

INNOVATION Fund Application Round 2

<b>Submission Date</b>	2014-09-02 18:31:46
<b>Organization Name</b>	inewsourc
<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.inewsourc.org">www.inewsourc.org</a>
<b>Phone Number</b>	
<b>Applicant's name</b>	Lorie Hearn
<b>Title:</b>	Executive Director
<b>Contact email</b>	
<b>Proposed Start Date</b>	10-15-2014
<b>Proposed End Date</b>	04-15-2015
<b>Total estimated budget for the proposed project</b>	\$50,000
<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>	\$630,000
<b>Request amount:</b>	\$28,404
<b>In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.</b>	inewsourc is dedicated to producing data-driven investigative reports, primarily for San Diego-Imperial counties. Our five-year goal is to be the most recognized local source of credible, in-depth reporting and the leading advocate for government transparency and the people's "right to know." Our audience currently is the radio, television and web audience of KPBS, which is the local PBS and NPR affiliate and our primary distribution partner.
<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>	<p>inewsourc intends to grow its audience demographically and geographically by establishing a social media network of community news outlets in one virtual space. The network throughout San Diego and Imperial counties will increase brand awareness, distribute content and stimulate conversations around inewsourc content.</p> <p>This project, which has been a concept with a framework for three years, is at the heart of the inewsourc distribution philosophy: to distribute our projects as widely as possible and to achieve the most effective results. The network would increase our visibility, help distinguish our brand and</p>

build communities around the topics we raise. Greater awareness and community engagement will increase revenue through individual donations and some possible fees for service.

We submitted this proposal in Round 1 and sought guidance about weaknesses in the proposal. As a result we have strengthened the proposal by continuing to invest time, money and energy in the initiative. Actions taken include: 1) Updating the old list of potential partners/clients. (It is attached) 2) Reaching out to potential partners and receiving positive feedback about distributing our content in various formats. One community news group (sandiegometro) already is running some of our material and is eager to take the partnership to a more formal level. 3) Investing in and completing an analysis of our analytics, development of custom dashboards, analysis of audience and recommendations for website optimization so we have solid benchmarks from which to measure audience growth 4) Securing funding for a diversity fellowship program, which we hope will lead to a partnership with Univision, as part of our distribution network. Funding of the diversity program enabled us to hire a recent graduate of San Diego State as a full-time reporter and economics analyst. He is a native of Mexico, speaks, reads and writes Spanish fluently and has already translated some of our material into Spanish to expand our local and cross-border reach. We are talking with Univision about partnering to produce our content, specifically through reporter Leonardo Castenada, for their Spanish-language audience.

We intend to implement and grow a network of community news outlets in four phases. It will be accomplished through social media outreach, familiarization events, and email blast solicitation.

Key to the success of this project is relationship-building through social media, which we have documented as a powerful tool for inewsourc. Our analytics make this case emphatically: despite our important relationships with legacy media, most of the traffic to our website originates with social media.

Here is an example: Our interactive map that showed the voting results from the February 2014 mayoral election attracted a record 11,135 pageviews on a single day to the inewsourc website. The breakdown follows:

25% came from direct traffic  
25% from Reddit  
18.5% from Facebook  
10% from Twitter  
5% from KPBS)

Once we have established a virtual relationship with news outlets and other content distributors, we will host meetups to further introduce our brand and strengthen the value propositions for all parties.

The final phase will invite distributors to take a look at our content in advance of publication. They will have a choice of running our full stories, tailoring them to their micro audiences or displaying graphics packages we will develop that "tease" the content to our website.

We will implement a system for tracking publication and mentions, similar to what Wisconsin Watch has developed.

We believe this is a solid plan, but we recognize it will require constant rethinking and updating. The ways people get information and communicate with each other are changing almost every moment. Some of the tactics we outlined in a plan a year ago, for example, needed to be refreshed for this proposal. We embrace flexibility in constructing this network.

Additional information: The inewsourcse board of directors feels strongly that we should build on the social media presence we have been able to establish over the past 18 months. One board member pledged to match the INN grant during Round 1 and she has renewed that commitment in order to ensure that this project can be given a reasonable amount of time to prove itself and be improved.

#### Phase I: Define the Micro-News Organizations and Engage in Initial Outreach via Social Media

inewsourcse has updated its original list and has identified more than 90 major media news organizations, individual newsgroups, privately owned journals, print, radio, online, and broadcast news outlets within the San Diego-Imperial counties region.

The bedrock of the list is a purchased roster of media outlets, but it now includes a range of outlets from major to micro-local neighborhood outlets.

As part of this initiative, we will integrate the list into our Customer Relationship Management system, SalesForce, which we began to use earlier this year for our donor base.

