

## INNOvation Fund Application Round 4 - Dec. 8, 2015

<b>Submission Date</b>	2015-12-08 17:27:06
<b>Organization Name</b>	Oklahoma Watch
<b>Tax-exempt status</b>	501(c)(3) organization
<b>EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)</b>	27-3721498
<b>Website address</b>	oklahomawatch.org
<b>Phone Number</b>	(405) 325-3529
<b>Applicant's name</b>	David Fritze
<b>Title:</b>	Executive Editor
<b>Contact email</b>	dfritze@oklahomwatch.org
<b>Proposed Project Start Date</b>	03-15-2016
<b>Anticipated Project End Date</b>	02-28-2017
<b>Total estimated budget for the proposed project</b>	\$39,250
<b>Request amount from the INNOvation Fund:</b>	\$30,000
<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>	\$660,000
<b>In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.</b>	Oklahoma Watch, a statewide media nonprofit, produces in-depth and investigative journalism to inform and empower people and hold government and other institutions accountable, especially on how policies affect the vulnerable. We amplify the voices of the disadvantaged. We promote civic engagement by holding public forums and fostering debate through social media, multimedia and public appearances. Our audience is diverse, but we strive to reach those at the highest levels of policy-making.

## 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.

### Summary

The working title is: "A Few Minutes With..." It is essentially a video project in which, over a year (and beyond), we will produce at least 25 videotaped interviews with key figures, newsmakers or representatives of critical problems in our state, with a focus on a personal story related to an important issue. We will re-purpose many of them as one-graph mini-stories on Instagram and make the videos available to news media across the state. We will sell sponsorship packages for the series.

### Ability to Pursue Revenue

For the first time in our five-year history, we are poised to move aggressively in selling sponsorships, in addition to seeking more foundation grants. A full-time chief operating officer responsible for fundraising and development, Dena Drabek, joined Oklahoma Watch in September, and she has since led preparation of a full slate of sponsorship packages that we are starting to shop to institutions, universities and corporations. (We adhere to INN's editorial independence policy.) We have identified a list of "recognition assets," or the various means for providing public acknowledgement to sponsors. Examples are website ads (home page, topic section, special pages, middle-of-story positions, Data Center page and apps etc.), newsletter ads and verbal recognition at our public forums. To help complete this sponsorship slate, we contracted with a digital marketing firm to audit our current audience visiting our website and following our Facebook and Twitter accounts, so we can explain to potential funders the demographic composition of our audience. All of this sets the stage for monetizing this project.

### Appeal of Content for Revenue Purposes

Video, GIFs and stills have exploded across the digital news-scape in recent years and show no sign of letting up. Oklahoma Watch is underperforming in visual journalism, having focused mainly, and rightly, on investigative stories and deep data, which will remain central to our mission. But we are taking steps to grow the visual dimension by publishing more stills and video. We also believe that adding more people and narratives to a designated section of our content that still aligns with our mission will make us more appealing to all audiences, by humanizing the issues we cover, and more inviting to potential sponsors who see value in video storytelling. That is what "A Few Minutes With" is all about.

Each of the series' core video interviews will be relatively short; the working title will signal that the time commitment is relatively small and viewers will have an option to explore a person's story or the topic in more depth. Each video will be posted with a short text intro and sometimes with a longer version of the video and/or a simple data graphic as well as links to new or previous Oklahoma Watch stories and data visualizations. We will interview figures who are either well-known, yet speaking about something you would not expect them to address, or whose title, position or situation is intriguing within the context of the subject.

### Some examples:

- We cover mental health. A video could feature former University of Oklahoma football coach Barry Switzer talking about his struggle for years after his mother took her own life with a gun at home while the teenage Switzer was there.
- We cover diversity. A video could feature two of the relatively few women in the Oklahoma Legislature talking about their experiences at the State Capitol and why the gender disparity exists.
- We cover homelessness. In a video, the director of a charitable organization who spent a week on the streets posing a transient could relate highlights from the experience.
- We cover immigration. The manager of an apartment complex with many undocumented immigrants could talk about the struggles her tenants face, such as their fear of reporting crime.
- We cover Native Americans. Bill Anoatubby, chief of the Chickasaw Nation, could speak about where he sees casino gambling in Oklahoma going when tribes negotiate new compacts.
- (We would look for some lighter themes as well.)

