

INNOVATION Fund Application

Submission Date	2014-02-25 10:11:43
Organization Name	Iowa Center for Public Affairs Journalism-IowaWatch
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	
Website address	http://iowawatch.org
Phone Number	
Applicant's name	Lyle Muller
Title:	Executive Director-Editor
Contact email	
Proposed Start Date	02-25-2014
Proposed End Date	08-31-2014
Total estimated project budget	\$56,145
Request amount:	\$25,000
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	The Iowa Center for Public Affairs Journalism-IowaWatch is an independent, non-profit news service founded in 2010 to maintain an independent, non-partisan journalistic program dedicated to producing and encouraging explanatory and investigative journalism in Iowa, engaging in collaborative reporting efforts with Iowa news organizations, and educating journalism students to do this kind of work at a high, ethical level. Our Center informs the issues-aware public that consumes news on multiple platforms so that it can be armed with the knowledge necessary to play its role in a democracy.
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 Iowa Center for Public Affairs Journalism-IowaWatch seeks funds for a statewide audience engagement program that takes its reporting to new audiences via two methods: a weekly statewide radio program and IowaWatch-based public forums in cities where the program is aired. We are eager to expand our audience, and believe that doing so will help us reach on the business side more potential personal and corporate funders – through donations, underwriting and advertising – than we reach now through our heavy reliance on newspapers.</p> <p>IowaWatch's business plan for 2014 calls for testing possible products that can produce revenue and move the organization closer to self-sustainability. The radio program is an easy-to-grasp concept for underwriters and advertisers to whom we want to make pitches for financial support. At first blush radio might seem to be an aging,</p>

traditional format. But we want to apply a blue ocean strategy to the medium. (“Blue Ocean Strategy”, W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, Harvard Business School Press, 2005) With this strategy we consider radio to be a portion of vast and uncharted waters where competition for a particular kind of programming doesn’t exist. In that spot, IowaWatch can be a partner that helps stations that have reduced resources to do community affairs programming. In this partnership, IowaWatch helps the stations serve their public and the stations help IowaWatch build an audience and influence that is needed in order to expand our influence and fundraising efforts.

Moreover, we will post each radio show and video from interviews for the show on our website, IowaWatch.org/. This will give news consumers multimedia options at our site and IowaWatch an opportunity to grow an audience that uses popular modes of communication – podcasts, and radio via the Internet.

EDITORIAL

The editorial effort will stem mostly from stories covered by IowaWatch.org but also may follow impactful investigative reporting done by other media in Iowa to which IowaWatch wants to give attention.

Radio

The radio program is the key ingredient for this project. A weekly program would be 23 minutes long, to fill out a 30-minute block that includes a radio station’s local news, weather and advertising block. The format will consist of a producer/host airing a packaged radio version of an IowaWatch report that either is from IowaWatch.org or which is original for the radio show, interviewing an IowaWatch journalist involved in the report, and interviewing newsmakers and those feeling the story’s impact. It will be distributed by the host/producer to a network of stations that have been lined up to air the program. The expectation is that the network covers the entire state geographically. Radio stations will determine when they air the programs. The producer/host will make audio cuts available to partner radio stations ahead of the show’s airing so that the stations can use them in newscasts, for their news value but also promotional value for the weekly show. Additionally, the radio show and video of interviews conducted for the show will be posted at IowaWatch.org, providing our website with multimedia content that interests news consumers.

The pilot project will be placed on select Iowa radio stations based on their geographic location, signal strength, and demonstrated commitment to community-based programming and service. The producer/host is targeting placement on 10 stations by the time the program starts, with additional stations to be added as the pilot continues, and/or for any extension of the project beyond the pilot.

The radio project is being done in phases. Decisions on whether to proceed or drop the project, based on a gauge of audience engagement and financial sustainability, will be made at the end of each phase:

- Phase I: Develop the radio show and establish an initial

network of six radio stations – April 1-April 30, 2014. We will proceed to Phase II if successful obtaining this grant.

