

INNOVATION Fund Application Round 2

<b>Submission Date</b>	2014-09-02 13:38:18
<b>Organization Name</b>	Carolina Public Press
<b>Tax-exempt status</b>	501(c)(3) organization
<b>EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)</b>	
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.carolinapublicpress.org">www.carolinapublicpress.org</a>
<b>Phone Number</b>	
<b>Applicant's name</b>	Angie Newsome
<b>Title:</b>	Executive Director and Editor
<b>Contact email</b>	
<b>Proposed Start Date</b>	01-01-2015
<b>Proposed End Date</b>	12-31-2015
<b>Total estimated budget for the proposed project</b>	\$34,000
<b>What is the total annual budget for your organization or, if you are a project of another organization, the total annual budget for your overall project.</b>	\$102,000
<b>Request amount:</b>	\$25,000
<b>In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.</b>	Carolina Public Press provides unbiased, in-depth and investigative reporting as well as educational opportunities to journalists, students and others. Serving the nearly 1 million residents of the largely rural Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, Carolina Public Press believes public interest reporting is critical to an informed, engaged electorate and to ensuring government accountability. As North Carolina's only nonprofit regional investigative news service, Carolina Public Press's journalism is published on <a href="http://www.carolinapublicpress.org">www.carolinapublicpress.org</a> and by content-sharing partners that include print dailies, weeklies, online-only, radio and TV news organizations across North Carolina.
<b>Describe in detail the project for which you are requesting funds. How does it fit with your sustainability plans? Explain the need for this project, and how you expect it to increase revenue and/or audience engagement.</b>	<b>PROJECT DESCRIPTION</b> Carolina Public Press requests \$25,000 to support the expansion of a reader and donor engagement program toward reaching the organization's vision of building North Carolina's most reputable public interest, in-depth and investigative regional news service, which may also serve as a model for sustainable rural-based nonprofit journalism.

One of the largest challenges faced by Carolina Public Press is reaching the large, sparsely populated potential and current readership found within the 18 westernmost counties of North Carolina, which are united by its geographic and, in some instances, cultural isolation from the centers of policy making in North Carolina. While understanding and uncovering the news that matters most to readers is a challenge of any nonprofit investigative journalism organization, those challenges are compounded when the region is rural and mountainous. Dedicated to meeting these challenges, Carolina Public Press will expand its effort to engage and build its readership, and, therefore, also build its base of individual donors – a key revenue stream in the organization’s long-term sustainability plans.

Experts often advise nonprofit leaders on tips and techniques on locating and identifying potential donors. Often the first pieces of advice offered revolves around gathering the names of those who have been in contact with the organization, through events and program services. Nonprofit news organizations such as Carolina Public Press, which operate primarily online, must make concentrated efforts to move off-line and make personal and one-on-one contacts with readers, which represent a base of untapped donors.

This is a critical need among nonprofit media. According to a 2013 study by the Association of Fundraising Professionals and the Urban Institute, nonprofits saw, for the first time in five years, positive gains in individual giving from new donors, the return of previous donors and increased giving from current donors. But nonprofits are also continuing to lose donors faster than they gain them.

“The results are troubling because we’re seeing a trend of charities relying on fewer donors giving larger gifts,” said Elizabeth Boris, director of the Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy at the Urban Institute. “Charities need to work harder on reaching out to new and different groups of donors. More important, however, is keeping donors for longer than a year, since it’s much cheaper to retain existing donors than it is to continually find new ones.”

This provides a challenge to rural-based organizations, which must consistently and continually add contacts to its potential donor base, even though the population base and density is much smaller than those found in urban areas. Individual donors to Carolina Public Press are now first introduced to the organization through its website and the journalism it produces. But as a rural-based news organization, Carolina Public Press, as Boris cautioned, needs to work harder to reach out to new and different groups of donors and follow up on that work with developing relationships toward long-term retention. Carolina Public Press’s leadership believes that to attract and retain donors, the organization must find ways to connect readers personally to its mission and journalism. To do so, it must enact a robust outreach program that meets readers where they are across the region, but also fulfills its overall mission of producing high-quality, impactful and unique investigative and in-depth reporting in the public interest. Learnings from these efforts can not only strengthen Carolina Public Press but also assist others who are interested in developing similar campaigns -- and not by just the nonprofit press but

numerous other cause-related rural programs.

