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2009 promises to be a year of extremes, filled with great opportunity and deep struggle. The opportunities are great, as the political tides that moored America's democracy for eight long years have finally shifted. The challenges are large as millions lose their homes and jobs in the most extreme economic downturn in decades.

John Pilger, editor of *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism That Changed The World*, notes why journalism is so central to documenting these moments: "Without it, our sense of injustice would lose its vocabulary and people would not be armed with the information they need to fight it."

At the same time, the media landscape reflects the flux of the country. The corporate media system is in a critical moment of turmoil as local newspapers shutter and national outlets cut reporting jobs. There is also rebirth: swift changes with online technology and platforms are completely refashioning traditional journalism and business models.

The state of progressive, independent media is also at a crossroads. Independent media organizations are committed to continuing *and increasing* the critical journalism needed to inform and activate the public as corporate media shuts down. The online transformation offers opportunities to engage new audiences and communities. But the economic climate also brings the prospect of severe downsizing. As almost 50 independent journalism organizations agree, independent media simply can't make it through this crossroads alone.

That's where The Media Consortium comes in. As our mission statement reads, the purpose of this network is:

"To amplify our voices; increase our collective clout; leverage our current audiences and reach out to new ones; attract financial resources; strengthen and transform our individual businesses and our sector's position in a rapidly changing media and political environment; and redefine ourselves and progressivism for a new century.

The Media Consortium's goal is to harness opportunities, overcome challenges, and create a new, game changing system in which progressive, independent media flourishes. Our key role is to coordinate with members to foster initiatives that will advance and strengthen the sector and the very foundation of democracy itself. Past support from The Arca Foundation has been integral to The Media Consortium's successful development of these vital objectives.

The Media Consortium is now a network of almost 50 leading independent journalism organizations that work in print, online, on television, and on the radio. **Our current members are:**

Afro-Netizen	GlobalVision/Media Channel	OneWorld US
Air America Radio	GoLeftTV	The Progressive
AlterNet	Grist.org	Public News Service
American Forum	High Country News	RealTV/IWT
American News Project	Hightower Lowdown	Regional News Network
The American Prospect	In These Times	Talking Points Memo
Balcony Films	LinkTV	Texas Observer
Brave New Films	Mother Jones	Truthdig
Berrett-Koehler Publishers	Ms. Magazine	The Uptake
Center for Independent Media	The Nation	The Washington Monthly
ColorLines	The Nation Institute	WireTap
Democracy Now	National Alliance for Media Arts	Women's Media Center
Feministing.com	and Culture (NAMAC)	Workers Independent News
Free Speech TV	National Radio Project	YES! Magazine
G. W. Williams Center for	New America Media	The Young Turks
Independent Journalism	The New Press	

The Media Consortium has several projects that have launched or are in development for 2009—all generated during Consortium-facilitated discussions and meetings. Each of our 2009 projects is tied to one of four strategic principles which were developed at a strategy meeting of our coordinating committee in the summer of 2008. They include:

- **Fostering Collaboration and Coordination**
- **Building and Diversifying the Media Leadership Pipeline**
- **Focusing on Audience Development**
- **Bringing Money into the Sector**

With these principles and associated projects, The Media Consortium will support its members in the creation of high-impact journalism that provides transparency for the political, social and economic issues of our time. We will help place our members at the forefront of tomorrow's media landscape. The following proposal outlines our major programs for 2009. Each project fulfills one or more of these principles and the overarching mission of The Media Consortium.

### **Fostering Collaboration and Connection among Media Consortium members and allies**

The Media Consortium creates spaces for networking and collaboration among members and allies, allows members to provide input on consortium strategies and projects, and connects members with critical information and outside experts to help guide them through the changing political and media landscapes.

#### Member Meetings and Networking Spaces

Since its inception, The Media Consortium has organized biannual in-person members meetings that serve as the crux of professional relationship development among members.

We held our first 2009 meeting in Washington, DC. Over 60 members traveled across the country to attend. The Media Consortium provided special travel funds to members to ensure that as many members as possible could attend the meeting. Members were joined by special guests, including: Chris Hughes, the Obama campaign's Online Organizing Guru; Rep. Raul Grijalva, Co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus; Laura Quinn of Catalyst; and many more. These guests provided critical information on how consortium members could integrate online organizing models and social media technology into their work, access an insider's view of organizing plans within Congress, and investigate opportunities to target and build out new audiences.

