**2010 Membership Strategy Memo**

Erin Polgreen, 3/24/9

**Memo Outline**

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**The need for a new TMC membership strategy**

The media landscape is incredibly different from when TMC was founded five years ago. While the landscape is still in the midst of dramatic shifts, the consortium has reached programmatic stability, thanks to years of work and collaboration. Thanks to our work, we can lead and define the role of independent, progressive media to the public. This is a powerful moment, in which we can help shape the evolving progressive media landscape.

The last major membership mandate was implemented in 2008. As TMC grows in public awareness and influence, it has become increasingly difficult for the membership committee to argue for or against potential members. The key question now is how can we evolve TMC’s membership strategy to accurately reflect and shape the new media landscape and best support our members?

**Landscape analysis and its implications**

At the 2010 Media Consortium membership meeting, we performed a media landscape analysis, asking our members to self-identify their current and future roles/value within the progressive media sector. For a deeper review/recap of the process and results, please [see this post.](http://www.themediaconsortium.org/2010/03/22/2015-progressive-media/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+MediaConsortium+%28The+Media+Consortium%29)

From the landscape analysis, we now know that members are moving from “pure play” journalism organizations (which The Media Consortium was founded on) to media producers that are looking to engage, engage and foster communities and move those communities to action. In addition, many organizations stated they wanted to evolve into “hybrid media makers” that combine great acts of journalism with messaging, advocacy, action and community building.

In order to identify how to evolve our membership strategy, we spent some time at the meeting discussing the implications of the landscape analysis and membership needs at the meeting. Four themes emerged.

1. *Symbiosis and Collaboration:* The Consortium creates an energizing space where independent media are able to mutually benefit and support each other. A future membership strategy must foster these qualities.
2. *Impact and Action:* As the sector evolves, we need to make sure that the work of potential members has impact. We need to help our current membership answer two questions: Who is your information reaching (audience)? What are they doing (action) with that information?
3. *Quality Control*: How are we defining “quality” media for member recruitment? As the landscape diversifies, having metrics defining quality will be essential to building trust and relationships in this community.
4. *Distribution and Expanding Our Reach:* A membership strategy must help reveal the most efficient and effective ways to put information into the hands of more people.

With these results, we need to articulate an updated membership strategy that reflects and also helps to shape the overarching progressive media sector. TMC can best serve its members by evolving to incorporate innovators who are redefining how media engages society.Internally, this will impact the make up of our membership and the current/potential editorial, training, marketing and business projects that The Media Consortium organizes on behalf of and with its members.

There are several key questions to developing a future membership strategy:

* **Who should we be recruiting?**   
  We must focus on recruiting organizations that are not necessarily pure play journalist groups, but are hybrid media makers and community-builders. Potential areas to recruit from include local media organizations, organizations that are experimenting with community + content, organizations that are reaching new demographics.  
    
  Next step: We need to articulate what kinds of organizations we want to recruit that will reflect and shape long-term evolution of progressive media sector. This should be a part of a finalized 2010 Membership strategy document.
* **How can we guarantee credibility/quality of content among members?**

We need to craft a standard of quality for what our definition of “media” entails, but also need to think about audience and representation. Reinforcing the power of the sector means that we need to talk about the impact of TMC member content on audiences, political conversations and more.

Next step: Once the membership committee is reconstituted, a good first step for could be to survey existing membership to develop commonly agreed upon benchmarks of quality media to help hone our criteria.

* **How can we be strategically diversifying our membership to reflect changing demographics?**

Potential members should bring diversity of media, audience, distribution models or experience to the existing membership body.

* + Audience Diversity: Age, Income, Ethnicity, regional reach.
  + Media Diversity: Increase Radio, Online and Experimental Orgs.
  + Unique models/landscape diversity: Producing/Dissemminating Journalism in new/interesting ways. Citizen journalism sites, local media organizations, people producing mobile journalism, etc.

Next step: TMC Staff and membership committee should pinpoint a few target organizations that would fill in these diversity considerations.

**Next Steps to developing and implementing a 2010 membership strategy:**

* TMC staff and the Coordinating Committee will **develop a membership strategy document and work to rebuild the membership committee.** The new membership strategy and programmatic planning must strike a balance between the needs of current and new members.
* Refine **joining and recruitment** process for 2010. We need to make it easier for the Membership Committee to ascertain whether an organization is a good fit or not. We also need to actively recruit members that add to the skill sets and diversity of our overall membership body.
* Once a new membership strategy is in place, we will **reopen the membership process** and begin pinpointing organizations to recruit so that we are including all four elements of the emerging landscape.
  + We want to generate more collaboration and better economies of scale. During the feedback session, members noted that they would like to see a greater concentration of TV/Radio in the membership mix. There is also the possibility of creating an Associate Membership/concrete role for allies in the Consortium.
* **Work with current members** to engage them with TMC projects, peer-facilitated learning, sharing of best practices, and trainings for middle management of TMC member organizations. This includes developing the role of 1-2 **Ombudsmen** that represent TMC's governing committees and also acts as an ear for potential projects and collaborations.
* Expand the scope and capacity of the Membership Committee and TMC staff to focus on **developing a network of allies** that can help TMC members lead in experimentation with distribution, list-building and audience development. This network could also be key for helping define quality in terms of content and audience engagement.

