

INNOVATION Fund Application Round 2

Submission Date	2014-09-02 14:09:14
Organization Name	The Citizens Campaign
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	
Website address	www.thecitizenscampaign.org
Phone Number	
Applicant's name	Amanda Kathryn Roman
Title:	Senior Director, Engagement
Contact email	
Proposed Start Date	11-03-2014
Proposed End Date	11-06-2015
Total estimated budget for the proposed project	\$45,000
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.	\$928,100
Request amount:	\$35,000
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	The Citizens Campaign is dedicated to repairing our democracy from the bottom up by training citizens in no blame politics and evidence-based problem solving so they can get results without waiting for the political establishment. In October, 2010, The Citizens Campaign established and continues to operate an award-winning hyperlocal news site serving the citizens of Paterson, NJ and surrounding communities. Paterson Press is the go-to source for broad, unbiased coverage of the City of Paterson from the nitty-gritty daily operations of local government to aggressive investigations holding public officials accountable, to positive stories that highlight educational achievements and community assets.
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	The Citizens Campaign launched Paterson Press in the fall of 2010 to revitalize and energize the civic community of New Jersey's 3rd largest municipality, Paterson. An award-winning hyperlocal news site, Paterson Press gives this economically distressed city an extremely effective source of local hard news which is instrumental in focusing on, and addressing, the serious issues facing the City; and provides

engagement.

unparalleled coverage of the arts, nonprofit and business community. Equally important, by publishing online, the news continues to be furnished free of charge and delivered to every household online and via mobile devices. Over the course of the past four years we've steadily increased readership by providing timely, high-quality content in accessible user-friendly formats. We launched the Paterson Press with a goal of reaching 25,000 readers in our first year, instead we more than tripled our goal and reached 90,000 visitors! The following year, readership nearly tripled once again, reaching 245,000 visitors! And this past year, we have received unprecedented growth - averaging 84,000 to 100,000 monthly readers. As this trend continues, we are projected to reach more than 1,000,000 readers annually.

Our Paterson Press project had auspicious beginnings with the hiring of Joe Malinconico, a top notch investigative reporter, as Editor. Malinconico is a Bayonne-born "Jersey Guy" whose 20-year journalism career took him from being a copy boy at the New York Times to one of the State's top investigative reporters at the Star-Ledger. During his 13-year tenure at the Star-Ledger, Joe's stories were credited with providing insight that led to reforms in transportation policy and the E-ZPass system. Joe won the 1999 Dee Murphy Award and the New Jersey Press Association's Robert P. Kelly Award in 2007. While at The Citizens Campaign, Joe has written a how-to guide for online investigative journalism called "Shining Light in Dark Spaces: A Hyperlocal Reporter's Guide to Covering Municipal Government in New Jersey." And under Joe's outstanding leadership, the Paterson Press has received 14 awards for excellence in reporting.

In its short life, Paterson Press has had a tremendous positive impact on the City. Its investigative stories and unbiased coverage of government affairs have directly affected decision-making, raised the level of public official accountability and stimulated the interest of Patersonians in the civic life of their City. Yet achieving this success continues to be accompanied by a concomitant need of The Citizens Campaign to identify additional sources of revenue to support not only Paterson Press's day to day operation, but its future viability as well.

Over the course of the past four years we have pursued a number of approaches seeking to secure Paterson Press's future, and we have learned a lot along the way. Initially, we partnered with the online platform The Alternative Press, which not only hosted the hyperlocal but also agreed to solicit online advertising from Paterson businesses on our behalf. Unfortunately, this arrangement did not produce significant revenues for the Press, due we believe in large measure to the fact that Paterson is an economically depressed area. We then pursued a more innovative approach, entering into negotiations with North Jersey Media, owner of the Bergen Record, Herald News and 80 other media sources, to host Paterson Press online and purchase content for print. We solidified this unique public-private partnership by a contractual arrangement beginning in April, 2013 and currently ongoing, that produces revenue for us through a sharing of their general online advertising and the purchase of our content for their print editions. While we share revenues, Paterson Press continues to maintain its own branding on a unique landing page. While

this arrangement is bringing us closer to achieving our goal of sustainability, there still remains a gap between revenue and expenses. This gap has partially been met with foundation grants, however, we do not consider this type of support a consistent or reliable source of future income. In order for the Paterson Press to have a solid financial footing, we need to secure \$60,000 in reliable income each year. We anticipate that the special project we are requesting funds for will raise \$25,000 in the first year of implementation, \$40,000 in the second year, and \$60,000 in the third year. The formation of a volunteer advisory council, one of the important components of this proposed project, will provide the foundation for a strong community-based interest in securing the sustainability of Paterson Press as a trustworthy source of news benefitting the entire city.