- Phase II: Produce 13 programs, launch the weekly series the weekend of July 5, add stations to the network, measure audience response, show potential financial supporters what we have, and hold a minimum of three community forums – May 1-August 31, 2014. We will proceed to the next phase if successful attracting funding that sustains the program for another quarter and leads us to believe funding for a full year can be raised.

- Phase III: Commit to the program for one additional year with a combination of the weekly radio show; once monthly forums in a community where the show is aired; and organized pitches for financial support in the form of underwriting, advertising and/or listener donations. At this point we have to be confident that the program will sustain a full-time staffer who hosts, produces and markets the radio show and raises the funds necessary to pay all of the program's costs while helping where pertinent and practical to raise additional money related to the radio show that supports IowaWatch's operating budget. September 1-August 31, 2015. We will proceed to a Phase IV, to be determined, if financial support exists to do so.

Community forums

We want to be a catalyst for community discussion about topics, issues, trends and policies that affect Iowans' lives. Topics we are prepared to present now include: how to improve farm safety, working conditions for seasonal migrant farm workers in Iowa, what Iowa needs to do to address meth addiction among mothers who pass the habit on to their children, what Iowa should do about voting accessibility, and how Iowa can narrow an opportunity gap that exists among its white, black and Latino residents. Many of the topics would be critical during upcoming political campaigns, notably Iowa's midterm elections in 2014 and first-in-the-nation presidential caucuses in which no incumbent is running in 2016.

We would go to a community where our show is aired and invite people to discuss an IowaWatch issue resonating in that community. The local radio station would be invited to be a co-sponsor. We want to facilitate discussion that is important locally. We do not want to portray ourselves as strangers swooping in for a night and then leaving with some cash. We would determine during the phase funded by this grant whether or not one forum a month is a manageable goal.

An IowaWatch journalist would moderate the forum, or co-moderate if the radio partner wants to help with those duties. The format would be:

- Introductions and acknowledgment of the program's sponsor or sponsors.
- A summary of the story with a video report.
- A panel of three or four experts who have something to say about the topic.
- Comments and questions from the moderator and audience.
- Conclusion and acknowledgment of the program's sponsor or sponsors.

BUSINESS

Our expectation is that we approach corporate and private donors who have an interest in having a lively state and being attached to public affairs discussion in which solutions are explored and possibly found. We would approach corporations established in Iowa or with strong Iowa ties about underwriting the show's costs in exchange for a message that gives them credit. We are not opposed to attaching a produced ad to the end of the radio show.

Likewise, we want to approach those corporate and private donors to be general financial donors to our public forums. For each of these potential income-producing opportunities we need to do more research on what we reasonably could charge an underwriter for both the radio show and public forums. We have received preliminary feedback from people at a handful of large Iowa-based corporations who decide whether or not to buy advertising or support non-profit charities.

IowaWatch's next organizational need is a collection of products people feel they need enough that they would pay for them, and to have someone who can devote time to market and sell those products. The producer/host can provide one of those products – a radio program. Existing staff, volunteer subject matter experts and, we hope, local radio stations can provide another product – local forums. The producer/host and IowaWatch executive editor can provide the marketing and sales.

The producer/host will start as an independent contractor. If we can secure this grant a decision will be made August 1 on whether or not the show will continue after its initial 13 weeks and whether or not discussions about making the producer/host a full-time IowaWatch position are warranted. Available funding, customer interest and audience demand will inform that decision.

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?

Jeff Stein: A contract employee from May 1-August 30, Stein will produce, host, market, collect verification data and help seek funding to sustain the radio program. He will distribute advance audio cuts for use by radio stations before the full show airs. He also will draw up contracts for stations agreeing to air the program and documentation for the use of IowaWatch content.

