

# FROM PREDICTION TO PRACTICE



## A YEAR OF JOURNALISM INNOVATION, COLLABORATION AND EXPANSION

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Cover image features logos of TMC Members

## Overview

Whether the issue is the economy, the environment, elections, or healthcare, the one consistent thread in the fabric of our democracy is the need for credible, quality journalism. Those invested in the art and practice of journalism remain focused on its commitment to veracity and transparency, but must also constantly re-imagine new practices of engagement, impact and sustainability.

As technology changes how people access, consume and interact with information, journalism producers must evolve to meet and anticipate the core needs of their audiences. The public needs quality journalism. No matter the platform, access to reporting makes it possible to learn about issues and connect with other citizens and communities. Journalism informs and shapes key pieces of policy and provides a historical record of events.

In 2008-2009, the industry was mired in a discussion about the “death of journalism.” But through the latter half of 2009 and into 2010, while still recognizing the ongoing perilous financial position of most journalism organizations, the mood of many in the industry turned from grim resignation to hopeful experimentation.

In addition, the development of new types of journalism producers, as well as the breadth of new organizations incorporating journalism activities into their work, has expanded in the last year. To identify where our members were evolving and how the organization could best serve their future needs, The Media Consortium (TMC) conducted a media landscape analysis that outlined the emergence of four types of journalism producers during its annual member meeting.

- **Pure Play Journalism:** This model produces high quality journalism and analysis, Potentially integrates multi-media/platforms and social networking tools for distribution, but is generally one-way communication to users. Such projects avoid citizen engagement in journalism production as well as any any advocacy/action opportunities.
- **Journalism and Community:** This model builds on the Pure Play Journalism model, but strategically integrates community into media making and/or distribution processes. Such projects also create ongoing and productive spaces for communities/networks to communicate with each other and with media organization around stories, issues, etc..
- **Journalism and Action:** The next level up from Journalism and Community, in this model a media producer creates or integrates strategies/tools for its community to take action because of the journalism it produces. Those actions can be supported/organized on the media organization’s website, social networking site, or where those

communities already exist. It could also include strategic partnerships with outside advocacy or non-profit organizations

- **Hybrid Media Makers and Action:** This model combines great acts of journalism, media production, advocacy, and/or messaging. Hybrid Media Makers generally include individuals, media organizations and/or non-profits/advocacy groups who produce quality content, emphasize community involvement and put out regular calls to action.

We asked members to self-identify their organizations within those four categories in 2010 and where they want their organization to evolve to in five years. The most obvious change was that while many organizations were in the Pure Play category in 2010, there were no organizations there by 2015.



For a full look at the landscape analysis, go to: <http://www.themediaconsortium.org/2010-meeting-notes/>

As each media outlet has its own mission, audience, capacities and needs, it is clear that there is no silver bullet that applies to all organizations in this evolutionary process. Key questions remain: What new opportunities will work for a particular news organization? How can news organizations navigate, test and implement these new strategies? How would lessons be learned and shared with other media producers?

Throughout the past year, The Media Consortium set the agenda to help dozens of media organizations begin answering these questions. In 2010, TMC helped its members to:

- **Evolve for a changing media landscape.** Through a range of programs, including our Incubation and Innovation Lab; a partnership with Mozilla’s Peer to Peer University, and the release of our *Investing in Impact* report, we have helped TMC members navigate and learn about new strategies and trends, experiment with new opportunities

and tools, develop relationships with experts on the cutting edge of technology, and foster innovation that will further their overall impact and sustainability.

- **Editorially collaborate on a range of issues and events for maximum impact.** We have increased and led editorial and promotional collaboration among members around specific topics including the 2010 U.S. Social Forum and a groundbreaking, two-week project focused on campaign finance and the impact of the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling. TMC members also self-organized collaborations with each other and additional media allies for projects like the [Climate Desk](#) as well as a collaboration around the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference, dubbed the Copenhagen News Collaborative.
- **Expand audiences and build core infrastructure.** TMC continues to provide and increase ongoing core support for our members through our MediaWires, Independent Media Internship (IMI), and Membership programs. The MediaWires program has continued to build the audiences for and impact of our members' reporting on health care, the economy, the environment, and immigration. In its second year, our IMI program offered key editorial support to our members and on-the-ground training for the next generation of journalists. Our membership program is recruiting new TMC members that represent the changing media landscape, and working to provide additional education, collaboration, and training opportunities for our members.

TMC's projects and initiatives are a key part of the ongoing public conversation about the evolution of journalism. In 2010, TMC staff presented our work and findings about the evolving media landscape to funders, other journalism networks, and to dozens of journalists and media organizations at both conferences and private meetings.

And with this report we offer a comprehensive overview of our initiatives, reflections on key opportunities, and lessons learned from 2010 to help journalism organizations and producers continue to sharpen their strategies and evolve for a new media environment in 2011 and beyond.



