The purpose of our focus group is to set direction for our strategic planning process, which aims to answer this question: What is the unique value of the Media Consortium?

Questions I have for you to prompt discussion:

--What other associations have you joined (and are you still members)?

--What did you hope to gain for your organization by joining the Media Consortium?

--Have you found a value for yourself or your organization in Media Consortium membership?

--What value do you believe the Media Consortium could have for your organization?

1. INN, MPA-IMAG, Social Venture Network,

2. I din’t know my peers; I wanted to get to know them and share war stories; I wanted to collaborate.

There was an historic moment when we felt impotent in terms of the progressive news sector and we wanted to see if we could leverage ourselves into something more powerful in a collective way. That didn’t happen, but what happened instead was an evolution of a trade association of sorts. Growth made the earlier notion of a small group collaborating less of a possibility. There’s always been a split of editorial/business but it turned out that a lot of the publishers had resistance from editors in terms of collaborative projects, especially around publishing at the same time. Now Consortium is less of a priority—for the most part I think it serves the smaller members who have more of a need for networking than it does for me.

Getting to know people better is important; publishing is opportunistice—who can I emulate, who can I collaborate with. I wanted to improve the perception about the impact of the progressive sector—the perception that we were only preaching to the choir.

I was new to the field 10 years ago. Getting to know counterparts was cool, and led to a tighter sense of connection and fellow feeling. 2004 was the peak moment of blogger triumphalism with traditional media seen as irrelevant and aside from Katrina, the rest of us were invisible. At Pocantico, we layered over that the technology piece, because we could see the technology coming.

When we discovered you guys we felt like we are not the crazy ones. It was a self-validating moment. We are for-profit, so in addition to the activism, we do a lot of other things on our platform that are more entertainment driven. We joined to collaborate, to cross-promote, to drive audiences, to drive revenue together, brand, etc. Collaborative efforts have been weak or non-existent. We don’t work in lockstep so there are limits to how we don’t collaborate. We speak in different voices but are on the same page. I’d love for our side to do better.

We were looking for community. We felt isolated. After the meeting I came away with a list of people to talk to about our work—biz, editorial, etc.. We valued the New Revenue Generation lab. We would love to see those kinds of labs come back. Potential for group advocacy is there. The collaborative capacity of the Consortium has filled in for us. The May Day coverage was huge for our readers and readers were wowed by the idea of a network of organizations that could amplify a topic in the news.

3. It’s been a long time since we’ve gotten major ROI out of the Consortium. We have participated in pieces and felt good about it. The annual meetings and renewing relationships is good. I’m hopeful about the metrics project. It feels to me that we’ve been able to internalize some of the things we were looking outward to the Consortium to solve. The two or three things that are missing that we can’t do ourselves are:

1) we need to market and brand and promote the progressive media space to potential readers, users and funders and make the case that what we do matters—that continues to be an issue. If we could get the revenue to do that, it would lift all boats. Many of us are cut off from funders and donors—liberal donors don’t see the value yet.

2) Why do some of the media funders see some members as a third rail—that problem has to be eliminated by a pressure the group has to bring

3) we have done cool editorial projects, like Wisconsin. Putting aside resources, there are huge possiblities for that editorial work.

4) Rationalizing the progressive media space itself. Questions of merger and sunsetting, integration of operations. We should talk about that.

One of my hopes was to improve perceptions about the sector. We haven’t accomplished that yet. Time and resources are the big impediment. For example, we are part of Vocus, but we can’t take advantage of it because we don’t have anyone on staff. There is a circular quality to some of this; you hope you can do x, but even if the Consortium provides it, you can’t do it.

The meetings have been most helpful. The Media of the 99% focus, the advocacy journalism focus, was helpful. Strengthening the meetings, calling them conferences, will help. Collaborative coverage has also created a lot of impact with our readers. How can we come together to take a message to funders is important, but how does that play out as a group? We need to find a way to talk about revenue that is mutually beneficial. There is a limited pool of funding.

It’s frustrating from a business perspective that given our progressive leaning, we can’t take money from a number of businesses (like a major oil company) because it doesn’t mesh with our values. However, there are a lot of good responsible companies—would love if we could put together a team that finds those companies and systematizes advertising for them.

Networking vs. Collaboration. There’s no more individualistic value system than independent media. That can play out in how we operate as a whole. For us, the Media Cosnortium is a place where something pops up that we can take advantage of, but when it comes to fundraising I think it’s impossible for that to happen. We are competing for advertising, funding, donors—I don’t know how that gets transcended. For me, the Media Consortium is a modest project.

WE tried an ad network; it needed major staffing to take off, and we couldn’t get the money for it.

We found the meetings energizing, but not useful enough to stop and send people to the Media Consortium meetings. We ran into problems between large and small organizations. A little of an issue between forprofits and nonprofits. I’d love a place where I can go and learn about new technology and a sense of what is working—I don’t know if that’s realistic from the Media Consortium. Same with business/ vendor partners.