

INNOVATION Fund Application

Submission Date	2014-03-03 19:34:48
Organization Name	InvestigateWest
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	
Website address	www.invw.org
Phone Number	
Applicant's name	Jason Alcorn
Title:	Associate Director
Contact email	
Proposed Start Date	05-01-2014
Proposed End Date	09-30-2014
Total estimated project budget	15,000
Request amount:	15,000
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	InvestigateWest is an independent nonprofit journalism studio for the Pacific Northwest. We invest in investigative reporting on the environment, public health, and government accountability and leverage a network of media partners to produce and distribute our work where it can have the greatest impact.
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>InvestigateWest and Seattle NPR affiliate KUOW are embarking on a collaborative project to launch a new regular branded series — built on InvestigateWest’s expertise in investigative and explanatory journalism. The series solves a challenge faced by each organization. InvestigateWest has high-quality content but needs to reach a larger audience to generate substantial revenue. KUOW has that audience, but lacks the infrastructure to generate regular investigative journalism and monetize it through individual member support and underwriting.</p> <p>Our solution is to partner in making a market in the Puget Sound region for high-quality investigative journalism. A regular, branded series will allow listeners to look forward to broadcasts, find related material online, and support the series financially. It will also manufacture new opportunities for KUOW and InvestigateWest to solicit premium on-air underwriting and event sponsorships from businesses and institutions that want to reach a highly engaged, civically minded and influential local audience.</p> <p>Most installments will follow our well-established studio</p>

model: InvestigateWest will provide the foundation of a story — through data analysis, public records, and traditional reporting — and KUOW will add the narrative storytelling that makes it must-listen radio. The unbundled pieces will run during drive time, when station listenership is highest. InvestigateWest will receive greater distribution for its stories, and KUOW will have a recognizable showcase for its local investigative journalism. Both organizations will benefit from opportunities to increase audience engagement generated by the series: in-studio interviews, public conversations with sources and experts, a podcast, and documentary photography exhibitions.

We are requesting \$15,000 from the INNovation Fund to bring the new series to market, including program design and market testing. (See Project Plan, below.) We subscribe to the philosophy that “products should be released early and iterated often.” Our project plan is designed to organically build an audience while spending less money than new radio series have traditionally required. The project budget will cover staff and expenses for program design and creative. Most importantly, it will also allow us to appropriately market test our ideas not only with listeners and community leaders, but also with potential funders. The metric of success is straightforward: actual and projected revenue the series can generate.

Project Plan

- **Series Design.** Starting with a two-day scrum in Seattle, Wash., with project staff from KUOW and InvestigateWest and a team of advisors, we will identify the principles for the new series. Using the lessons learned from our 2013 test projects, we will design a series concept and framework that fulfills the shared editorial goals of both organizations. We will consider new ways to tell stories and engage the community, based on input from the year-old KUOW community engagement team and InvestigateWest’s experience with journalism that has an impact on public and corporate practice.
- **Brand Design.** When we finish the program design, we will invite pro bono creative input from local firms as we develop the look and feel of the series, including series name and logo, visual brand, and collateral such as t-shirts. The logo and collateral will be commissioned through 99designs.com. In order to series to extend from on-air to online to in-person events, it’s important that we have a lively and consistent brand experience for listeners wherever and whenever they encounter the content.
- **Market Testing.** Market testing will be the most important and lengthiest part of bringing the series to market, and it will proceed on two tracks. For its part, KUOW’s underwriting team will take the new product to its contacts at local businesses and institutions to gauge interest and revenue potential. (Note: The underwriting team will be involved throughout the series design process, and we are deliberately working to develop a series that can earn financial support as well as audience interest.)
- **Beta Release.** The first produced installment of the series will be the second track of market testing. We will conduct four to six focus groups with KUOW and InvestigateWest

audiences, as well as community members outside our existing base of support, to solicit feedback, understand what audiences like and don't like about the series, and ask for input on future series topics that will be meaningful and interesting to the community.

Outcomes

Purpose of the Grant Request. Funding from the INNovation Fund will allow us to:

- Improve the quality and appeal of how investigative journalism is delivered to market
- Increase the audience for InvestigateWest's journalism
- Create a revenue-generating platform for investigative journalism that is self-sustaining

Project Deliverables include:

- Public radio series with compelling stories based on investigative journalism
- Market research on branding public interest journalism in the Puget Sound region
- Event series that engages traditional and non-traditional news consumers

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?

Project Staff and Advisors

- Jason Alcorn, Associate Director, InvestigateWest
- Robert McClure, Executive Director, InvestigateWest
- Mark Briggs, Board Member, InvestigateWest
- Cathy Duchamp, News Director, KUOW
- John R. Hill, Director of Corporate Support, KUOW
- Carolyn Dodge, Director of Community Engagement, KUOW

Outside Vendors

We will invite pro bono design input from Pyramid Communications or another local firm during the Series Design and Brand Design phases. We will use 99designs.com to solicit an original logo and marketing collateral for the project. We will use Elance.com to transcribe focus group audio recordings in order that the feedback can be summarized and shared with the project team and INN.

About the Partners

InvestigateWest is a full-service nonprofit journalism studio serving the Pacific Northwest, with an annual reach of more than 3.7 million. We invest in investigative reporting on the environment, public health, and government accountability and leverage a network of media partners to produce and distribute our work where it can have the greatest impact.

