2014 will be a critical year for the environment, for women's health, and for democracy itself. The stakes have never been greater. To respond to these challenges Americans need a vibrant independent news sector.

The Media Consortium, an international network of progressive independent news organizations, provides key support for this sector. Our 64 members publish in print, online, radio, TV and film, and reach a truly diverse set of audiences. Members include Mother Jones, KCETLINK TV, Colorlines.com, opendemocracy.net, Ms. Magazine, Earth Island Journal, the Nation, Yes! magazine and many more.

In 2014, our goal is to grow the ability of our members to make a real impact on the lives of the people they reach. We will achieve this goal through four key objectives.

1. To Use Editorial Collaboration to Create Measurable Collective Impact in the areas of Reproductive Justice, Extreme Energy, and Access to Democracy.

Strategy: We know editorial collaboration leverages scarce reporting resources and brings together siloed audiences. We believe it does more. We believe a horizontally-networked collaboration-a collaboration in which each outlet's editors act in their own best interest as well as in the interest of the group-leads to collective clout, multiplying the impact of the group. The very diversity of the collaboration leads to new stories and provokes new thinking. The FSG group, in a working paper for the Stanford Social Innovation Review, has called this outcome "collective impact."

If we want to go beyond fixing a specific problem--if we want instead to arrive at a multifaceted solution for a deeply embedded socio-economic or cultural issue, we need to create collective impact. That's why we've chosen this strategy to tackle such deep-seated problems in our culture as the diminishment of women's rights over their bodies, corporations' increasing devastation of our planet in their search for fuel, and the growing limitations on real democratic participation.

Our Reproductive Justice Pilot Project experiments with creating collective impact by organizing 10 independent outlets to co-publish stories around an issue they have chosen: access to plan B. Their stories will appear in the same week online, in print, and on radio, and be promoted via a transmedia website, whereismyplanB.com.

If the project successfully increases the attention Americans pay to family planning access, then we will expand the Reproductive Justice project, testing a collaboration that might include 15-20 outlets or more. We will also replicate the experiment with collaborations around Extreme Energy (fracking, tar sands, mountaintop removal) and Money in Politics, two issues around which we already have very active working groups.

2. To Develop a Tool to Create a Quantitative Measurement of Collective Impact.

Strategy: The Media Consortium has been at the forefront of measuring impact. Former director Tracy van Slyke's book, "Beyond the Echo Chamber," was largely a discussion of how independent media could create impact. We have experimented with embedding tracking codes in joint publications, using hashtags, counting media, and other qualitative and quantitative means of measuring how many people our stories reached, and what kind of effect stories appeared to have.

In 2013, we have moved to the cutting-edge of this research, with an experiment conducted jointly with Harvard Professor Gary King and the company Crimson Hexagon. Gary and his team can process every single tweet created each day; they can run an algorithm that tracks how particular conversations change in these tweets.

We are using this tracking method (usually available only to multinationals) to measure if our editorial collaborations change these conversations. We will produce a white paper on this study by the end of 2014.

3. To Build the Infrastructure of the Entire Independent Media Sector.

Strategy: In 2013, TMC Executive Director Jo Ellen Green Kaiser embarked on a bold strategy to bring together the leaders of every independent news association so that they could share resources and opportunities.

The first meeting of this network of networks took place on May 28, 2013. Present were leaders from the Media Consortium, the Investigative News Network (investigative journalism centers), the Association of Alternative Newsmedia (print newsweeklies), the National Federation of Community Broadcasters (community radio), the Alliance for Community Media (cable access TV stations), the National Association for Media, Arts and Culture (film and digital arts producers), the Association for Independents in Radio (radio producers), New America Media (ethnic press), and Youth Radio.

This was the first-ever convening of these leaders. They found much in common, and agreed to continue meeting by monthly call. Those calls have continued. We hope to hold a retreat in summer of 2014.

4. To Provide Support for our Members

Strategy: We are expanding our annual meeting into a three-day conference; we will hold at least 5 regional meetings; we create a communications toolkit to increase networking; and we are working with business partners to bring sophisticated database, advertising and PR tools to our members.

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Along with these strategies for fulfilling our mission, we have begun a strategic planning process for 2014. As we approach our 10th year, the Media Consortium must clarify whether we are a trade association for independents, or a policy organization that promotes independent media. The two are related, but not the same. We also, like our members, must develop a path to sustainability that does not rely on foundation giving.

We have begun the planning process, using Future Search methodology to guide us. The process will include a retreat March 1-2 for all TMC stakeholders, and will result in a 8-10 page strategic plan by May 2.

Already a leader in innovation and experimentation, the Media Consortium will end 2014 stronger than we began, with a new vision for fulfilling our mission to support and grow the independent media sector.