

INNOvation Fund Application Round 4 - Dec. 8, 2015

<b>Submission Date</b>	2015-12-07 19:10:31
<b>Organization Name</b>	Foundation for National Progress (dba Mother Jones)
<b>Tax-exempt status</b>	501(c)(3) organization
<b>EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)</b>	94-2282759
<b>Website address</b>	<a href="http://www.motherjones.com">www.motherjones.com</a>
<b>Phone Number</b>	(415) 321-1700
<b>Applicant's name</b>	Allison Stelly
<b>Title:</b>	Development Manager, Foundations
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<b>Proposed Project Start Date</b>	01-01-2016
<b>Anticipated Project End Date</b>	12-31-2016
<b>Total estimated budget for the proposed project</b>	\$71,500
<b>Request amount from the INNOvation Fund:</b>	35,000
<b>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.</b>	\$13.5 Million
<b>In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.</b>	With a budget of \$13.3 million and a staff of 80 based in San Francisco, New York, and Washington, DC, Mother Jones has built a proof of concept for how investigative reporting can work in the digital, 24/7 news cycle. Our reporting has become a go-to source for everything from presidential politics to key issues like climate, reproductive rights, income inequality, and gun control. Mother Jones' impact ripples far beyond our 9 million monthly readers and well beyond the traditional choir, to thought-leaders, decision-makers, other journalists, and activists.

**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.**

For Mother Jones, as for many other publishers, especially in the nonprofit space, social media – Facebook, particularly -- is the current top driver of growth. In just the past five years, our online audience has grown from fewer than one million people per month to upwards of nine million per month. We credit some of that boom to substantial growth in our Facebook readership. Facebook referrals currently account for 45 percent of our total online traffic, and Facebook sharing has helped us reach many readers who previously would not have seen our content.

However, slow article load times, especially on mobile devices, present a major problem for publishers. There's no way to know exactly how many readers we (and other organizations) lose because of loading lag times, but it's known to be a major issue industry-wide – enough of a problem that Facebook has dedicated its own resources to devising a solution, Instant Articles, which loads stories instantly inside the platform. Mother Jones is one of the organizations invited to test Instant Articles, which launched last summer with a small number of partners and has gradually been opened to additional publishers.

Facebook Instant Articles presents a conundrum for nonprofit news organizations: It may be an important way to ensure that users can quickly and easily access our content, but it also requires building a custom feed and significant evaluation and optimization – not an easy task for many nonprofits. We propose to test and optimize how Instant Articles can perform for nonprofit publishers – including developing custom membership/donor asks for the platform and working closely with Facebook's team to make sure the tool can appropriately serve smaller and nonprofit publishers. By sharing our learnings with fellow INN members, we hope to enable other publishers to make maximum use of the platform once it is open to all.

- Tasks:
- Hire developer to build custom Instant Articles feed
  - Design and test options for optimal use of platform: all content, limited content (e.g., specific verticals), special projects
  - Work with Facebook team to design and test membership/donor asks on the platform
  - Evaluate effect on reach, impact, and revenue

**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?**

Robert Wise, Online Technology Director of Mother Jones, will supervise the technological development and implementation, as well as oversee hiring a contract developer specifically for this project. Robert has been with Mother Jones for more than 15 years and brings deep technological and social media expertise. He and the contract developer will work closely with Brian Hiatt, Director of Marketing and Membership, Khary Brown, Integrated Advertising Director, and Ben Dreyfuss, Engagement Editor, on setting strategy and goals.

**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.**

- Facebook shares and likes
- Total pageviews
- Time on page and articles per user
- Membership actions (new donors / subscribers / sustainers)

**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 have been experiencing steady growth in Facebook referrals, but we hope with Instant Articles to see an increase in all of the above metrics. We are especially interested in seeing whether users engage more deeply – i.e., whether we see fewer of them abandoning an article because it is too slow loading, and whether this translates into more users who view additional articles, return for additional sessions, or take membership actions such as subscribing to our newsletters. We have been gathering baseline metrics via both Google Analytics and Facebook analytics and will set and monitor specific goals as we implement the project.

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

We will share detailed reports 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?**

Mobile load times present a problem for Mother Jones, as for all online publishers. Facebook Instant Articles presents an interesting potential solution – and, if it is widely adopted, may also put publishers who have not implemented it at a disadvantage. With support from INN, we will be able to undertake the experimentation and testing to develop best practices for how fellow nonprofit publishers can best utilize Instant Articles for reach, impact, and membership growth.

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

Mother Jones has been highly successful on Facebook, with more than 1 million Facebook followers and engagement (as measured by Facebook's analytics) above many of our larger competitors. That broad base of users following us, reading us, liking, commenting, and sharing our content on Facebook gives us the volume necessary to do the iterative testing and data gathering required to make maximum use of the platform. In addition, our social media and editorial teams are recognized as leaders in optimizing Facebook reach, and we can leverage their expertise for this project.

**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?**

Facebook Instant Articles is new – it is not yet open to every publisher, and so far, the primary partners have been for-profit outlets. We have the opportunity to learn how nonprofit media organizations can utilize this new platform.

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

Facebook is still in beta, and if we undertake this project now, we can take advantage of the test phase to position nonprofit publishers to use the platform as efficiently as possible. In addition, like many of our peers, we are expecting a surge in interest in our work with the presidential election, and that is an excellent opportunity to test and measure this new project.

**Upload your project budget**

[INNnovation-Fund- Budget facebook.xlsx](#)