The meeting started as a celebration and outlined the rise and impact of the progressive, independent media in the last few years. A representative from Media Matters detailed the broad growth of progressive media from 2004 to 2008. Tracy Van Slyke, Project Director of The Media Consortium, and Jessica Clark of the Center for Social Media debuted a special presentation documenting the impact of Consortium members in 2008. This presentation was based on information from a survey MC members took in late 2008. It was the first attempt to synthesize and categorize the impact of MC members on political and social issues, events, and public debate. This impact presentation, which is part of our "Bringing Money into the Sector" principle, will continue to evolve in 2009 so that individual members can adapt it to narrate and showcase their own impact to funders and allies.

Consortium staff also updated members on 2009 projects (outlined below). Members discussed and learned how MC projects will benefit their individual organizations and the overall sector. The final portion of the meeting provided space for MC members to discuss and brainstorm opportunities to build their individual and collective capabilities in critical areas, including social networking, business models and editorial collaborations. The next member meeting will be in Fall 2009.

In addition to our meetings, The MC hosts a member listserv and website that provides active engagement opportunities and information for all members. In February 2009, members conducted a robust conversation over the listserv on how to identify and best use social networking tools for building online communities and marketing journalism. A full update on the development of The Media Consortium hosted listserv and web site is in our 2008 report.

### Tip Sheet

In the first half of 2009, The Media Consortium looks to launch a special project that will connect issue experts to journalists, producers and editors within the consortium. We've created a "tip sheet" form to be distributed on a weekly basis to a small, approved list of organizations and individuals who specialize in areas like the economy, labor, foreign policy, women's rights, civil rights, healthcare, Congress, and more. These experts will fill out a short online form and provide story tips, give key "insider" information, and note future trends. This information will be stored in a private database accessed only by consortium members. The tip sheet will help feed stories and information to consortium members to help them break stories. The consortium will be using free online tools to manage this project. The goal is to build the connective tissue between key allies and consortium members that will directly support high-quality, high-impact journalism.

### **Building and Diversifying the Media Leadership Pipeline**

The Media Consortium's second strategic principle centers around helping members support and launch the progressive journalists of today and tomorrow. We are beta-testing two projects to develop this concept in 2009.

### Getting our Future Journalists Started

The Right invested time and money in their future leaders for years—results we see now in the likes of Bill O'Reilly, Ann Coulter, and many other, untold conservative reporters and pundits. If progressive media were to show the same initiative and dedication to developing talent, we could attract dedicated workers and visionaries from a young age, helping to ensure the longevity of our respective organizations and foster the kinds of innovative thinking necessary to building a successful media sphere. This initiative could also help develop the next generation of media leaders and journalists by specifically focusing on women, people of color and economically diverse as candidates.

What does the beta program for progressive media internships look like? Media Consortium staff will identify and place 12 interns with member organizations in 2009. We're looking to space it out as either six interns over two quarters or four interns over three quarters. The consortium will provide a \$2,000 stipend to the interns and partner with existing university internship placement programs and promote to schools with leading politics, communications and journalism programs. These partnerships will focus on finding interns from a diversity of backgrounds.

Both Media Consortium members and prospective interns will fill out an application form and must meet criteria set by the consortium. We are not looking for members who want interns to get coffee. Members must give their intern one to two major editorial projects to complete during their internship and provide weekly duties, including fact-checking, reporting and more. They must also provide mentorship to their intern via bi-weekly, one-on-one check-ins with top editors and/or reporters.

Interns will also have to fulfill rigorous requirements. They must demonstrate a commitment to journalism and showcase any prior experience in either journalism or social justice in their application. For the internship, they must be able to work at least four, eight-hour days per week. In addition to their duties at the organization, they must write a monthly report on their experiences and participate in any consortium-led conference calls and trainings. Interns will be recruited with the utmost attention to economic, gender and ethnic diversity.

