Minutes: December 18, 2012

Present: Christa, Andrew, Liz, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

Absent, excused: Hanaa

Absent:

This meeting is focused on new applicants. We discussed the past meeting. The directive is really 1) is this outlet sustainable? 2) will they contribute to the Consortium? 3) is their journalism high quality? 4) do they fit with our values (see core values).

Applicants are:

People's Power Media
Bitch magazine

Vancouver Observer
Shelterforce

The last two have been on hold for almost a year while we debate membership strategy. We came to a tentative resolution of that strategy at our joint meeting with the Coordinating Committee on December 6, 2012.

Vancouver Observer discussion: good journalism, what is operating budget? They do have a fashion section, etc—they are more of a weekly. Hard to get rid of folks if they change or we change. They identify as being a progressive online newssite. Founding editor is an investigative reporter.

Vote to approve as associate member.

Shelterforce discussion: Similar to RPE. Liz: let’s bring them on as full members. Vote to approve as full members.

Bitch discussion: unanimous vote to bring on as full members

People’s Power Media: Benefit is the multimedia and their excitement around collaboration; wonder if they will need a lot of support; JGK: I agree, but this would be a good use of my time to support them. They don’t have a budget or secured funding, they are very new. Should we have them come back to us in six months to see if they are still going. IF JGK is willing to work with them, then there is no downside. Accepted as associate members.

Christa has summed it up very well (see below)

The short version:
For now, the majority of people seem generally interested in feeling out the process of growth and specifically open to considering non-U.S. and single-issue media outlets. Our concerns may or may not turn out to be legitimate obstacles, and we may find the growth beneficial. We can scale toward 100 and reevaluate our policy, making changes based on how the diversified membership is working out.  We are at 60 members now, which gives us a lot of space to experiment and revisit our questions/considerations as we approach 100.

The long version:

To help guide the Media Consortium's membership and growth policy, the Membership Committee and the Coordinating Committee discussed the pros and cons of growing the Consortium into a larger, more diversified organization. It is essentially a question of 1) building a sustainable financial plan and reach to a broader audience and 2) nurturing trusting collaboration as well as maintaining a manageable workload for Jo Ellen.

-As a large (500+ member) organization, we would be more financially sustainable through increased dues and attracting funders by offering a wider, more diversified audience.

-As a smaller organization (under 100 members), there is greater capacity for building trust and community, and less of a need to hire extra staff to help Jo Ellen.

The particular considerations that led to this discussion are: 1) should we open membership to non-U.S. outlets? and 2) should we open membership to more single-issue outlets?

In opening membership to these types of organizations and thus growing membership, the following questions must be kept in mind:

-What resources can we expect to offer to an extended base with differing needs? How would needs of different types of outlets need to be balanced?  Jo Ellen is stretched in terms of the number of projects she is coordinating. Would different needs mean more projects? It is expected that applicants would first consider how membership can benefit them before they apply in the first place. We should be careful about not taking on outlets that are not financially sustainable.

-As we grow, are we finding that new sources of funding are opening up as a result of our expanded reach (eg, grants for non-U.S. or issue-specific outlets)? Or are they going away (eg, if the mission becomes too general/diluted)? How would we fund another staffer if we exceed 100 members but have not yet reached 500?

-Would trust break down in a larger organization?  Would the meeting feel less like a collaborative gathering with productive, creative energy, and more like a schmoozy conference?  Would members hesitate to collaborate on editorial ideas, fundraisers, etc?

-We should be cognizant of our brand/values as we consider new members. New outlets can dilute the brand if they do not match our values statement well. Membership Committee should take a close look at quality of journalism when considering all applicants, including non-U.S., hyperlocal, or single-issue outlets.  We should also ask ourselves, when considering applications, if we are focusing on building independent media or building movements. If we accept a broader range of media categories, would that make membership more or less appealing to potential applicants considering how this particular Consortium can help their specific organization?

-We should come back to impact as a touchstone--if our mission is to make an impact, how do we measure that? Does expanded reach or focused collaboration make more of an impact? Or can both work together?

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