To begin the initial outreach process, targeting these outlets via the social media forums of Twitter, Facebook and Google+ is essential. By adding these organizations to the inewsourcse social media network, familiarity with our daily / weekly / monthly content will be gained. They will appear in our newsfeed whenever a story is published and circulated in the online forum. By sharing these stories with inewsourcse followers, re-Tweeting with an attribution (“@delmartimes”, for example), and linking to the content of these stories within our own news content, reciprocity is encouraged, creating precedent for future requests to align news distribution goals.

Here are some of the steps involved:

Follow all news outlets from the data set on Twitter, “friend” or “like” on Facebook, and add them to Google+ circles.

Create lists via Twitter that separate news outlets into categories indicating geographic distribution reach, political districts, platform, language, content themes, etc. to maintain an active understanding of the reach of each outlet. Some suggested categories are:

Major Media Group (20,000+ subscribers, “followers,” or potential distribution)

Distribution frequency: Daily / Weekly / Monthly  
TV Broadcast, Print, Radio  
Political Districts (CC Districts 1-9)  
San Diego, North County, Downtown, South County, Imperial Valley / Yuma  
Community News  
Foreign Language: Spanish, Chinese

Phase I(a): Determine Influential Media Groups within Current Aggregate List

Based on the current data, two media groups emerge as premiere targets for forging relationships, based on their ownership of multiple print and online news outlets and expansive distribution. These include:

Mainstreet Media Group (Recently purchased by U-T Community Press)

Mainstreet Media Group represents a robust existing network of San Diego County free and subscription-based print and online media with already-existing, mobile-friendly and intuitive platforms. Each online newspaper advertises its sister outlets and, in many instances, the social media platforms which promote each source are combined to cover multiple areas. By partnering with a media group with such a robust network, inewssource will reach a large community-based populace via a single contact.

Mission Publishing Group, LLC  
6549 Mission Gorge Road #199  
San Diego, CA 92120  
(619) 283-9747  
info@ScoopSanDiego.com

Mission Publishing Group picks up, geographically, where Mainstreet Media Group leaves off. Covering the Mission Valley and East San Diego areas, Mission Publishing Group continues a network of coverage into the San Diego Metro area.

In addition, forging relationships with major metropolitan print and broadcast networks such as KFMB, which owns multiple outlets, and U-T San Diego, which is connected to Spanish language outlets, will expand the reach of the network.

Phase II: Policy, Planning and Sharing

Once the groundwork for the online relationships is laid, we will create a "sharing plan" and policy.

This policy will define all areas of content sharing, including exactly how often we will share content, how we will decide what to share, terms of use, how much weight will be given to each publication, which platforms we will use to spread content, and how we will keep track of what we've shared.

Once this policy is set, we will begin spreading the micro-network's content.

Through Mention.net, a social media monitoring software, we will track success in terms of overall "mentions," as well as the associated traffic to our site using Google Analytics.

Through Commun.it, a Twitter management software, we will bolster our Twitter output by following and unfollowing recommended accounts, thanking new high-profile followers, engaging with people who have engaged with us, and tracking our number of tweets, retweets and favorites over the 90 day time period and after. According to its website, Commun.it is used by Nike, Dell, Sony, Cisco, Volkswagen and other highly-successful companies for Twitter management.

#### Phase III: Provide Learning Opportunities to Introduce Potential Network Partners to the Benefits of Partnership

After the initial phase of online networking, in-person mixers and educational seminars that explicitly outline the terms of partnership, functions of network sharing of content, data aggregation services, and cost, where applicable, will be necessary to orient potential partners to the benefits of network partnership.

A series of informational / educational sessions featuring both a meet-and-greet and a formal presentation of the data aggregation / use techniques to be held at three locations relevant to the locations of targeted partner publications. Most likely, one event would be held in North County, one in downtown San Diego and one in South County or the Imperial Valley.

In the report we developed a year ago, we surveyed possible venues for the events. Our events consultant suggested we budget \$35 per person to cover the costs of the venue, refreshments and materials. These are reflected in the budget.

#### Phase IV: Partnership Outreach and Content Distribution

Once the initial phases of outreach are completed and partners have been aligned, it will be necessary to create an outreach and distribution network that aggregates all partners in one virtual space. After careful consideration, we've determined the easiest and most effective way to create this space is to use a password-protected page on our own Wordpress site. The passwords will be mailed out in bulk through our CRM, Salesforce, to relevant groups of publishers prior to the article's publication. Inside the password-protected page, we will have the entire article, its graphic(s), and a short summary paragraph for publications with limited space to use in place of the full article.