In order to achieve these reader and donor engagement goals, Carolina Public Press proposes to enact an ambitious and unique engagement project. Specifically, throughout 2015, the organization will:

1. Organize, market and conduct 18 free and public meetings, called the News Exchange series, for its readers, donors and potential content-sharing partners in each of the counties in its coverage area;
2. Organize, market and conduct four public policy forums, called Newsmakers, in four Western North Carolina cities that will bring together journalists, lawmakers, agency and organization leaders and Carolina Public Press readers for thoughtful dialogue on some of the top issues facing the region and that will cultivate them into potential donors; and
3. Track the program's efforts and results, including how many new donors are recruited and/or cultivated through the engagement program, and produce a white paper at the end of the grant period evaluating the successes and challenges of this rural-based reader and donor engagement program.

This reader and donor engagement program will allow Carolina Public Press to meet many of its overall objectives:

1. Build a base of readers in each of the counties in its coverage area;
2. Improve and increase CPP reporting in each of those counties by furthering its understanding of residents' top issues and concerns;
3. Improve and enhance the number and quality of sources in each of the 18 counties it covers;
4. Provide opportunities for residents to understand and engage in real and thoughtful dialogue about the top issues facing the region; and
5. Build long-term relationships with readers and donors by increasing Carolina Public Press's face-to-face contact with its users and audience.

Carolina Public Press's leadership believes relationship building is critical to its journalistic and financial successes. Ultimately, this reader and donor engagement program will support Carolina Public Press's efforts to expand its audience to a level to the critical mass needed to build a successful source of revenue from individual donors.

#### NEWS EXCHANGES

Carolina Public Press launched its meetup series, called the "News Exchange," this spring. The series attracted groups of content-sharing partners, academics, residents, academics, readers, donors and community and agency leaders to discuss in-depth and investigative news across Western North Carolina — especially the people, places and issues that are traditionally overlooked and under-reported. Participants were asked to identify and discuss the issues that need investigation and what the future of independent media and high-quality news is in their communities. Participants were also asked what Carolina Public Press could offer them, both in terms of ongoing investigative journalism and in resources and other information they need in their daily lives.

Exchanges have already been held in Watauga, Avery,

Mitchell and Yancey counties, where the number of residents ranges from 15,400 to 52,400 people per county. Attendance varied from one participant at one of the earliest meetups to nearly a dozen at one of the most recent. These pilot meetups provide some important and early evaluative information on effective outreach and marketing of the events. The meetups also provided the organization with key information it will use to shape its reporting and relationships with its readers. Participants were eager to discuss issues in their county and neighborhoods – from issues regarding ownership of public utilities to the state of local roads – and how Carolina Public Press may partner with local, existing news outlets that are either unwilling or unable to report more in-depth or investigative reporting pieces. Carolina Public Press’s editors have used this information to shape its journalism, begin researching and reporting important issues, and build a base of sources and contacts in some of the more rural and remote points of its coverage area. As one example, participants expressed frustration at the meetups about understanding who controls road repairs and planning in their communities. Carolina Public Press, therefore, launched its WNC Transportation series, which provides county-by-county resources – including contact information and direct links – to state, regional and local transportation planning organizations and public works departments, allowing residents and readers to improve their understanding of which entities control area transportation networks.

Throughout 2015, Carolina Public Press will hold News Exchange meetups in the following locations during the grant period:

March 2015: Watauga, Avery, Mitchell, Yancey counties

April 2015: Madison, Buncombe, McDowell counties

May 2015: Swain, Graham, Cherokee counties

Sept. 2015: Clay, Macon, Jackson counties

Oct. 2015: Haywood, Henderson, Transylvania counties

Nov. 2015: Polk, Rutherford counties

No other news organization – either nonprofit or for-profit – in North Carolina has enacted such an intense outreach program to every county it serves. Carolina Public Press plans to continue the dialogue after the meetings are through, specifically by following up on each meetup by consulting with participants about:

1. suggested story ideas and results;
2. information on becoming a donor to Carolina Public Press;
3. resources, reporting and training opportunities from Carolina Public Press; and
4. additional information on upcoming events such as Newsmakers forums.

