

INNOVATION Fund Application Round 4 - Dec. 8, 2015

Submission Date	2015-12-08 14:10:45
Organization Name	New Mexico In Depth
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	45-4011138
Website address	http://nmindepth.com/
Phone Number	(203) 577-9399
Applicant's name	Trip Jennings
Title:	Executive Director
Contact email	trip@nmindepth.com
Proposed Project Start Date	01-01-2016
Anticipated Project End Date	12-31-2016
Total estimated budget for the proposed project	\$90,000
Request amount from the INNOVATION Fund:	\$30,000
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.	\$300,000
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	New Mexico In Depth produces public policy journalism in the public interest, aspiring to surface conditions and perspectives of communities most affected by public decision-makers. We have a dual audience: those already active in public policy decision-making processes, such as state lawmakers, other public officials and activists, and those who are disenfranchised from that process who simultaneously are the most affected by policymakers' decisions.

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.

In existence since July 2012, over three years we've significantly grown our direct reach to individual New Mexicans, with a current outreach list of 4,000 who receive our articles in their email inboxes. We've established our position as a go-to public policy journalism source, with ongoing special projects focused on the state legislature, the influence of money in politics, and how climate change is affecting our New Mexico landscape.

We've also developed a special product focused on the New Mexico legislature that has made it possible for us to raise 10% of our \$300,000 annual budget through corporate and non-profit sponsorships. We are reliant on three New Mexico foundations for the bulk of our \$300,000 annual budget. This product—a special edition that runs in newspapers throughout the state the Sunday before the annual state legislature convenes and is distributed at the statehouse—helps us demonstrate public support for our NMID.

Our goal is to develop an ongoing program that brings us in direct contact with our communities, makes it easy for New Mexicans to engage with the public policy issues we cover, and that systematizes a process for acquiring public support from within New Mexico. In addition to building our sponsorship program, we want to demonstrate support directly from individuals who are engaged with our work.

This project, we believe, will inform our future decisions about fundraising strategies that speak directly to the interests of our audience. It will also provide valuable insight for the broader nonprofit journalism field, on tactics for shifting an engaged audience to a donating audience, in a state with a small population and struggling economy. Our project will utilize time-tested non-profit donor development strategies within the context of non-profit journalism, a field that by its nature offers “free” news. Most community members are not accustomed to supporting non-profit journalism. Our goal is to develop a successful narrative and engagement approach that persuades New Mexicans to support NMID.

The project:

This project will build on the foundation we've established with our current audience and sponsors, utilizing a mix of both direct “in person” and online strategies. Key components include public policy community forums, exploration of a membership and sustainer program, and expansion of our sponsorship program. We'll prioritize creation of opportunities for community members to give us direct feedback and to weigh in on the important public policy issues we cover. We'll utilize a tracking system that captures data about our audience, enabling us to group our audience members by issue interest, providing greater insight into who our followers are and what stories are most important to our community. These insights will in turn help us develop targeted fundraising drives.

Project components

- Community Engagement:

- o Forums: We'll conduct a series of public forums in regional settings that provide community members an opportunity to engage with their elected officials on important public policy issues. The first forum will occur during the state legislative session in Santa Fe, February 2016. Additional forums will occur in regional centers throughout New Mexico, approximately every two months.

- Impact: These forums will achieve several important objectives. They'll make our project more relevant to our citizen legislators and other public officials who are key thought leaders in their communities. They'll put our citizen legislators “in the hot seat” to directly answer questions from the folks who elect them. And, they'll expand our reach into rural geographies of New Mexico, expanding and solidifying our statewide profile.

- o Online surveys and polls: We'll implement a special project focused on soliciting input and ideas from New Mexicans who directly receive our articles in their inboxes. We'll utilize a mix of polls, surveys, and comment options, and report the results in special articles on our webpage.

- Impact: As somewhat exclusive—only received by those on our email list—this project is designed to grow the pool of community members who engage with us, and through it we'll explore the benefits and utility of creating a membership program that collects dues.

- Donor Development

- o Focus Groups: NMID will hold three focus groups in regional geographies of New Mexico, designed to understand what frames and messages about the value of nonprofit public policy journalism resonate the most with our audience.

- Impact: These focus group results, in addition to surveys of our email list, will help us understand how to most successfully engage New Mexico community members to support our work.

- o Donor Appeals: We'll conduct four email donor appeals in 2016 that combine an issue focus with messages we've developed about the value of nonprofit journalism. Each donor appeal will include successive emails sent over the course of two weeks.

- Impact: By tracking the response to each message, we'll better understand what messages most resonate with our audience, and we'll be able to build issue area supporters.

- o Major Sponsors: NMID will build a year-round sponsorship program through direct outreach in New Mexico, and develop a more robust acknowledgement package that provides exposure on our website and in our special publications.

- Impact: Engagement with institutions, corporations, and other nonprofits will not only help NMID demonstrate public support, but also help us become better networked with people who more directly attempt to influence public policy.

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?

The project would be managed by NMID Deputy Director Marjorie Childress. Her background includes financial management and fund development for a nonprofit with a budget of \$1.4 million, including grants management and development of a comprehensive individual donor program. Our entire staff, including our executive director, Trip Jennings and data journalist, Sandra Fish, would be active participants in planning and execution of various components of the project. We will contract with an outside facilitator for the focus groups, and contract with supplemental outreach personnel for our sponsorship drive.

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.

Our progress will be measured by number of forums and focus groups we conduct, the degree to which our outreach list is expanded, and the growth of our non-foundation public support. These metrics are important because they demonstrate expansion of NMID's reach and influence within New Mexico.

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

Our goal in 2016 is to increase our annual public support from approximately \$30,000 to \$50,000, and to grow our outreach list by half, to 6,000. Another key factor of success will be the degree to which we are able to build a systematic engagement process linked to our fundraising program, that — however small initially — we are able to grow in coming years.

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

We will share baseline data with INN in January, including up-to-date size of our outreach list, number of donors by issues area, number of sponsors and final 2015 public support tally. We will then provide INN with mid-2016 report with progress to date on growing those numbers as well as description of our community engagement events and messaging strategies.

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 how to grow a committed group of members/donors/sponsors for non-profit journalism in New Mexico, by experimenting with community engagement events, testing messages, and systematically implementing a development program. In the long term we'd like to demonstrate public support equal to 30% of our annual budget.

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

In the 21st Century, community engagement is a critical piece of successful journalism. In addition to building a sustainable revenue generation program, this project contributes to NMID's relevancy as an important part of the public policy debate in NM. Because we are relatively new in New Mexico, we have an opportunity to test our messaging and build out a program in a way that works with the specific dynamics of our organization. And we have a team that together brings strong backgrounds in both journalism and nonprofit management and fundraising.

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 can learn the specific messages and events that resonate with New Mexicans, utilizing a very grassroots/hands-on approach, taking our team on the road throughout the state. Its very similar to classic donor development programs of other non-profit sectors. But we've found that giving to journalism projects is not something many New Mexicans are used to doing. Through this project we'll hone our narrative and messaging, in service to building out this sector in our state.

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

It's critical that we build on the foundation we've created so that we are able to demonstrate continued public support as we grow our organization. Currently, we've established a program that raises 10% of our annual budget from non-foundation sources. In order to bring in more foundation funds, its essential that our public support also grow. It's the right time because we've established a foundation—we now feel confident about moving forward with a more ambitious community engagement program. And we think we have a lot to offer to the broader field, through insights we learn along the way.

Upload your project budget

[NMID.INNnovation-Fund-Project-Budget-Template.xlsx](#)