**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?**

Executive Director Lorie Hearn will oversee the development and execution of the project, as well as the recruitment of a social media manager  
inewssource staffer Brad Racino, who manages our website and oversees our social media efforts  
Executive Assistant Victoria Mendiola  
Social media manager - This person, who will be a contractor, will execute the plan. With the help of matching funds inewssource has raised locally, we can build and maintain the program through mid April. By that point, we should have the systems in place to maintain it long-term.

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

We will measure progress in three phases.  
Phase one will measure the growth in Twitter, Facebook and Google+ followers on three occasions using each platform's built-in measurement tools. These analytics can be supplied to INN on Day 1, which would be the baseline measurement. The second set would be supplied at the end of our first 90 days after implementation. The third would be supplied six months later, after the network is established and running at full speed. Since Google+ does not yet have sophisticated measurement tools, we can only supply one key performance indicator, which would be growth in the number of people who put inewssource in their 'circles.'

Phase two will measure reach and impact, and again would use the built-in measurement tools in social media platforms as well as Google Analytics. From Analytics, we would measure our website's growth from social media traffic from Day 1 through Day 90, then six months later. From built-in measurement tools, we'd supply Facebook "reach" and Twitter mentions and retweets over the same period. Since Google+ does not yet have sophisticated measurement tools, we can only supply one key performance indicator, which would be growth in the number of people who put inewssource in their 'circles.'

Phase three will measure impact through distribution. Six months after rolling out our online sharing platform, we will provide INN with a detailed breakdown of how many outlets shared our content, respective pageviews, related traffic to our site, and growth, if any, in donations or fee-for-content payments, as well as any anecdotal evidence of success and impact.

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

If, by mid-April, we have 20 new outlets using our material, I would call that a giant step toward success. And equally giant step would be having acquainted most of the outlets on our list with our organization and material.  
Real success, which should mean real revenue potential, would be increasing our newsletter signup list in the six-month span of the project from the current 800 to about 1,200. That would give our content a much larger audience of people who care about in-depth journalism. Hopefully, that also will translate into many new contributions to support that content.

That said, this project is a shovel-ready experiment -- as the funders have encouraged -- which is primarily aimed at grassroots community news outlets, rather than large, established legacy media. (There aren't many of those left in San Diego and Imperial counties.) Our colleagues who run

state investigative centers have large and small media partners who distribute their content in traditional ways. The kind of community publications and news sites we are talking about are far less structured. In some ways, they will be easier to engage; in other ways, it will be harder to develop and maintain a consistency with them.

We feel strongly this is a way to reach an audience that does not rely on traditional media for their local news. If we are successful, we will be delighted to share our journey with INN members.

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

Obviously, we will be providing INN with detailed reports. We will be happy to share password-protected access to our analytics if you feel that is necessary.

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

By connecting with local news outlets and other distribution channels, inewsource hopes to learn how it can better personalize its investigations to build audience and supporters. In other words, how can we make big, in-depth investigations relevant to micro local communities? Listening to local publishers and engaging with them should in theory improve the ability of inewsource to reach more affected citizens. These publishers know their communities best. They can help us frame the conversation around our projects and tease out the information that is most important to their audiences. We hope to learn efficient ways to manage the network without sacrificing the personal interaction that is essential to keeping it going.

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

inewsource has been contemplating this network for more than three years, chipping away as time and resources permit. We invested in this idea by contracting for development of a plan more than a year ago. We also have laid the groundwork in other ways, including: 1) Implementing a robust social media plan over the past 18 months that has increased our exposure across all platforms, including Reddit. Most of our traffic now comes through social media. 2) Signed on to Salesforce as our CRM for donor management and outreach. Having a CRM in place will help manage the news network contacts as well. 3) Contracted for analysis of our analytics, development of custom dashboards, analysis of audience and recommendations for website optimization. This is complete. 4) We have Board of Directors recognition of the importance of social media in our overall goals for sustainability, and at least one director has offered to match the INN-Knight grant to make this proposal a reality and to give its effectiveness time to play out.

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

The timing couldn't be better. inewsource has had a formal relationship with KPBS for more than two years. The radio, television and web platforms have elevated our profile in the community and our association with KPBS has engendered much good will. At the same time, the relationship has created a branding challenge for us. Generally, the audience doesn't realize inewsource is a separate nonprofit, with a focused mission and a separate need for support. We can capitalize on our name recognition but in building the news network, we will establish our brand and build a following that will come from community engagement with our content. Distinguishing our brand requires intimate community conversations. It is essential for our long-term maintenance and growth.

**Upload your project budget**

[inewsources budget\\_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.**

[Community new list 2014.xlsx](#)