#### NEWSMAKERS

Similarly, Carolina Public Press believes its financial sustainability depends upon its reputation as the regional source of reputable and expert reporting on public interest issues. The Newsmakers series may provide a model program to engage rural residents in public policy, without having to travel up to seven hours – as is the case in the most-rural points of Carolina Public Press’s readership area – to interact with their elected lawmakers or with policy and organizational experts.

Newsmakers is a forum series that will delve deep into the top issues facing Western North Carolina today. Going beyond headlines and sound bites, Newsmakers will bring together the state and region's top journalists with those making and influencing the news — people ranging from business leaders, lawmakers, agency administrators and others — for in-depth conversations with the public. In an era when many residents do not know or have not met the journalists and sources setting the agenda for statewide conversations on public interest issues, Newsmakers will break down barriers often felt between journalists and lawmakers, between community members and leaders — all toward building an engaged, informed society and ensuring government and corporate accountability.

Newsmakers will be a regional forum, to be held in four different locations throughout the year, which will provide unbiased, independent opportunities for information sharing, discussion and engagement with “the newsmakers.” The Newsmakers forums present a unique opportunity for community engagement for Carolina Public Press. Existing similar forums in the region are provided by advocacy organizations representing points of view and calls to specific action reflecting those platforms. The Newsmaker series' will not hold any underlying advocacy goals, but, instead, provide a balanced and nonpartisan platform for dialogue.

The organization will hold its first public forum on one of these issues – the future of more than 1 million acres of national forests located in its coverage area – in November, following a long-term reporting project on the topic. This forum will provide evaluative information, including the success of outreach to donors and readers and opportunities for follow-up and evaluative information on Carolina Public Press's reporting.

Throughout 2015, Carolina Public Press anticipates holding Newsmaker forums in the following locations during the grant period:

March 2015: Burnsville, NC

May 2015: Sylva, NC

September 2015: Asheville, NC

October 2015: Hendersonville, NC

In order to continue to build relationships with attendees, Carolina Public Press will also follow-up on each forum with contacts with participants on and about:

1. suggested story ideas and results;
2. information on becoming a donor to Carolina Public Press;
3. resources, reporting and training opportunities from Carolina Public Press; and
4. additional information on upcoming events such as other Newsmakers forums and News Exchange meetups.

#### PROJECT NEED AND SUSTAINABILITY PLANS

Finding a sustainable revenue model for nonprofit organizations is a critical need nationally. This is especially true in rural America, where the nonprofit press now offers public interest news that the traditional for-profit press often has neither the ability nor the resources to provide and where access to and choices for sources of news

information is, overall, limited in comparison to its urban counterparts. Nonprofit news organizations are under scrutiny for how they are finding ways to provide this service to their communities under the long term, and best-practice recommendations abound.

“Nonprofit news organizations have made progress — reducing their reliance on foundation funding, building new revenue sources and investing in business development and marketing. Among the clear front-runners are those that are constantly experimenting and challenging assumptions around who their audience is and what they care about,” said Mayur Patel, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation’s vice president for strategy and assessment, in a release about the foundation’s 2013 report “Finding a Foothold: How Nonprofit News Ventures Seek Sustainability.”

Carolina Public Press is committed to vetting and changing its assumptions about its audience and their concerns, as Patel suggested, through its engagement program. While events, themselves, are not unique among the nonprofit press, they are among rural journalism organizations whose readership and audience are spread out among thousands of square miles. Indeed, the Knight Foundation’s report does not appear to evaluate whether models must be adjusted depending upon whether the audience is in an urban or rural setting. While the study finds that 12 of the 18 projects produced some events, the majority of the study’s highlighted groups appear to be in urban areas, and, overall, showed little in the way of earned revenue from the events.

