

**A Proposal for General Support**

**Submitted by:** The Media Consortium,

a project of the Foundation for National Progress

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2014 will be a critical year for the environment, for women’s health, and for democracy itself. The stakes have never been greater. To respond to these challenges Americans will need a vibrant independent news sector.

We need reporters who have the time and expertise to investigate the secret workings of business and government, such as the dark money going into politics. We need reporters who can deliver facts, not just repurposed PR about projects like the Keystone pipeline. And we Americans need journalists who can present the big picture of what is happening, such as the wholesale destruction of reproductive access through state and local laws.

The Media Consortium provides key support for the independent news sector. An international network of progressive independent news organizations, the Media Consortium’s mission is to support and grow the impact of the independent news sector. Our vision is to build an infrastructure of independent news media with real power to inform, educate and engage the public on matters of public policy.

Since our founding in 2005, the Media Consortium has become the leading forum for building partnerships and collaborations among independent media outlets and external allies. In 2014, we have two goals: first, to grow the ability of our members to make a real impact on the lives of the people they reach. We will achieve this goal through **four key objectives**.

1. To use editorial collaboration to create measurable collective impact in the areas of reproductive justice, extreme energy, and access to democracy.

2. To develop a tool to create a quantitative measurement of collective impact.

3. To build the infrastructure of the entire independent media sector.

4. To provide support for our members.

Our second goal is to strengthen the Media Consortium itself, so that we continue to grow as the premiere organization representing the independent news sector. We will achieve this goal by creating a strategic plan.

**I. Who is the Media Consortium?**

*Eight years [after its founding], many [Media Consortium members] are making a significant impact on the larger public debate. Put simply, these are the people who made the terms 47 percent and 99 percent household terms. Individually and collectively, progressive and independent media organizations are having an increasing impact on the media landscape.—Vincent Stehle, Director, media Impact Funders in* [*Chronicle of Philanthropy*](http://philanthropy.com/article/article-content/137985/)

The Media Consortium is an international network of 64 independent progressive news media outlets. Our current members are:

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| AlterNet | GregPalast.com | The Progressive |
| American Forum | GritTV | Public Eye/ PRA |
| The American Prospect | Grist | Public News Service |
| Berrett-Koehler Publishers | The G.W. Williams Center | Rabble.ca |
| Bitch Media | The Hightower Lowdown | Race, Poverty and Environment |
| Brave New Films | Interpress Service | Raw Story |
| Care2 | In These Times | The Real News Network |
| Center for Media & Democracy | LA Progressive | RH Reality Check |
| Chelsea Green | Link TV | Specialty Studios |
| The Chicago Reporter | Mother Jones | The Texas Observer |
| City Limits | Ms. Magazine | The Thom Hartmann Show |
| Colorlines | NAMAC | Tikkun |
| The David Pakman Show | The Nation | Toward Freedom |
| Dissent | The Nation Institute | Truthout |
| Earth Island Journal | Making Contact | Truthdig |
| Feet in 2 Worlds | New America Media | The Uptake |
| Feministing | The New Press | Utne |
| Free Speech Radio News | News Taco | Washington Monthly |
| Free Speech TV  Generation Progress  Globalvision | Oakland Local  OpenDemocracy.net  Orion | Women’s Media Center  Vancouver Observer  Yes! Magazine  The Young Turks |
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The Media Consortium prizes diversity, and continues to seek outlets as members that serve the needs of the entire progressive community. Half of our members—32 outlets—are led by a woman publisher, producer or editor. Almost a third of our members—14—employ a person of color in a key leadership position. Our outlets also reach a widely diverse range of audiences, from an outlet like News Taco that speaks to second and third generation Latinos to an outlet like Feet in 2 Worlds that works with first generation immigrants. New members in 2013 include: OpenDemocracy.net, Tikkun, Toward Freedom, the Vancouver Observer.

The director of the Media Consortium [is Jo Ellen Green Kaiser](https://www.freespeech.org/video/ncmr-2013-jo-ellen-kaiser-executive-director-media-consortium).

The Media Consortium is nationally known as a center for innovation, especially around collaboration and impact. In 2014, we are pushing even further to define what impact journalism can look like.

