

Submission Date	2015-03-02 13:06:01
Organization Name	Investigative Post
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	
Website address	www.investigativepost.org
Phone Number	
Applicant's name	Kate Heidinger
Title:	Director of Development
Contact email	
Proposed Project Start Date	10-01-2015
Anticipated Project End Date	03-31-2016
Total estimated budget for the proposed project	\$35,000
Request amount from the INNnovation Fund:	\$35,000
What is the total annual budget for your organization or, if you are a fiscally-sponsored project of another organization, the total annual budget for your fiscally-sponsored project.	\$325,050
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	Investigative Post is a non-profit investigative reporting center serving Buffalo and Western New York. We have a two-fold mission: produce high-quality, high-impact investigative and analytical stories of importance to our community and train young journalists in public service journalism. Our audience is the general community, particularly those citizens with an interest in public affairs.
Describe in detail the business experiment 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 project that we are requesting funds for is a social media marketing and advertising campaign.</p> <p>Investigative Post has been successful in building local awareness and an audience through our media partnerships - including WGRZ, the local NBC affiliate - having grown our cumulative audience reach to 7.1 million viewers, listeners and readers in 2014. Unfortunately, traffic to our website accounts for only a small portion of our audience, which makes us over-reliant on our partners.</p> <p>Moreover, we know from our analytics that "our" readers - those who "like" our Facebook page, "follow" us on Twitter, and come directly to our website or via links contained in emails we send them - spend considerably more time on our site than those arriving through other sources. We are therefore of the belief that "our" social media fans and followers are of more value to us than those of WGRZ, i.e., spend more time on our site.</p> <p>We want to raise our public profile and build a base of supporters and followers directly associated with Investigative Post. We will use paid social</p>

media advertising supported by funding from the INNnovation Fund to promote Investigative Post's Facebook and Twitter pages with the intention of increasing our audience reach, increasing traffic to our website, marketing our events and promoting fundraising activities.

As of Feb. 24, Investigative Post had 1,266 Facebook fans and 1,726 Twitter followers for a total social media audience reach of 2,992. This audience has more than tripled over the past two years due to organic growth, but with support from INNnovation Fund we will experience much faster growth.

Social media is the single largest driver of traffic to our website, accounting for 34 percent of visits last year. Total traffic to our website during 2014 totalled 83,192 unique visits, an average of 6,932 per month. Additionally, about 10 percent of attendees who purchase tickets to our events online tell us they learned about the function through social media.

This proposal offers four measurable goals to increase:

- The number of Facebook fans and Twitter followers.
- Website traffic, including the portion referred to our site through social media.
- Attendance at Investigative Post events, including those who became aware through social media.
- Donations generated through social media outreach.

WHAT WE DO NOW

Investigative Post has engaged a social media manager, retained as an independent contractor, since March 2013. Since then, our Facebook fans have increased from 300 to 1,266; Twitter followers have grown from 615 to 1,726. Our posts on Facebook and Twitter have also increased, from about 5 to 10 per month to 150 to 200.

In addition:

- Our three journalists on staff, who between them have 2,995 Twitter followers, promote Investigative Post content and events on their feeds.
- WGRZ, our primary partner, provides us administrative access to their Facebook and Twitter accounts, thus enabling us to promote our content to their fans and followers. WGRZ has the largest social media following of any news outlet in the Buffalo market with 175,099 Facebook fans and 77,400 Twitter followers.

As a result, referrals from social media have become the single-largest driver of traffic to our website, accounting for 34 percent of visits last year. Stories we break on WGRZ and promote through its social media can account for up to three-quarters of traffic on peak days.

WHAT WE PLAN ON DOING

Our growth in social media fans and followers has been completely organic to date. While our numbers are up, they are still relatively small; the same can be said of our website traffic. We need to ramp up our efforts.

Our objective is to increase our Facebook fans and Twitter followers to increase traffic to our website and establish a clear line of communication to our base of supporters to help promote our events and fundraising activities. While we appreciate the access WGRZ has granted us to their social media accounts, we feel the need to expand our social media base independent of our partners.

To do so, we plan to purchase ads and sponsored posts on Facebook and Twitter.

Bicycle Creative, our vendor on the project, will conduct pre-market research to identify users most likely to "like" and "follow" Investigative Post. Facebook and Twitter enable organizations to target prospective followers based on factors such as demographics, including location, gender, and age; interests, such as investigative journalism, the environment and politics; and news organizations they already follow, such as The New York

Times, Mother Jones or The Buffalo News.