KUOW serves communities in the Puget Sound region, Western Washington and Southern British Columbia, with an audience of more than 354,000 listeners each week. Its mission is to create and serve an informed public, one challenged and invigorated by an understanding and appreciation of events, ideas and cultures.

How will you measure progress? Please be specific and concrete about the metrics you will use and how and when you will provide them to us for validation.

We will measure the success of this project by the future revenue commitments and projected income we are able to secure by the end of the project plan defined above, i.e., the beta release of the first installment in the series.

- Unsatisfactory: Less than \$10,000 in revenue commitments
- Target: \$10,000 in revenue commitments
- Very good: More than \$10,000 in revenue commitments

This target is based on the minimum revenue required to report and produce the next installment of the series, which will proceed on a quarterly schedule. As the audience and influence of the series grows, we expect revenue will increase against relatively flat costs. Currently, KUOW receives \$4,645,369 per year in business support. If a new locally produced, high-value series can increase business support by just 1 percent in the first 12 months, it will generate nearly \$50,000 in new revenue from businesses alone.

We expect to provide full results to INN and the Knight Foundation approximately five months after the project kickoff in early May.

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

After the grant period, we see three potential paths to sustainability. The first possibility — and our priority, as described above — is that the project will generate enough income through underwriting, sponsorships, and related income streams (e.g., new memberships, ticket sales) to cover 100 percent of its operational costs and either subsidize or wholly cover the reporting costs of both partners going forward. The second possibility is that the series becomes a magnet for philanthropic support of journalism in Seattle, a metro region that hasn't yet supported nonprofit journalism as robustly as other cities have, despite the greater Seattle area's wealth. It's likely that the project will grow through a combination of both revenue streams. The third — longer-term — possibility is crowdfunding: if the series can successfully build a loyal audience, we will consider a Kickstarter campaign to fund the editorial and production costs of its second year.

What we hope to learn is straightforward: What is the market for high-quality investigative journalism among underwriters and members of public radio? What topics, ideas and issues motivate support for investigative journalism? If we package investigative journalism with the answers to those questions in mind, can it generate ongoing revenue for both KUOW and InvestigateWest?

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

InvestigateWest associate director Jason Alcorn is a two-time alumnus of INN's Community Journalism Executive Training program and the author of InvestigateWest's business plan, which became the topic of a Columbia University-published case study for students of the business of journalism in 2013. He has a decade of experience leading technology projects and online strategy for nonprofit, public affairs and media organizations.

Under Alcorn's leadership in 2013, InvestigateWest and KUOW piloted an editorial partnership to understand how

each organization's strengths and expertise could complement each other. The two organizations have also worked together under the framework of the Program Venture Fund, a designated fund at KUOW for longform radio reporting.

A case study of that partnership from July 2013 —

Wandering uncovered the challenges that missing-person cases that involve dementia or Alzheimer's pose for police departments. With no state agency tracking such cases, InvestigateWest compiled our own database for Washington going back five years, and began to interview law enforcement officials and families. One case we delivered to KCTS 9 Television for a half-hour TV special. A second case we delivered to KUOW for a two-part radio series. We shared with each partner a five-page story brief outlining the major issues our reporting uncovered, the status quo in Washington in national context, and a summary of the best practices and potential solutions put forward by experts in the field. We also shared names and contact information of the sources we had pre-interviewed. The published package included 8 minutes of radio, 30 minutes of television, and print distribution with five newspapers with a combined circulation of over 200,000. KUOW's reporting was solutions journalism at its best: exploring steps taken to prevent future tragedy by one community that had already experienced the death of a local senior from wandering. The joint effort led to a screening by the Alzheimer's Association of Western and Central Washington, and the stories informed Oregon legislation in 2014 to create a Silver Alert system that mandates written policies and formal training for police officers across the state.

The proposed project has the full support of both organizations.

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

In fall 2013, KUOW made the biggest change to its programming in decades when it cancelled three locally produced programs in a major rescheduling of its midday programming. It's now building a new format and structure for more and better local coverage under the leadership of a new general manager, Caryn Mathes, installed in January. That alone makes this project particularly well timed, as the station sets its sights on innovation in audience, content and technology and makes plans for the 2014-2015 fiscal year and beyond.

We would also point to the success of recent feature reporting at KUOW, such as the 4-part series "Black in Seattle," about the life of young black professionals in Seattle that sparked a robust community conversation. The station has a long-standing hunger for a harder edge and a proven model for how to find and foster engagement, while InvestigateWest has nearly five years experience producing consequential investigative journalism. InvestigateWest also received funding in January for new staff to oversee event and community management, and this project would put the new hire in a position to hit the ground running.

Overall, InvestigateWest is coming off a year of substantial institutional growth. Income from our membership program and individual donors grew 300 percent, Seattle Magazine

recognized our executive director as one of Seattle's most influential people, and more and more people look to us for in-depth watchdog reporting. We can take advantage of that momentum with this project, to grow beyond our core supporters and leverage our valuable editorial assets to create a sustaining, mutually beneficial business relationship with KUOW.

Upload your project budget

[IW Project Budget.xlsx](#)