## Fostering Innovation

In early 2010, The Media Consortium launched its dynamic Incubation and Innovation labs program. Taking a cue from recommendations from our 2009 groundbreaking report, [The Big Thaw](#), we looked to see how we could help members:

1. Change Internally
2. Increase Experimentation
3. Leverage the Unique Role of a Consortium
4. Build Audiences as Communities

The Incubation and Innovation Lab's purpose: Move media producers from talking about the future of journalism to actually shaping it. The program is designed to support our members in conducting rapid prototyping as a low-cost way to test new business, technology, community engagement, and content development models at a scale that they would not be able to achieve alone. The program has two components, the Digital Refresh Workshop and the Digital Innovation Studio. The Incubation and Innovation Labs were reported on in both [Nieman Journalism Lab](#) and [MediaShift](#), high-profile hubs that track new developments in journalism and civic engagement.

### *Digital Refresh Workshop*

Designed in early 2010 and tested among three organizations through the summer, the Digital Refresh Workshop (DRW) offered one-on-one support to help our members analyze and innovate around key digital strategies, including list and community-building, revenue generation and harnessing new journalism production strategies. DRW participants—*The American Prospect*, *ColorLines*, and *The Uptake*—represented a variety of media organizations at different stages of their digital strategic planning process.

The DRW involves three phases: pre-planning, a two-day, in-person meeting with key staff members, and post-implementation support. Throughout the pre-planning process, TMC staff worked with each organization to tailor the in-person meeting to meet that organization's information needs and goals. The news organization also completed a "Digital Profile Survey," which covered topics such as content production, organizational capacity, future aspirations, current traffic analysis tools, communications and social engagement practices, revenue generation opportunities and budget needs.

*"Staff of ColorLines and the Applied Research Center were blown away by the awesomeness of The Media Consortium's Digital Refresh Workshop. We had no idea just how refreshing it would be. The practical media smarty pantsyness that TMC brought to bear in the workshop will, I think, forever change our organization's sense of what impact for racial justice is possible with a news and action website."*

—Noel Rabinowitz, Director of Media Programs, *ColorLines*

The survey questions were designed to provide TMC with baseline information about the practices and capacity of each organization. The process was also designed to spark deep analysis from within the organization in regards to how the staff's perception of its online activities, traffic and opportunities differed from actual implementation.

*"We've thrown so much digital spaghetti against the wall in the last three years and really needed help making sense of it all. The TMC team really helped us think deeply about how and where we need to focus and how best we could reach our community to take the successes we've had further and to do less of what really hasn't been working. The advice was honest, direct, painful and encouraging. You really can't ask for more from a service like this."*

—Jason Barnett, Executive Director,  
The Uptake

Each in-person meeting covered the full arc of the organization's digital operations, from production to distribution to basic traffic analysis to defining the organization's various audiences. Finally, the meeting provided a corresponding strategic overlay of those subjects with the organization's content, audience, and revenue generating strategies. Participants then developed the organization's "editorial promise" to their audience (i.e what the audience could expect from the media outlet). Combining and building on the ideas generated throughout the first day, the group then brainstormed a series of experiments and initiatives based on the organization's editorial and publishing goals and needs.

Examples include:

- Strategies to expand networks of audiences
- Cultivating and converting networked audiences
- Refining analytics to work on a more personal level
- Incentivizing good community interactions/engagements
- Creating better contextual entry points for new audience members

By the end of each meeting, participants developed and prioritized experiment ideas. TMC then provided support when needed to help iterate each of these experiment ideas post-meeting. For example, TMC advised on The Uptake's website relaunch and also provided support for the development of the ColorLines's [Drop the I-Word](#) campaign, which meshed journalism production with the integration of an action campaign.

At the end of the Digital Refresh Workshop, participating organizations had completed an in-depth analysis of their current digital profiles, nailed down future goals to revamp their digital strategies, and initiated at least one experiment to reach those goals.

## *Digital Innovation Studio*

Journalism organizations can take advantage of the tremendous opportunity the digital revolution provides—but only if they understand the tone, pace, technology, and unique editorial products that thrive on the web and in new platforms. To help a larger group of TMC members understand, navigate, and experiment with new ways to overcome crisis and take advantage of new technological opportunities, we launched our **Digital Innovation Studio** in 2010. The program involved a series of small group labs on the following topics:

1. Moving into mobile: Cell phones, e-readers, and iPads, oh my!
2. Identifying new journalism and community-building models
3. Experimenting with new revenue-generating opportunities

These topics were picked based on trends identified within *The Big Thaw*, additional research by TMC staff, and a survey of TMC members that detailed their needs and interests.

Organized by TMC staff, each of these small group labs included regular conference calls with outside experts, an in-person meeting for lab participants, online information sharing/communication spaces, and ongoing research into specified topic areas. This structure provides lab members with the opportunity and space for self-education, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, connections to outside experts/tools, and collaborations that can scale up to improve the long-term sustainability of their outlets. The result? At least one experiment (some labs result in multiple experiments) is tested by the participating members, and supported and funded by The Media Consortium.

*“These labs are what TMC should be doing. It’s a good project and allows us to view resources that we wouldn’t be able to on our own because our budget won’t allow it.”*

*–Dan Dineen, Associate Publisher, In These Times*

Experiments were required to meet the following criteria:

- Have top line goal(s) that can be shared by all participants in that small group lab.
- Address one or more of following opportunities:
  - Bring in revenue from new sources or deepen current revenue-generating opportunities;
  - Raise impact/influence of journalism (i.e. collaborations, new journalism production models, community engagement);
  - Expand reach of content to targeted audiences.
- Be scalable/replicable.
- An emphasis on experiments that are collaborative or customizable per organization is highly encouraged.



