“The question that everyone [in media] is grappling with [when covering Trump] is: Do normal standards apply? And if they don’t, what should take their place?” – Jim Rutenberg, [New York Times](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/08/business/balance-fairness-and-a-proudly-provocative-presidential-candidate.html?_r=0)

“Nuance rarely makes it into Black Lives Matter coverage”—Jephie Bernard, [Columbia Journalism Review](http://www.cjr.org/analysis/black_lives_matter_the_movement_the_organization_and_how_journalists_get_it_wrong.php)

Historians may well describe 2016 as a date like 1968, a year of disruption that revealed tectonic shifts in U.S. culture and society. At such times, we need to get beyond personalities and loud voices to understand the [history](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/black-lives-matter-new-civil-rights-movement-fredrick-harris) and [context](http://alldigitocracy.org/where-do-journalists-go-from-here-context-context-context/) of the political actions we see and hear. Not surprisingly, we can’t look to the corporate media for that deep understanding. Watching corporate media fumble as they try to cover the Trump campaign only underscores how impoverished these for-profit companies are when they are called upon to tell the true story of our times.

Even as the corporate media has been hit by budget cut after budget cut, the independent news media has continued to strengthen over the past decade. The Media Consortium, a national network of independent news outlets, has grown from 40 to 80 members in the past decade. Just this year, we have doubled our staff, adding Manolia Charlotin as our Director of Membership and Programs. And we have continued to strengthen our ties to the alternative newsmedia, public access channels, and others who make up the larger independent news ecosystem. Working together, we are ready to make a significant ongoing impact on public conversation.

**A Story of Racial and Economic Injustice**

The insurgent campaigns led by Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump on the one hand, and the Black Lives Matter movement on the other, appear to emerge from very different issues. The Black Lives Matter movement arises directly from police violence and the ongoing racial injustice mainfested in unwarranted police shootings. The Sanders and Trump campaigns both tapped into the significant despair of the working class around growing income inequality.

Yet, in neither case can we separate out racial and economic injustice. The racism evident both implicitly and explicitly in the Trump campaign has loomed so large that the corporate media has lost the story of economic injustice that fueled Trump’s campaign from its start. Similarly, the corporate media has focused so closely on the violence against black civilians and against the police that it has missed the economic justice message underlying the Black Lives Matter movement—a message that has been elevated in the recent Movement for Black Lives [platform.](https://policy.m4bl.org/economic-justice/)

In short, the story of our times is the intertwining of economic and racial justice at a moment of economic and demographic disruption. This is the story that the Media Consortium will be supporting our network of 80 independent news media and our allies in the ethnic and community media to tell over the next year.

**Racial and Economic Justice Require Racial Equity**

For solutions-driven progressive news outlets, reporting on economic justice starts with racial justice. Over the past year, Media Consortium members have become much more sophisticated at providing nuanced coverage of the Black Lives Matter movement. The sector’s success came as a result of a mindful commitment to racial equity by Media Consortium members.

In February 2016, thanks to ongoing support from Wallace Global Fund, and with additional direct support from the Quixote Foundation and the [Ford travel grants], the Media Consortium held an all-day training in race equity attended by 65 people from 45 of our member outlets. This training is already having concrete impact:

*“I brought what I learned back to our board, and we started thinking differently. For example, we realized that to become more diverse we needed to move our offices into Seattle, where they would become more accessible.”* –James Trimarco, editor, Yes! magazine.

Much work remains to be done, however, which is why the Media Consortium will pursue our TMCinColor and WhoCounts initiatives in 2017. The TMCinColor initiative supports the increasing number of journalists of color in the independent sector (many coming via diversity fellowships). The WhoCounts initiative supports our vision of developing strong relationships between community and independent news by focusing on an issue critical to communities of color and to ethnic media: immigrant rights.

TMCinColor: Support Journalists of Color in Independent Media

* Provide bi-weekly #TMCinColor newsletter profiling a journalist of color
* Curate a platform, #TMCinColor that aggregates stories focused on racial justice
* Partner with an existing institute to provide mentorship for journalists of color, especially those who have received “diversity fellowships.”

WhoCounts: Partner with Communities of Color to Tell their Stories

* Pre-Election Community Media Events in Chicago, New York and CA

These bring together ethnic and independent media with immigrants rights groups to learn about challenges to immigrant voting rights;

* #WhoCounts Tumblr aggregates stories on immigrants
* Muslims in America: A Reporting Project with Rethink Media to educate Media Consortium members on the vocabulary and practices of Muslims
* Childhood Detained: A Reporting Project on the detention of child immigrants to begin post-election.

