Media Consortium Philadelphia Conference

Race Equity Workshop

February 19, 2016

From February 17-20, the Media Consortium will hold our [10th annual conference](http://www.tmcmedia2016.org) in Philadelphia. The focus of this conference will be on racial equity.

The conference begins with a [full schedule](http://tmcmedia2016.org/schedule) of the editorial, business and marketing topics we typically offer attendees, but presented with a racial justice lens. Our lunch plenary Thursday will be a roundtable on the Philadelphia ecosystem with representatives from the African American and Latino media as well as independent, public and corporate media. On Wednesday evening we host Stanley Nelson, and Thursday evening we will go into the community, hosting our annual impact awards at PhillyCam, the local public access station.

The conference’s early focus on racial justice and community engagement will set the stage for Friday’s all-day racial equity workshop led by three trainers from Race Forward. Keith Woods, VP of Diversity at NPR will start us off—lending his prestige to this day and offering his experience as a newsman. The Race Forward trainers will then educate us on the difference between structural and individual racism, how to identify structural racism, and what organizations can do to counter structural racism. Over 60% of the day, however, will be given over to hands-on working groups, facilitated by Race Forward trainers, in which editors, publishers and producers will be asked to step back and look at their own organizations.

The objectives of the race equity workshop will be:

* Assert that The Media Consortium’s priority for our next 10 years is to create an independent news ecosystem that is racially equitable and just;
* Assist TMC members in elucidating the specific challenges to racial equity their own organizations face. For example, these challenges could include a staff that is not diverse, weak editorial when it comes to reporting on particular ethnic and racial groups or issues, and an inability to reach audiences of color.
* Provide TMC members with the strategies and skills to identify the structural reasons for their challenges so that they can begin to replace those structures with alternatives.

Racial equity work is not unlike strategic planning work. Simply focusing on “diversity” will not lead to institutional change. Change will happen when leaders understand the threat to their organizations if they don’t pursue a racial equity analysis, and the many, many opportunities to increase audience, improve editorial , and even build revenue that can result from structural changes to address institutional bias. The aim of this all-day workshop is to help our members understand the benefits of this kind of racial equity analysis and to begin the process.

The cost to hold this one-day workshop is $20,000, of which we have already raised $5,000 from Quixote. We expect 70 leaders of over 50 independent news organizations to participate.

The Media Consortium

Racial Equity Project

The Media Consortium’s 10th anniversary conference marks the formal start of our effort over the next 10 years to build an independent news sector that is racially equitable and just. That work began informally in 2015 with internal changes at the Media Consortium itself:

* TMC hired Manolia Charlotin, a Haitian-American, as special projects coordinator
* Manolia initiated the launch of our weekly newsletter, #TMCinColor highlighting the work of journalists of color in the independent news sector
* Manolia refocused our Tumblr to provide daily updates on police violence and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The aim of our 10th annual conference February 17-20 is to invite our member organizations to engage more deeply in racial equity and justice work. Of course, some of our members have long been leaders on race equity—Colorlines, New America Media and feministing in particular stand out as leaders. Others have moved in this direction. In 2015 alone, Bitch magazine, AlterNet, Brave New Films, and Making Contact created fellowships designed to diversify their staffs. A significant number of members began news verticals focused on immigration reform or the #Black Lives Matter movement. There is an increasing understanding among progressive independents that we cannot fulfill our missions if we are staffed largely by white reporters writing for mainly white audiences.

Yet, the move to racial equity is not easy. Simply adding one or two people of color to the staff won’t overcome deep racial bias built into the structure of an organization. To really change, most outlets will need to undergo something like a strategic planning process, thoroughly examining all their systems for structural bias and then testing new systems that will preserve the audiences and revenues they have while helping them to broaden out their scope and reach.

The Media Consortium would like to assist our members in that process by hiring a full-time membership coordinator to support members as they add racial equity analysis to their other efforts. And we’d like to set up a grant fund to enable our members to hire racial equity facilitators and hold retreats focused on moving their organizations towards racial equity. Finally, we’d like to offer a series of video chats, to enable members going down this road to connect with each other and get support as they do this difficult work.

We estimate that the cost of this project will be $250,000: $150,000 for an initial grant fund plus $100,000 for a full-time membership coordinator, tools, overhead and supervision.