A dozen media organizations participated across all three labs, with some outlets participating in more than one. Over 150 reports, articles and other items were identified as resources to create shared knowledge among the groups. Two dozen experts in the fields of mobile, community journalism, and new revenue models offered their expertise and insights to members. A sample of experts who participated in the labs include:

Jed Alpert, Mobile Active	Steve Grove, YouTube
David Cho, Publisher, The Awl	Burt Herman, Hacks/Hackers
David Cohn, Spot.us	Daniel Jacobson, NPR
Erika Croxton and Jen Mac Donald, Grist	Mark Luckie, <i>Washington Post</i>
Chase Davis, California Watch, Texas Tribune	Varsha Raju, Razoo
Joellen Easton and Anna Weggel, Public Insight Network/ American Public Media	Lynn Smith, Mobile Active
	Jake Shapiro, PRX
	Dick Tofel, ProPublica

### **Moving into Mobile**

Throughout the “Moving into Mobile” lab, participants from The Uptake, *Yes! Magazine*, *Ms. Magazine*, American Independent News Network and AlterNet came together for a slew of conference calls with experts in mobile production, researched trends in mobile/journalism, and gathered for a one-day meeting to develop experiment ideas. Members learned throughout the process that:

1. For most small to mid-sized organizations, building a mobile site was more of a priority than building an expensive application.
2. Future mobile applications will be successful in proportion to the degree by which they incorporate community interaction and gaming mechanics that take advantage of mobile device features. Shovelware that replicates what’s on the news organization’s web or mobile site will not have the same level of impact.
3. Mobile apps require constant innovation, updates and management.
4. Now is the time to start investing in long term infrastructure, such as APIs, that will allow content to be readily accessed and used by many applications on many different devices.

During this process, TMC noted that one of the biggest barriers for independent media in developing mobile strategies is the lack of a connection with programmers in the mobile space. As TMC wanted to help members think beyond a standard news application and start building bridges into the mobile programmer space, the idea for an Independent Media Mobile Hackathon rose to the top of the list as an opportunity to do rapid mobile prototyping that built on the lessons learned in the lab’s research phase.

The Media Consortium partnered with [Hacks/Hackers](#) to organize the Independent Media Mobile Hackathon. With the overall call to action centering on the frame of “News + Fun +

Community,” the hackathon focused on fostering creativity and new ideas and applying them to building prototype mobile apps that could be adapted and used by one or many organizations. The Media Consortium spent the months leading up to the Hackathon locating a space, promoting the event, recruiting programmers and journalists, prepping participants, and developing the judging criteria.

In addition, TMC staff identified a swath of sponsors for the event including: Chicago Instructional Technology Foundation, Big Door Media, Illinois Technology Association, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Chicago Android, The Knight News Challenge, O’Reilly Media, BreadPig, and Mozilla. Such sponsors are new to the progressive media field, and represent fresh sources for support and strategic assistance.

*It’s not as hard to engage people in using mobile technology as I thought. I learned that there are many avenues you can go down depending on budget, the people you want to reach, purpose etc... I am extremely grateful that Erin and Tracy headed this up and were patient. It was great to meet people and talk about this. It wasn’t competitive and was very helpful to be with like-minded and like-funded people who are trying to do the same thing as we are.”*

—Melissa De Bartolomeo, Web Developer,  
American Independent News Network

On Oct. 9-10, more than 50 journalists and developers came together to create prototype mobile applications that merged news creation and delivery with community engagement and audience expansion opportunities. As an added bonus for participants, [BigDoor Media](#), a Seattle-based startup that powers game mechanics for mobile applications and websites, opened up its API for the hackathon to help increase user engagement and loyalty through the use of points, badges, levels, leaderboards, virtual currency, goods and more.

The hackathon’s goals included:

- Developing ongoing connections to the mobile development community that foster new ideas and knowledge
- Creating a foundation for a strong mobile future for TMC members that allows for experimentation and development of new applications
- Providing test prototypes to serve as a proof-of-concept for potential support from funders/investors to help build out applications
- Having real chunks of open source code that can be used immediately by all participants in their mobile development

In 29 hours, six prototype mobile applications were pitched, developed and presented to a panel of judges. Riotstarttr, a mobile application that enables users to organize their own events, track attendance via GPS-enabled mashup, then report on what happened, took home the grand prize.

Runners up included Zin.gr and BeatBox. Zin.gr was developed to provide one-line, on-the-fly rebuttals to misinformation. All zings are sourced by news content. In addition, the Zin.gr community would vote “zings” up and down, comment on quality, and earn rewards for participation. BeatBox is an SMS switchboard for communities to report public safety issues with ease. Community members can text public safety issues to a neighborhood moderator, who then forwards valid reports to the rest of the community—and local beat reporters as well. Other groundbreaking prototype apps included iBreakNews, a hands-on tool for citizen journalists to break and share news using augmented reality and I Can Has Newz?, which merged news photography and LOLspeak to engage users in the news cycle via parody.



