

INNOvation Fund Application Round 4 - Dec. 8, 2015

<b>Submission Date</b>	2015-12-08 19:00:36
<b>Organization Name</b>	The Listening Post (partnering with Georgia Public Broadcasting)
<b>Tax-exempt status</b>	501(c)(3) organization
<b>EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)</b>	58-1510475
<b>Website address</b>	listeningpost.us // listeningpostnola.tumblr.com // gpb.org
<b>Phone Number</b>	(612) 501-0690
<b>Applicant's name</b>	Andrew Haeg
<b>Title:</b>	Founder, Groundsource / Co-creator, Listening Post Macon
<b>Contact email</b>	aohaeg@gmail.com
<b>Proposed Project Start Date</b>	02-01-2016
<b>Anticipated Project End Date</b>	08-01-2016
<b>Total estimated budget for the proposed project</b>	75000
<b>Request amount from the INNOvation Fund:</b>	35000
<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>	\$34,132,640
<b>In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.</b>	<p>The Listening Post is a new model for creating an ongoing conversation with a broad base of citizens in a community around issues that affect them using two-way text messaging (powered by GroundSource), a community news site, recording booths, events and other engagement tactics.</p> <p>The listening posts, while open to anyone, are especially effective at building engagement with people who for whatever reason have felt left out of the public discussion -- whether because they lack the time, motivation or channels to be outspoken, or feel as though their voice is not welcome.</p> <p>The goal of listening posts is to provide insightful and relevant information to the community and to solicit their concerns, hopes and priorities to ensure the public discussion reflect their day-to-day reality.</p>

**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.**

Over the past two years, the Listening Post has evolved from an experiment in community into a citywide conversation in both New Orleans ([listeningpostnola.tumblr.com](http://listeningpostnola.tumblr.com)) and Macon ([listeningpost.us](http://listeningpost.us)) -- captured both online (SMS and Tumblr) and offline (people record thoughts and anecdotes at recording stations around the city).

The model has proved an effective and sustainable way to include a broad segment of each community in an ongoing conversation. Response rates are strong, and call-outs to the community via text message (using GroundSource -- [groundsource.co](http://groundsource.co)) routinely yield 10 percent response rates, and authentic reports of life as lived on the ground.

Much of our success has come through trial and error, and anecdotal observation has led us to believe that the listening post model is building trust and engagement in communities typically outside of the traditional base of public media listeners and supporters.

We now want to apply rigorous monitoring and evaluation to determine whether and how the listening post model can engage new audiences, support new sponsorship and underwriting opportunities and activate new audiences to become supporters and members.

By closely measuring the extent to which listening post projects can build and engage new audiences, we will have the evidence we need to gather resources to make listening posts in Macon and New Orleans sustainable, and extend the model to other cities and newsrooms.

**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?**

Extension of an existing project. We are doing this now or have done it in the past year.

**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?**

Jesse Hardman, creator of the New Orleans Listening Post: Develops strategies for community outreach, designing and installing physical listening posts, producing journalism drawn from community input.

Burgess Brown, co-creator, Macon Listening Post: Coordinates partnerships with community organizations, conducts direct outreach to communities, coordinates community messaging using GroundSource.

Andrew Haeg, GroundSource, co-creator of the Macon Listening Post: Manages the mobile engagement technology platform used to run the listening posts.

Natalie Chang, Internews Design and Learning Team: Natalie is an experienced researcher and has experience evaluating media development projects similar to the listening post model.

**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.**

Response rates to engagement triggers, including text message prompts, posters, flyers, on-air callouts, advertisements, etc.

Number of people who take action as a result of being engaged (visit the web site, attend an event, volunteer, contribute financial support)

Numbers of people who respond who are not public radio listeners

Pre-and-post surveys of community members to determine levels of connection with media before being engaged by the listening post and after

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

The success of the listening approach rests on its ability to directly engage people, as such, the most important indicators of success will be low (<1 percent) opt-out rates, high and stable response rates (>10 percent). Matching or exceeding those basic engagement levels will give us a solid foundation for deepening engagement. But just sustaining engagement won't be enough -- we need to ensure that in fact we are reaching new audiences. We don't have a benchmark rate that we're shooting for (yet), but we will focus on defining a few key segments whose information needs make them more likely to engage (e.g. parents, business owners, etc.) As we continue to engage people, we'll ask them to attend events, share pictures and stories, or encourage them to invite others into the conversation and as they become more engaged, pledge their support for public media by volunteering or contributing. We'd like to see our conversion rates from newly engaged community members to supporters increase as we become better at determining what motivates people to move up the engagement ladder.

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

Through a report delivered by Internews' Design and Learning team and through metrics gathered using the GroundSource mobile engagement platform. INN staff will receive reports generated by GroundSource detailing key engagement metrics.

**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 understand better what spurs sustainable engagement with communities when it comes to news and information. How are the information needs of communities best met? And what are the basic building blocks, both online and offline, of creating sustained engagement around important topics that affect communities?

Moreover, we want to develop a business model to support active listening, and broad-based community engagement. The data generated by our work here will help us raise money from funders, and also make the case to underwriters that by supporting the listening post they can directly connect with people across their whole community. That work, by extension, will help us spread the model to other cities.

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

As a collective we have worked on media engagement projects around the world for more than a decade. We've contributed to many different community news projects, and have learned both what works and what doesn't. Over the past two years we've combined a strategy of connecting offline with communities, through public events, signage, non-profit partnerships, etc., with a strategy to maintain contact with participants using online tools, including cell phones, social media, and live internet conversations.

**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?**

This project is different in that it seeks to dissect and understand the impact of the work we've already been doing through our Listening Post project, and both improve on our model, and also create a blueprint that can be utilized by other media outlets and community organizations. Most projects survive for a few years, and then disappear when the funding is gone. We want to spend time researching how to make our work have long-term impact in the communities we engage with.

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

We have two years worth of engagement and data under our belt, it's the perfect time to take a step back and take an analytical look at what we've created, and see if we can make it better and more sustainable.

We've received inquiries from several newsrooms about starting listening posts in their communities, but those advocating for them lack the data they need to convince their superiors that it's worth the time and effort to engage the community in this way.

More and more journalists and newsrooms are embracing the values of active, inclusive listening and direct community engagement as core to the mission of public media and nonprofit news operations. More data will help us and them raise money and persuade newsroom leadership to integrate "listening posts" into the day-to-day work of their newsrooms.

**Upload your project budget**

[Listening Post Budget for INN Innovation Fund.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.**

[Images - INN application.zip](#)