Stein, who will do preliminary work as an independent contractor in April with funds from another grant, is the executive director and legal counsel for the Iowa Broadcast News Association, which gives him important contacts and credibility with those who make programming decisions at multiple Iowa radio stations. He is a veteran journalist and educator who has been a political commentator on the Jim Bohannon national radio show, PBS Newshour and Fox News. He has been a moderator and, in some cases, an organizer of broadcast candidate debates for U.S. Congress and Iowa governor. He has worked for Iowa newspapers, radio stations and television stations for 35 years, including as on-air political analyst for KWWL-TV, WOI-TV, and WHO

Radio. The holder of a BA and JD from the University of Iowa, Stein has taught journalism at the college level for more than 20 years, including stints at Iowa State University, Buena Vista University-Marshalltown Center, Wartburg College, and William Penn University. He is a past president of the Northwest Broadcast News Association and past chair of the State Historical Society of Iowa board of trustees. A graduate of the University of Iowa, Stein has also produced a number of award-winning documentaries and broadcast programs; his latest, "From the Battlefield to the Homefront: Iowa Broadcasters Go To War", received awards for both its radio and television versions. A recipient of Iowa's highest news broadcast award, the Jack Shelley Award, the national Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History, he is recognized as the foremost broadcast historian in Iowa. His 2004 book "Making Waves: The People and Places of Iowa Broadcasting" is the only comprehensive published history of radio and television and their impact on the state of Iowa, while "One Week in June: The Iowa Floods of 2008" was a Barnes & Noble #1 best seller. His latest book is "Iowa's WHO Radio: The Voice of the Middle West". He also authored "Covering Iowa Law & Courts: A Guide for Journalists", now in its fourth edition, published by the Iowa State Bar Association.

Lauren Mills: IowaWatch full-time staff data analyst/journalist will work closely on community forums and also do reports and be interviewed for the radio show. She works closely with collaborating news organizations. Mills joined IowaWatch shortly after its 2010 launch as a volunteer and student earning her BA degree at the University of Iowa and eventually became its assistant editor while in college. She returned to IowaWatch as a full-time staff journalist after working at the Sioux City Journal as a reporter.

Lyle Muller: IowaWatch's executive director-editor will oversee the project, serve as an organizer and host of some of the forums, do reports and be interviewed for the radio show, work with Stein on identifying and seeking financial resources for the radio show, and seek additional resources for the forum series. Before joining IowaWatch in May 2012 Muller was editor of The Gazette (Cedar Rapids, IA), which is owned by a multimedia company that also owns KCRG television and other digital and publishing enterprises. Muller held several reporting and editing positions during his 25 years with the company. A 1992 Council for the Advancement of Science Writing national fellow, his focus as a reporter was on health, science and higher education. He is a member of the Iowa Newspaper Foundation Board of Directors and Iowa Newspaper Association Government Relations Committee. He has taught political reporting and editing at the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication as an adjunct faculty member. He organized one of the three televised debates in Iowa's 2010 gubernatorial race. He was a radio and television news reporter at the start of his journalism career. He is an occasional interview guest on radio and television news programs and regular monthly guest on talk shows on WMT radio in Cedar Rapids and KXIC radio in Iowa City. He has a BA from the University of Iowa.

Erin Jordan: The president of The Iowa Center for Public

Affairs Journalism board of directors will help plan and organize some of the public forums. Jordan is an investigative reporter for The Gazette and KCRG-TV9 news in Cedar Rapids. She received the Iowa Newspaper Foundation's Harrison "Skip" Weber Investigative Reporting Award in 2012. Before joining The Gazette, Jordan was the Iowa City Bureau reporter for the Des Moines Register from 2003 to 2009. She has also taught at the University of Iowa's Summer Journalism Workshop and Iowa Young Writer's Studio. Jordan has a BA from Iowa State University.