To view slideshows providing more details about each prototype application, visit [bit.ly/resourcehack](http://bit.ly/resourcehack). Code created at the hackathon is all open-sourced and available at [github.com/tmcmedia](http://github.com/tmcmedia).



While the Hackathon accomplished its goals and fulfilled the mission of the lab itself, TMC and participants saw opportunities for the independent media landscape in further developing the proposed apps. TMC has been working with a few members to identify next steps and apply for seed money to build out the prototypes for iBreakNews and Zin.gr.

From the top: I Can Haz News? in action; drafting Riotstartr’s user interface, and the Zin.gr team presents their app at the Independent Media Mobile Hackathon

*“The Hackathon (and the Digital Innovation Studio - Mobile Lab that lead up to this) is a fantastic example of the value of TMC. It’s the kind of learning opportunity that no single organization of our size could create for itself. By pooling our resources, hiring visionary, smart, energetic, and extremely competent leadership in TMC staff, we get this kind of intense, hands-on learning, networking, and source code for a fraction of what it would cost any other way. The Mobile Lab conference calls alone were extremely valuable, with guest speakers from NPR and other organizations that again, most of us wouldn’t have access to alone. Even for a mobile-skeptic like me, the entire lab and the Hackathon were very valuable.”*

—Rod Arakaki, Audience Development  
Director, Yes! Magazine  
A Year of Innovation

## News Models for Community and Journalism

Following the same pattern as the Moving into Mobile lab, participants engaged in two months of research and recon about the various intersections of community engagement and journalism production for the New Models for Community and Journalism Lab.

Lessons learned include:

1. There are multiple ways to break down the community/journalism landscape, including: interactive journalism and data visualization informing, collaborations among two or more media producers for and with their audiences, community-powered reporting that ranges from crowdsourcing to full-on citizen reporting, and more.
2. New community engagement strategies call for journalism organizations to break down the typical editorial/business divide. Outlets need to reorient their infrastructure to develop and deploy community engagement strategies that harness skills and staff across editorial, marketing, social media, community management, and business.
3. It is increasingly important to have voices/personalities that regularly interact with the community from the news organization. This can range from more interaction with reporters and editors online and in person to a “community manager,” whose role lies at the intersection of the organization’s editorial, community and business arenas.
4. Data visualization is not about dumping data, it’s about telling a story. Great data visualizations provide critical context on news/information through a visual and interactive medium rather than through text-only reporting. When done well, data visualizations also encourage audience interaction with content.



The participants of this lab—*Ms. Magazine*, Free Speech TV and ColorLines (*Mother Jones* joined later in the process)—agreed that it was critical to focus the experiment on integrating crowdsourcing/community engagement into their organizational practices. But the time, staffing and structure needed to do so was beyond their current resources, even with the

support of The Media Consortium. So where and how to start? The answer: build a partnership with an institution that already has those structures in place.

*“We joined the New Models for Community and Journalism Lab with the hope we would learn about innovative community journalism and crowdsourcing strategies and be able to implement that knowledge. The lab went a step beyond that. Now we have direct access to an existing network for crowdsourcing. Overall the lab helped break down the distinction between audience and content producer. Rather than having only a one way relationship with an audience it showed some good examples of audiences being active in various ways with content production.”*

—Jessica Stites, Associate Editor,  
*Ms. Magazine*

American Public Media’s “Public Insight Network” (PIN) was identified as the organization that would help these groups jump into the fray without starting from scratch. PIN, which launched in 2003, has 95,000 volunteer sources in their database for newsrooms to tap for story ideas, interviews and trend identification.

PIN has become the industry standard for journalistic audience engagement. More than 30 radio, television, online and newspaper newsrooms are currently using PIN to inform their reporting.

In late 2010, The Media Consortium and PIN brokered a pioneering deal that allows the four TMC media organizations to partner with PIN for a full year. Throughout 2011, these four TMC members will have access to all of PIN’s trainings, technical support, database of sources and more. In addition, PIN will help the four media organizations cultivate their current communities as sources, reach new audiences and produce dynamic new journalism products. The lessons they learn throughout this experiment will help not only their own organizations, but be passed onto the rest of the TMC network.

This partnership supports the goals of TMC members to learn about and implement crowdsourcing, but with the added bonus of built-in infrastructure. This is a huge move for all of the organizations involved, one they wouldn’t have initiated or been able to afford on their own.

### **New Strategies for Revenue Generation**

In October 2010, TMC began the New Strategies for Revenue Generation lab with seven organizations, including ColorLines, *Ms. Magazine*, *In These Times*, The American Independent News Network, The Uptake, Truthout, and Inter Press Service. The research and education phase evolved in this lab to pair selected readings and special guests that revolved around a specific theme, including:



**Where are you now and what will the future look like?** Using selections from *The Big Thaw*, participants discussed potential opportunities for developing revenue streams and examined common challenges they all face.

**Making the most of your community.** David Cohn of Spot.us presented key findings on how to integrate community into journalism production, and also revealed ways for participating organizations to work with Spot.us to crowdfund content. In their reading, “Seeking Sustainability: A Nonprofit News Roundtable”, produced by the Knight Foundation, participants identified opportunities for generating revenue they wanted to learn more about.

