The Media Consortium is a Project of The Foundation for National Progress

http://www.themediaconsortium.org



The Media Consortium | 2014

# Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

The year 2014 proved to be the year of #Ferguson. If the Occupy movement of 2012 raised consciousness about the slow demise of a stable middle class, the fatal shooting of Michael Brown in August 2014 reminded us that racism has not disappeared, despite the election of our first black president.

Michael Brown’s death was not only a news event—the way #Ferguson unfolded told us much about news stories in the 21st century. Social media has become the main “stream” for breaking news and opinion. Audiences now look to the news media primarily for deep analysis and investigation—the work crowds cannot do.

This news revolution, while terrible for “mainstream” news outlets, has been great for independent outlets. Independents have always argued that the most important news—the news that really matters—is not just the who, what, where, but the how and especially the why.

In 2014, the Media Consortium is stronger than ever. We have grown to 75 outlets. Members like Mother Jones, Colorlines, PR Watch and RH Reality Check are having a direct impact on national policy. Most of all, our members are telling stories that are not told anywhere else.

Thanks for reading, listening, and watching and supporting all of us.

Jo Ellen Green Kaiser  
Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, Executive Director

# Mission

The Media Consortium is an international network of independent, progressive news outlets. Our mission is to grow and strengthen the impact of the independent news sector.

We pursue this mission through the following strategic initiatives:

* **Grow the Sector**
* **Build Capacity**
* **Foster Collaboration**
* **Support Innovation**

# Grow the Sector

# This year, the Media Consortium added 5 new members. Since 2011, we've grown from 45 to 75 members, a 40% increase.

“Having the support of the media consortium helped us recover from losing a key funder and rebuild”—Nell Abrams, Director, FSRN

We are proud that the sector continues to promote staff diversity: 16% of our outlets are led by people of color; 60% are led by women!



# Build Capacity

Each year, the Media Consortium’s director, Jo Ellen Green Kaiser, makes site visits to at least a third of the members. These visits inform the programs we implement to build capacity. In 2014, we began offering low-cost business tools to assist members in building for sustainability. Our current discounted tools include:

* Vocus, a PR database, at 10% of the market price;
* What Counts, an enterprise-level email marketing system;
* In-house subscription database, being developed by a group of members

*I can't tell you how valuable it's been to have the opportunity to team-up with other media professionals as a member of The Media Consortium. The added value of a shared VOCUS account -- a vital marketing tool that we could not afford on our own -- has been an amazing asset to our outreach and media relations building work. We hope to continue our partnership long into the future."*–Joann Kalenak, High Country News

On the editorial side, the Media Consortium continues to build capacity by training reporters in the media policy beat through monthly webinars, thanks to a generous grant from the Media Democracy Fund. In 2014 we have trained 8 reporters in the media policy beat.

# Foster Collaboration

In the 20th century, news outlets competed with each other. No longer. The digital revolution means that audiences can access all information everywhere all the time, so there is no reason to put a barrier between your readers and the rest of the world.

By collaborating, news outlets help each other learn sustainable business practices and best of all, can help each other develop complex stories. This year, for example, the Media Consortium facilitated a collaboration by seven outlets to tell the story of how pesticide-ready GMO seed corn in Kauai is destroying the island’s environment and damaging citizens’ health. These stories, co-pubished on one website, <http://wtfcorporations.org>, have changed the political climate in Kauai.

The Media Consortium staff promote collaboration by suggesting potential areas of collaboration, bringing outlets together by phone and in person, and attracting funding for collaborations. We facilitate collaboration by using basecamp to host projects, our listservs to promote projects, and by holding an annual conference.

# Support Innovation

The Media Consortium is at the forefront of a sector-wide search to understand how to best measure the impact of news stories. Through a generous grant from Voqal, the Media Consortium is in the midst of a metrics experiment designed to help us learn if we can measure how news changes conversations.

This past year, the Consortium organized 9 collaborations around 4 topic areas: immigration, education, and reproductive justice. Up to seven outlets worked together to produce independent stories on a particular issue, which they then published simultaneously and co-promoted. Researchers from Harvard measured whether these collaborations changed social media conversations on those issues. When this project concludes in 2015, we will produce a full report for the industry.

# Annual Conference

In 2014, the Media Consortium’s annual conference was held February 27-March 1 in Chicago. The conference opened with a full-day workshop on surveillance, underwritten by a generous sponsorship from the University of Illinois Chicago-Kent College of Law. The Media Consortium was the first news organization to devote a full-day workshop to this issue in 2014.

Attended by over 100 editors, executive directors, publishers, and reporters, the conference welcomed keynotes from Bea Edwards, Juan Gonzalez, and a skyped live presentation from [Julian Assange](http://youtu.be/TP3jagw-R2I).