Carolina Public Press’s reader and donor engagement project will provide a test ground and model, with evaluative quantitative and qualitative data and information, for rural-based nonprofit news organizations seeking to engage readers both toward improving content and toward increasing individual donors. Carolina Public Press’s proposed white paper, tracking that effort throughout the first year, would expound on the effort and experience and seek to disseminate its learnings to similar organizations by:

1. Providing the study to its funders, both current and prospective, including the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, J-Lab and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation;
2. Sharing with its networks, including the Investigative News Network, the N.C. Press Association and the Sunlight Foundation; and
3. Sharing the paper digitally and for free on its website and promoting its dissemination through press releases to the national press.

Carolina Public Press is uniquely positioned to conduct this engagement project because it recognizes that to be a sustainable nonprofit news organization operating in a rural, sparsely populated region, Carolina Public Press must reach its readers and potential donors. This simple statement belies a set of complex and unique challenges considering that the region in which the organization operates includes some of the most sparsely populated areas with the highest elevations east of the Mississippi river.

Nearly 1 million people live scattered among the mountains and valleys of the 18 westernmost counties of North Carolina – the area in which Carolina Public Press reports extensively – and covers more than 7,200 square miles. In Swain County, for example, only 26.5 people live in each square mile. Even in the region’s “urban” area, Buncombe County, 363 people live in each square mile. That density is still one-fifth of the population of the state’s largest county, Mecklenburg County and Charlotte, where 1,756 people live in each square mile.

Without the benefits of newspaper boxes, a dedicated TV or radio presence or aggressive advertising, it can be difficult to attract readers’ and donors’ attention to a start-up media organization. Carolina Public Press understands that this poses one of the most significant challenges in terms of long-term sustainability for any rural news source. Carolina Public Press has had remarkable success with increasing its readership and pageviews, and is exceeding current growth expectations. Based on Google Analytics, Carolina Public Press has more than doubled its unique viewers in the last year. Page views have increased by nearly 275% in the last year. Between January and June 2014, CPP’s website unique sessions grew 75% compared to the previous six months alone. Similarly, pageviews grew 66%.

While this growth is notable, CPP still reaches a fraction of the region’s residents. Carolina Public Press’s programmatic and organizational growth plans require additional growth in revenues, which is inextricably tied to readership, as they represent a base of potential individual donors and business sponsors. As a result, Carolina Public Press has invested significant time and resources into development planning. With the aid of a grant from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, Carolina Public Press anticipates completing its three-to-five year development plan document by Oct. 30. Following intensive meetings with Carolina Public Press’s board of directors and surveying its readers, donors and existing funders, a set of objectives and a plan that will guide CPP’s fundraising and development work over the next five years has been created.

Overall, CPP prioritizes revenue-generating efforts that:

- 1) meet its mission of producing and promoting in-depth and investigative reporting;
- 2) build an engaged and informed audience and community;
- 3) present solutions to unique problem or information need in the community; and
- 4) consider local and regional economic conditions and culture.

Located within the rural Blue Ridge Mountains, Carolina Public Press is not supported by a high-tech economy. The eastern-most edge of the organization’s coverage area is more than five hours away from the state’s economic and policy-making centers of Research Triangle Park and the state capital; the western-most is more than eight hours away. Carolina Public Press’s mountain region has lost most of its large traditional manufacturing base over the last decade, leaving tourism, small businesses and nonprofits to gain in economic significance. Therefore, the organization must consider local and regional economic conditions –

which include unemployment rates reaching more than 10 percent in multiple counties – in developing revenues outside of private foundations and large corporations.

Considering those priorities, Carolina Public Press's primary sustainability objective is to create a concentrated outreach and engagement model that will build a strong foundation of support from individuals, both general level donors and major donors. Carolina Public Press's goals in individual giving range from \$15,000 in 2014 to \$50,000 in 2016, with a possible target of \$100,000 by 2018. According to the development plan, the target is to identify 800 new prospective donors per year, including 100 personal contacts identified by board members and current donors and 700 new subscribers and event participants. That level of outreach requires focused planning to attract new and potential readers and build sincere relationships that will move those readers to becoming financial supporters of the organization.

The News Exchanges and Newsmaker forums are linchpins of this outreach and engagement model and will not only enhance the quality and quantity of Carolina Public Press's journalism, but will also assist in identifying and building relationships with new prospective donors.