**The Entrepreneurial Mindset: Innovating your way to sustainability.** Members learned about new, entrepreneurial strategies for making money and how to think creatively about content to reach out to niche audiences. Dick Tofel, General Manager of ProPublica, and Martin Langeveld, founder of CircLabs and writer for Neiman Journalism Lab, discussed their different approaches to distributing content to maximize impact and revenue. The reading featured selections from *Funding Journalism in the Digital Age*, by Jeff Kaye and Stephen Quinn, on microeconomic principles that could apply to news and emerging distribution opportunities.

**All about ads.** David Cho, publisher of [The Awl](#), shared his strategies for cultivating community to help sell unique sponsorships and advertising opportunities to monetize their network of general interest websites. Participants also learned about other innovative advertising concepts and potential experiment ideas from their assigned reading, “Clues in the Rubble: A User-First Framework for Sustaining Local News,” by Bill Mitchell.

**It’s Not Just Another Direct Mail: Smart online fundraising strategies.** Erika Croxton and Jen Mac Donald of Grist joined us to discuss their outside-the-box fundraising strategies. They also shared their lessons learned from their new membership structure, which celebrated its first anniversary in November.

Important themes and lessons that highlighted from the lab thus far include:

1. Metrics analysis is evolving, and is key to explaining the value of your audience. Advertisers and funders aren’t just looking for household income and spending habits any more. From advertising to sponsorships to donations, new metrics focused on social networking, impact and reach allow you to better tell your audience’s story and chart their influence to potential financial backers.

2. New tools and technologies are emerging that will rewrite how organizations think about syndication and content portability. For example, the Associated Press is currently developing a content clearinghouse which will make it possible for any news organization to syndicate and sell their content with ease. In order to think strategically about this model, organizations will need to conduct research into potential audiences and syndication partners to ensure a solid return of investment.
3. Niche audiences represent key opportunities to monetize content and reach new audiences. Lab participants are particularly interested in building easy-to-launch content verticals that would be highly search-optimized to draw in new traffic and sell advertising. For example, a lifestyles vertical could act as an in-road to other content and make it easier to sell ads. Tablets devices also represent a key opportunity for organizations to share content related to key issues via topic-based applications.

Potential experiment ideas range from incorporating new technologies to make it easier to build and manage membership platforms and micro-donations to conducting collaborative fundraising events, such as an auction or a day-long webathon. In 2011, we will build upon the findings from this lab and implement an experiment that can become a sustainable, scalable model for generating income for independent media outlets.

#### *Mozilla/P2PU partnership*

In Fall 2010, TMC staff worked with a team from Mozilla, The Medill School of Journalism, and Hacks/Hackers to develop of a six week, peer-to-peer course titled "[Open Journalism on the Open Web](#)." The course was designed to bring programmers and journalists together to educate one another about their respective fields and mutually benefit. Class topics included "Edit it. Fork it. The art of collaboration and journalism," "Data journalism and government," and "Old and new business models for journalism."

*"Every time I signed into the P2PU chat room or called into a lecture, I ended up with an incredible list of programming ideas and terms to learn more about. It was the first time I ever got a direct line into how hackers think about journalistic problems."*

—Sarah Laskow, Media Consortium blogger and class participant

The course was written up on [Boing Boing](#), and opened with a bang. Ultimately, more than 40 journalists and programmers participated in the course, sharing resources, experiences, and learning how programmers and journalists can more effectively work together over six weeks.

The course had good attendance throughout and in a post-program survey, participants cited the quality of resources and lectures as highlights of the venture. Open Journalism and the Open Web was a beta course and we hope to conduct another course that builds on its successes in 2012. Resources from the course, including readings and conference call recordings, are available at <http://p2pu.org/general/open-journalism-open-web>. This partnership builds on the findings of *The Big Thaw*, and is also part of our ongoing strategy to develop member engagement and education events.

As part of our work to develop programs that educate journalists for the next evolution of news, TMC also launched the Chicago chapter of Hacks/Hackers to further develop the educational opportunities for and connections between programmers and journalists. Hacks/Hackers Chicago has hosted and organized two events in 2010 on data visualization and developing web-based applications to support reporting.

*"It didn't cost participants more than time and they got a lot out of it. There's lots of potential and hunger for this type of course."*

—Phillip Smith, course facilitator

### *Report: "Investing in Impact"*

In mid-2010, The Media Consortium, in collaboration with the [Center for Social Media](#) (CSM), released the report: [Investing in Impact: Media Summits Reveal Pressing Needs, Tools for Evaluating Public Interest Media](#). The report was developed out a series of "Media Impact Summits" that took place in seven cities around the country throughout the first quarter of 2010.