This approach enables us to target our advertising to Facebook fans and Twitter followers who are most likely to follow Investigative Post. It also increases the likelihood of Investigative Post actively appearing in fans and followers' news feeds.

Our advertising budget will be allocated to a mix of different types of ads on Facebook and Twitter with different objectives to help us achieve our goals for the campaign. The majority of the budget each month will be dedicated to Page Like/Follow ads, aimed at getting people to "like" and "follow" Investigative Post on Facebook and Twitter, in order to build up our audience base on these networks.

In addition, we will be using part of the budget on ads focused on driving people to investigativepost.org to increase web traffic and promote our content. We will also create a separate group of ads specifically promoting events on Facebook to both fans and other potential attendees. Finally, we will create additional ads that encourage people to donate to Investigative Post and become members.

While it's difficult to project exact numbers because advertising costs are dependent on the number of impressions each ad receives, we anticipate spending approximately \$1 per impression that results in a successful page "like" or "follow" on Facebook and Twitter. Costs for the other types of ads will vary, but we will aim to spend approximately 50 cents per click on ads that drive people to investigativepost.org, promote events and encourage donations.

Based on these estimates, the projected average cost is \$2,500 per month, or \$15,000 over the six-month campaign.

Below is the the breakdown and anticipated results of the \$2,500/month ad spend:

- \$1,000 on acquiring Facebook/Twitter followers at a cost of \$1 per like/follow will result in 1,000 new likes and followers/month.
- \$1,000 on driving web traffic at a cost of \$0.50 per click will result in 2,000 new visits/month.
- \$250 on promoting events at a cost of \$0.50 per click: 500 clickthroughs to event page/month.
- \$250 on driving donations at a cost of \$0.50 per click: 500 clickthroughs to "Donate" page/month.

Over six months, based on this budget we will have added 6,000 fans/followers to our audience (a 200 percent increase) and increased our web traffic by 12,000, a gain of just under 200 percent.

The additional budget being spent on promoting events and donations should also impact our traffic, event attendance, and donations, although it is more difficult to predict at what rate these will increase. Given that these ads will be shown to our core audience and people interested in our content, we expect a high conversion rate and more traffic to the Events and Donate pages on our website, which currently average about 400 visits and 50 visits per month, respectively. Following our estimates, each page would gain approximately 500 visits per month, or 3,000 over six months.

Of course, we're not just looking to increase our web traffic; we're aiming to increase traffic from high quality visitors--the people most likely to read and share our content and eventually, donate and become members of Investigative Post. By targeting high-quality visitors through targeted social media advertising, rather than advertising to the general public, we anticipate that the traffic we drive will be even higher quality than we're currently getting from social media.

In terms of evaluating high quality traffic vs. low quality traffic, we would compare the time spent on site, pages per visit, and bounce rate to our current numbers. Currently, users visit about 1.5 pages per visit and spend an average of 1 minute, 13 seconds on the site. Our bounce rate - the percentage of people who leave after viewing just one page on the site - is

76 percent. However, over the course of the campaign, we expect our pages per visit and time spent on site to increase and our bounce rate to decrease. This is because we'll be targeting the very people most likely to read and donate to Investigative Post based on their interests and demographics on social media.

In addition to paid advertising, WGRZ has agreed to supplement this campaign in a variety of ways:

- Post direct appeals to WGRZ fans/followers to like/follow Investigative Post.
- Have key anchors and reporters share Investigative Post stories on social media and ask their followers to like/follow Investigative Post.
- Have WGRZ Twitter account and anchors/reporters retweet Investigative Post tweets.
- Add "Follow Investigative Post on Facebook and Twitter" with links to accounts on WGRZ stories.
- Promote Twitter Q&A with Investigative Post reporters before and after stories broadcast.
- Include Investigative Post's Facebook and Twitter handles on the "lower third" of the television screen during the broadcast of Investigative Post stories.
- Assist in the production of promotional videos used in our campaign.

In order to distinguish traffic coming from the Investigative Post social media accounts vs. WGRZ's accounts we will employ "UTM codes." These codes will be added on to our standard URLs and allow us to segment our traffic within Google Analytics, which is the platform we use for tracking website traffic. This coding would be useful for other INN member sites, as well, as it allows for more precise tracking on Google Analytics of social media referrals.

