

Submission Date	2015-03-02 16:18:15
Organization Name	The Center for Sustainable Journalism at Kennesaw State University
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) University
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	
Website address	JJIE.org
Phone Number	
Applicant's name	Leonard Witt
Title:	Executive Director
Contact email	
Proposed Project Start Date	04-01-2015
Anticipated Project End Date	03-31-2016
Total estimated budget for the proposed project	\$50,110
Request amount from the INNOvation Fund:	\$30,610
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.	\$824,569
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	The Center for Sustainable Journalism (CSJ), housed at Kennesaw State University, publishes the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange (JJIE.org). Using professional journalists, we cover youth justice issues. Our target audiences are policy makers and practitioners who seek reliable information to make informed decisions about systemic or on-the-ground incremental changes to improve the lives of children and the families directly affected by the juvenile justice systems.
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>One of our three primary goals for the JJIE.org is to increase understanding and encourage dialogue regarding youth justice and child welfare issues among policymakers, practitioners, academics, advocates, parents and youth themselves. We do this by making sure we have a healthy influx of commentary written by a diverse group of people taken from our audience. We also make sure to focus a good percentage of our attention on our social media platforms, which provide a place for conversations around these issues to flow. We realize that juvenile justice is a very narrow beat, but a very deep one at the same time and we believe that idea relates to who are audience consists of. We are requesting \$30,610 to take our audience engagement to the next level and convert our most loyal and interactive readers to members of JJIE.org.</p> <p>If done well, a membership program can provide a new and dependable stream of revenue for an organization working towards sustainability. Our membership team has already begun research on best practices at local, regional and national news organizations to see what has worked and what has not. In addition, we will tailor a program to meet our audience's specific</p>

needs by conducting a survey produced by the A.L. Burruss Institute of Public Service and Research at Kennesaw State University. In the end, we will have a combination of best practices as well as user-specific information.

The goal is to create a mutually beneficial, customized relationship with specific subsets of our audience tied to their individual financial capability and interests. Examples of subsets include groups interested in youth justice and mental health, substance abuse, ethnic inequality, LGBTQ, girls or foster care issues. We produce added benefits for each subset, including targeted newsletters, online discussions with high profile thought leaders and webinars in their interest areas.

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

Principally an audience-driven project that we hope to monetize right away

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?

We have constructed a team designed to specifically work on our new membership program. The three-person team, all of whom presently work at the CSJ will include Erica Honeycutt, our assistant grant writer, Morgana Kennedy, our Kennesaw State University presidential scholar assigned exclusively to research and help create our membership program, and James Pound, our web producer. This team will be under the supervision of Leonard Witt, executive director of the CSJ and John Fleming, executive editor, both of whom have an extensive background in journalism.

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.

Quantitative – All figures presented will provide validation at the end of the first year, mostly based on latter nine-month period. The first three months in year one will be devoted to start-up time.

- Survey: We will start by conducting a survey through the online JJIE, social media platforms and our weekly newsletter now geared to a general audience of 3,300 opt-ins. Our goal is to have at least 600 respondents.
- Membership: Once the membership program officially launches, we will keep track of how many readers are converted to members in each targeted membership category. Our goal is four target areas with 50 new members in each at the end of the first year.
- Staff time involved: After the program is up and running for a full year, we will produce a return on investment (ROI) report assessing all the costs measured against expenses, which mostly will be in terms of staff and freelance time and effort.
- Webinars: One of the services provided through the membership program will include access to two webinars annually that the CSJ will produce for each of the four different membership categories. These webinar topics will reflect the interests our targeted audiences discovered via our research and at a donation level also consistent with our research. We will monitor the number of webinar audience participants.
- Newsletters: Another service provided will be monthly topical newsletters specific to the member's interests.
- We will aim for quarterly, high profile online thought leader discussions and count the number of audience members listening in real time and as archived podcasts and the conversion rate.

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

This program's success will be measured by having created a more invested and engaged group of JJIE.org audience members who will lay the foundation for other audience members to build upon in the future. These members will have multiple opportunities to provide feedback on what is working for them, what is not working for them and what they would like to see more of. This information will be used to make the membership program a working model for other niche news organizations to use in the future. Also, if the program proves successful, it will have created a new stream of revenue for the JJIE.org.

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

Our income and expenses are shared in detail with internal, meticulously applied Kennesaw State University auditing systems. The audited data will be shared with INN.

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 learn more about what our readers want from us. What kind of specific information they need on a daily, weekly and bi-weekly basis; what it is that keeps them coming back and what we can provide for them in the future. The project will bring our audience and us closer together, while providing us with a new stream of revenue that will help us provide the kind of information that our readers want.

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

We are the only organization that covers juvenile justice issues on a daily persistent basis with professional journalists. In return we now have an audience of some 600,000 unique visitors annually, viewing more than a million pages. We have a very strong foundation support base and the next step to becoming more sustainable is to build our membership base.

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?

We have had discussions with news-oriented organizations such as The Texas Tribune as well as other nonprofits, development officers and consumer revenue and membership directors. The similarity between our membership program and others is the clarity of our mission. We make sure every new project started at JJIE.org supports our mission. It is of the utmost importance that our readers know and understand what our mission and vision are and how we wish to accomplish them. Our program will be different in that our audience members will build it. By surveying them and gathering the information over the coming months, we will be able to build a program from the ground up of exactly what our readers want. By building this program and communicating with our members every step of the way, we will learn infinite amounts about our readership and be able to grow this program exponentially every year.

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

Since we have successfully moved our organization from being a start-up to a fully functioning news center, we now have the capability and team of people who are interested in dedicating their time to this project. Now we are at a place where we can explore new ways to deepen that interest and create the most mutually beneficial relationship with our readers as possible.

Upload your project budget

[JJIE.org Membership Program Budget.xlsx](#)