These will not be hard-edged "gotcha" interviews; the goal will be to evoke the poignant or the heroic or to be informative in a fresh way, always pointing to the common struggles and needs in a state that has many challenges, from poverty to poor health outcomes.

### Generating Revenue

With our COO taking the lead, we will market a title sponsorship for the entire series, in addition to topic-specific sponsorships, such as one for five videos related to mental health. The sponsor would have no say in choosing topics or interviewees.

The INNnovation Fund grant would provide funding to cover most of the first year of expenses. Then we will seek more sponsorships to sustain the series beyond the first year, and we will apply cost-saving strategies learned during the initial year. We want to bring the total costs down to \$15,000 to \$20,000, including salaried time, and raise at least twice that amount. The revenue picture also could include offering video sponsorship recognition as part of other general sponsorship packages for Oklahoma Watch that relate to forums, website ads or the Data Center.

Sponsorship recognition for "A Few Minutes With" would come in several forms:

#### Series Sponsor: \$25,000 (tentative pricing)

- Name and logo near top of all web pages with videos, prefaced by "Sponsored by..."
- Up to 7 seconds of pre-roll video with name, logo and short mission statement.
- Acknowledgement of sponsor(s) in newsletter, in a module with link to a video.

#### Series Presenters: \$12,500

- Name and logo near bottom of all web pages with videos, prefaced by "Presented by..."
- Name during post-roll of videos.

#### Five-Videos Presenters: \$5,000

- Name and logo near bottom of all web pages with videos, prefaced by "Presented by..."
- Name during post-roll of videos.

#### Single Video Presenter: \$1,000

- Name and logo near bottom of all web pages with videos, prefaced by "Presented by..."
- Name during post-roll of videos.

### Distribution

We also will offer the videos, embeddable from Youtube or Vimeo, to other media partners around Oklahoma. (We distribute our stories regularly for free to about 100 news outlets across the state, and the largest publications publish most of our content, putting our reach well above a million readers.) It's not clear yet whether other newspapers and broadcast stations would agree to post the videos, especially if the videos contain pre-roll or post-roll recognition of paid sponsors. We do not plan to share any sponsorship revenue.

**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?**

A combination of current staff and independent contractors would be used during the grant year.

Staff

Dena Drabek, Chief Operating Officer: an estimated 10 percent of her time marketing sponsorships for the series. Drabek, who has extensive marketing and fundraising experience, has put together a comprehensive sponsorship and marketing strategy for Oklahoma Watch that includes tiered sponsorship packages tied to our community forums, weekly newsletters, underwriting ad positions, and Data Center. We are also exploring offering a calendar for thought leaders that could be funded with an initial grant and then sponsorships.

Ben Fenwick, Enterprise Editor, an estimated 8 percent of time, more directly guiding generation of ideas for video interviews, enlisting reporters' help when needed, conducting some interviews. Reporters may also fill in for this role. Fenwick has more than 25 years of journalism experience and has covered stories such as the Oklahoma City bombing investigation; he was an embedded independent correspondent in Iraq and Afghanistan.

David Fritze, Executive Editor: an estimated 4 percent of his time, helping oversee quality and approaches to the video series, finding contractors, conducting some key video interviews. Fritze took over leadership of Oklahoma Watch in November 2012 and has built up its reputation for journalistic quality and impact, rich and compelling data sets, and promotion of public discussion of issues through "Oklahoma Watch-Out" public forums.

Contract and Interns

Videographer: shooting and editing videos, adding title screens, pre-roll and post-roll, for 2 to 3 hours per video. We have used a videographer on contract, Ilea Shutler, for our public forums, and have sought her advice on finding other contract videographers for this project. We have also talked with Gaylord College of Journalism faculty who teach video journalism in search of a professor who is interested in freelancing on the side. There are several prospects. We will reach out to faculty at the University of Tulsa and Tulsa Community Colleges to recruit freelance videographers.

Student Intern: 5 hours per week on average for the year, assisting videographer at interviews, taking still photos, posting still photos or videos to Instagram, pursuing data for accompanying graphics, all-purpose assistance. We recruited a fairly experienced student, Michael Willmus, to work 15 hours per week for us in spring 2016 taking photos and video; he may also be available for summer and the 2016-2017 school year.

