

**2010 TMC Membership structure + Recruitment Strategy**

**May 26, 2010**

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**Overview + Strategy**

As our media landscape continues to shift, The Media Consortium must take advantage of this critical moment to support the evolution of its members into sustainable organizations and increase the overall impact of the progressive media sector. By expanding our membership strategy we can evolve our network to accomplish the organization’s mission, and help the progressive media sector advance and deepen the accomplishments of our strategic principles. This strategy influences the types of new members we will recruit and includes the launch of an “associate member” strategy.

There is a mutual benefit to expanding the scope of our membership structure to include different types of organizations. Our current members will be exposed to new enterprises that are capturing value through new orientations, platforms, business models and demographics. New players will benefit from the legacy experience of TMC member organizations in terms of fundraising, content development, and how these organizations are evolving in this new media environment.

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) This new structure for TMC membership is based on the results of this exercise and is designed to simultaneously reflect industry changes and help shape the overarching progressive media sector. 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.

Existing criteria regarding collaborative spirit and engagement apply across all tiers.

**Membership Tiers**

In order to strategically expand our membership to strengthen the overall sector, TMC proposes the creation of an associate membership and allies program for launch in 2010. Potential members should provide value in one or more of the following areas: 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/Disseminating Journalism in new/interesting ways. Citizen journalism sites, local media organizations, people producing mobile journalism, etc.

*Associate Members*

An associate membership program will be the first step to initiating new, quality progressive media organizations into the network. Organizations eligible for Associate Membership include aggregators, bloggers, small-staff organizations, local media outlets, and media-focused technologists. In general, these organizations will be at a stage that they do not currently fit within the full membership criteria or cannot fully participate in TMC projects. This is an ideal membership level for organizations that are under 3 years .

Below is a proposed logistical outline of how associate members could participate in TMC. We recommend thoughtfully and strategically recruiting five organizations as starting members of this program so that the process can be evaluated and tweaked as necessary.

**Cost:** $150/year for organizations w/2 or more staff, $75/year for single-person enterprises.

**Application/Recruitment process:** Potential Associate Members will answer a questionnaire that includes a statement of purpose, history of the organization and organizational snapshot (budget, reach, demographics), and information about their willingness and ability to collaborate. Associates should also have a conversation with TMC staff or chair of Membership Committee prior to joining.

**Benefits:** Can attend meetings, participate in TMC listserv, MediaWires project and participate in content collaborations, etc.

**Associates cannot:** Participate in top-tier TMC projects such as the IILabs or the internship program. Associates are also not eligible to be a part of TMC governance, but as their organization grows, they can scale up into full membership.

In order to scale up to full membership, Associate Members must demonstrate organizational capacity to collaborate, an institutional history of more than 3 years, be producing original content, and have the financial and staff capacity to participate in top-tier consortium projects. The membership committee must also approve any move to full membership in the Consortium.

*Members*

TMC can best serve its members by recruiting innovative media organizations that are redefining how media engages with communities.Eligible organizations should span the landscape analysis conducted at the 2010 member meeting, and particular focus should be placed on organizations that are engaging communities and encouraging action, reaching out to new demographic sets, and experimenting with new technologies, business models and platforms. We should also focus on non-traditional “hybrid media-makers” that are producing informative journalistic content to move communities to action.

The below set of membership criteria has been updated so that TMC is able to recruit organizations that are ready to think big, primed to collaborate, have the capacity to do so, and are in a place where experimenting with new models means that there won't be a huge learning curve. It also accounts for landscape changes and opens the door for new types of media makers and community builders to join and collaborate.

**Criteria** as outlined by the TMC membership committee and according to legal stipulations outlined by Silk and Adler. Proposed updates for 2010 are in **bold**.

* Members **must publish original journalistic or media content**, which can be defined by: intended social impact, informative intent of content, and whether or not the content was reviewed for editorial and factual accuracy by staff before production.
* Potential members **must have a history of collaboration with other media organizations**, or at least the capacity to do so.
* 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."
* 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.
* 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.

**Cost:** Dues shall remain on a sliding scale of $250-$1,000, depending on an organization’s annual budget. Dues do not include the added cost of participation in top-tier projects such as the internships, IIlabs, etc.

**Application/Recruitment process:** Parties interested in full TMC membership must fill out a brief, confidential questionnaire about the mission, reach, budget and capacity. Potential members must also have the endorsement of an active Media Consortium member, TMC staff or persons serving on TMC governance committees. The endorsement will help ensure that we are able to bring organizations with the capacity and ethos that support collaborative projects.

