In 2014, the Media Consortium undertook a strategic planning process to determine how we can best achieve our vision of building a progressive infrastructure for the independent news media in our next decade. Creating that infrastructure is our goal as we enter 2015.

As part of the planning process, we sent out surveys, held focus groups, and spent a day at our annual meeting in structured conversation. Two points became clear:

1. Our members rely on us. When asked during our planning meeting what members would do if we ceased to exist, one member exclaimed: Build a new Media Consortium!

2. While our members appreciate our mission to build their impact, they also rely on us for technical and business support. When we asked our member organizations what we could do for them, one replied: “Sometimes, we need more technical training, sometimes we need a better means for fostering collaboration and creating new partnerships. Sometimes, we just need funding for important projects. This year in particular, we've found a great need to protect the rights of the press in particular. I'm so grateful for the purpose that TMC serves!”

Asa result, the objectives we set for ourselves were:

1. Build sustainability for the Media Consortium, so we can continue to serve members. Specifically, we seek to locate non-foundation revenue streams.

2. Add technical training and offer more business services, especially around revenue generation.

3. Find new ways to deepen our mission to grow the impact of the independent news sector. Specifically, as a result of a larger study of the media ecosystem (summarized in the attached narrative) we seek to add more local news outlets in order to build up local/national reporting collaborations and partnerships.

As we enter 2015, we are increasingly clear that the best strategy to fulfill all of these objectives is to merge with a sister organization, the Association for Alternative Newsmedia (AAN), which represents 180 local alternative newsweeklies. AAN’s main arm is a 501c6 trade association, with an annual budget of $630,000. AAN also has a dormant 501c3.

1. SUSTAINABILITY. AAN’s 501c6 is funded by membership, sponsorship and business service revenue. By joining our 70 outlets to their 180 outlets, the two organizations will jointly be able to attract more exhibitor and sponsorship revenue at conferences. Meanwhile, the newly reorganized TMC-AAN 501c3 will create more opportunities for impact, which will bring more foundation funding to the 501c3.

2. TECH and BIZ SUPPORT. The Media Consortium will be able to expand our marketing-focused business services to AAN members. AAN will extend its C-Xense mobile ad network to TMC members. In addition, TMC members will gain the use of AAN’s legal counsel. The two organizations will be able to offer members three meetings a year: a leadership retreat, a 2-3 day workshop series, and a conference.

3. IMPACT. The Media Consortium’s mission has always been around impact. That mission will find a home in the new 501c3. The joint organization will be able to develop impact in three new ways:

a) **Localize National Content and Nationalize Local Content.** Having a local/national network will allow us to create robustly reported and deeply investigated stories that will reflect what is happening locally and that can change policy nationally. Best of all, these stories, because they will be reported by a number of local reporters, will contain the diversity of viewpoints that are too often missing in today’s bifurcated, partisan news outlets.

Voting rights is the kind of story that would benefit from this local/national reporting. As PRWatch’s Alec Exposed project shows, reporters build impact and change policy by compiling numerous local instances to tell a national story. We hope to understake a collaboration of this kind in 2015 around voting rights and we’ve already found a model that works: a national outlet provides an in-depth overview; local alt-weeklies run that report as a cover story plus send local reporters out to create a local sidebar; the national reporter then pulls these sidebars together into a new national story.

b) **Cross-Pollinate Audiences.** Today’s news economy deliberately segments and silos audiences. Too often, that means important stories are missed. For example, last summer, the Media Consortium partnered reporters from Earth Island Journal, Making Contact and Grist with reporters from Truthout and PR Watch in order to tell the story of how BigAg companies were spending dark money to elect politicians and judges who would ignore the damage their pesticides were causing to the people and land of Kauai.

In 2015, we plan to create more collaborations around money in politics that will cross silos, helping audiences understand how this kind of dark money can affect different aspects of everyday life.

c) **Pool Reporters to enable Investigative Reporting.** With razor-thin budgets, most news outlets can’t afford the cost of a six month investigation, let alone one that crosses state and national boundaries. An independent news network, however, can solve the cost of investigative reporting and travel-based reporting by pooling reporters. Pool reporters have long been used in war zones and other areas where sending reporters is limited by external factors.

This fall, for example, the Media Consortium has arranged for pool reporters to cover two different media policy issues. In College Station, Texas, freelancer Teddy Wilson will report on Commissioner Pai’s net neutrality town hall. In New York, Truthout reporter Mike Ludwig will report on Quartz’s Next Billion event, which will certainly feature Facebook’s zero-rating scheme. In each case, we are leveraging foundation funding or pooling outlets’ money to send a reporter to a place other reporters from our outlets cannot be, with the invitation to other outlets to share the reporting on their sites.

Along with these objectives and strategies, the Media Consortium (and the new organization it becomes) will continue to offer a detailed palette of programs, including our ongoing impact experiment and an exciting video journalism project. With your support, we look forward to a very exciting second decade.