



**TMC Meeting Notes,  
Day 2, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

### **Media Consortium Membership Overview and Feedback**

Facilitated by Rinku Sen, chair of The Media Consortium's Coordinating Committee.

This session was created to help develop a future membership strategy for The Media Consortium. As we explored in the first day of the meeting, the media landscape is quickly changing and our members are also morphing strategically into new roles within that landscape. As that landscape changes, we need to consider what kinds of organizations are a part of the consortium. There are several key questions to developing a future membership strategy:

- Who should we be recruiting?
- How can TMC members fill different aspects of the emerging landscape but also are support each other?
- How can we develop a membership body that shores up the sector's credibility and reinforces the power of independent media?

Cynthia Samuels, Care2; Ann Friedman, The American Prospect & Feministing; and Don Rojas, Free Speech TV gave brief presentations about how their respective organizations are evolving to face tomorrow's challenges—and what role they saw The Media Consortium playing in their development. Rinku synthesized 4 themes from these testimonials:

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, and must have a means of responding to organizations who are members in name only.
2. *Impact and Action:* As the sector evolves, we need to make sure that the work of potential members has impact and engages members. 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.

#### Next Steps:

- TMC staff and the Coordinating Committee will develop a membership strategy 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.

- Once a new strategy for membership is in place, we will reopen the membership process and also 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.

#### Ongoing questions from members:

Has there been an internal discussion of what is quality and how can we determine quality, deftly to be able to monitor or advise in a way that is not confrontational? Perhaps there could be a small body to examine. –Chris Rabb

There are some members in name only, who we got to sign on but have never participated – what are doing about that? –Steve Katz

What types of partnerships are in place to help facilitate a mentorship program, etc? We have to support current members but also look at future members and seeing how they can help mentor them.

#### **Small group brainstorming**

Throughout the meeting, TMC members organized themselves into small groups to discuss in-depth next steps, questions and ideas around revenue generation models, mobile, community-building and new journalism strategies. The below notes include top take-aways and how TMC could strategically support its members in these areas.

#### Revenue Generation:

*Takeaways:* Revenue generation is in part a question of how to reframing the sector. We must clarify our value and process on what it takes to keep us going, whether to audience or foundations. Many audience members don't understand the difference between for profit and non-profit news.

#### *How TMC could support:*

1. Coordinate resource sharing. Maybe there are bits of technology or staffing that could be shared across the network.
2. Build a peer-to-peer learning and sharing system. Could TMC build an online database where members log experiments on revenue gen and do some quick notes on what worked/didn't work. Could also work for fundraising skills, staff development.
3. TMC could put energy into research and development around new technologies, new experiments and tools to test those out and then report out to members. **TMC NOTE: Stay tuned for our II Labs project. We're hoping to do just that!**

#### Moving Into Mobile

*Takeaways:* Yes, we should engage in mobile platforms! But the trick is doing it strategically. We need to engage users to figure out what our respective organizations do well, and what kind of hole a mobile application or website could fill.

*How TMC could support:*

1. There are existing services ie. Mobify or Mofuse that make it easy to make a mobile site. TMC could broker a deal for members to subscribe.
2. Could TMC provide support on researching opportunities for revenue generation via mobile? **TMC NOTE: Stay tuned for our II Labs project. We're hoping to work with members to work on these and other ideas.**

## **Mini-labs**

### **Diversifying Your Audience**

Shifting demographics are creating challenges and opportunities for content producers. Different groups use media in different ways and access different types of information and entertainment sources. So where do you start when you're trying to increase your reach? This session worked with TMC members to lay the groundwork for moving on the best editorial and outreach strategies to diversify and expand your audiences. Special guests: Latoya Peterson, Racialicious; Kety Esquivel, National Council of La Raza; Joe Baker, Care2

The media environment is crumbling. And yet, in many ways, ethnic media continues to thrive. Emerging media markets have had success targeting first generation immigrant populations, and the shifting demographics of America have allowed for new entrants to thrive. Over the last three years, mainstream media has taken an interest in minority populations, but they treat it as if it's the new gold rush: pan for what you want, leave the rest.