**Not just Economic Inequality: Economic Justice**

The Sanders and Trump campaigns both focused on the inequalities of our economy and the specific elements that worry most working class people about their economic health, including the student debt crisis, mortgage default crisis, and jobs moving overseas. Focusing only on the problem, however, inspires white working class individuals to scapegoat immigrants and people of color.

Instead of focusing only on economic inequality, we will achieve a more equitable society if we focus on the principles of a more just economic system. That is the aim of the platform for the Movement for Black Lives. Douglas Williams writing for Media Consortium member *In These Times* [explains](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/19348/a_radical_plan_for_an_economy_that_makes_black_lives_matter) why three of the movement’s planks are economic:

*“By seeking to take on all of the threats to Black lives and not just those that are most immediate and violent, this platform is … seeking to address the challenges working class Black people face in their day-to-day lives under racialized capitalism.”*

The independent news media have a critically important responsibility to investigate and report on economic justice solutions to racialized capitalism. Many of these solutions are being developed today using innovations in banking and finance such as DPOs, convertible debt, and and new types of equity. Similarly, we are seeing new policies from governmental agencies on everything from crowdfunding to a Jobs Act that makes certain types of worker-ownership models more feasible.

Reporters in independent media often know very little about finance—those who are interested in finance usually become business reporters. To enable our journalists to report on these new developments, the Media Consortium is launching Just Transitions, a reporting project in partnership with the New Economy Coalition.

Just Transitions: Reporting on the Next Economy

* Monthly webinars educating reporters on new policies and financial instruments to realize a Next Economy;
* Specific projects bringing together community media with independent media reporters to explore Next Economy projects in Appalachia, inner city Boston, and other regions;
* Specific projects focusing reporting on planks of the Movement for Black Lives around restructured tax codes, the Glass-Steagall Act, and financial support of Black alternative institutions

While the main function of the Just Transitions project will be to educate reporters on new financial instruments, we will be bringing in partners that can demonstrate how these instruments can have a direct impact on climate change (from public power muni bonds to DPO investments in food coops), internet access (e.g. muni broadband), and sustainable jobs and housing.

**Intersectional, Engaged Journalism**

The journalism we need today must be intersectional in its focus and engaged with the communities it serves.

That’s why, for our 2017 conference, we are seeking to work with policy experts and grassroots advocates to explore the connections between racial justice, economic policy, media policy and climate policy. To be held in March 2017 in DC, this post-election conference will provide reporters access to newly appointed officials at the FCC, EPA, and other regulatory agencies. While connecting with the new administration, the conference will also convene policy allies to help reporters make connections between policy areas and look ahead to new initiatives.

Similarly, it is this belief that we are stronger together that has led the Media Consortium to strengthen its bonds with local and grassroots media. Media Consortium Executive Director Jo Ellen Kaiser now sits on the board of the Foundation for Alternative Newsmedia and on the board of the Alliance for Community Media Foundation. Members of the Association for Alternative Newsmedia, the Alliance for Community Media and the Institute for Nonprofit News are invited to participate in all Media Consortium webinars and events.

In January of 2017, the Media Consortium will implement a new member database and website that will help us draw these bonds even closer. When this database is launched, we will be able to offer members of partner associations a deep discount to our conference and add them to a regular newsletter we will send out to the independent media as a whole. Our members will be able to connect to each other without going through Media Consortium staff in order to create rich partnerships and collaborations.

**The Power of Partnership**

The Media Consortium alone among all others in the news sector has stood out for organizing ongoing editorial partnerships and collaborations. We have always strongly believed in a theory of collective impact, which postulates that collaborative work is more likely to change sentiment on an issue than any single publication.

Our metrics project, which concluded its first phase in April 2016, has proven this theory to be true. For the first time ever, quantitative sociologists found a measurably significant increase in impact from editorial collaboration. The 35 collaborative instances the Media Consortium created in 2015-2016 actually moved the needle on public sentiment. A detailed report on this experiment is being readied now, but we don’t want to wait. Now that we know collaboration works, we want to explore its power by telling the story of racial and economic justice.

Racial justice and economic justice are deeply intertwined. ﻿“The liberation of all Black people rests upon achieving a greater margin of economic justice for our families and our communities,” writes BYP100 National Director Charlene Carruthers (as quoted by Mychal Denzel Smith, [The Nation](https://www.thenation.com/article/black-lives-matter-group-issues-a-concrete-list-of-demands/)). Working together with community and ethnic media, the Media Consortium will support independent journalists in creating the nuanced coverage of our times the American people want and need.