**BACKGROUND MATERIALS**

**Membership Committee structure**  
The Membership Committee is currently structured to have 5-6 members that are staff of TMC member organizations, chaired by a CC member and TMC staff. The chair of this committee could be an Ombudsman (more info below). Once the CC approves 2010 membership strategy, TMC staff will work with membership committee chair and committee to recruit new members and build committee infrastructure for 2010.  
  
The membership committee's tasks, as outlined at the CC meeting, include:

* Makes quarterly reports to EC regarding recruitment strategies, growth.
* Votes on new and potential members based on existing application process.
* Works with TMC staff to engage members in TMC projects and gatherings

**Working criteria for new membership strategy**The current application and review process for new members is stable, though our baseline criteria for membership needs to be updated*.* (See below for current criteria.)As it currently stands, there are some organizations that match our goals on paper, but it's too easy for any organization to argue their ability to be a member of the Consortium and be offended by a "no" vote from the Membership Committee. We need to be able to maintain a good standing in the sector and not burn any bridges by being unclear about our goals and processes with potential members and allies.

Membership criteria updates should make it easier to recruit organizations that are ready to think big, primed to collaborate, have the capacity to do so, and are in a place to experiment with new models. The goal is to make sure that new members are ready to participate and can help take TMC to the next level.

* Potential members **must publish original journalistic or media content**, not just have a journalism-driven mission, as our criteria currently states. The current language leaves membership open to aggregators/syndicators and media networks, which are not really successful members of TMC. These organizations can not participate in many TMC projects, but could potentially be beneficial allies.
  + Other potential means of defining journalistic or media content: level of social impact, informative intent of content, high level of political awareness, and is reviewed for editorial and factual accuracy by staff before production.
* Potential members **must be endorsed for membership** by staff from an active TMC member organization/ally or by TMC staff/Coordinating Committee. This strategy will prevent a lot of applications that we get from organizations that, quite frankly, do not have the bandwidth or shared mission/vision of the larger TMC member body.
* Potential members **must have a history of collaboration with other media organizations**, or at least the capacity to do so.
* Potential members must **be able to participate in TMC projects** as their organization currently stands. It's unreasonable for us to ask that potential members are able to participate in all of our projects, but if they can participate in 1/2 of the below items, it's a good first step:
  + Have staff bandwidth to mentor and support interns
  + Have content that is able to work with the MediaWires Project
  + Have vision/infrastructure to support participation in II Labs
  + Be able and willing to attend TMC meetings or participate in TMC governing committees.

**Joining/Recruitment Logistics**  
TMC has approximately 40 active members and organizations that are interested in TMC membership typically self-select. There's not a lot of pro-active recruitment at the moment.

At this point, new member recruitment should be based on diversity in landscape, platform, business model and audience. I propose capping membership at 50-55 for 2010 and creating the following targets:

* 2 media innovators that are engaging communities, producing and distributing journalism in new ways.
* 3 organizations that reach new audiences, including youth and people of color.
* 2 organizations that have large reach, audience, or public influence.

**Legal questions regarding membership:**

In order to be considered for membership, organizations under consideration must be in line with the charitable purpose/mission statement of The Media Consortium. This criteria was crafted with the advice of our lawyers, Silk, Adler and Colvin and includes:

* Amplifying the power of the independent media in order to foster a more informed, just and open society.
* Promoting the gathering and dissemination of news about current affairs in communities underserved by mainstream media.
* Supporting “mission-driven” media outlets whose missions encompass promoting the public interest in political, social and/or cultural diversity.
* Encouraging the participation of underrepresented communities in civic affairs by enhancing their connections with opinion leaders and policy makers.
* Research and development on innovative approaches to media production and distribution.
* Enhancing the practice of journalism in the public interest.
* Organizations that on whom participation would confer a non-incidental private benefit are excluded from membership.

**Current Membership Criteria**

In the last two years, TMC staff has built the infrastructure that a healthy, member-driven organization needs to thrive. This included rebuilding the membership committee, creating core values and criteria for membership, and implementing a basic, democratic process to evaluate organizations that are interested in joining. Organizations that want to join TMC must adhere to the following core values and commitments:

* Commit to participating in projects and collaborations that help other Consortium members (who commonly distribute content on one or two primary platforms) leverage new technology to disseminate their messages.
* Commit to sending delegations of senior staff to at least one Consortium meeting per year.
* Invest resources and staff time in the development of The Media Consortium and TMC-sponsored activities so that we can create strong, collaborative relationships among independent media organizations. If organizations cannot commit such resources, they are not eligible to join the consortium.
* Member organizations must have a journalism-driven mission that promotes progressive ideals.
* Member organizations aggressively promote social, racial, and economic justice; they commit to pursing these values as they apply to hiring practices, audience outreach, editorial policies, and ownership.
* Member organizations thrive on collaboration and member input; participants commit to "playing well with others."