**I. Objective: To Use Editorial Collaboration to Create Measurable Impact**

We know editorial collaboration leverages scarce reporting resources and brings together siloed audiences. We believe it does more. We believe a horizontally-networked collaboration—a collaboration in which each outlet’s editors act in their own best interest as well as in the interest of the group—multiplies the impact of the group. The very diversity of the collaboration leads to new stories and provokes new thinking. FSG calls this “collective impact.”

If we want to go beyond fixing a specific problem to conceptualizing a solution for a deeply embedded socio-economic or cultural issue, we need to create collective impact. That’s why we’ve chosen this strategy to tackle such deep-seated problems in our culture as the diminishment of women’s rights over their bodies, corporations’ increasing devastation of our planet in their search for fuel, and the growing limitations on real democratic participation.

**Reproductive Justice**

Collaboration: Imagine: a week in which story after story detailing barriers to family planning access (and success stories of communities gaining that access) is told in local and national outlets—in print, online, on radio and TV—across the country! Imagine this story is linked to petitions and accompanied by a solutions-oriented campaign by advocacy organizations. Imagine this content is tweeted, facebooked, pinned, and youtubed across the social media sphere by participating outlets AND by others in the two associations.

That collaboration is happening right now! In a ground-breaking pilot project, the Media Consortium is bringing together editors and reporters from 10 news organizations—5 local and 5 national-- to work together on one issue: access to plan B and family planning. Working separately and in groups, reporters are crafting six different stories across radio, digital and print platforms that all speak to this issue.

On October 7 they will co-publish and co-promote these stories using a pop-up transmedia website filled with links to their articles, anchored by an Upworthy-style video, and with “Act Now” links to a FDA petition via Care2 and info-sheets individuals can download to take to their pharmacies. The collaboration will be promoted via press releases shot out through the Vocus PR database, a concerted social media effort using agreed-upon hashtags and keywords, and support from Media Matters.

This is a project that will move the dial of public conversation—and will provide a model for the way media can have a real impact on how we live. Once we run the pilot project, we will take lessons learned and create an expanded project for 2014. Our hope is to involve even more outlets—we think we can manage up to thirty—to proactively start conversations around topics in reproductive health. We are applying now to get funding from a number of sources to expand this project in 2014.

**Extreme Energy**

Collaboration: In 2013, we began creating a truly multimedia project around extreme energy--the intensive extraction of fuel that has devastating environmental consequences such as tar sands, fracking, and mountain top removal. Partners in this collaboration include Earth Island Journal (print/digital), Truthout (digital only), AlterNet (digital only), Making Contact (radio), Link TV (TV), Specialty Studios (film), Chelsea Green (books) and Care2 (the petition site). Together, they reach over 55 million Americans.

The first fruits of this collaboration have become visible:

* An ongoing collaboration between Making Contact and Specialty Studios, turning film footage into radio shows that are crosspromoted.
* An ongoing collaboration between Making Contact and KCETLINKTV, turning video footage into radio shows that are crosspromoted.
* A one-time collaboration between Free Speech TV, Care2, and Specialty Studios, in which FSTV broadcast a Specialty Studio film while pointing viewers to a Care2 petition hosted on the FSTV site.
* A [collaboration](http://www.earthisland.org/journal/index.php/eij/article/an_extreme_energy_roadtrips_postcard_from_the_edge/) between AlterNet and Earth Island Journal.
* Cross promotion of books, articles, films, tv, radio and digital content between all members of the collaboration.

We continue to seek funding to enable this group to create joint editorial together.

Beat Reporting: We have joined in a grant proposal by the [Project for Improved Environmental Coverage](http://environmentalcoverage.org/) to create more environmental “beats” in the independent news sector. Our model for this project is the media policy project we have run successfully for the past three years.

**Access to Democracy**

Collaboration: In 2011, the Media Consortium organized #campaigncash, a collaboration designed to explain Citizens United to Americans. In 2012, we organized Outing the Corporations, a followup to look at how Citizens United impacted the 2012 elections. We followed the story in 2013, keeping track of the work of PFAW, Common Cause, Move to Amend, Public Citizen and others.

In 2014, with court cases underway and an amendment movement fully in process, we are planning a money in politics collaboration modeled on our Reproductive Justice Reporting Project (see above). We aim to bring together the editorial teams from ten or more members to craft stories around money in politics; to copublish these stories; and to crosspromote them using a pop-up microsite, social media, and embedded shared graphics.