With the support of the INNovation Fund, we want to explore new avenues that may lead to ensuring the hyperlocal's sustainability. We also want to raise awareness around the nonprofit nature of Paterson Press. Our project aims to connect Patersonians with Paterson Press as a community resource that goes beyond providing the hard news of the City. The Citizens Campaign knows the empowerment that comes along with a well-informed citizenry. We also know how important it is for City stakeholders to have opportunities to showcase all aspects of their City and not just the typical attention grabbing headlines about crime and violence. As a nonprofit news outlet, Paterson Press remains committed to improving the overall civic health of the City.

Looking and planning ahead, we would use this INNovation grant to develop and implement a two-phase approach to building up Paterson Press's revenue. First, we would launch a strategic grassroots, on-the-ground outreach campaign to introduce Paterson Press, our coverage, and the ability of citizens to be part of the storytelling process directly to the people of Paterson. Second, we would develop a volunteer Advisory Council whose membership would be committed to both helping ensure Paterson Press' sustainability as well as identifying and securing new sources of revenue.

The Citizens Campaign would hire a part-time person to lead this special project, preferably someone bilingual and familiar with the City and its populace - and utilize the following time frame:

November-December 2014 training the new hire about our mission and programs, making introductions to our established Paterson network, researching new and prospective civic, business and faith-based leaders and organizations

January-May 2015 conducting comprehensive one-on-one outreach to introduce Paterson Press directly to Patersonians, educating individuals about its content and value provided, inviting story suggestions and comments on existing stories, and discussing ways to get involved and maintain interest

June-August 2015 planning the inaugural Community Day which would include a 5K walk/run, continue cultivating

Paterson businesses and organizations and inviting them to participate in the Community Day with a sponsorship or booth rental, setting-up the logistics for the Community Day

September, 2015 hosting the Community Day: setting-up the 5K with featured stations along the route that community organizations/businesses will sponsor to showcase what Paterson means to them, featuring fare from local restaurants at the finish line to showcase the ethnic diversity of the City as well as booths for local businesses and organizations, beginning Phase 2: building on the strategic community outreach developed during Phase 1 to create a volunteer Advisory Council for Paterson Press

September-November 2015 inviting identified and cultivated citizen leaders to join the newly forming Advisory Council with a goal of providing a forum for discussion of pertinent issues affecting the diverse and minority populations in the City and connecting them directly to the news media, setting-up a regular meeting schedule to identify and solidify local collaborations and partnerships, and developing “buy-in” for Paterson stakeholders seeking ways to provide Paterson Press with long-term sustainability

Is this a new project?

New project. We have not done this before.

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?

Senior Director, Engagement, Amanda Kathryn Roman, will head this project, mentor the new hire who will manage this special project, and provide strategic guidance for the community outreach in Paterson. As an executive member of The Citizens Campaign’s leadership team, she will use her two decades of national experience as a political strategist and grassroots organizer building broad coalitions and leading teams of diverse stakeholders, to train and mentor the new hire on how to engage and empower Patersonians. Amanda is also a health and wellness coach and avid runner on her personal time with significant experience with community-wide events and nonprofit 5Ks.

Heather Taylor, Senior Director, Communications & Public Affairs coordinates The Citizens Campaign’s social and traditional media plans and puts her degree in Journalism to further use in developing and overseeing our Citizen Journalism Curriculum to empower individuals to report and publish local news in their communities. She will provide promotional support for the 5K and Community Day as well as supervise Citizen Journalists who will enhance the overall coverage of the Paterson Press.

Joe Malinconico, Editor, Paterson Press, will continue with his regular coverage of the City. In addition, he will publish articles about the 5K and Community Day as well as spotlight features on the community sponsors. Joe will also serve as the Master of Ceremonies for the 5K and Community Day festivities.

As previously mentioned, The Citizens Campaign will also hire a new part time employee to manage this special project as outlined. We will have an application process complete with interviews but will first go to our extensive volunteer network to see if anyone would be well suited for this role. Qualifications will include, but are not limited to, a bilingual Spanish speaking individual that is familiar with

Paterson and/or an urban environment with good interpersonal skills who is organized and has a friendly, outgoing personality.

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

We will measure progress under this grant utilizing the following metrics and standards:

- || trust built and connections solidified among Paterson stakeholders as evidenced by participation of at least 12 sponsorships of the Community Day festivities
- || increased coverage of nonprofits and local businesses in the Paterson Press through spotlight articles which will result in at least 15 articles
- || exploration of new ways to expand citizen engagement in Paterson through journalism - e.g., considering YELLR app and similar online tools which will result in at least 3 Paterson Citizen Journalists

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

-|| ability to raise a minimum of \$20,000 through the Community Day and 5K run

-|| solidifying a 10 member (minimum) Advisory Council representative of the City's diversity

-|| raising additional funds to fill in Paterson Press budget gaps

We believe in this special project and are strongly committed to the continued operation of Paterson Press. We have an established history and presence in Paterson not only through the Press but through our past work in the City as well. We consider the metrics and standards set forth above as demonstrative of minimum thresholds to be achieved to define success. However, success will truly be realized when Paterson Press faces a more certain, financially-secure future.

