

INNOvation Fund Application Round 4 - Dec. 8, 2015

Submission Date	2015-12-08 14:11:09
Organization Name	The Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting
Tax-exempt status	501(c)(3) organization
EIN of organization (or of fiscal sponsor's organization)	27-1652830
Website address	www.investigatamidwest.org
Phone Number	(312) 970-0395
Applicant's name	Pam Dempsey
Title:	Executive Director
Contact email	pamelagdempsey@gmail.com
Proposed Project Start Date	01-01-2016
Anticipated Project End Date	06-30-2017
Total estimated budget for the proposed project	70,000
Request amount from the INNOvation Fund:	35,000
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.	310,000
In two or three sentences, describe your organization's purpose and audience.	We are a nonprofit online newsroom offering investigative and enterprise coverage of big agribusiness and related issues such as energy, climate change, labor and government. Our audience includes residents in the Midwest as well as researchers, corporations and advocates.

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.

We are creating a digital tool that will harvest Securities and Exchange Commission filings and other documents and data on risk assessments by multinational corporations on climate change, market turmoil, regulations, food insecurity, products, wars and other factors and put them into an easily searchable database in which they can be analyzed and visualized.

(See a demo of the tool by downloading the video file here <http://bit.ly/riskminer>)

Our digital tool will test the effectiveness of bringing together channels of corporate information and data not currently curated for free for citizens to give users a comprehensive look at the companies' risk assessments that have substantial impact on policies and practices.

If successful, then we will build out our tool on a freemium platform, with a tiered subscription plan based on services in addition to free access to basic features.

Our sustainability plans include a mix of foundation and grant money, membership models and revenue products such as this tool. This tool would be the first of our revenue products.

Citizens and journalists have few free tools to fully understand the large multinational corporations and how their assessment of risks create policies, practices and strategies impact our governments and lives.

We will making it easier to find and analyze the multi-national corporation documents and data that are public but seldom collected in an easily searchable format that allows journalists or the public to see how those multi-national corporations are affecting or influencing local and regional issues.

This approach will cut through the rhetoric and opinion by allowing journalists and the public to see corporations own assessments of risk in our world and how they plan to deal with those risks. This will help create deeper and more meaningful conversations and news reports and bring value to the public discussions.

Moreover, we believe corporations, industry and advocacy groups and researchers will find this information easy to use and valuable.

The tool will offer subscription models that will increase our revenue and include a paid newsletter digest of information and analysis.

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

Principally a revenue-generating project that is part of a larger revenue-generation plan

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?

Acton Gorton, Ph.D. candidate, Informatics, Graduate School of Library and Information Sciences, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Data journalist with a focus on open data, geospatial analysis, and software development. His work commonly appears in investigative journalism news outlets, such as CU-CitizenAccess and The Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting. Gorton is currently completing a PhD with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, focusing on the visualization of computer based data analytics using Augmented Reality.

Loretta Auvil, Illinois Informatics Institute, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. Auvil has worked with a diverse set of application drivers to integrate machine learning and information visualization techniques to solve the needs of research partners. She has led software development and research projects for many years. Prior to working for I3 and ARI, she spent many years at NCSA on machine learning and information visualization projects and several years creating tools for visualizing performance data of parallel computer programs at Rome Laboratory and Oak Ridge National Laboratory.

Pam Dempsey, Executive Director, Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting. Veteran journalist covering issues such as agribusiness, local and regional government, health, housing and Native American government through investigative and enterprise stories. Dempsey has helped develop community engagement projects and coordinate the start-up of two online newsrooms.

Brant Houston is a Professor and Knight Chair in Investigative Reporting at the University of Illinois. Before coming to Illinois, he was executive director of Investigative Reporters and Editors for more than decade and a database editor and investigative reporter at newspapers for 17 years. He is author of four editions of "Computer-Assisted Reporting: A Practical Guide" and has overseen many data projects and the development and application of several digital tools.

We will work with a local tech team, Pixo Tech, to help us develop both the back-end and user-end of the project. They are a local, proven firm that has developed innovative applications and mobile technologies. Further, theirre products can easily be integrated into our existing platform. For the past three months, we have worked with them to develop a cost analysis to our tool. We will not need to hire additional help, instead, we will divert some of our existing resources to this project.

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 metrics are relatively simple.

One, we plan to use Google analytics to gauge site traffic.

Second, we plan to monitor our newsletter metrics via MailChimp through sign-ups, shares and opens.

Third, we will measure activity on social media on how often the site is mentioned or shared.

Finally, we plan to monitor subscriptions sign-ups.

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

As the goal of the project is to increase audience engagement and generate revenue, we will measure success by the percent increase of site traffic and social media traffic, newsletter traffic and subscription sign-ups.

Our first hard goal is a 10 percent increase in site traffic (300 more unique visits a month), 40 percent increase in newsletter traffic (100 more sign-ups) and subscription sign up of (150 people).

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

If approved, we will provide Google analytic reports of all of our sites and a MailChimp report of our newsletter lists at the start of the grant.

This will set the baseline.

At the end of the project deadline, we will provide Google analytic reports of all of our sites and a MailChimp report as well as the analytics from the subscription platform.

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

One goal of this project is to create a revenue generating product that is sustainable and brings added valuable to the rhetoric of discussions on big agribusiness.

If successful, then we hope to use it to develop a model that other nonprofit newsrooms can use to launch similar platforms.

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

For the past three years, we have reported on big agribusiness and its impact locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

We also have a combined experience of 40 plus years of investigative and enterprise reporting and 20 years of computer programming experience.

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?

Big Ag Watch is a freemium model data tool that aggregates public databases on corporate agribusinesses.

The data tool scrapes SEC filings, enforcement actions, federal lobbying databases, social media channels, corporate press releases, and government databases to mash together deeper insights into the big agribusiness corporations that impact our daily lives across labor, food, energy, climate change and environment among other issues.

Our tool initially focuses on five of the biggest agribusiness companies – Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, Bunge, Monsanto and Syngenta. Together, these companies control a billions-dollar industry with deep roots in the Midwest and international reach.

Our data tool will test the effectiveness of bringing together channels of information and data not normally curated in a holistic approach to give users a comprehensive look at the companies with big impact but little notice.

Moreover, we are testing a freemium model to see if it would generate some income in a tool that could be a prototype for nonprofit newsrooms.

Our tool will be a prototype to better inform citizens of how big agribusinesses affect their everyday lives and equip them with the tools and information they need to have more effective conversations.

Further, the data tool will provide journalists with story tips and data needed to better report on these companies and the issues they impact and give them at-a-glance reports that quickly show the impact of these companies.

Researchers and investors can use this information to inform their own work.

Other tools are expensive and do not curate data in the same manner.

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

Over the past 20 years, consistent, in-depth coverage of agribusiness has declined.

Instead, issues are covered as either news releases or a spot investigative piece.

Underscoring issues of local, regional and national importance are the companies we are focusing on.

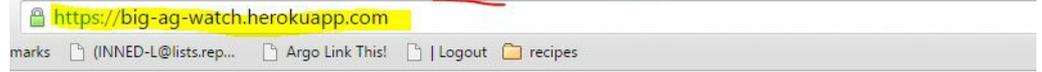
The tool aims to bring to light a comprehensive look at these companies and their activities in a holistic approach to better inform citizens as well as provide story tips and research to journalists.

Upload your project budget

[Innovation budget-Midwest.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.

← test here



SEC Risk Filings

? Hint

Try searching for a company name such as "Archer Daniels" or a descriptor such as "credit rating"

[riskminer.JPG](#)