If successful with these endeavors, we will leverage our know-how to launch a voting rights and/or internet freedom collaboration along the same lines.

Beat Reporting-Media Policy: We use the word “media” to represent news content, but fundamentally the word refers to the mechanisms that bring the content to us. Americans rely on media—radio, TV, and internet in particular—to bring us most of the news we consume. However, our access to news is threatened by the increasing consolidation of media companies; by high costs and limited choices; by the physical unavailability of high-speed internet in some locales; and by companies’ ability to restrict how much content we consume (data caps) and which programs we can access (net neutrality).

If citizens aren’t informed, democracy doesn’t function. That’s why keeping an eye on media policy is essential to democracy. Unfortunately, media policy is not inherently exciting and its experts speak a technical jargon. That’s why the Media Consortium devotes resources to train reporters in media policy through our Media Policy Reporting Project.

Community Journalism Training Institute. The Occupy movement taught us that individuals can be the most powerful communicators of their own stories. But many advocacy organizations that recruit volunteers to take action do little to encourage these volunteers to tell their own story. The Community Journalism Training Institute is designed to solve that problem. Our Institute will work with progressive organizations like Common Cause, Ocean Conservancy, and Planned Parenthood, to empower their volunteers to use social media to tell the story of their activism.

CJTI is both a policy initiative and an initiative designed to provide revenue that can help sustain the Media Consortium’s general operations. We are currently developing a full business plan for CJTI, and expect to implement the program in 2014.

**II. Objective: Develop a Quantitative Tool to Measure Impact**

The mission of the Media Consortium is to grow the impact of our members. Thus, we have always taken a special interest in understanding how best to measure the impact of journalism and have focused particularly on the complex issue of how to measure the impact of editorial collaborations.

In the past, the Consortium has experimented with measuring impact in these ways:

* We’ve measured the number of people who click on or view content across a collaboration through using an embedded tracking code called a pixel ping;
* We’ve measured the number of people who engage with content by using a common hashtag to promote collaborative content over social media;
* We’ve measured the number and type of other media that pick up content;
* and we’ve observed whether political change happens coincident with the publication of content.

These methods produce good qualitative and narrative data on the impact of content, as well as excellent quantiative data on reach (how many individuals have been touched by content). There has been a centuries-long assumption that those who read content will act--that is what drove advertising in the 19th and 20th century, and should not be discounted.

What [no one has yet been able to do](http://investigativereportingworkshop.org/ilab/story/measuring-impact/), however, is to produce quantitative measurements that can measure whether conversations and thinking change as a result of a particular set of content. In 2013, the Media Consortium embarked upon an 18-month experiment to develop tools to measure this impact. During this period, Harvard Professor and Crimson Hexagon co-founder Gary King will use his cutting-edge lab to track Media Consortium members’ memes through digital space. His goal is to develop tools to measure how much our stories change prevailing memes, and to ascertain whether and how our editorial collaborations build impact. We will produce a white paper on this study by the close of 2014.

**III. Objective: Strengthen and Support the Independent Media Sector**

In 2013, TMC Executive Director Jo Ellen Green Kaiser embarked on a bold strategy to bring together the leaders of every independent news association so that they could share resources and opportunities.

The first meeting of this network of networks took place on May 28, 2013. Present were leaders from the Media Consortium, the Investigative News Network (investigative journalism centers), the Association of Alternative Newsmedia (print newsweeklies), the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (community radio), the Alliance for Community Media (cable access TV stations), the National Association for Media, Arts and Culture (film and digital arts producers), the Association for Independents in Radio (radio producers), New America Media (ethnic press), and Youth Radio.

This was the first-ever convening of these leaders. They found much in common, and agreed to continue meeting by monthly call. Those calls have continued. We hope to hold a retreat in summer of 2014.

**IV. Objective: Provide Support For Our Members**

An essential aspect of the Media Consortium’s mission is to support both the independent media sector in general and our members in particular. We are widely known in the media field as a key innovator and experimenter in the future of journalism.

**Member Support**

*"I can't tell you how valuable it's been to have the opportunity to team-up with other media professionals as a member of The Media Consortium. The added value of a shared VOCUS account -- a vital marketing tool that we could not afford on our own -- has been an amazing asset to our outreach and media relations building work. We hope to continue our partnership long into the future."*

*JoAnn Kalenak,* High Country News *Subscription and Outreach Marketer*

Annual Conference**.** For many outlets in the Media Consortium, the annual conference is the only trade event they attend. They come to the conference to find out the latest in business and technological innovations, and to network with their peers in the independent news sector.