**Is this a new project?**

Extension of an existing project. We are doing this now or have done it in the past year.

**Who will help carry out the project? Describe the key staff and capabilities. If you plan to use outside partners, consultants, or vendors, tell us why you chose them (or how you will select them). Will you need to hire additional fulltime or part-time help to complete your proposed project?**

Carolina Public Press's Executive Director Angie Newsome will provide overall program management and ensure it meets CPP's strategic mission and development goals

A native of North Carolina with nearly 15 years of journalism experience, Newsome has a master's degree in journalism from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and was a reporting and writing fellow at the Poynter Institute before becoming an award-winning business and investigative reporter. While a reporter at the Asheville Citizen-Times, she led a professional-development training program and received training instruction and guidance from the American Press Institute. She went on to launch Carolina Public Press in 2011 and was, in 2012, named one of four national New Media Women Entrepreneurs by J-Lab and The McCormick Foundation.

Newsome will be primarily responsible, with the assistance of the CPP Board of Directors, for enacting the reader and donor engagement program. She will be assisted by Development Assistant Tara George. Originally from New Jersey, George has lived all over the country and settled in Asheville, N.C., in 2005. She graduated with honors from San Diego State University with a bachelor's degree in applied design. A desire to be more involved and make a difference in the community brought her to the nonprofit world, where she has worked in development, project and office management for leading nonprofit organizations in Western North Carolina, including Land of Sky Regional Council and OnTrack Financial Education and Counseling.

Currently, George's position is funded by the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, which is supporting Carolina Public Press's development planning and



implementation through April 2015. With that level of funding, she assists Newsome with all aspects of development – including reader and donor development – for eight hours a week. With the support of the INNovation Fund, George’s position can expand to nearly 20 hours a week, and she will be tasked implementing Carolina Public Press’s engagement programs under Newsome’s management, from organizing to promotion to evaluation. Newsome will be responsible for financial and evaluative reporting, attending events, managing George throughout the duration of the project and writing and producing the final evaluative white paper about the project.

**How will you measure progress? Please be specific and concrete about the metrics you will use?**

Carolina Public Press will measure its progress with the reader and donor engagement program by evaluating whether it met its goals in:

- 1) News Exchange meetups including:
  - a. Successful scheduling of:
    - i. 18 meetups (at least one in each county of the 18-county coverage area)
    - ii. Invitation-only donor networking before or after forum (Total Goal: 40 donors)
  - b. Registrations and participation (Total Goal: 160 participants)
- 2) Newsmakers including:
  - a. Successful scheduling of:
    - i. 4 forums (in four Western North Carolina cities)
    - ii. Invitation-only donor networking before or after forum (Total Goal: 40 donors)
  - b. Registrations and participation (Total Goal: 160 participants)
- 3) Follow-up including:
  - a. Surveys and evaluations of event participants (25 percent of participants)
  - b. Action on story and/or outreach (25 percent of participants)
- 4) Increasing gifts from individuals
  - a. Identifying 700 new subscribers and event participants
  - b. Developing and implementing a cultivation calendar that focuses on communication with prospective donors and readers
  - c. Reaching goal of \$25,000 in individual donor gifts in 2015 (representing a 67% increase in individual donor gifts).

CPP will track these metrics through using:

1. Event sign-in sheets;
2. Survey results;
3. Prospect lists; and
4. Tracking responses to solicitation and asks.

**Using those metrics, what is the threshold of success for this project?**

The threshold of success for this project revolves around whether Carolina Public Press reached its goals in each of the above areas. It also includes making a determination of whether something new was learned for the organization that will, in return, be shared with other nonprofit news organizations interested in, funding and/or operating in and for rural areas.

Therefore, Carolina Public Press will also analyze and provide information on:

- 1) The percentage of event attendees that went on to become new donors (goal: 25 percent);
- 2) The level of gift event attendees made;

3) Whether event attendees shared information on the organization with their networks (via social media, conversation, forwarding emails) (goal: 30 percent); and  
4) Any adjustments and/or changes to events, and the rationale for and results of those changes.