**Benefits:** Members are encouraged to participate in the listserv, meetings, all TMC projects, and governance committees so long as they have the capacity to do so.

**Recruitment**
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 full on membership at 50 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.

**Pending applicants for membership:** Change.org, Orion Magazine, Rabble.CA (Launching US channel).

**Potentential recruits for Associate Membership: Oakland Local**, **America's Voice, Western Citizen**, **Twin Cities Daily Planet**, Latina Voices, MinnPost, High Country News, **Free Speech Radio News,** **Racialicious**

**Recruits for Membership:** Spot.us, Facing South

**Membership Engagement**

While TMC has a strong history of member engagement through individual projects and meetings, a sustained, strategic effort has not been a part of our week-to-week processes. A sustained member engagement and training program would effectively prime our members to think ahead of the curve, foster innovative thinking from the ground up, and support the sector over the long term. Creating an infrastructure that continually networks peers, educates about industry trends and builds connections between members and industry innovators is a vital part of fulfilling TMC’s mission and strategic vision.

*Member Education Calls/Salons*TMC staff and the Membership committee will develop a series of calls and in-person salons with leading technologists, vendors, or allies that parallel the strategic focus of the Innovation and Incubation labs. These events will help provide a direct benefit to members on a regular basis by encouraging conversations, exposing members to new tools, and fostering collaboration. Stepping up the frequency and means of engagement will not only foster better relationships among TMC members, it will prime the pump for future projects and empower organizations to break new ground for the sector.

Working with current members should be a major focus for TMC staff and governing committees in 2010. As TMC takes on new projects and initiatives, building a network of allies (see below) will be key to developing sustainable programs and engaging members via trainings and resource-sharing. By giving members the tools and connections to leaders in their fields to innovate and think about the bigger picture in their own offices, we can help revitalize our sector. These gatherings could easily dovetail with TMC staff’s current travel schedules.

*Ombudsman*
At the 2009 Coordinating Committee meeting in Pittsburgh, the concept of an ombudsman role was developed. Ombudsmen are CC members who help foster transparency and communication. As The Consortium grows, it will become increasingly important for members to be able to pitch projects or critique TMC processes through a designated channel. The ombudsman role offers an objective, diplomatic ear to concerned members.

They could also potentially function as the Chair of the membership committee and report back to the CC re: recruitment, etc. Ombudsmen duties include:

* Act as sounding board for potential projects and collaborations.
* Ensures that not all ideas fall on director, and cross-check proposed projects for fit with TMC's overall strategic direction and provide cost/benefit analysis.
* Ensure members know that communication lines are open and CC is representational of membership.
* Ad hoc and meets as needed.
* Communicates directly with director on ideas/feedback.
* Listed in Membership FAQ as a resource for proposing projects

*Allies*

Allies and partners have been a lightly-defined part of TMC membership for some time. But as we move forward, it's time to explore using collaborations, the skill-sets, and technical know-how of other organizations to build out our projects and educate our members. Allies benefit by being able to tap into the independent media sector and diversifying their own reach.

Our working definition of "allies," as taken from 2008 membership committee documents:

*Allies of the Media Consortium are organizations that may not produce original content, but work to promote the voices and diversity of progressive, independent media in the press and public dialogue.*

The following types of organizations could be considered "allies" of The Media Consortium:

* Networks of freelance journalists or journalism outlets
* University-based Journalism/Media studies centers
* Websites that syndicate or aggregate content and deliver it to new platforms
* Individual media makers and organizers
* Organizations that increase reach/audience on non-editorial fronts (mobile platforms, aggregation, advertising, listbuilding, tech experiments)
* Think tanks and organizations focused on Media Policy Reform, political organizations, groups that study/experiment with new technology.
* International media organizations that are experimenting with new platforms and models.

As we build this role out, I recommend using the below baseline criteria to help inform and engage potential allies:

* Developing criteria for allies that helps nurture mutually beneficial relationships between allies and TMC members.
* Build systems for allies to pass ideas, advice and information to TMC members, be it a digest that's passed out via the TMC listserv to monthly conference calls and in-person meetings with members.

In the interests of staff capacity, we will conduct the allies program at a smaller scale with 2-3 partners. This will allow us to iron out any processes and test the program out.