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

We believe that INN will be able to validate our metrics in the following ways:

-|| We will prepare periodic reports on our progress related to the objectives set forth in our proposal.

-|| We will have a public tracking device (such as an online thermometer graphic) to show dollars raised for the event posted on our website.

-|| We will share the bios and specific commitments of each advisory council member as they join.

-|| We will provide a summary of interviews with community members that will be conducted by our Citizen Journalists and Paterson Press Editor, Joe Malinconico during the Community Day festivities; interviews will ask participants to share what they knew or learned about the Paterson Press over the past year as well as their experiences at the event. We will also share these interviews via social media.

-|| We will provide information about Paterson Press donations received over the course of the grant.

→ We will track and provide clippings and/or links to spotlight articles about sponsors and supporters of the Community Day and 5K appearing in Paterson Press.

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

We are always learning from our experiences. And our experiences with Paterson Press represent a unique foray for us into the world of journalism. We created Paterson Press to fill a void in New Jersey's third largest City. Without a newspaper dedicated to covering meetings of the City Council, School Board and the like, no one was watching the public till and citizens were less able to hold officials accountable. Citizens were truly relegated to the back seat in driving the wheels of government. We believe we have filled that void and done so in a stellar manner. Operating Paterson Press over the last four years has taught us much about engaging and empowering a citizenry via news reporting and we see our current exploration into new ways to fund these efforts as an ongoing learning experience for the present and as a guide as we continue moving forward. Furthermore, as we continue our efforts to build a sustainable nonprofit hyperlocal news source, notably one that serves an economically-depressed city, we would hope our work produces a replicable model that citizens in other urban areas might pursue; and one that could become part of The Citizens Campaign's best-practice Menu of Solutions developed as a resource available on our website.

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

We excel at what we do, receiving accolades and awards from the professional journalist community, Paterson officials and Paterson citizenry. Paterson Press has set a gold standard for hyperlocal news reporting, being acknowledged as number 1 in its class 7 times, including being the first online news source to ever win the Stuart Awbrey Award for distinguished public service by a community newspaper from the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists, and for two successive years, being chosen as the "Best Independent Online News Organization" in the state. Shortly after Paterson Press made its debut, it received high marks in the Columbia Journalism Review. And its excellence continues to be acknowledged by the professional community with 14 awards in its roster at the present time.

The Citizens Campaign created Paterson Press to foster a more engaged citizenry, one that is informed and empowered by free access to unbiased news. We believe that such access generates and elevates public discussion of City affairs. Equally important, through Paterson Press, government decision-making and activities could be more carefully scrutinized and as a result, lawmakers and officials would be more responsive to community needs. And this has in fact proven to be the case. Public officials and residents say they rely on Paterson Press for news about their city. The immediate past Mayor, Jeffery Jones, said that Paterson Press brought with it an unprecedented level of accountability regarding the operations of City government. Audiences and participation at public meetings often expand following Paterson Press coverage of local issues.

We have been successful in filling the void created when traditional news outlets cut their coverage of Paterson affairs, and we have done so in a way that creates true value and real benefit for the community. We are well positioned to continue providing this valuable service by

expanding the opportunities for greater City stakeholder involvement in building a viable Paterson Press.

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

Paterson Press is now four years old. Since its inception, The Citizens Campaign has consistently pursued various avenues toward the goal of achieving long-term sustainability for our hyperlocal. We have a unique, revenue-producing contractual arrangement with North Jersey Media; we are the recipient of several foundation grants; we have provided outstanding editorial leadership; we utilize a reliable and trustworthy platform that provides a stable and consistent presence online. Paterson Press enjoys a substantial and growing readership; it is a highly respected and award-winning news outlet. Now we are at a serious juncture- we must leverage these assets in order to cover our expenses to continue producing Paterson Press. And we believe that one of the best options leading to sustainability lies within the Paterson community itself- with a commitment and investment by City stakeholders in its future. The Citizens Campaign has worked closely with Patersonians and public officials in the past and we have built a foundation of trust and credibility in the City. Now is the time to capitalize on that strong network and connect City leaders with the paper that is serving them well, with mutual benefit to all.

Upload your project budget

[The Citizens Campaign_INNOvation-Fund-budget-form-update_round-2.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.

[Paterson Press Demonstrable Impact.pdf](#)