The Media Consortium staff is currently fine-tuning participation criteria for members and interns as well as creating an application process for both. The major challenge for this project is demand. Almost all members will want a paid intern, but as part of a beta test, we will not have the capacity to place interns at all member organizations. We will also make sure that we place interns at organizations that are ready on day one to work and support the intern. We will limit internship placement to New York, Washington, DC and San Francisco for the test run, as a critical mass of our members are based in these areas. We plan to roll out this program and start placing interns no later than mid-May, but due to resource and time constraints may have to wait until June.

If successful and with additional funding, we can increase the size and amount of interns we can place in the fourth quarter of 2009 and early 2010.

### Making the Media Darlings

Rachel Maddow. Jeremy Scahill. Chris Hayes. Amy Goodman. In addition to their amazing talents, these individuals have broken through the mainstream media system thanks to the support and platforms provided by progressive

media outlets and allies. As public faces of progressive media, they have helped to coalesce, diversify, and legitimize progressive media analysis and journalism to a broader audience. If we want to make the next generation of media darlings, we need to promote, publicize, and connect them to the establishment media, targeted audiences, allies, and even unlikely allies. These journalists can help act as bridges to targeted, diverse audiences for the individual outlets and the larger public as a whole.

The Media Consortium will help create and implement a beta plan that embraces innovative strategic communication strategies to push out and brand these journalists as critical voices. The goals for this initiative include:

- Make the next generation of media darlings.
- Create a sustainable and scalable program to increase the influence and impact of a diverse set of progressive journalists, their work, and media outlets on the political and public dialogue. We'll undertake concentrated efforts to increase their presence on MSM, reach new audiences and employ new media/journalism tools.
- Legitimize and expand the audience of the progressive media to new and established communities.

The 2009 plan is to launch a beta program over the next 12 months focused on four to six journalists already working for Consortium members. This test run will allow us to refine a high-impact program using ready-to-be established personalities that are already affiliated with MC members. The beta program will be organized around one issue (i.e. the economy) and participants will be recruited with special attention paid to diversity.

The consortium will work with a small group of member organizations and coordinating committee members to identify the issue that the "media darlings" must have an expertise around and produce related content over the next year. We will set up an initial consulting partnership with a professional public relations group to outline the project's priorities and opportunities. Due to limited funds in 2009 and an unwillingness to "recreate the wheel," we will not be setting up our own shop to book or promote the darlings. We will work with allies inside and outside of the Consortium to provide media trainings, book the darlings on television and radio, syndicate their content to other national and local media outlets and more. We have already begun initial conversations with the American Forum and Media Matters for America. We are working on further developing this program and nurturing concrete partnerships in the first part of 2009 and will roll out the Media Darlings in the latter half of the year.

The beta run will allow us to track impact by focusing on one issue as baseline for a more comprehensive program in the future, and adjust/evaluate as needed. Our major challenge is that the current budget only allows for a base line approach to this project—not a full-throttle effort to really move it forward. We have a small amount of money in our current budget to partner with organizations in certain skill areas, but do not have the ability to deepen or expand our efforts. We will be aggressively fundraising for this project throughout the year. With additional support, we can increase the opportunities to spotlight and support our media darlings.

Overall, a diverse range of members strongly believe that building a successful media pipeline will dramatically scale up the progressive media as a whole and have tangible benefits to individual media outlets.

### **Focusing on Audience Development**

The Media Consortium's third strategic principle is to leverage the individual and collective content of our members to expand their audience reach and to their increase impact on the public and political dialogue. We are also looking at specific opportunities to identify and market to new audiences.

#### MediaWires

In 2008, The Media Consortium partnered with Common Sense New Media to launch its "MediaWire" project using their existing NewsLadder platform and distribution tools. With this project, our goal is to showcase the first-rate independent journalism produced by our members, bring their work to larger audiences and build the influence of their journalism. With these goals in mind, we built a series of one-stop shops organizing and offering the best in "progressive, independent media."

We are also using new media tools, which represent current and future journalism trends, by linking, filtering and distributing content for audiences to easily track and find MC members' content. The project, which launched October 2008, is a critical part of The Media Consortium's core goal: Increase distribution opportunities for our

members via new technologies and social networking applications. Please see our 2008 report for more information on this project's performance last year.