Jessica Clark of CSM and Tracy Van Slyke of TMC drew together dozens of leading public interest media makers, funders and researchers from Chicago, New York, Miami, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Washington, DC, and Boston to address the question that many media makers are asking themselves: "How do you know your media matters?" Insights from those summits are the basis for *Investing in Impact*, which outlines the major arguments for assessing impact, synthesizes the **five top impact evaluation needs**, and proposes **five new tools** for public interest media assessment. As a quick highlight, the five overarching needs expressed by summit attendees include:

1. **Getting on the same page:** *Developing shared categories of impact assessment*
2. **Following the story:** *Tracking the movement of content and frames across platforms and over time*
3. **Contextualizing the anecdotal :** *Refining methods for analyzing shifts in public awareness, deliberation and behavior*

4. **Understanding our users:** *Creating more sophisticated profiles of audience demographics, habits and concerns*
5. **Moving beyond market assumptions:** *Defining the uses and limitations of commercial metrics schemes for assessing public interest media*

And the five proposed tools to help public interest media makers assess their impact:

1. **Putting it all in one place:** *Building a unified social media dashboard*
2. **Chasing the frame:** *Building a social issue buzz tracker*
3. **Telling your story of impact:** *Developing model formats and processes for strategically communicating outcomes*
4. **Asking the right questions:** *Creating common survey tools for evaluation and audience assessment*
5. **Identifying networks:** *Creating tools that track the growth, health and effectiveness of networks*

TMC will create spaces for strategic exploration on this topic as part of its II Labs and membership education series in 2011.

## Building and Organizing Editorial Collaborations

Starting in 2009, TMC members began engaging in a variety of editorial collaborations involving dozens of media organizations. At the end of 2009, TMC members, including *Mother Jones*, *The Uptake*, and *Grist.org*, self-organized to share space, resources and content among 11 organizations at the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference (COP15). The effort, dubbed the Copenhagen News Collaborative, was an exemplary opportunity to share content and resources, and to foster synergy among news organizations. Reporters teamed up with videographers to produce multimedia content that was republished on multiple sites. Ultimately, the collaboration resulted in nearly two dozen reporters, videographers etc. on the ground, better coverage and multimedia capacity for all organizations, more content, and a larger, cross-pollinated audience for that content.

The Media Consortium promoted the collaboration and related reporting via a series of COP15 blog roundups that were published three times a week throughout the conference as a part of *The Weekly Mulch*, TMC's environment blog. ([See COP15-related posts](#)) *The Mulch* is regularly syndicated to over a dozen partner organizations. This experiment in collaboration and the subsequent lessons learned, led to two major TMC-organized editorial collaborations in 2010.

### *USSF Collaboration*

Based on the success of the Copenhagen collaboration, and requests from our members to replicate this collaborative framework, The Media Consortium organized a content collaboration and distribution wire for the 2010 U.S. Social Forum, which took place in Detroit this past June. Over 15 Media Consortium members, grassroots media outlets, and social justice groups participated. The collaboration had three central components:

1. A newswire of free content for any media organization to reprint and repost. View an [archived list](#) of USSF content.
2. A daily newsletter of top stories that were delivered to Media Consortium members and a cultivated listserv of publicists, bloggers, academics and government officials
3. A headline feed of all content generated by TMC members and other media at the social forum that could be posted on any website—12 media and advocacy organizations in total made use of this tool.

Organizations shared content, reposted stories, and developed their own connections and collaborations using infrastructure developed by TMC staff. Stories covered included interviews with attending activists and leaders in the social justice movement, reports on emerging social justice movements, and live feeds of USSF events. The USSF organizing committee used these feeds to populate both the USSF 2010 official website and the daily print publica-



*“The U.S. Social Forum was a great opportunity for Free Speech TV to work with Media Consortium journalists. We set up a studio in the People’s Media Center, and journalists from New America Media, Yes! Magazine, Truthout and others were able to schedule slots in our live broadcast. And it was a great opportunity for outreach and promotion, I know we made contact with lots of potential new viewers. I look forward to doing more of this kind of collaboration in the future.”*

—Eric Galatas, Program Director,  
Free Speech TV

### Campaign Cash

An ongoing beat for many TMC members is the critical issue of how money influences elections. In the 2010 election alone, outside groups spent an estimated \$400-\$500 million to influence the results. But those numbers will never be confirmed, due to the Supreme Court's recent *Citizens United* ruling, which opened the door for unlimited, unchecked money to flow from outside groups into the hands of organizations that are not required to disclose what amount they spend or what they spend it on.

From October 21-November 4, The Media Consortium organized and worked with seven media outlets to support and promote important reporting and analysis of the short- and long-term impact of Citizen's United in a project we called Campaign Cash. More than two dozen articles, videos, and radio pieces on the campaign cash issue were produced in just a week and a half. Coverage included investigations into the Tea Party’s funding, a look at the future of political attack ads, and in-depth explorations of the impact of secret money on both the Chamber of Commerce and local elections.


The Media Consortium coordinated and contracted promotional efforts for this project, which included:

tion of USSF, Terra Viva, which circulated among over 10,000 social change activists every day of the social forum. Media Consortium member Free Speech TV built a live studio at USSF and brought TMC members and local media together to do live reporting on the event.

This collaboration functioned as a unifying hub for multiple media outlets and strengthened relationships and connections throughout the sector.

### Campaign Cash: Who’s Funding Your Elections?

Get breaking reporting on the corporate money flowing into the 2010 election. Read the daily Campaign Cash blogs, or get the latest news on [Twitter](#).



