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Overview

With the support of The Arca Foundation, The Media Consortium convened a diverse group of economists, media producers, grassroots advocates and funders in April 2009 to:

- Have a comprehensive discussion that provided media makers and other attendees with critical information, insights, trends and stories to help them produce in-depth and accessible reporting on the economic crisis/recovery over the next year.
- Dig into tangible initiatives to support the creation of this journalism and it's high-impact effect

The meeting was a smashing success. Critical information and analysis was conveyed, debated and discussed. Numerous connections were made and Media Consortium members have already reported on many of the story ideas that emerged from the meeting. But there's more to do. Attendees brainstormed specific projects to build the impact of critical independent reporting around the economy. The Media Consortium has synthesized and put together a short, initial report on these topline ideas including an "Economy Aggregation Portal" and an "Economic Investigative and PR Fund." Further development and next steps on these ideas will be forthcoming in the next month. Feedback and questions are all welcome and should be directed to Tracy Van Slyke at tracy@themediaconsortium.com or 312-315-1127.

Idea 1: Economy Aggregation Portal

Goal: Create a dynamic aggregation portal that filters and organizes the best economic reporting, information, analysis, and tips for a broad range of users. In addition to harnessing and organizing existing content, new content will be integrated to answer the basic questions that the American public still need addressed about the economy. The portal will:

- Make it easy to access and understand the latest news, reporting, in-depth analysis and action points
- Provide context and simple explanations for complex issues
- Be simple and enjoyable to navigate

What: The to-be-named portal will aggregate and organize critical independent reporting, analysis from think tanks/economists and actions and information from grassroots organizations. The variety of resources will provide users with opportunities to learn about critical components of the economy, what it means to them and what they can do.

Structure: The content will be easy to navigate and accessible for all types of users, whatever their knowledge base is around the economy. The portal structure will organize content into "level" sections: beginners, intermediate and advanced. It could also include topic pages on top issues, i.e. including the stimulus plan, the budget debate, and so on.

Added Bonus: Sometimes reporting and wonky analysis leaves the user with the question "what does this mean to me/for me?" When readers scroll over the headline link of select postings, a box will appear with a short paragraph explaining in simple terms the "what does it mean for me?" factor or the "top three things you need to know" explanation.

New Content: One of the major takeaways from the Musgrove retreat is that there is still a deep need to educate the public with simple "101" information backgrounders. This portal will provide critical breakdowns on complex issues to inform users to understand what it means to their personal lives, their communities and the country as a whole. For example, initial ideas include, defining:

- 10 most common "I don't understand" economic terms
- How stimulus distribution works and how to apply

- How the federal budget process works

This dynamic online resource will allow beginners, intermediates and experts to gather, obtain critical information and be exposed to diverse and deep range of information and analysis about the economy. The Media Consortium has already started this work with its "Media Wire" program that aggregates all of its members' content around the economy on newsladder.net, and redistributes the content through a variety of social media tools to reach new and expanded audiences. The Media Consortium is perfectly positioned to expand its current work and plan for a "souped-aggregation" portal and distribution strategy that can have maximum impact.

One of the major takeaways from the Musgrove retreat was a need to focus on long-term structural issues before and after the crisis. Everyday people will still be feeling the effect when major newspapers and television networks finally turn their attention away. We will have created the infrastructure for supporting and disseminating critical reporting and information around the economy.

Marketing/Distribution:

- It would be ideal to partner with an existing organization that has an audience already versus creating an audience and building buzz from scratch.
- All new creative content would be open-source: available for any publisher or organization to repost and also housed at you tube.
- Work with partners (non-profits, social justice organizations, online advocacy groups, think tanks, etc...) to distribute aggregated and new content to their own communities and raise awareness of the portal. Their content will also be featured on the portal.

Potential Partners (Developing List):

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| • The Roosevelt Institute | • OMB Watch |
| • Center for American Progress | • Good Jobs First |
| • Center for Community Change | • Brookings Institute |
| • Center for Economic and Policy Research | • National Community Reinvestment Coalition |
| • Insight Center for Community Economic Development | • and more.... |
| • Unions? | |

Resources/Staffing Needs:

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|---|--|
| • Technology/Platform development | • 101 creatives manager/producer and organizer |
| • Tech person to manage ongoing support | • Online Community and Partnership Manager |
| • 2-person team managing aggregation | |

Funding Support: \$500,000 for 1 year

B) Economic Investigative Reporting and PR Funds

Goal: Create a large fund to directly support critical reporting around the economy by progressive, independent media producers and pair up a sister fund to market, disseminate and promote this reporting (and reporters) to ensure high-impact viewership and results.

What: The establishment media already has a sullied reputation for their mishandling and misrepresentation of the economy in the lead up to the crisis, while the progressive media has been sounding the alarm for years.

It is time to support quality reporting that:

- Sheds sunlight on government actions and debates around financial restructuring, the stimulus distribution, the budget and other economic issues
- Puts a human face on the impact of these debates and
- Zeroes in on resulting effects and action on a community level

We propose an investigative fund tailored to economic journalism that will allow media outlets to dive deep into all the components of this critical issue, follow a story over a period of months and engage in both proactive and news cycle reporting. Included in this fund, would be a set amount of resources set aside to

supporting collaborations among media makers to work together to experiment with new media models and resultant high-impact reporting.

But in this 24-7 media landscape, it is even harder to break the white noise barrier to make an impact with this reporting. A sister fund would be created to directly promote, aggregate and disseminate this reporting to the public and targeted audiences. The sister "pr" fund would be managed by The Media Consortium and directed to support the dissemination and promotion of the reporting created by the economic investigative fund. This would include aggregation, dissemination through partnerships with allies and social media tools and regular bookings/promotion to targeted media outlets.

Structure: There are two options for structuring the "Economy Investigative Fund."

Media Consortium Managed: The Media Consortium has developed the first round of a proposal to manage/disseminate funds to Media Consortium members for reporting, including a proposal and application process, initial criteria (to be developed further) for acceptance and ongoing reporting. This model can specifically apply to an investigative fund around the economy. The model can also apply to special collaborations proposed by Media Consortium members and allies.

Partnership between Media Consortium and Existing Institution: Another option would be house the Economy Investigative Fund with an existing institute or organization that has the infrastructure to disseminate the funds. Criteria for who would be approved and how would be determined as a partnership b/w the organization and The Media Consortium. The Media Consortium would still manage the "pr" fund and work closely with its partner institution and media outlets to determine the strategic plan for best promotion opportunities.

Next Steps: The Media Consortium will work to finalize criteria for the investigative fund including what would be funded, why and acceptance process. Determine management and process for distributing funds. Targeted deadline for finishing: Mid-June.

Resources Needed:

- \$300,000 for 1 year "Economic Reporting Fund"
 - \$100,000 set aside for specific collaborations among Media Consortium members and allies
 - Staffing: Manager of project: Proposals, Acceptance, Coordination, Etc...
- \$150,000 for matching pr and distribution for maximum impact
 - PR Firm/Consultant
 - Supporting Staff: These staff would work with the MC on planning, coordination and implementation. MC would coordinate all pieces and provide backend support.