OUTCOMES

SOCIAL MEDIA FANS & FOLLOWERS: As a result of our ads specifically focused on promoting page likes and follows, we expect a steady, substantial increase in fans and followers. This will promote greater brand awareness, resulting in increased website traffic and an enhanced ability to promote events and fundraising campaigns. It will also help us reduce our reliance on our partners' larger audiences.

WEBSITE TRAFFIC: More fans and followers should result in a substantial increase in traffic to our website, since we will have a larger audience with whom we can share our content. In addition, we will be spending a portion of our advertising budget on ads specifically pushing people to investigativepost.org, which will increase traffic. As a result, we expect that social media will account for an increased share and number of referrals to our website. Increasing our traffic is essential for improving awareness of our organization in the community and giving us greater leverage as we work to partner with relevant organizations. It also increases the likelihood that our work will be shared with new audiences interested in becoming members of Investigative Post. As we've outlined, we are most interested in quality web traffic, which indicates a high level of engagement with, and increased likelihood of donating to, Investigative Post.

EVENTS: We will stage an event in the last quarter of 2015 or first quarter of 2016. This event will include a multi-media presentation from one of our reporters, likely based on a major investigation recently published and broadcast, along with a dialogue with topic experts, and a question/answer session with the audience. We will create additional Facebook and Twitter ads specifically promoting these events, which should increase the number and share of attendees referred by social media.

FUNDRAISING: The social media campaign will be integrated with a membership campaign we will launch the fourth quarter of this year that utilizes the model developed by the Voice of San Diego and MinnPost and funded by the Knight Foundation. We plan two campaigns that will be supported by the social media program. A portion of our advertising budget will be used to drive donations by referring people to our fundraising page.

We will contract with Anna Crotty, consultant with Voice of San Diego and former chief information officer of MissionEdge, to implement Salesforce and Predictive Response. Crotty's work will include the creation of an automated membership program that will integrate with Salesforce and be easy to track and maintain. She will also implement Predictive Response which will automate marketing emails, including membership notification for current members, thank you notes, renewal notification for expiring memberships, and asking non-members to join.

Two fundraising campaigns will take place during the course of this proposal. The first will be the year-end campaign in December 2015, which will coincide with the public roll-out of the automated membership program. The second campaign will take place in March 2016 which will allow us to test our fundraising potential at the end of the social media marketing campaign.

PLAYBOOK: At the conclusion of the program, we will produce a playbook for other INN members that draws on our experience. This playbook will share the lessons we've learned from this project and provide a template and options for organizations to consider in crafting their own program. In addition to producing a document, we would be available to make a presentation to INN members, perhaps at the 2016 IRE conference or an INN Community Journalism Executive Training seminar.

Which of the following statements best describes your proposed business experiment?

Principally an audience-driven project that will generate leads to convert and monetize in the future

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?

Investigative Post will retain Bicycle Creative to execute the social media marketing campaign, including pre-campaign research, advertisement creation and placement, and post-campaign evaluation. Bicycle Creative, a local web design, social media and online marketing agency, is our current social media, web design and digital marketing vendor. It has provided on-demand technical service and consulting since our launch and developed our website. Bicycle Creative is owned by James Heaney, son of Investigative Post's editor and executive director Jim Heaney.

Investigative Post will also retain Anna Crotty, consultant to Voice of San Diego and former chief information officer at Mission Edge, to implement Salesforce and Predictive Response. Crotty, under the direction of Mary Walter-Brown, guided the successful implementation of these tools at Voice of San Diego.

Key staff overseeing this project include Heaney and director of development Kate Heidinger. Heaney's role as executive director includes executing the strategic vision of Investigative Post and monitoring the operating budget. As an extension of these duties he will review and monitor the content and progress of the social media marketing campaign. Heidinger's role as director of development includes prospecting, cultivating, soliciting and stewarding donors. As an extension of these duties, she will directly oversee planning and execution of the event, and the two fundraising campaigns; implementation of Salesforce and Predictive Response; and evaluation of this grant.

How will you measure progress? Please be specific and concrete about the metrics you will use? Suggestion: Keep the number of suggested metrics limited and make sure that they are actually measuring the results of the proposed business experiment.

