

INNOvation Fund Application

Submission Date	2014-03-03 22:36:09
Organization Name	San Francisco Public Press
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	27-1275141
Website address	sfpublicpress.org
Phone Number	(415) 846-5346
Applicant's name	Lila LaHood
Title:	Publisher
Contact email	lila@sfpublicpress.org
Proposed Start Date	05-01-2014
Proposed End Date	11-30-2014
Total estimated project budget	\$50,000
Request amount:	\$35,000
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	The San Francisco Public Press is a nonprofit news organization producing local, public-interest news online and in a quarterly print newspaper. The mission of the Public Press is to enrich civic life in San Francisco by delivering public-interest journalism to broad and diverse audiences through print and interactive media not supported by advertising.
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.	<p>The Public Press will launch a street mobilization program that will increase the visibility of the organization, expand our audience and grow the funnel of readers who are most likely to become paid member-subscribers. This program is key to our long-term goal of building a broad base of public support through small, individual donations and decreasing dependence on foundation grants.</p> <p>We will deploy a crew of street hawker-canvassers to participate in and track public-facing activities that increase engagement and raise revenue to support local public-interest journalism. We will experiment with a range of strategies, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• selling the quarterly ad-free paper for \$1 per copy• offering free newspapers in exchange for signing up for our weekly email newsletter• surveying people about their interest in supporting public media and unmet news and information needs• soliciting donations

We will equip our street hawker-canvassers with iPad Minis to demonstrate our news site, sfpublicpress.org — and to gather email addresses, collect survey responses and process donations.

This program will dovetail with our upcoming Pedal-Powered News initiative, an effort to expand distribution and increase community engagement using bicycles to deliver the newspaper to nearly 100 retail locations and community centers, and to members' homes across San Francisco. We are funding Pedal-Powered News through a Kickstarter campaign set to launch in April, with matching funds from the Knight Foundation.

The ability to show off our hard-copy print edition as an inviting conversation starter will give our street canvassers an advantage over street fundraisers for other nonprofits whose goal is to solicit only donations.

Our approach will:

- immediately increase revenue through newspaper sales
- inform new audiences about the Public Press' journalism in print and online
- engage community members in conversations about their news priorities
- establish communication connections for future donation requests
- raise money through donations from people already familiar with our brand

Gathering email addresses could prove to be the most valuable activity. We have found that the Public Press establishes stronger bonds with newsletter subscribers than with those who follow the organization only on social media. Newsletter subscribers are the most likely to convert to being paid members.

We will recruit and train all of our hawker-canvassers to be well-informed, engaged “news ambassadors.” As representatives of the Public Press, they will reflect the organization in the best light and be able to articulate our project-based investigative approach and innovative aggregation of the best of more than two-dozen local public media organizations.

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?

Publisher Lila LaHood will supervise the project with assistance from Executive Director Michael Stoll. We will hire four part-time street hawker-canvassers, one of whom will be an assigned project coordinator. We will recruit candidates with experience in sales, canvassing and community organizing.

The project coordinator will be responsible for maintaining work schedules for hawker-canvassers; entering sales data, email sign-ups and new members into Salesforce; analyzing data; and submitting money to the publisher. Collectively, these part-time contractors will work 40 to 50 hours per week.

How will you measure progress? Please be specific and concrete

This project offers clear opportunities for tracking progress. Our staff will report the following metrics on a weekly basis:

about the metrics you will use and how and when you will provide them to us for validation.

- number of newspapers sold
- number of newspapers given away in exchange for email addresses
- number of new memberships (total from all organization activities)
- amount of money raised from new memberships (from all organization activities)
- number of new memberships attributable to hawker-canvasser activities
- amount of money raised from new memberships attributable to hawker-canvasser activities

Because it will be important to track the effectiveness of these engagement strategies, our staff will also report on a weekly basis (a) the number of hours spent at farmers markets, street festivals and other pedestrian-dense events, (b) the time spent on specific hawking and canvassing activities at each location, (c) the number of new social media followers, and (d) the total Web traffic on sfpublicpress.org.

Our long-term challenge is to build the donation funnel in order to expand our base of member-donors to generate a significant source of reliable funding. Taking cues from public radio, we aspire to achieving a donation rate of 10 percent among regular readers. To that end, we expect this street hawker project to bolster both audience engagement and revenue.

Some of our key goals during this six-month project include:

- Growing our newsletter mailing list — currently at 1,400 subscribers — by 3,600 email addresses so that we will have at least 5,000 newsletter subscribers.
- Growing income from newspapers sold by \$4,500 (about doubling current six-month sales income).
- Growing six-month revenue from paid memberships by \$10,500 (an increase of about 75 percent).
- Determining the most effective street mobilization strategies for building audience engagement and generating revenue, so that we can incorporate these sustainable activities into our ongoing operations.

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 experimenting with various approaches — sales, digital demonstrations, email sign-ups, direct donation solicitations — we will learn during early phases of this project what works best, and will adjust our activities to maximize revenue and engagement.

This project will help the Public Press generate revenue, enhance visibility, engage with readers and provide guidance and data to other nonprofit news organizations pursuing similar face-to-face outreach activities.

Our goal is to craft an ongoing street engagement program that generates enough revenue to be self-sustaining and provide additional operating funds for the organization.

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

Among nonprofit news organizations, the Public Press is uniquely positioned to connect with community members on the street because we distribute a newsprint edition that serves as its own marketing and can be a powerful face-to-

face engagement tool.

And this is the right place to test such a scheme: San Francisco's vibrant street culture is extraordinarily conducive to grassroots marketing because its urban density creates many opportunities for rapid pedestrian interactions. Bike-friendly events, daily farmers markets, weekly neighborhood festivals, parades and other seasonal public gatherings make it easy to connect with people one on one.

Since 2010, we have experimented with using volunteers to sell newspapers at farmers markets and to give away copies at street festivals. From these experiments, we have learned that a team of two can sell about 25 papers per hour in a high-traffic zone.

While this intensive street mobilization project requires dedicated paid professional salespeople, it will also benefit from the Public Press' deep well of volunteers; more than two-dozen people have helped distribute papers and could be activated to participate in supporting this new initiative.

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

Across the country, newspaper print distribution is in flux; in some smaller markets, it has slowed its once-precipitous decline. It is clear that this medium is not going away, but it is being transformed. Within this changing landscape, we see opportunities for innovation to occur not just in doing journalism, but also in the business and ownership models — and for local news publishers, in the sense of community generated by interpersonal engagement.

For the Public Press, this move makes sense in terms of our organizational development. The Public Press is now in a position to diversify and expand its revenue sources with the aim of reducing dependence on foundation grants. This step requires increasing our visibility in the community, and connecting with individuals who want to find ways to support local public media.

Upload your project budget

[INNovation-Fund-Project-Budget-SFPP-FINAL.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.

[Public Press attachments.zip](#)