Digital Marketer: posting sponsorship ads on website. We have used Smirk New Media of Oklahoma City to provide digital marketing services. The company, founded by former Oklahoman assistant sports editor Mike Koehler, would explore what is needed to post sponsorship ads in various positions on our website. We recently held a Google Hangout with the INN Nerds to understand how much latitude Smirk New Media would have to add plug-ins and customize our sponsorship ad presentation in Largo.

**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.**

We will use the following metrics to measure success:

- Total number and amounts of sponsorships tied only to “A Few Minutes With” videos.
- Proportional amounts of number and sales amounts of sponsorships tied in part, along with other multi-faceted sponsorship packages, to “A Few Minutes With” videos.
- Website metrics from Google Analytics (users, sessions, page views) for project video pages.
- Social media post metrics (shares, likes, reach).
- Re-postings of videos by media partners, in numbers of videos and partners.

**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 sponsorship revenue from this project will grow from \$0 to at least \$20,000, which is our eventual target goal for breaking even on costs beyond 2016 for the continuing series. If successful, we would eventually push to hire a full-time visual journalist who would help produce one video chat per week.
- Our COO will have the option of including video recognition in recognition packages for other general sponsorships. We will count as a success five new sponsors or other funders in early 2017 stemming in whole or part from reaction to the series.

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

- An itemization of videos completed and published, with hyperlinks.
- A listing of all project-related sponsorships sold, with amounts and copies of sponsorship agreements or invoices.
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- A print-out of metrics reports from website and social-media analytics.
- Copies of invoices for all project-related contractor payments and receipts for all purchases.

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

As an investigative news organization, we face a fundamental challenge: how to generate earned revenue from corporate, nonprofit and public-institution sponsors who may be sensitive to controversial news coverage. This project will help us understand whether we can create a vehicle for sponsorships that complements and ultimately helps support our investigative journalism. Our COO has shared copies of drafts of our general sponsorship packages with corporate and nonprofit representatives and received positive feedback. We will learn over the next few months whether that, including this video project, will translate into underwriting. We did receive a \$20,000 grant from the Kirkpatrick Foundation in September to cover two thirds of the costs of nine public forums, but it was not considered a sponsorship. We will also be focusing on marketing sponsorships for forums.

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

Our journalism is widely admired, is read and re-published across the state and commands the attention of top leaders and public officials who make decisions that affect the lives of all Oklahomans. We are known for high quality and our mission of focusing on the poor and disadvantaged. With that reputation established, and with a full-time fundraising person and strategic fundraising plans in place, we are in a position to capitalize on enabling grant assistance intended to help nonprofit media rise to a new level in sustainability efforts.

**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?**

Unlike all other projects approved for an INNovation Fund grant, ours would focus almost exclusively on monetizing a form of video journalism, with an added element of social media via Instagram. More broadly, we will learn if content focused on people and personal stories, related to but separate from our investigative and explanatory journalism, will have special appeal to potential sponsors and other funders.

If successful, this broad approach, whether in video, photos, text or audio, could be employed by other nonprofit media outlets. Our idea arose as an extension of our public forums with various leaders and our powerful interviews with people interviewed for our stories and in our "Talk With Us" mobile video project in low-income neighborhoods, done with Gaylord College students (talkwithus.net) in 2014-2015. In hindsight, we should also cite as subconscious inspiration, at least for appeal to audiences, both NPR's "storycorps" and The Arizona Republic's live-event "Arizona Storytellers."

"A Few Minutes With" will be a unique variation on the concept.

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

As mentioned before, visual journalism on mobile, the Internet and social media is becoming a dominant part of the popular and digital culture, especially for younger people. Few local or statewide nonprofit news organizations are making video (beyond events) or still photos a central part of their identity. It is inevitable that they will have to do so, as some national outlets, such as CIR's Reveal, have. In order to do so, local and state nonprofits will have to find new ways and sources to fund it that are integral to the medium.

**Upload your project budget**

[INNnovation-Fund-Project-Budget-Oklahoma Watch.xlsx](#)

**Optional: if you wish, you may provide additional material about your project, including screenshots, plans, marketing material, or estimates from vendors who will help you carry out your project. If you have more than one file, please package them as a single .ZIP file before uploading.**

[Sponsorship Guide.docx](#)