

Submission Date	2015-03-02 21:43:13
Organization Name	NJ Spotlight
Tax-exempt status	Fiscally-sponsored project of 501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	
Website address	www.njspotlight.com
Phone Number	
Applicant's name	Lee Keough
Title:	Managing Editor/Co-founder
Contact email	
Proposed Project Start Date	03-02-2015
Anticipated Project End Date	11-02-2015
Total estimated budget for the proposed project	\$50,000
Request amount from the INNOvation 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.	\$1,267,000
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	NJ Spotlight is an award-winning news service launched in 2010. We focus on public policy issues in the Garden State, and how those policies affect our communities. Our key areas of coverage are education, energy, environment, healthcare and public finance. We've recently been named the state's "best independent online publication" by the New Jersey Society of Professional Journalists, and we consistently win awards for excellence. Our coverage attracts anyone who is interested in New Jersey and these issues, but the bulk of our readers are policymakers, activists, politicians, bureaucrats and business leaders.
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 Symposium for NJ Cities will be a one-day, multi-tracked event held at the state's premier venue, the NJ Performing Arts Center in Newark.</p> <p>If successful, we expect to make it an annual event.</p> <p>The Symposium will focus on issues of interest to the state's many urban centers. New Jersey has a number of sizable cities -- 15 with populations of more than 50,000, not including numerous sprawling suburban municipalities with populations of about 100,000. Two of them, Newark and Jersey City, are among the top 75 cities by population in the country.</p> <p>Nevertheless, these cities are often overlooked in the region since they are sandwiched between New York and Philadelphia. This symposium would gather local, state, and even national leaders together to share plans, success stories and discuss needs of New Jersey cities. Some of New Jersey's cities are finding growth and success through innovative programs</p>

such as arts centers, walkable city centers that have proximity to transit hubs, and strategic investments and new public safety programs.

We aim to have an informative, multi-track symposium that has elements of fun as well as afford members of the community to the state's leaders. We want to engage public policy celebrities -- such as local U.S. Senators Cory Booker and Bob Menendez, whom are closely tied with the state's two largest cities, as well national speakers.

The NJ Performing Arts Center has offered to partner with us on the program, so we envision a livelier entertainment element, and possible breakouts such as a walking tour or tour of the facility.

A key goal for the event is to develop our audience. So we plan to "crowd-source" some of the planning, creating an online platform where readers can submit ideas for subjects and panels. We are also considering a contest that lead up to the symposium, i.e. for poster designs, urban photography and videos. This participatory component can build buzz as well as engage the potential audience.

Our major goal is to make money. So we will sell sponsorships and charge admission. Our highly successful roundtables have shown us that live events are very complementary to our mission. Events not only provide revenues that underwrite journalism, they can also broaden audience, engage readership, raise our profile in the state, and provide fodder for stories and content.

It's vital to understand that no one currently provides this type of programming for an urban symposium. Although there are conferences/conventions for education or planning executives, there is no one conference that looks at cities and their needs in a holistic manner. Every group that has been approached with the idea has asked us how they can get involved, since the need for such an event is absolutely clear.

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

Principally a stand-alone revenue-generating project that we plan to do again if successful

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?

This project will be overseen by the founders of the site: Lee Keough, managing editor, Kevin Harold, publisher and John Mooney, founding editor. Also key to its success will be Paula Saha, our director of community engagement and social media, as well as Michelle Ruess, our development director, and Emilio Delia, business development director.

We will have to hire part-time help on the day of the event to do registration, distribute materials and the like.

Leading up to the event we will likely need to hire freelance graphic artists to create marketing materials.

We have a large stable of partners for this event, leading off with the NJ Performing Arts Center, which has much experience with symposiums of this type. Rutgers University-Newark Cornwall Center/School of Metropolitan Studies is an enthusiastic partner and hopes to help us plan the programming.

Additionally, other organizations have asked to participate including the Citizen's Campaign of New Jersey (<http://www.thecitizenscampaign.org>); Next City, an international web site based in nearby Philadelphia (www.nextcity.org); and NJ Future, a planning organization (www.njfuture.org) have also asked to partner on this and will be able to help us market the event.

How will you measure progress? Please be specific and concrete about the metrics you will use? Suggestion: Keep the number of

The first metric will be revenue. We envision this as an annual event and so hope to make money both through sponsorships and ticket sales. We expect to more than break even on the event.

suggested metrics limited and make sure that they are actually measuring the results of the proposed business experiment.

Attendance will be the second metric. We hope to have about 200 attendees -- possibly more. Our one day, single topic events typically attract about 130-150 attendees, so we think 200 is doable.

Third metric would be an increase in social engagement on our site and via other social media venues.

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

We will know we've had a success if we show a profit, see an increase in reader engagement, and have a at least 200 attendees.

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

We will provide financial statements, engagement stats, and attendee statistics.

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 make this an annual event that will provide a regular stream of income as well as an avenue for social engagement.

One impetus for this idea is that we need more products to sell in order to grow. Advertising is very tied to traffic and that is limited with a focused audience. (It's also a race to the bottom in terms of price.) Event sponsorships are currently limited to one topic roundtables, i.e. "How to Make NJ More Energy Efficient", "The Future of Long term Care", "Tackling New Jersey's Water Woes."

There is a limit to how many of these we can do a year given our current staff levels, and thus we need new and different products to sell.

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

NJ Spotlight has gained a reputation as the place to follow public policy issues. We are the media outfit with the best reputation when it comes to the coverage of serious issues, and we've engendered a great deal of trust and participation in our events. By expanding our niche -- while still including our coverage cornerstones such as education and planning but adding arts and public safety to the mix -- we can raise our profile with a broader audience and solidify the support we already have. We believe this symposium will attract a large and varied audience.

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?

Although all states are different, New Jersey has its peculiarities. So while the initial idea for a conference like this came from Texas Tribune's multi-day policy event, we will have special challenges.

For instance, much of the state's population is within driving distance of Newark and Trenton. That means people do not feel the need to stay over, as in a convention. This would be a symposium, with multiple tracks, at a highly attractive venue. But we will not have a captive audience. People will leave throughout the day and few will stay into the evening unless the programming is right. So what we hope to learn is that through creative programming -- and possibly coordinating with NJ PAC's other policy programs -- we can create a profitable event that can be expanded in future years. And one that has an element of entertainment, rather than just pure business, in order to attract a wide audience.

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

New Jersey is in the midst of a transition. For the last 60 years or so, it's thrived by serving as the bedroom community for New York and Philadelphia workers. Its existing cities have declined as major manufacturers moved out of state, and other populations chose to live in increasingly elaborate suburban homes.

That trend has reached its limit. The state is trying to protect its remaining natural resources and open space. What's more, a new generation has express the clear preference of living in urban communities that have the advantages of walkability, public transportation and vibrant neighborhoods.

As a result, the state has implemented some policies, such as tax breaks for "transit villages," intended to bolster investment in its cities. But it still must address the problem of poor schools and crime in order to compete economically with neighborhoods undergoing renewal in New York and

Philadelphia. New Jersey's future depends on it.

What's more, Gov. Chris Christie is expected to run for President. So although this is envisioned as a state issues conference to be repeated in years to come, this year's conference could provide relevance beyond the state's borders.

The bottom line is that there is a lot of interest in this subject from activists, municipal leaders, state officials and policymakers. They want to try new approaches and address the issue in a serious way. But there is no focal point for learning or discussing solutions. This symposium will allow this community to share ideas, promote gains, and discuss ideas that can impact all New Jersey cities.

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