The screenshot shows two blog posts from the Campaign Cash series. The first post is titled "Campaign Cash: Tea Party Vows to Block Campaign Finance Reform" by Zach Carter, Media Consortium blogger. It includes a small portrait of a man and a text snippet: "Welcome to the final edition of Campaign Cash, which tracked political spending during this year's midterm elections. Stay tuned for more reporting on money in politics from members of The Media Consor...". The second post is titled "Campaign Cash: Citizens United Becomes Get-Out-of-Jail-Free Card for Corporate Criminals" by Zach Carter, Media Consortium blogger. It includes a small portrait of a man and a text snippet: "The votes are in, and while some close races are still being tallied, there is a clear winner from the 2010 elections: Secret corporate cash. Such unaccounted for political donations may end up allowing..."

- Daily Campaign Cash blogs produced by The Media Consortium, published around the blogosphere and reposted by TMC members and allies. [See the Campaign Cash blogs.](#)
- Intense social media efforts (Twitter was on fire with our #campaigncash hashtag)
- Working with a booker to secure eight interviews on national daily radio and online shows with Zach Carter, TMC blogger, and other reporters from member outlets. Media hits included radio/online TV show The Young Turks as well as the nationally syndicated shows hosted by Leslie Marshall and Stephanie Miller. English language Russia TV picked up on this issue.
- Public News Service also created radio stories based on reporting from TMC members that reached tens of thousands in multiple states across the country.

Our work helped influence the national conversation. Both the *New York Times* and NPR used our coined phrase of "campaign cash" in their coverage. Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) retweeted one of our blog posts, and [Bill Moyers mentioned](#) Carter's reporting in an address to Boston University. What we were able to accomplish in less than two weeks is just a snapshot of the power of combined original reporting, social media engagement, and intense promotional efforts.

### *Editorial Collaborations: Lessons Learned*

Editorial collaborations in 2010 laid a foundation for future high-impact joint efforts between multiple media outlets in the future. Here's what we've learned so far:

1. An outside organizer (i.e. TMC) can play a key role in identifying opportunities, procuring funding, organizing logistics, and developing a communications strategy among multiple media organizations. This infrastructure is critical to increasing the impact and influence of content.
2. The cross-promotion among members via their individual websites, social networks, radio, and television channels helps expand and cross-pollinate audiences for all participants.
3. TMC-organized blogs provided critical entry point and context creator for new audiences about the topic. The blogs exposed millions of additional people to the outlets participating in collaborations and the reporting that comes out of it.

Structured collaborations also provide a host of opportunities that TMC staff will examine in 2011, including building strategic collaborations across different platforms (video, audio, text, data visualization) to provide dynamic multi-media reporting on key issues as well as helping to foster collaborations between TMC member organizations and their communities.

## Expanding Audiences and Providing Core Support

### MediaWires

Our [MediaWires project](#) has become one of the consortium's flagship enterprises. Designed to heighten the visibility of our members' content on key political issues via smartly-written roundup blogs and headline feeds, the program has become a key tool for expanding the reach of our members' reporting to new audiences, a launching pad for new writers, and a tool for raising public awareness of oft-overlooked issues in the [economy](#), [health care](#), [immigration](#), and [environmental](#) realms. The MediaWires program has also become a scalable framework that members can use to build campaigns around key social issues, as demonstrated with the Campaign Cash project.

Over thirty-five organizations, including blogs and news organizations, TMC members, advocacy groups, and non-profits, are republishing and sharing the MediaWire blogs on a regular basis.

Other notable syndication partners who have posted the blogs include Current TV, America's Voice, Tck Tck Tck and OneClimate. Collectively, the blogs have an audience of over 7 million people.

MediaWire blogs have considerable reach and are increasing the exposure of Media Consortium members' content and brands. The program is also a phenomenal entry point for potential allies, partners, and new TMC members—a primer for crafting content collaborations.



We've been able to pull usable stats from a sample of our 35 partners. Six organizations reported that, from May-July 2010, the MediaWire blogs generated 105,411 pageviews. This is only 1/6 of the total reporting, so we can extrapolate that the reach of these blogs is much, much larger, potentially in the range of 1.5 million pageviews per quarter. This means that every time a user views a MediaWire blog, he/she is exposed to coverage by a range of TMC members, potentially increasing viewers/subscribers for those outlets in the future.

Other notable stats include:

- 17 widgets featuring TMC member headlines are currently in use [where/how?]. They've been interacted with 369,767 times between May-July 2010.

- More than 150 people subscribe to the topical RSS feeds that run TMC member headlines.
- Stories featured in the blogs generated 29,817 clicks to TMC member content from May-July 2010.

TMC staff have also scaled up the blogs' presence on Facebook and Twitter in the past year. The Media Consortium fan page on Facebook has more than 1,400 fans and the blogs themselves have more than 2,000 Twitter followers. (Each blog has its own Twitter handle).

In fall 2010, we began piloting short video pieces that spotlight members' content and reporters on a roughly bi-weekly basis. The videos are brief interviews with reporters at TMC member outlets, and offer an inside look at the groundbreaking analysis and reporting produced by TMC members. As part of this beta run, we've distributed five videos as part of the weekly blogs, and look forward to exploring more multimedia opportunities for this program in the future.



*Mother Jones* reporter Andy Kroll discusses campaign financing as a part of the MediaWires video project.

