**TMC 2016: Moving from Survival to Racial Equity**

From February 17 to February 20 in Philadelphia, the Media Consortium held its 10th annual conference. Celebrating our increasing strength as a consortium of independent progressive news outlets, we focused this conference on adopting a racial equity lens for our future work.

We are excited to report that TMC2016 exceeded our expectations in every way. Below, we report on the numbers, the conference content, and our next steps.

**TMC2016 by the Numbers**

Our goal this year was to celebrate our past and prepare for our future by moving both the Media Consortium itself and our members towards adopting a race equity lens for all our work. A key element of this work was bringing more diversity to the Media Consortium’s conference. We succeeded in this goal: the numbers tell the story.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Metric | 2012-2015 Average | TMC2016 |
| # of Attendees | 100 | 153 |
| # Attendees for RF Workshop | N/A | 60 |
| % Speakers of Color | 20% | 60% |
| % Attendees of Color | N/A | 48% |

Making an effort to invite speakers of color encouraged more journalists of color to attend. What we learned was that people of color feel excluded in media spaces:

*Thank you for a wonderful conference - it was a tremendous opportunity for me to network, reconnect and hit the ground running with indy media work after a small break in India. ...Thanks for your leadership in making this space truly POC inclusive.*

--Preeti Shekar, ReImagine

Having diversity in the room was itself an important part of the message, modeling for our journalists the kind of world we imagine:

*At one point after lunch on Thursday I looked around the room and almost everyone in my field of vision was either female or person of color - an amazing diversity.*

--Kim Spencer, Founder, LINKTV

Like Kim, our members were inspired by the diversity in the room and on the panels. This conference was not only our most diverse, but our content was extremely highly rated. The highest rated panels were the ones with the most race equity content:

Evaluations: 1.0= Lowest Satisfaction; 4.0 = Highest Satisfaction

Norris West in Conversation with Stanley Nelson: 3.83

Susan Smith Richardson, Investigating Race: 3.78

Keith Woods, What I’ve Learned about Race Equity: 3.74

Average Score for all Panels at TMC2016: 3.32

Lowest Score for a Panel at TMC2016: 2.80

**TMC2016 by the Content**

Numbers can tell the story of racial diversity, but not the story of racial inclusion or equity. While a conversation without people of color can never lead to racial equity, we can’t expect that the simple presence of people of color will make change.

The opening reception—organized and sponsored by Media Impact Funders—set the tone, with a conversation between Norris West of Annie E. Casey and Stanley Nelson, director of the Black Panther documentary. This powerful conversation reminded us of the history of black organizing; the power of corporate media to distort stories; and the power of community and independent media to partner with activists to speak truth to power.

We followed this opening with a closed reception for attendees of color designed to provide a safe space for them to discuss the Stanley Nelson talk and to prepare for the conference. Over 20 people of color attended, and told us that this event was helpful in giving them a sense that they were welcomed and included in the conference activities.

The conference program itself was designed to counter the fallacy that race is a stand-alone category within media coverage. As we created the program, we looked for speakers who employ a race equity lens in their work, no matter what the focus of their work may be.

*“A racial equity lens” brings into focus the ways in which race and ethnicity shape experiences with power, access to opportunity, treatment, and outcomes, both today and historically.”* –Annie E. Casey Foundation

*[Journalists adopting a race equity lens should]* *“be explicit about race, investigate issues from a systemic perspective, and focus on actions and impacts, rather than attitudes and intentions.”—*Race Forward

One goal of our conference was to ensure that every panel—including ones that were not explicitly about race—used a race equity lens. So, for example, the social media panel talked specifically about how to reach different racial and ethnic groups, and how to incorporate members of these groups into social conversations. Sabine Quetant of Blavity stood out as she described how her organization has mindfully invited their audience—mostly Black Americans—to contribute via social media.