The idea of strategic partnerships are becoming more and more popular, as a way for media outlets to diversify their audiences and produce more targeted segments. However, many of these partnerships are ineffective, failing to attract more audiences and advertising. **Here are some pointers on leveraging a successful partnership:**

1. Throw passivity out the window.
2. Start redefining your core audience.
3. In order to maintain your growth, ensure your messages do not conflict.
4. Meet often with your partners to identify funding targets and work on multipronged plans of attack.
5. Work with each other's strengths and resources. Often, progressive outlets can find funding where ethnic outlets cannot - but ethnic outlets will have the resources to break news before it is major and sense shifting trends. (Examples - Color of Change, 2008 election coverage)

The future will belong to those with solutions, not just an analysis of the problem.

### **New Journalism Tools: Data visualization, Transparency/Sourcing, Investigative Journalism and Action**

Members heard from people working on the hottest tools and engaging in the most innovative strategies to produce and deliver high-impact journalism, and discussed how these tools and strategies could be integrated and what the potential benefits are. Special guests: Noah Kunin, the Sunlight Foundation; Amanda Hickman, DocumentCloud and more.

These are the URLs that we showed off in the data visualization and new tools session:

<http://www.documentcloud.org>  
<http://www.propublica.org/series/disposable-army>  
<http://www.eff.org/fn/directory/8443/362>

Potential Resources/Models:

<http://flowingdata.com/>  
<http://10000words.net/>  
<http://news.muckety.com/new>  
<http://newmediators.com/crisis-of-credit>  
<http://services.alphaworks.ibm.com/maneyeyes/home>  
<http://fieldguide.wnycclabs.org/>  
<http://tableausoftware.com/public/gallery/taleof100>  
<http://www.data.gov/>

### **How Do You Know that Your Media Matters?**

Media makers and outlets are struggling to assess their impact as familiar print and broadcast forms fragment across screens and streams. What approaches best reveal how independent and public media producers engage the public and make change? TMC members discussed lessons learned and best practices to track and explain media impact to your funders + community. Hanaa Rifaey of the American Independent News Network discussed their model of “impact journalism.” Jessica Clark of the Center for Social Media shared the results of a series of impact summits conducted by CSM and The Media Consortium.

*How American Independent News Network measures impact:*

AINN publishes six news sites -- including Washington Independent (based in DC), as well as Colorado Independent, Minnesota, Michigan, etc. They are an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan news network that conducts progressive, reporting on stuff that was not being covered. Our bias is "the public good" = progressive.

"Impact" = won't ever report on something just for sake of reporting "what happened."  
Impact is when elections were lost or won, people forced to resign, policies changed or introduced, etc. To be a reporter for AINN, you need at least four impacts a year. Not just number of blog posts, investigative pieces per week, etc.

*What has AINN's reporting resulted in?*

- Our biggest impact ever was during the 2008 elections, Michigan Messenger received call about RNC getting foreclosure lists in MI, OH and PA and planned on Election Day to stop anyone from voting if they were among the folks who had lost their houses. We contacted DNC, who took RNC to court, challenged it. We are pretty sure that several hundred thousand people were allowed to vote that day, who otherwise would not have been able to vote.
- Collaboration is important to us. We work with change-makers, etc. **We are not an advocacy organization.** We are a news site.
- We are trying to “change the game.” We can’t let the Republicans use their money to take us down. Now we are looking at Tea Party connections to Republican Party. We are looking at Ballot Initiatives.

*Findings from Impact Summits:*

The Summits are related to principles from Tracy and Jessica's book, Beyond the Echo Chamber. Their goal to clarify what impacts media organizations are trying to have and reveal what tools are available to us to express and document that impact. A new tool that we've created are these Network Layers

(<http://www.beyondtheecho.net/2010/01/31/networkslideshow/>) that show how networks are creating new impact opportunities.

- There are four major questions that are part of the impact summits:
  - How do you **define** impact?
  - How do you **track** impact? This encompasses reach, influence, relevance, engagement, inclusion. None of these constitutes influence by themselves, but together they do
  - What do you **wish** you could track? i.e. which tools do you want?
  - How can we work **together** to get new tools (find funders to pay for)?