-- The growth of Investigative Post fans and followers will be measured using data collection tools provided by Facebook and Twitter. In addition to learning the simple audience growth, we will be able to learn what target audience segments performed better than others.

-- The growth of visitors to InvestigativePost.org will be measured using Google Analytics. This tool not only measures total traffic to the site, but also the length of time spent on a page and the website that refers them to InvestigativePost.org.

-- The growth of event attendees who learn about an event from social media will be measured by posing the question "how did you hear about this event" at check-out.

-- The growth of donors will be measured using data collection tools provided by Salesforce, Google Analytics, Facebook and Twitter. We will be

able to determine which ads resulted in donations; how many people gave and the total raised.

Using those metrics, how will you know you have succeeded in meeting the objectives for the business experiment. Please be as specific as possible.

Using the above-stated metrics, success will be measured in the following ways:

- The number of social media followers. The current baseline for this metric is 1,266 Facebook followers and 1,726 Twitter followers of Investigative Post accounts.
- Page views of InvestigativePost.org, unique website visitors, and the number of visitors referred from Facebook and Twitter. The current baseline for these metrics are: 8,787 average monthly page views; 6,932 average monthly unique visitors; and an average of 34 percent of page views referred by Facebook and Twitter.
- The percentage of fans and followers who attend an Investigative Post event. The current baseline for this metric is 10 percent of event attendees stating they learned about the event they attended from social media.
- Total funds raised from fans and followers of Investigative Post fundraising campaigns. Two campaigns will be held in December 2015 and March 2016. The current baseline for this metric is \$6,760 raised in December 2014. Our current donor database software does not integrate with Facebook or Twitter, thus we do not have a baseline for the number of social media followers who also make financial contributions.

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 outcomes with reports compiled by Bicycle Creative and Investigative Post. These reports will be sourced from Facebook, Twitter, Google Analytics and Salesforce.

The raw and reported data will be provided to INN at the completion of this campaign. This information will be in addition to the social media campaign playbook.

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

We hope to gain knowledge that will allow Investigative Post, as well as other INN organizations, to better utilize social media to grow the organization, increase readership and event attendance, and drive donations. Throughout the social media advertising campaign we will continually experiment with copy and design, closely monitor the demographics and co-existing interests of newly acquired fans, followers and donors, and make adjustments as needed to maximize the return on our advertising dollar. This will also gain us valuable insight into the preferences of our readers and members, which will be extremely useful when planning and producing future stories and events. Gaining a better understanding of our core audience's interests and which stories resonate the most with fans and followers will help us maximize future readership and attendance.

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

Investigative Post has assembled a smart team to execute this project that includes an innovative executive director, a full-time development director and a cutting-edge social media marketing and technology vendor. Our relationship with Bicycle Creative allows for a creative approach to marketing and promoting our stories without a great burden of expense. This scale of social media advertising is largely untried by INN members. We anticipate sharing our work and helping other INN organizations realize success through social media campaigns.

Additionally, Investigative Post produces high-quality journalism that has had impact. We have built a strong distribution network that has generated a cumulative audience of 16.1 million readers, viewers and listeners during our first three years of operation. As such, we have a good "product" to sell the prospective members.

How is this project similar/different than other projects you've researched ahead of this proposal? What can you learn that is different from what others have already tried?

This project takes a unique technical, creative and analytical approach to increasing readership and growing our audience and donor base. While other organizations have used social media for promotional purposes, we are unaware of any that have used advertising on social media.

Furthermore, while other organizations may have paid to promote posts on occasion, we doubt that many have worked with an agency to develop a comprehensive advertising strategy. This project will specifically target those most likely to be interested in Investigative Post and our work,

allowing us to increase our audience and members.

Finally, this project includes the production of a playbook which will allow INN members to replicate this work based on best practices identified. This project feature will allow others to learn from what we will have tried.

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

As more brands and organizations are on social media than ever, social media advertising has become more necessary to get through the clutter to promote organizations and content. We have built a loyal social media following through organic means and want to capitalize on available targeting features that will allow us to create cost-efficient ads aimed at engaging people similar to our current members, subscribers and followers. This campaign will significantly increase our traffic, event attendance, and membership base, which will help spur our organization's growth and increase its sustainability as we enter our fourth year.

Upload your project budget

[Investigative Post - INNnovation Fund Project Budget 3.0.xlsx](#)