The conference is designed to provide in-depth workshops on business tools; peer-led panels to stimulate new thinking; plenaries to bring in thinkers from outside the sector; time for working groups to meet; and plenty of networking space.

The conference location moves each year to foreground members in different locations. In 2013, we met February 6-8 in Baltimore around the theme: Make an Impact. Over 115 individuals from 45 outlets attended for 3 days of workshops, plenaries and open space meetings. In 2014, the conference will be held February 27-March 1 in Chicago.

Innovation and Incubation Labs**.** These labs take an in-depth dive into a business or technology problem. In the past, labs covered the move to mobile, crowd-sourcing, and long form journalism.

* *Metrics Lab*. Our focus from 2012-2014 has been the metrics impact lab (see below).
* *Database Lab*. In 2014, we will launch a new lab on database consolidation. This lab comes as a response to members who want to consolidate their social media, donor, subscriber, “comment” and other databases to better reach and engage stakeholders.

While we can only focus on one or two topics a year for our deep dive labs, we have created other mechanisms to keep members up to date on new technology.

* ***“****How it Works” Monthly Webinars***.** These monthly webinars around editorial strategy and technology innovations supplement the in-depth work we do in editorial collaborations and Innovation and Incubation labs. We have held webinars on measuring analytics, new search tools, creating data visualizations and more.

In addition to the Annual Conference and the Innovation and Incubation Labs, the Consortium provides daily infrastructure support through these vehicles.

Tools

* *Vocus Database*. Public relations is a key part of making impact, yet many Media Consortium members cannot afford specialized PR staff nor the full set of PR tools. One of those tools is the Vocus PR database. In 2013, the Media Cosnortium was able to negotiate a deal with Vocus to provide their PR database to 10 TMC members at 10% of the cost of the regular package. A $5000 tool became a $500 tool, providing a total of $45,000 in savings across the membership!
* *C-Xense Ad Network*. The Consortium is working with our colleagues at the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies to provide our members with access to C-Xense, an advertising tool. And we are working with the Independent News Network to provide members with access to Largo, a webpress template for journalism.

Communications

* *Regional Convenings***.** The Media Consortium organizes regional convenings to create ongoing interpersonal relationships between member organizations. In 2013, we held regional meetings in Denver, Chicago, San Jose, New York, Atlanta, and DC.
* *Monthly Newsletter***.** Each month, the Media Consortium staff puts out a newsletter summing up our projects and giving members a heads-up about new initiatives, in addition to maintaining an on open listserv for member comments.
* *Listservs***.** In addition to the main Media Consortium listserv, TMC has set up a listserv just for social media staff at member outlets so they can better publicize each other’s content. We also run separate google groups for each editorial collaboration.
* *Social Media***.** Our twitter handle, @tmcmedia, has 2800 followers. It serves as an important resource for media watchers, and a tool to encourage members to crosspromote their content. Our Facebook page has 4200 likes.

When asked to name the main benefit of being a Consortium member, respondents answered it was the opportunity to network with each other. Media Consortium staff provide the infrastructure that supports those powerful relationships.

**V. Strategic Planning**

After 5 years, it is time for the Media Consortium to once again engage in strategic planning. Now that we have come into our maturity, it is time for the Consortium to resolve the question that has dogged us from our founding: whether we are a trade association for independent news organizations that happen to be progressive, or whether we are an advocacy organization for progressive independent media. Quite a lot rides on that difference, yet it is one we have not entirely resolved.

In a related question, we must find a route to sustainability as an organization. Will it be through increased membership (and dues)? Through a program like our Training Institute? Through a more policy-driven mission that will attract additional funders? The question around revenue goes to the heart of who we are and what we do.

We begin strategic planning in September 2013, and aim to conclude it in May 2013. We are seeking additional funding this year to support this planning and capacity building process.

**VI. Conclusion**

At a time when our country is facing serious challenges, independent media are committed to working together to inform, educate and engage the public to make real change. The Media Consortium plays a key role in this independent media sector, providing the infrastructure necessary to promote collaboration and increase impact. We request $50,000 from the Wallace Global Foundation to support our work and build our capacity.