Perhaps the most powerful panel in this respect was the panel on freelancers. Michelle Garcia gave an impassioned talk about the unfair and unequal treatment accorded to freelancers of color that resonated throughout our subsequent conversations.

*The conference was an incredible learning experience, and I'll be replaying many of the conversations and lessons in my mind for months to come.—*Anonymous (Survey)

Looking back at the conference, our main regret was that we were not inclusive and equitable enough in our planning. While the program committee was diverse, it did not include our speakers and community media. That is part of the learning that continues for the Media Consortium itself.

Race Forward Workshop. The conference included—as part of the conference, not a supplement—an all day workshop with Race Forward. We knew that asking journalists to attend an all-day no cellphone workshop was a big ask, especially when the subject was one that is often difficult for white journalists. We were very pleased that 60 attendees—over a third of all attendees—made the commitment to attend the workshop.

*“The conference was like meeting up with extended family, except there were no uncomfortable moments, only inspiring ones! The workshop on race was exceptional and much needed. Thank you”*—Anonymous (Survey)

Evaluations from the Race Equity workshop were very positive. TMC members that attended have already begun making commitments to change how they work.

*Kate said this was one of the best trainings she has ever attended. I would love for you to send me slides and I am going to contact [Race Forward] about possibly facilitating a training for our board and staff.—Julie Falk, Bitch Media*

We received over 25 requests for the Race Forward powerpoint from attendees, a sign that they plan to take this training back to their own shops. We have heard anecdotally about followups, but we believe our most important future work will be ensuring that the learning process continues and manifests in concrete action steps.

**TMC Next Steps**

We knew from the start that “race equity” is not an end goal but a process. TMC2016 and the Race Forward Workshop marked the public kick-off of that process. Here are the next steps we have planned:

1. TMCinColor. In Fall of 2015, TMC Director of Special Projects Manolia Charlotin began a semi-monthly newsletter called TMCinColor to highlight journalists of color at TMC outlets. We will now expand “TMCinColor” into a program that will include:

* Semi-monthly newsletter highlighting journalists of color
* National conversations with scholars of color who write for TMC outlets; initial cities will include New York, Chicago, and Oakland.
* #Ouramerica –an initiative to tell immigrant stories through a race equity lens, which will feature
	+ weekly calls with immigrant and community organizations
	+ mentoring calls with journalists on covering immigrant stories with a race equity lens
	+ Support for co-publishing and collaboration from TMC staff

2. Diversity Pipeline. In the past, TMC, like other associations, set up diversity fellowships. What is needed, however, is not more diversity fellowships, but support infrastructure for journalists of color already at independent outlets.

We are in talks with the Emma Bowen foundation, which already provides that support to college interns of color in corporate media, to provide similar support to new journalists of color in independent media.

3. Structural Race Equity Fund. Independent progressive news outlets are hungry to make structural change. We know, however, that structural change requires resources. Thus we seek to create a fund from which we can offer grants of $25-30K to enable independent news outlets to put in place structures for their race equity work.

While we work to assemble this fund, we will support our outlets in these ways:

* Folllow-up on “race equity buddies” created during Race Forward training
* Phone calls and/or slack channels to continue conversations around race equity
* Implementing the TMCinColor initiative above. We achieve race equity at our outlets in part by doing the work of race equity as a consortium.

Some of these next steps are one we can take now. Some will require funding. We would be delighted to provide more details about any of these initiatives.

**Our Thanks**

We thank Quixote Foundation for giving us the means to begin this work through Quixote’s generous support of TMC2016—we could not have started down this path without Quixote. We also thank the Ford Foundation for providing an additional travel grant through its IIE program to support bringing more speakers and attendees of color to TMC2016. We thank Wallace Global Fund for their generous general support and Media Democracy Fund for their support of media diversity.

Submitted March 18, 2016

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser

Executive Director, The Media Consortium

[www.themediaconsortium.org](http://www.themediaconsortium.org)

@jgksf | @tmcmedia

415-878-3862

joellen@themediaconsortium.com