The Media Consortium is currently supporting four wires or NewsLadder "hub sites" including:

- Immigration: <http://immigration.newsladder.net>
- Healthcare: <http://healthcare.newsladder.net>
- Economy: <http://economy.newsladder.net>
- Stimulus Plan: <http://stimulusplan.newsladder.net>

We plan to take over management of Sustain.NewsLadder.Net in Spring 2009 and are working with members to launch a fifth wire, which is coming soon.

Using the hub sites as a base, we built a social media toolkit that makes MC member content easily accessible and available to new audiences and partners. With these free, easy to implement distribution tools, we are working to develop deeper relationships and partnerships with allies to connect and integrate the tools and reporting provided by our members. Toolkit components include:

- **Weekly Blogs** round up the best progressive reporting on immigration, healthcare and the economy and are published three times a week. The blogs are available for MC members to post on their own sites and are cross-posted on sites like Huffington Post, Open Left, Firedoglake, Open Salon, and more. We are also working with partners including Young People For, OneAmerica and the Student-Farmworker Alliance to post these blogs for their members to access critical information and reporting. You can read the blogs at [www.themediaconsortium.com/consortium-report](http://www.themediaconsortium.com/consortium-report).
- **Headline Widgets** featuring real-time headline updates from MC members are available for members and organizational allies to post on their sites. Widgets are available for all four issues. An additional widget feature packages all MC member content. Widgets link directly to MC member web sites, in order to drive traffic back to the originating content source. You can see them at work on MC member Link TV (<http://www.linktv.org/currentaffairs>) and on the site of organizational partner, the National Council for Research on Women (<http://is.gd/lqKJ>).
- Our **Facebook Page** and social networking applications are bringing MC member content to new audiences by integrating our content with the social network. We've just launched a new tool through Facebook Connect, which feeds an update into a user's profile and their friends' news feed whenever the user submits or votes on an article on the NewsLadder site. This tool was used by the Obama presidential campaign. Every time an Obama supporter donated, volunteered, signed a petition and more it showed up on their Facebook news feed, making the action go viral to all of their friends. We also have widget applications with MC headline feeds available for hosting on an organizational page or personal profile. Visit <http://is.gd/lfwp> to see them in action.
- **RSS Feeds** linking directly to member headlines are available for partners to pipe into their sites. MC ally WhiteHouse2 (<http://is.gd/lfyv>) features the feeds on their discussion pages.
- Each MC-sponsored ladder sends regular updates out via **Twitter** to our audiences.

Initial efforts in late 2008 sent over 30,000 visitors to MC member sites, but the 2009's potential is much greater. We're targeting non-profit, NGO and philanthropic organizations that already have networks in place to help funnel this content to their engaged, invested audiences. By pooling content around key social issues, we are able to raise awareness around the quality reporting Media Consortium members are providing to the people most likely to develop long-term relationships with our sector due to personal investment in an issue. Our current partners include:

- WhiteHouse2.org
- National Council for Research on Women
- OneAmerica
- Young People For
- Student-Farmworker Alliance
- Campaign for America's Future
- Twin Cities Daily Planet
- Center for Health and Gender Equity

Consortium staff will be actively cultivating new partnerships to increase the branding, recognition and impact of our members' journalism over the next few months. Funding for this project is guaranteed through June 2009. MC staff are working to bring in additional funding, increase MC member participation and develop new partnerships with

likeminded organizations. Due to 2008's election cycle, traffic and partnerships started slowly, but are quickly gathering steam. Over the next three month, MC staff will be holding conference calls with interested parties and provide tech advice for organizations looking to install widgets or feeds on their sites. We're also looking at producing weekly audio/video round ups from the Wires for radio stations and easy distribution via YouTube to increase the portability and impact of this project across networks and media platforms.

#### List Building

As noted in our 2008 report, MC staff is currently in discussions with Catalyst, a company which houses a database of 250 million voter-aged individuals, making it one of the most comprehensive and largest database files the country. Catalyst representatives are currently working with a small group of Media Consortium members to provide them with information on how independent media outlets could use their database to reach and target new audiences. The Media Consortium and its members will take this information and decide if and how to expand its relationship with Catalyst in the near future.