Stephen Berry: The cofounder and advisor for IowaWatch will be called upon to be interviewed on the radio show. He is a journalism professor at The University of Iowa and author of the book "Watchdog Journalism: The Art of Investigative Reporting" (Oxford, 2009). Before coming to the UI in August 2003, Berry was a journalist at the Los Angeles Times for seven years, mostly as an investigative reporter. In 1993, while at the Orlando Sentinel, Berry and his reporting partner won a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting. The four-part project – "Tainted Cash or Easy Money?" exposed abuses of power and racial targeting by an elite squad of deputies of the sheriff in Volusia County, Florida. Berry holds a BA from the University of Montevallo in Montevallo, Alabama, and MA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Radio station partners: We will ask representatives of local radio stations to assist with staging and promoting public forums.

Student volunteers: We occasionally will use student volunteers to report stories and be interviewed on the radio program, and to help plan and stage some public forums.

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 report progress on August 1, 2014, and September 5, 2014. We will measure that progress by:

- The number of radio stations airing the program. We initially wanted to start with six and grow from there but increased that to 10 after the initial response from stations we approached. We will have a count from the number of agreements signed by participating stations.
- The number of audio cuts used by stations in newscasts in advance of the full program airing. We will seek documentation, for the purposes of this grant but also for measuring our impact for other potential funders.
- Participating radio stations' estimated audience, where possible. Some stations have not subscribed to audience measurement services.
- The number of forums held and their attendance. We want to hold a minimum of three, each in a different community.
- Money raised from corporate underwriters/sponsors. We are trying to get better estimates during Phase I research. The levels we have identified for this grant are:
 - a. \$1,000 – getting somewhere but cannot be sure where.
 - b. \$1,500 – the minimum of what we were hoping during this test.
 - c. \$5,000 – underwriters are willing to try us, and we take what we learned when deciding whether or not to proceed.
 - d. \$10,000 – a major underwriter is willing to try us, we take what we learned and extend the program for part of another quarter, and find more underwriters.
- Money raised from personal donors. We will use marketing

to build audience interest and gauge the results. The level we will eye for this grant are:

- a. \$500 – getting somewhere but cannot be sure where.
- b. \$1,000 – the minimum of what we were hoping during this test.
- c. \$5,000 – a significant donor is willing to try us, we take what we learned from that when deciding whether or not to proceed.
- d. \$10,000 – more than one significant donor is willing to try us, we take what we learned from that and extend the program for part of another quarter, and find more donors.

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

1. Whether or not a financially sustainable market exists for an IowaWatch public affairs program for commercial radio stations in Iowa and, if so, what adjustments we need to make for continued growth.
2. Whether or not an IowaWatch public affairs program for commercial radio stations in Iowa can generate IowaWatch operating income, through a combination of:
 - a. Underwriting and/or advertising income from the radio show that exceeds radio show expenses.
 - b. Underwriting/sponsorships of community forums.
 - c. Personal or corporate donations related to the programming and the exposure to IowaWatch it provides.
3. Whether or not to proceed beyond the test period with more of this programming.
4. Whether or not to attempt another project. We have another in mind but want to manage within our available resources.

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

We believe we have the best possible team for this project. Jeff Stein brings to the radio project the best array of experience and contacts in the state. Lyle Muller has had experience organizing community events – he organized and managed one of the three Iowa gubernatorial debates in 2010. Lauren Mills brings enthusiasm, smarts and new ways of looking at and presenting journalism. Local radio stations bring connections and context for holding forums in their specific communities. Student volunteers bring necessary content and labor. Erin Jordan and Stephen Berry bring their willingness to devote energy to a worthy cause, credibility and knowledge.

We have a running start for this program and a well-developed plan.

We have reached during a series of discussions a memorandum of agreement with Stein that can lead to a five-month independent contract for his services. Stein already has developed a format for the initial launch of 13 programs, beginning the weekend of July 5, 2014. He had secured by February 24, 2014, commitments from four radio stations willing to air the program. A fifth station was interested and three others were considering it. He has instant credibility with broadcasters and connections with the industry. He has secured recording facilities at a radio station willing to waive any fee for their use. He has production expertise and a system for delivering the programs and audio cuts to participating radio stations. IowaWatch has a library of relevant stories and credibility for doing good work that has been published in Iowa's largest newspapers. IowaWatch also has some name recognition with broadcasters from a presentation Muller made about

the organization at the 2013 Iowa Broadcast News Association convention.