The MediaWires program also launches new voices in media. Zach Carter, the founding blogger for the Weekly Audit, has become one of the most sought-after financial reporters in the field. After two years of working with us and building contacts and influence, Carter has moved on to be a full time reporter at the Huffington Post. Sarah Laskow, author of the Mulch, is building her freelance portfolio and has been tapped to appear on GritTV and other television programs to discuss environmental issues. She's also gone on to write for Newsweek.com and other publications. Catherine A. Traywick, the voice of the Diaspora, is becoming an expert reporter on immigrant issues. Since joining the MediaWires project in this summer, Catherine has become a staff writer for Campus Progress and has provided insightful, on-the-ground analysis from Arizona, where the battle over immigration issues is fierce.

As we plan to build out the MediaWires in 2011, TMC staff will survey members to brainstorm other potential growth opportunities, which could include a new issue vertical and the development of a marketing strategy that would move headlines about key issues and contact information to producers and bookers in mainstream media.

### *Independent Media Internships*

As part of our efforts to build and diversify media leadership, the Media Consortium's Independent Media Internship Program successfully recruited and placed five interns with the Uptake, the Washington Independent, Link TV, *Yes! Magazine*, and the Nation Institute in 2010. These interns completed a three-month, full-time, paid editorial internship that offered unparalleled, hands on experience working with leading independent media outlets. TMC staff recruited a diverse set of young people. Of the six interns in 2010, four identified as female; at least three were bilingual; two were of Middle Eastern decent; and one was of Hispanic decent.

*"The Media Consortium is providing a wonderful and much-needed service to aspiring journalists. The internship stipend allowed me to work for a publication that I admire and live in a place that I love. In addition, I'm appreciative of the feedback I received during the professional development calls and the networking connections I was able to make along the way."*

—Keith Rutowski, *Yes! Magazine* intern,  
Spring 2010

The contributions of TMC interns have been substantial and valuable to independent media. Throughout the year, interns produced substantial research and reporting to MC members. One intern contributed to a major collaborative project between the Nation Institute and AlterNet in launching a citizen reporting project tracking the Tea Party. Another intern identified an interest in immigration reporting and ended up writing a weekly post on immigration news. The program is filling a gap in leadership and training that develops a diverse next generation of media leaders. TMC provides training and support for interns via monthly conference calls with experts and listservs for current interns.

At this time the capacity and resources of MC staff to continue supporting this program are being evaluated and next steps will be announced soon. In the second half of 2011 we hope to relaunch the program with a streamlined application and placement process. We also hope to expand programming and training opportunities so that interns with any TMC member are able to participate.

### *New Membership and Associate Membership Strategy*

Based in part on feedback and findings from our February member meeting in New York, The Media Consortium developed and successfully launched a new membership strategy this summer. We've also rebuilt our membership committee and have brought several new member organizations on board.

The new membership strategy includes a revamp of how TMC membership is structured via a new, introductory associate member tier. The associate membership position is designed to



be an easy entry point for young or smaller organizations that may not have the capacity to participate in all TMC projects, but can contribute through their connection to diverse audiences and share innovative business strategies with legacy organizations. We've brought on three new full members of the Consortium in 2010 and three new Associate Members:

Members:

*Earth Island Journal*

Truthout

*Orion Magazine*

Associate Members:

Feet in 2 Worlds

Free Speech Radio News

Western Citizen

The new membership strategy is also designed to put greater emphasis on education and training for TMC members via monthly resource/training calls and regional salons in which members can meet one another, glean fresh perspective on tools and challenges facing the industry, and expand upon the findings from our IILabs. The training calls will begin in January with a focus on new technologies.

## What It All Means and What's Next

The Media Consortium kicked off 2010 with a focus on incubation, experimentation and collaboration with the overarching goal of helping our members shift their organizational DNA and become equipped to innovate with new technologies and collaborate with other media organizations like never before.

Above all, TMC has demonstrated how a dynamic network and its organizing efforts can successfully place independent media at the forefront of journalism innovation. We do this by:

- Synthesizing and articulating big-picture visions for the emerging media landscape to help our members evolve on individual and collective levels
- Developing and implementing long and short-term projects that help members experiment with and experience these new concepts
- Convening meetings large and small among TMC members and key media/technology experts
- Constantly building relationships among media producers and outside allies

In 2011, TMC will deepen and expand its innovation focus by creating multiple tiers of access for members to engage in high-level strategy discussions, collaboration opportunities and hands-on learning. We will continue to zero in on our 2010 curriculum topics identified in the IILabs, but will also integrate additional cutting-edge topics into the process. Other activities already in development include the generation and implementation of the experiment(s) generated out of the new revenue generation lab and overseeing the launch and execution of our partnership with the Public Insight Network.

We also plan to increase our support and coordination of editorial collaboration efforts around multiple topics including continuing investigations into the role of campaign cash and a focus on media policy. In addition, TMC will develop an easy-to-implement toolkit to aid members in launching their own collaborative efforts. This will help our members and TMC quickly organize and promote content for newsworthy events and be able to easily measure their impact.

Overall, The Media Consortium will continue to play the unique and important role of helping members and the journalism landscape at large to not just talk about innovation, but to experiment and engage with it.

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