#### **Bring Money Into the Sector**

Issues of economic sustainability are plaguing mainstream and independent media. The Media Consortium has already advanced specific ideas and projects to help remedy this in 2008. As described in our 2008 report, The Media Consortium supported the initial research for the development of an online progressive advertising network. Four consortium members, including Air America, The Nation, Mother Jones and AlterNet are the founding partners of this network, now called Ad Progress, which will be up and running in March 2009. All consortium members with online advertising capabilities will be encouraged to join, with the goal of reaching new advertisers and bringing in additional revenue.

Looking towards the future, we believe that there is a unique opportunity to reshape the playing field for the progressive, independent media. Ideas and projects around the future of journalism, community building, outside economic factors and new technologies are being brought into this process. In 2009, we will have tangible next steps for a long-term plan to build sustainable progressive, independent media. This includes the evolution of our "Progressive Media Impact" presentation as noted in the Fostering Collaboration section that can be used by individual members to showcase their influence. We will also finish and assess our major strategic research and development project known as "Creating Progressive Media Game Changers." And last, but not least, we have a long-term goal to support high-impact journalism through our "Strategic Collaboration and Innovation Fund."

#### Creating Progressive Media "Game Changers"

The very core of The Media Consortium is to advance and strengthen the progressive, independent media sector. Our members agree that now is the moment to think and act big. Thanks to this energy, Media Consortium Project Director Tracy Van Slyke and members of the Coordinating Committee have worked closely with consultants Tony Deifell and Nicole Boyer in 2008 to craft the direction of our strategic long-term research which has centered on the creation and implementation of "game changer" projects. We define game changers as:

*Developments, 'disruptive' innovations, projects, ideas that could significantly increase the impact and influence of independent media in the next five years. By definition, these aren't incremental but really intended to 'change the game' you're playing in.*

In 2008, Tony, Nicole and Tracy have set up multiple small group conversations, created feedback loops through online surveys for consortium members and organized an in-person coordinating committee in 2008 that focused on future political and media scenarios. The process was intended for members to think outside of their everyday activities and to shift into long-term creative brainstorming. In addition, they interviewed dozens of outside experts in the fields of media, technology, politics, and financing. Together, the game changer team synthesized the current opportunities, challenges and uncertainties for the sector, as well as new possibilities for The Media Consortium and its members to significantly impact and change the landscape.

A first round draft of the report was presented at the February 2009 meeting and sparked dynamic and in-depth conversations among our members. The final report with its key findings and recommendations for "game changing" projects and opportunities for the consortium to explore further will be finished in March 2009. The key findings will

have major implications for individual media organizations. We will facilitate in-person, online and conference calls to help members think about the future economic and content production models that they will need to start strategizing for now. The coordinating committee, membership and staff will also review some of the key recommended “game changing” project proposals to develop and build toward in late 2009 and 2010.

#### Strategic Collaboration and Innovation Fund:

In the past, the Media Consortium has organized small and large editorial collaborations among its members. Some efforts have been more successful than others, but all have provided valuable lessons as we develop a model for future collaboration that is both high-impact and beneficial to individual participants. Collaborations among our members are not intended to push the same talking points across the board, but for individual organizations to work together to showcase their journalistic strengths, help members learn about and integrate new technologies, and break the “white noise” barrier. Collaborative editorial projects are also new avenue to reach additional foundations and donors interested in supporting more than one media organization and looking for high-impact media projects. Collaborations provide needed opportunity for members to think creatively, outside the box, and last but not least, create critical partnerships that support editorial missions and financial needs.

From experience, it’s clear that Consortium collaborations are most successful when generated and facilitated by the members. We’re pursuing a ground-up, member-driven model that will allow members to brainstorm their own collaboration ideas and make it happen with the support of The Media Consortium. The consortium is looking to create a "Strategic Collaboration Fund" that would distribute support to MC-member organized collaborations. The fund is based on the idea that it’s more feasible for the MC to fundraise and redistribute a large pot of money through a special project that has a strategic framework, rather than organizations individually and repeatedly approaching foundations and individuals.