[](http://youtu.be/TP3jagw-R2I)

Thought Leadership

An important role of The Media Consortium is to act as the eyes, ears, and sometimes the voice of the independent news sector. In 2014, Media Consortium E.D. attended a number of conferences to learn more about significant new projects and issues in the independent news sector, including the Media Impact Funders event in Los Angeles, the Personal Democracy Forum in New York, and the International Global Forum in Istanbul.

As part of the Media Consortium’s increasing role in media policy, Kaiser participated in the net neutrality activists list and visted Barbara Boxer’s office to educate the senator about the issue. The Media Consortium also began signing on to legal briefs from the Committee to Project Journalists.

In addition, Kaiser published a number of articles this year including:

[Why Net Neutrality is a Social Justice Issue](http://www.zeek.forward.com/articles/118206/)

[The Problem with Media Patronage](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2014/12/the-problem-with-media-patronage/)

# Media Consortium Members 2014

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| AlterNet | GritTV | The Progressive |
| American Forum | G.W. Williams Center (assoc) | Public News Service |
| American Prospect | High Country News | Political Research Associates |
| Belt | Hightower Lowdown | Rabble.ca |
| Berrett-Koehler Publishers | Human Rights Channel (assoc) | Race, Poverty, Environment (assoc) |
| Bitch Media | Hummingbird Films (assoc) | RH Reality Check |
| Brave New Films | In These Times | The Real News Network |
| Care2 | InterPress News Service | Rethinking Schools |
| Cascadia Times (assoc) | Kosmos Journal | Small World News (assoc) |
| Center for Media & Democracy | LA Progressive (assoc) | Specialty Studios |
| Chelsea Green | LinkTV | The Texas Observer |
| City Limits | Mondoweiss (assoc) | Thom Hartmann Show |
| Colorlines | Mother Jones | Tikkun |
| Defending Dissent | Ms. Magazine | Toward Freedom (assoc) |
| Democracy Now | NAMAC | Truthdig |
| Dissent | The Nation | Truthout |
| Earth Island Journal | The Nation Institute | The Uptake |
| Feministing | National Radio/Making Contact | Utne |
| Feetin2Worlds | New America Media | Vancouver Observer |
| Free Speech TV | The New Press | Waging Nonviolence (assoc) |
| Free Speech Radio News | News Taco (assoc) | Washington Monthly |
| Generation Progress | Oakland Local (assoc) | Womens’ Media Center |
| Global Vision | OpenDemocracy (assoc) | Workers Radio |
| Greg Palast | Orion | Yes! |
| Grist | People Power Media (assoc) | The Young Turks |

# Resources and Financial Management

In 2014 the Media Consortium continued on an even keel. Membership dues and conference revenue increased significantly. The high percent of members paying dues attests to the value they derive from belonging to the Consortium.

The Consortium also continued to receive funding from Wallace Global Fund, the Media Democracy Fund, and the Voqal Fund. We appreciate their continued support.

Like our members, the Media Consortium keeps a tight rein on expenses. Once again, our E.D. declined a raise. Almost 50% of our budget was paid out to members in project grants.

# Looking Forward

**Finance:** We expect the same budget in 2015 as in 2014. We expect a slight rise in program and membership fees. Our expenses will again stay flat.

**Programs:** The following programs are in the hopper for 2015:

* A bigger than ever conference in February, held jointly with AAN
* A renewed focus on media policy, especially around the net neutrality fight, municipal broadband implementation, and continued surveillance of journalists
* 45 short, smaller collaborations are being planned for our metrics impact project
* A video journalism project that has been in discussion since 2013 may come to fruition in 2015 or 2016
* We will use the February conference to try to develop a significant high-impact collaboration for the 2016 election

**Strategic Plan:** The focus of our attention in 2015 is on the strategic plan we developed in 2014. In that plan, Media Consortium members voted to research a merger with another news organization. Over 2014, we have moved closer to such talks with the Association of Alternative Newsmedia, including holding a joint conference with them February 5-7, 2015.

At the Media Consortium’s annual meeting on February 7, we will vote on whether to pursue that merger. If members approve, we will expect that merger to happen, if it is meant to happen, by the fall of 2015. A separate document outlining the reasons for this merger is available by emailing [joellen@themediaconsortium.com](mailto:joellen@themediaconsortium.com)

# What Matters

As Jefferson noted, democracy depends on an informed populace. Independent media, free of obligations to corporate boards or government officials, answer only to the people. Independent media speak truth to power, giving the people the accurate facts, deep investigation, and clear analysis they need to make decisions.

In turn, the independent media need support. These organizations put all their resources into the news—they need each other and they need an association to support their work. That is the role of the Media Consortium. We are proud that we are able to support and grow this incredibly vital sector.