, the Media Consortium is more able and willing than other journalism organizations to partner with social justice organizations. In the realm of media policy, for example, we have worked very closely with CMJ and Free Press, and have strong ties to Public Knowledge, Benton, EFF, ILSR, Common Cause, NHMC and Prometheus. We continue to work to strengthen these ties—for example, by partnering with CMJ and Free Press in 2014 on a FCC workshop for journalists.

The Media Consortium is also unique in our capacity to act as a laboratory to increase impact. In a recent survey, members overwhelming chose “increase impact” as the benefit they hope to obtain from attending our annual meeting. On the one hand, our members’ willingness to collaborate, experiment, and even redefine their work to increase impact gives us opportunities our sibling organizations don’t get, e.g. our metrics impact project with Crimson Hexagon. On the other hand, we’ve been able to leverage our role as the sector’s leader for experimentation to partner with sibling associations, such as the Association for Alternative Newsmedia and NAMAC, that want to take advantage of our experimental capacity.

Our challenge is to increase these inter-media relationships. The independent media field is not too empty but too full. There are now at least 7 associations offering membership to independent and community news media. At the same time, our members have needs that we cannot easily fulfill, but that other associations could (ONA as a source of technology; INN as a source for best business practices; AAN as a source for learning about external revenue, etc). To best leverage our resources, we would prefer to forge stronger alliances across the field with associations like INN, NFCB, NAMAC, ACM, and AAN. Such alliances would leave the Media Consortium freer to develop a stronger identity around policy and social justice as a kind of “laboratory” counterpart to Free Press, the Government Accountability Project, and the other justice NGOs that exist to ensure that our government remains free and democratic.