So what does collaboration look like? At least two members of the consortium would propose a long or short-term collaboration focused on a particular issue or investigation that is either currently underreported, part of the new cycle, or should be pushed into a larger public discourse. Along with the editorial focus, they would have an integrated marketing and public relations campaign that can raise the awareness of the coverage of the issue and raise the profile of the collaborating organizations. There are also major opportunities for members to coordinate with partners who have different skill sets including online video, television, radio, long-form investigative journalism and more.

Consortium members would propose their collaborations to a special advisory committee, who would work with consortium staff to distribute “strategic collaborative” grants one to two times a year for the larger projects. There would also be an option to support short-term collaborations based around the news cycle.

Proposals would be open to MC members on an equal opportunity basis. The proposals focus on the project idea, how this advances the individual orgs and the sector as a whole, why the participating members are the ones to organize this collaboration, the structure of the collaboration, who would be accountable for the project, how this project would create an impact, what steps would be necessary to create the impact, if it is a one-time collaboration or the basis for a long-term project, timeline, etc.

This project is a core component for the consortium’s long-term planning, but will probably not get off the ground until the latter half of 2009 or 2010. We believe it is a crucial aspect of supporting high-impact journalism as well as helping our members to fund the creation of that journalism. We are hoping to raise a minimum of \$250,000 for this project alone. But due to economic and fundraising realities, that goal is farther off that we would like. We will be working with members and hope to work with strategic partners that can help us create concrete fundraising expectations and plans for this project.

#### **Evaluation Benchmarks**

One of the big measures for our success over the next 12 months is to see how our projects will fulfill our four strategic principles. These principles are the guiding paths to internal evaluations, but also provide a framework for action steps and future developments.

- **Sustainability:** Are we supporting efforts that bring in new money or relieve financial burdens for members? Are we setting the stage for long-term sustainability for the sector?
- **Impact:** Are the projects supporting members to have more of an impact on the public and political debate? Is the project helping to build connections among members and outside partners to increase impact?
- **Audience:** Is the project helping members and their journalism reach and build its audiences now or in the future?

As noted in our 2008 report, The Media Consortium provides space and resources for independent media outlets to think big and beyond quick fixes. Our projects are focused on concrete gains for our members. At the same time, we are dealing with media organizations that are already economically pinched and a media system mired in an apocalyptic moment. As a result, some of our projects do not have immediate results, but require a combination long-term planning and nimble flexibility to make sure that they reach their full potential. We have made remarkable strides in 2008 for such a young network, but some of our newer projects might not have concrete, measurable results until late 2009.

### **Budget and Fundraising for 2009**

The Media Consortium's current 2009 projected budget is \$293,000, which includes funds already committed from the Open Society Institute, the Wallace Global Fund, and the Jo List Estate. This also includes revenue projected from an individual donor who has committed for this year, as well as membership dues. We are pleased that we already have funds in the door that total more than half our 2008 budget. But there is much more work to do.

Additional funds will allow us to increase the amount of support we provide our members and the projects that will directly benefit their organizations and the journalism they produce. We recognize these are tight economic times for both foundations and individual donors, but also firmly believe that The Media Consortium is providing critical infrastructure support for the best and brightest journalism organizations in our country. This is a moment of great opportunity for progressive journalism organizations to play a crucial part in the shape of our democracy and we must not stop now. To help us in our endeavor, we are seeking renewals from past allies, including The Arca Foundation and The Surdna Foundation, and hoping to develop new partnerships with foundations such as The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, The Quixote Foundation and more.

Currently \$161,000 is allocated for personnel and administrative costs including organizational support, travel, legal, and website hosting. The balance \$131,000 is allocated to direct program expenses for projects focused on fulfilling The Media Consortium's goals and strategies. Low to no-cost projects like the "Tip Sheet," "Progressive Media Impact Presentation," Catalyst/List Building are not noted in the budget, but are part of the consortium's 2009 priorities. The rest of the budget is set aside for administrative costs. We will be working throughout the year to raise at least an additional \$150,000 to go directly to support of programs noted in the attached budget.

The current budget and desire for growth demonstrates that the Consortium continues to draw support from its members, funders and allies and that its initiatives are continuing to develop and deepen in order to have an important impact on the independent media sector. Therefore, on behalf of the dozens of participating journalism organizations that make up The Media Consortium, we seek a renewal grant of \$60,000 from The Arca Foundation.