**How will INN be able to validate the metrics and how the project did using those metrics?**

INN will be able to validate the metrics and/or ask for updates and documentation of the project at any point during the project terms, or, at a minimum, with a 6-month and 12-month report as provided by Carolina Public Press. The report will include qualitative and quantitative measurements of the success of the project, whether it met its goals for participation, event planning and donor engagement, what was learned and how the project changed as a result. Financial reports will also be included.

INN may also achieve overall evaluative information about the success of such engagement programs in rural areas by receiving the final white paper produced by Carolina Public Press that will provide details on the program's strategies, operations, successes and evaluative determinations. The purpose of the report is not only to provide details on the success of this proposal, but also to provide a model to other organizations – both journalism-based and others – interested in enacting high-level and concentrated engagement programs in rural communities.

**What do you hope to learn from this project, and how do you hope to apply what you've learned over the long term?**

Carolina Public Press hopes to evaluate whether this type of engagement program will impact organizational development, particularly in building a base of new individual donors and increasing gifts from individual donors. By tracking participation and the engagement of readership, Carolina Public Press will determine the long-term potential of this type of reader and donor engagement program to increase readership engagement and, thus, increase the organization's source of revenue from new and retained individual donors. This project will also highlight the ability of a rural news outlet to engage readers in shaping the news. Carolina Public Press expects this engagement to increase community ownership and involvement with both the organization and regional and statewide community issues.

Engaging readers and donors will always be one of Carolina Public Press's top priorities; CPP will apply learnings gained during this project to refine and edit this program to meet its goals and to determine whether this program meets the level of success needed to sustain such outreach efforts over the long term.

**Why are you the right organization and team to do this project?**

Launched in 2011, Carolina Public Press has quickly earned the support of local, regional and national funders as well as the recognition of media organizations across the country. Foundations including the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina and the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation have made significant financial contributions to support the organization's work and programs. Content-sharing agreements with print, TV and radio news organizations including The Charlotte Observer, WLOS-TV, Mountain Xpress and WUNC, disseminate CPP's research and reporting. Existing academic partnerships also include the region's top public universities: Appalachian State University, UNC Asheville and Western Carolina University.

Much of this is due to the hard work of Carolina Public Press's Western North Carolina-based professional journalists and the fundraising, nonprofit and legal experts who form the Board of Directors that oversees the organization's mission and sustainability.

The Carolina Public Press Board of Directors includes Chair Allen Shaklan, who spent more than 30 years in the broadcast industry, first as an attorney for CBS and later as the Vice President and General Manager of CBS television stations in Miami and Atlanta. He later served as the executive director of an Atlanta nonprofit organization, where he managed a \$1.8 million budget. Other members of Carolina Public Press's Board of Directors are similarly accomplished and include the news director for a regional public radio station; a former assistant managing editor of the region's daily newspaper; successful grant writing, development and public relations professionals; the vice-chair of the journalism department at the region's largest university; and lawyers with experience in First Amendment and other law.

The Board of Directors also includes Eleanor Ashton, the Chair of the Board's Fundraising and Marketing Committee, who is the Director of Development and Communication for Evergreen Community Charter School, the state's first public charter school, for which she funds successful annual fund campaigns, school-wide fundraisers, signature fundraising event and grant writing resulting in a 100% increase in revenue since joining the staff of the school. She holds a Bachelor of Science from Florida State University and a certification in nonprofit management from Duke University Continuing Studies Program. For the past 25 years, she has worked for the private and non-profit sectors in the fields of communications, sales, marketing and development.

The Board of Directors also includes Calvin Hall, a Western North Carolina native who is the chair and associate professor of the Department of Mass Communication at North Carolina Central University. He is the author of *African American Journalists: Autobiography as Memoir and Manifesto*, published by The Scarecrow Press. Hall is an alumnus of the American Society of Newspaper Editors Institute for Journalism Excellence. For six years, he served as a member of the Board of Trustees of the North Carolina Humanities Council. He also serves as a Guardian ad Litem volunteer for the 24th Judicial District, which serves Avery, Mitchell, Madison, Watauga and Yancey counties.