Muller already has started to contact a handful of potential corporate partners, a process that has generated at least one statewide corporation willing to listen to more after we develop sponsorship details in our plan. We already have been told “no” by companies that say the program does not fit their marketing model or budget but those delivering that response also have been encouraging about the program. Some have offered advice on how to attract funds for it from other sources.

One other important factor is that IowaWatch has been part of two Community Journalism Executive Training sessions, during which executives of non-profit and community based journalism organizations have committed to building sustainable business models. We are trying to apply what we learned in those sessions.

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

Commercial radio in Iowa lacks local public affairs radio programming that reports on and examines in detail public matters. A handful of local talk shows exist but, though they include interviews about local issues, their focus is on the host and his or her point of view and do not include original reporting or transparency about a reporter’s approach to the story. Iowa Public Radio is the only outlet in Iowa that has regular public affairs programming that comes close to what IowaWatch proposes, yet our program differs in many ways.

American radio stations are licensed to serve the public interest, convenience, and necessity. As such, they are required to air news and public affairs programming. However, the amount and quality of that programming varies widely.

IowaWatch expects to fill a void at commercial radio stations that, even in this post-deregulation era are told they must prove on a quarterly basis that they have in good faith given the most significant treatment to issues believed to be a community concern. (The Information Needs of Communities: The changing media landscape in a broadband age, The Policy and Regulatory Landscape, Federal Communications Commission, July 2011) That July 2011 Federal Communications Commission report on the changing landscape of the digital age argued that the commission’s public interest obligation requirement for broadcasters was broken but still matters. It suggested that:

- "On close inspection, some aspects of the modern media landscape may seem surprising:
- An abundance of media outlets does not translate into an abundance of reporting. In many communities, there are now more outlets, but less local accountability reporting.
 - While digital technology has empowered people in many ways, the concurrent decline in local reporting has, in other cases, shifted power away from citizens to government and other powerful institutions, which can more often set the news agenda.
 - Far from being nearly extinct dinosaurs, the traditional media players—TV stations and newspapers—have emerged as the largest providers of local news online.

- The nonprofit media sector has become far more varied, and important, than ever before. It now includes state public affairs networks, wikis, local news websites, organizations producing investigative reporting, and journalism schools as well as low-power FM stations, traditional public radio and TV, educational shows on satellite TV, and public access channels. Most of the players neither receive, nor seek, government funds.

- Rather than seeing themselves only as competitors, commercial and nonprofit media are now finding it increasingly useful to collaborate."

(The Information Needs of Communities: The changing media landscape in a broadband age, Executive Summary, Federal Communications Commission, July 2011)

The report goes on to argue that, while innovations in the digital age have put local information efforts at risk, they also present great opportunities. "In other words, we find ourselves in an unusual moment when ignoring the ailments of local media will mean that serious harm may be done to our communities—but paying attention to them will enable Americans to develop, literally, the best media system the nation has ever had," the report suggests.

Risks exist with our proposal. Radio stations will start by placing the program at a time for which the audience is small, although we are requesting times when the audience is at least recognizable. The biggest risk is that underwriters/advertisers and potential personal and corporate donors may not find enough value in the programming to support it financially. We are realistic about that possibility and will learn, and will not be afraid to "fail fast". But we think we have something that can work in terms of engaging new audiences and opening the door to financial support. A grant from the Knight Local Media Initiative can help us either launch a sustainable success, or learn enough to share with other nonprofit news organizations like ours and move on to something else. Either way, we advance.

Upload your project budget

[INNovation-Fund-Project-Budget.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.

[Zip folder for Knight grant app.zip](#)