Here's a look at how a few session attendees track impact:

Applied Research Center

- We measure impact by looking at relationship between the below three elements in our community:
  - E.g. discovering Color Lines online and find research useful
  - Moving into our network for help with their campaign.
  - By their interest and commitment they move into narrower parts of org.
- In Philanthropic world we try to help foundations measure impact on racial justice. We want them to understand role of progressive media in eco-system. We need to define impact OURSELVES instead of letting philanthropists do it. This way we'll get more resources to flow in our direction.
- What we are measuring?
  - Shifts in racial discourse.
  - Does the story get picked up? By whom?
  - How stories are reframed. E.g. "Diversity does not equal equity."
  - Constituency markers – are we diversifying constituents, expanding it?
  - Distribution
  - Policy Implementation

*Andrew Golis - formerly with TPM, now with Yahoo News.*

- While I was at TPM, we tried to taunt, mock, advance story to force mainstream media to pick it up. We were taking an activist stance – documenting stupidity of other media, to mobilize our readers behind that cause to mobilize our readers.
- Josh Marshall, founder of TPM, has traditionalist perspective on role of journalist. He does not think it's his job to tell people who to vote for. It's important for people to believe that we'll cover both sides of a story accurately and fully and in a non-biased way.
- At Yahoo: interested in Reach. We are not a liberal publication. Different metric. I'm worried that, the way things are going, we may end up with 10 percent of

country who knows 10 times as much as they used to, but the other 90 percent knows nothing at all. Casual readership is totally destroyed.

### **What do people need to document impact and how can TMC help?**

- Ambassadors going to gatherings of funders.
- External case studies – eg. Finding more schools willing to work in a nonbiased way with MC members to identify impacts.
- Sharing outreach lists – e.g. to cross promote work that others are doing.
- Tell story of “Independent Media” as a brand to strengthen that brand.
- Do gigantic branding project to brand Independent Media
- How to generate revenue from content
  - It’s not a technical solution (Kachingle, Tip Jar). It’s a movement solution. We have a model –public media. It’s amazing how much it lifts up with voluntary contributions of users. Opportunity for independent media to brand the participation to support media. Don’t brand your own publication’s product. Brand the sector. “Creative Commons” is now the way we share media.
- In terms of metrics, we think often of how to reach mass media metrics. For funding purposes, much smaller numbers can be compelling. It’s almost like “AnecData” – Anecdotal Data.

Next steps: Tracy and Jessica will be working on creating a report out of the impact summits. Tracy will then work with TMC members to identify where we can work together to tell the story of our impact better, help increase impact and tools needed to track that impact.

### **Creating a Volunteer Social-Networking Team**

This minilab honed in on the how-to’s and benefits of organizing a social-networking volunteer team. When done right, social networking teams are a great way to help increase your audience and impact using tools like DIGG, Facebook and more. This session included case studies on how to build your social networking team, tools to use and how to measure success. Special Guests: Truthout.org, Adaptive Semantics and Deanna Zandt, author of Share This!

**Truthout** has built a social networking team of volunteers that Digg and promote stories to help accrue pageviews. Here’s how they did it:

1. Recruited volunteers to boost traffic via dig, reddit, Facebook by sending out an ask to their large community and mailing list
2. Demographics were originally older. There was a lot of training and hand holding involved with test set of volunteers.
3. But when something hits the front page of dig, you can get 10,000 hits. It’s like handing out flyers.
4. Make sure to show your volunteers results. Even 40 Diggs or submissions can make a story move really quickly. But you have to start with a good story first. And that publicity can be tied into a financial result.