As these three board members illustrate, the organization's core strengths are found in its volunteers, networks and journalists – including their contacts, professional experience and reputation – and in the quality journalism it has published and the accomplishments it has achieved since it launched in 2011.

In the past year alone, Carolina Public Press has offered reporting that cannot be found anywhere else – reporting that continues to build its reputation as the state's reputable source of nonprofit, nonpartisan investigative and in-depth journalism by trained journalists who prioritize, seek and fight for access to public information. Carolina Public Press itself, in 2012, formed a coalition of five news organizations

to sue for the release of a still-undisclosed audit of the region's largest police department's evidence room, whose former manager is now awaiting sentencing on federal charges of stealing an unconfirmed amount of drugs, weapons and cash from the room.

"They ARE the press out there," Frank Stasio, with WUNC North Carolina Public Radio, said of Carolina Public Press in a 2013 J-Lab report, "News Chops: Beefing up the Journalism in Local Public Broadcasting." "They are doing the hard work of regional reporting – the kinds of things that have statewide impact."

As such, Carolina Public Press's work is gaining increasing local, regional and national attention. In October, the organization was one of nine news organizations asked to present at a PBS MediaShift event on media startups. In January, Carolina Public Press was the only nonprofit news organization in the state presenting at a Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation event on the future of news organizations in North Carolina. In September 2014, Carolina Public Press will present about its nonprofit news model and editorial focus at the National Federation of Press Women. The organization has also received recognition for its journalism, including a reporting award from the Society of Professional Journalists and admission into the N.C. Press Association, a first for a nonprofit media organization in Western North Carolina.

In summary, Carolina Public Press is staffed and led by a reputable and reliable team of journalism and nonprofit experts who are devoted to its long-term success. They are also committed to the organization's sustainability and in being entrepreneurial in finding sources of revenue that will sustain the organization's important and unique brand of journalism.

**Why is this project timely? Why is now a good time to undertake this project?**

Across the mostly rural Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina, the for-profit press is under tremendous pressure. Layoffs, downsizing and news access restrictions through paywalls are common. Investigative, watchdog and in-depth reporting is on the wane, with the public left with less and less news on the pressing issues facing North Carolina's mountain region: water quality, development, jobs and the economy, education, crime and justice and more.

In August alone, the region's largest daily newspaper lost seven people in its newsroom; it currently does not have a photography staff. Carolina Public Press is, by comparison, growing. Its readership has more than doubled in the last year. Carolina Public Press is the only media outlet in the western half of the state to have credentialed news staff covering the N.C. General Assembly. Without Carolina Public Press, the public would not know that state environmental leaders are planning to conduct natural gas studies in the region. The public would not know about significant issues facing law enforcement's handling of evidence. And the regular workings of the region's lawmakers at the state capital would go unreported.

The organization's leadership realizes that its budget must be able to sustain its programs, and its reporting must reach its intended audience. With the support of the Ethics and

Excellence in Journalism's grant, the organization embarked on early and important work to plan for its long-term sustainability and has a three-to-five year development plan nearly completed, including setting goals for individual donors, major donors, foundation support, corporate and business sponsorship, content syndication and testing for earned income revenue. [Please see a copy of the draft plan, attached.]

Now, Carolina Public Press must implement the plan, especially in efforts to engaging its readers and donors. With CPP's track record of high-quality and reputable reporting, audience and revenue growth, and its commitment to increasing quality journalism through understanding the issues and concerns facing its audience, it is uniquely poised to continue – and expand – upon that opportunity.

Thank you for your interest in supporting the revenue-generating ideas of nonprofit news organizations across the country. We hope you'll agree that, with the support of the INNovation Fund, Carolina Public Press may test and evaluate the success of how to engage a rural audience in investigative, in-depth reporting and in supporting the organization's long-term financial health. We appreciate your interest, and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

**Upload your project budget**

[CPP\\_INNnovation-Fund-budget-form.xlsx](#)

**Optional: if you wish, you may provide additional material about your project, including screenshots, plans, marketing material, or estimates from vendors who will help you carry out your project. If you have more than one file, please package them as a single .ZIP file before uploading.**

[Draft Fund Development Plan 8-7-14.docx](#)