

INNnovation Fund Application Round 2

Submission Date	2014-09-02 10:11:24
Organization Name	The Lens
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	
Website address	TheLensNola.org
Phone Number	
Applicant's name	Anne Mueller
Title:	Development Director
Contact email	
Proposed Start Date	9-1-2014
Proposed End Date	08-30-2015
Total estimated budget for the proposed project	9000
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.	745,000
Request amount:	7500
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	The Lens is New Orleans' only nonprofit, public-interest newsroom. Our mission: to educate, engage and empower the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. We do that by providing the information they need to advocate for more just and accountable government.
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>A distinguishing feature of The Lens is our willingness to engage and talk with – not to – our readers. A recent addition to our offline toolkit is the creation of a Speakers Bureau. The Speakers Bureau offers a community service which bridges the gap between our readers and our coverage, explaining how and why we report the news you get. Lens reporters and editors are available to speak to organizations, corporations and individuals interested in learning about things ranging from what a nonprofit newsroom looks like, how we do what we do,</p> <p>Our sustainability plans are clear. We initially relied on the support of national foundations. With the addition of business side staff we expanded our revenue portfolio to include members (more than 500). In the past two years we</p>

have added more than 20 foundations, including local, sponsorship opportunities, and earned income from publishing partners and Google surveys. Our area of largest growth potential is with sponsorship and earned income. The Speakers Bureau adds to the earned income piece.

Since our first published article in 2009 Lens reporters have been invited to speak to various groups about our work and the difference it's making in our community. We professionalized these requests and now when we receive these invitations request that the organization made a gift to support The Lens. As recently as yesterday the Citizens Diplomacy Council who we've done numerous presentations to in the past are now paying for what we're terming The Speakers Bureau. Theses presentations are already leading to increased revenue and in this case an international audience of investigative journalists.

Is this a new project?

Extension of an existing project. We are doing this now or have done it in the past year.

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?

Our reporters and editors, who are well versed on many topics, will speak to groups about myriad issues confronting New Orleans, as well as coastal land-loss and restoration along Louisiana's coast. Our topic areas include politics, land use, schools, criminal justice, the environment and city government.

Our veteran journalists along with a new breed, news technologists, work together to create a fresh model for reporting and consuming the news.

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

We've created a strong organization that meets our journalism, fund-raising and engagement needs.

Our progress will be deliberately measured with the following:

- By September of 2015 we will average 6 inquiries per month
- By September of 2015 we will have an average 2- 4 presentations a month.
- By September of 2015 we will average 25 people per presentation. We will use a sign in sheet to track the number of attendees and a donor database to determine attendees who become members.
- We will have at least 5% of presentation attendees become Lens newsletter subscribers.
- Event surveys will be used to gauge presentation strengths and weaknesses.

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

Success will be determined with the professionalization of utilizing our reporters and editors as educators for the community in the value and importance of information for a healthy community.

An increased, more invested and engaged readership along with a regular revenue stream will also be used to define the success of the Speakers Bureau.

At The Lens we often look to our peers for ideas to replicate in our community. Another determination of success would be if our peers determine that this model could be repeated

in their community.

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

INN will be able to validate the metrics and how the project is doing by increased readership and revenue.

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

In this past year, especially the past 4 months, we've thought a lot about what we offer the community and the importance of placing a financial value on what we offer while ensuring that our product is attainable for all.

Additionally, with our increased offline engagement we expect to learn more about how The Lens is perceived in community, what stories we should be pursuing, gain insight and input.

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

As New Orleans' only nonprofit newsroom reporting what others aren't we believe in our mission to we have a responsibility to educate, engage and empower the residents of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast by providing the information and analysis necessary to advocate for more accountable and just governance.

We are doing this online and offline. The demand for our founder, editors and reporters to tell our story isn't new. What is new is our willingness to ask those organizations to consider supporting The Lens, to understand that the service we provide isn't free. The response so far is encouraging.

We are creating innovative tools like The Vault, a repository of information gathered and produced through our open-data initiative. To date our news technologist has made 7 presentations to over 300 people. We can pinpoint a number of gifts that have come in as a result along with increased interest in sponsorships.

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

The Lens is a trusted news source. We are more than a news provider. We are essential in a time when people tend to not trust their news providers. We have a sense of responsibility to our readers who have come to rely on our reporting. Part of that responsibility is for us to have a level of discourse with our readers, on and offline, so they get to know us. The Speakers Bureau offers the community a more intimate way to learn about what we do, meet the reporters and understand their work ethic and how they find and report the news.

The interest in our work and reporting continues to increase. With the addition of reporting partners like The Hechinger Report and ProPublica, our reach will only continue to grow.

Upload your project budget

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