To sum up the advantages of the social networking volunteer team strategy:

- It engages readers who want to support Truthout but can't afford to give financially. We consistently receive notes from readers looking for alternate ways to give.
- It involves readers in the larger Truthout community in a pro-active way. Volunteers feel like an integral part of Truthout--that they are making a difference (because they are!). (As an added perk, this personal connection with the organization can actually help encourage donations from volunteers who are able to give financially.)
- It fosters widespread user community interaction: promotion on Digg and Facebook generates comments and conversation about Truthout articles on Digg, Facebook and the pages of Truthout itself.
- One big-impact example: A couple of months ago, we published a report about a new Army policy under which female soldiers serving in some parts of Iraq could face a court-martial for becoming pregnant. We sent the piece out to our volunteers, who promoted it via Digg and Facebook. Within hours, the report was widely reposted across the Internet, and ended up in the hands of Gen. Anthony Cucolo, the general who instated the policy. Cucolo immediately responded with a letter to the editor. We published his response on Truthout, and the two pieces provoked an outpouring of comments and ideas from our readers. Eventually, the policy was reversed.

How we do it:

- We recruit volunteers through messages to our mailing list, as well as through responses to readers inquiring about extra ways to help.
- We go through a step-by-step training, teaching volunteers to promote stories via Digg and Facebook, and provide them with an instructional cheat sheet.
- When a particularly big story hits, we send out an email blast to volunteers, asking them to help promote it and providing tips on when and how to do so.
- If a volunteer-promoted story reaches the front page of Digg, generates especially interesting comments, or makes a powerful impact in some other way, we send out an email to volunteers about it, congratulating and thanking them.
- In the future, we hope to include other social networking tools besides Digg and Facebook. We'd also like to foster more interaction and strategy-building among the volunteer community.

**Deanna Zandt** spoke from the individual's perspective on how to engage and interact with social networking. A couple of points:

- Don't fall into the #hash tags trap! Sometimes you can overload the content so that no one really sees it.
- Relationships are key! 200 engaged people versus 500 passive people will always accomplish more.

**Adaptive Semantics** is looking at using their algorithms to help build communities of trust with news organizations. The goal is to help individuals train up to become members and content-generators on sites. Game theory could be key to engaging users in journalism.

**Member feedback: How is the Consortium working for you?**

Attendees split into two groups and jotted out how their expectations for the Consortium have been met and also what we can do to meet other expectations.

#### Expectations Met:

- Broadening of connections and networks, sense of ally-ship is deeper, and we are supporting each other's work.
- Movement from meetings to projects being formed is becoming smoother, feeling productive as a consortium. Ideas are developed and actually shows up in concrete products members can use.
- Emphasis on joint journalism programs is helpful, but maybe there should be a program of joint money-making programs, how to go out there and increase the range of revenue sources.
- The intern program rocks.
- Zach's economy coverage/MediaWire blogs are useful.
- Atmosphere of collaboration tremendous. Good collaborations have emerged due to these gatherings (Colorlines LinkTV, Copenhagen coverage).
- Panels were strong, good turnout.
- TMC creates a space where we see colleagues we don't normally get to interact with.

#### Expectations to be met

- Coming out of radio or print conferences in silos, but, feel that we still have room to talk about how platforms relate.
- People assumed this would be a direct counterpoint to the right's noise machine, but it's turned out to be different and more complicated. How do we create a complimentary response that is ethical and has impact? Have done so on environmental and econ collaboration, but don't have sustained rapid response strategy.
- Get more funders engaged in the process, pre or post gathering. We're only having half the conversation until we have major donors in the room, we're responding to their structure. When you look at what the right has done, the funders are in the room. Funder input and synergy on right is much more significant. Until we can get conversations going in some setting to talk about structural issues, we can't build the chamber.
- Capacity building within members is important, particularly to include those in social media, can't get support anyplace else with progressive values, MC is a great place for information and networking, but capacity building tends to benefit orgs with staff. If we can do this, it will benefit diversity, and the range of things that can come into this community. Folks have will, content, but need to have ways to scale out given lack of budgets. Will complement other MC goals.
- Relationship of community media to MC work seems missing. Community media is rich, there is infrastructure, radio and television, need support from independent media. Could have conversation about ways that they can connect with this group. Oakland Local as a lab for other sites like them, Knight has committed 7 million dollars thinking community foundations can help fund independent community media. Interested in finding recipes for ways to build independent media that works.