

Institute for Nonprofit News

Membership Survey Executive Summary

December 3, 2015

Survey conducted by The Bernard Consulting Group, Inc.

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(color coded version)

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INTRODUCTION

As part of INN's strategic planning / governance study process, The Bernard Consulting Group, Inc. (BCG) conducted an online survey with INN membership. BCG sent the survey to 110 INN members and received 63 responses, a response rate of 57%.

THE SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. What is your vision for INN over the next 3-5 years?
2. In 5-10 years?
3. On a scale of 1-10 (1 is low, 10 is high), how accurately does the current statement reflect your perception of the primary purpose of INN?
4. What significant changes, if any, would you make to the mission?
5. What do you expect your organization's most significant challenges or needs to be in the next 1-3 years?
6. Which of these would you most like help with?
7. Using the same scale of 1-10, (1 is low) what is your level of satisfaction with your membership in INN?
8. What factors influence your rating?
9. Please rank INN services from most to least valuable to your organization.
10. Other services (to rank)
11. If there is a service INN is not providing that you wish it would, let us know here.
12. Using the same scale of 1-10, with 1 being low, rate your level of satisfaction with the organization's performance in each governance practice area.
13. Using the same scale of 1-10, with 1 being low, rate your level of confidence in INN's governance practices.
14. What would you define as the most significant weaknesses of the governance structure?
15. From your perspective, how would you describe the ideal governance structure for INN?
16. Please select your primary editorial/audience focus from the following list.
17. Please select the category that best matches your gross revenue.
18. What year was your organization founded?
19. Going forward, tell us how you see your organization evolving in terms of your audience.

REPORT ORGANIZATION

This report is organized into two sections. Section One contains a summary of the demographics data. Section Two provides an overview of the major common themes generated from the analysis of the data. (A separate document has all of the survey data and common themes.)

SECTION ONE: DEMOGRAPHICS

The demographics questions were placed at the end of the survey but are summarized in the front of this report to provide an overview of the level of participation in the survey, and the types of member organizations that responded. Throughout this executive summary, and in the full summary report, the data is segmented based on the primary audience type identified by the member organization.

The organization’s primary editorial/audience focus (Question 16)			
Local	State	National	Specialty/Beat
16	19	14	12

The organization’s gross revenue (Question 17)				
	Under \$100,000	\$100,000-\$500,000	\$500,000-\$1M	Over \$1M
Local	4	8	2	2
State	5	9	1	4
National	5	2	3	4
Specialty/Beat	4	5	1	2

Year the organization was founded (Question 18)							
Local		State		National		Specialty/Beat	
1994	2010	1923	2010 (5)	1975	2008	1980	2008
2005	2011	1999	2011	1977	2009	1990	2009
2008	2012 (2)	2007	2012	1983	2011	2000	2010 (3)
2009 (8)	2014	2008	2013 (3)	2002	2012	2005	2012
		2009 (4)	2015	2004	2013 (2)	2006	2014
				2007 (2)	2015		

How the organization will evolve in terms of audience served (Question 19)				
	Local	State	National	Specialty/Beat
We produce news and most people consume it on our own publications. Some is distributed elsewhere but we’re focused on building audience for our own publication.	11	8	6	8
We produce news and distribute it primarily through partners. We may have our own web site or publication but reach many more people through our partners.	5	14	7	5
We are an association, service provider, funder, academic, research organization or similar group that primarily supports or promotes other news organizations.	0	1	1	2
Covering the news ourselves.	2	2	1	3

SECTION TWO: OVERVIEW OF COMMON THEMES

An overview of the common themes identified by BCG is presented below. This section is not intended to be all-inclusive or to represent unanimous views. Excerpts from the assessment data are included beneath each common theme to provide context for the theme.

Color code:

- Comments in gray are from organizations primarily serving a local audience.
- Comments in purple are from organizations primarily serving a state audience.
- Comments in red are from organizations primarily serving a national audience.
- Comments in green are from organizations primarily serving a specialty / beat audience.

MEMBERS' VISION FOR INN

3-5 Year Vision

There is one overarching common theme regarding members' vision for INN over the next 3-5 years: **INN will continue to support and provide services to member organizations.** More than forty comments were made related to this theme, which occurred across all four member segments. Representative comments include:

- That INN will continue to grow and provide vital services for its member organizations.
- That it will mobilize substantial national corporate and philanthropic support for its members, help members operate more effectively in technology and other areas, assist them in serving their audiences, and be a vehicle for collaboration and sharing of best practices between members.
- Continue to provide tech development, legal coverage underwriting and the like.
- Continue to serve as a resource to provide technical and business support to nonprofit newsrooms.

A related theme emerged in two of the groups – members serving a state or national audience: **INN will provide services tailored to a member's size or life cycle.** Representative comments related to this theme include:

- My vision would be for INN to grow to the point where it can provide services to different stages of a non-profit's life. For example, it could have a division to serve start-ups, mid-stage and mature organizations. The needs for INN members are different, depending on their stages of development. I'm not sure the INN staff is big enough right now to focus on specialization. I'm not sure I see INN being a funding organization, I

think that's mission creep. So I hope INN can convince foundations to fund members directly.

- Mature into a thriving membership organization that offers a strong support network and sophisticated business AND editorial services to nonprofit media organizations that are producing investigative & public interest stories and/or are working on issues related to investigative/public interest reporting. By "mature," I mean that INN will evolve from primarily supporting the needs of start-ups and younger orgs to becoming better able to meet the more sophisticated needs and interests of veteran investigative/public interest reporting organizations. Currently, these more established orgs don't have any practical reasons to be members of INN other than as a show of support for the network.

5-10 Year Vision

Once again the overarching common theme regarding members' vision for INN over the next 5-10 years is **that INN will continue to support and provide services to member organizations.** This common theme occurred across all four member segments. Representative comments include:

- Same - Be a good trade group -- offering advice consulting on monetization, fundraising as well as offer direct discounted services - like IT - that can reduce costs and spur innovation and cost savings.
- Be the top recognized entity in the nation that supports, promotes and leads the industry of nonprofit, community journalism.
- An organization that helps us grow by feeding us ideas and business strategies.
- Continue to serve as a resource to provide technical and business support to nonprofit newsrooms.

Other common themes related to members' vision for INN over the next 5-10 years are:

INN will be bigger, more robust, and have a higher profile. This theme emerged in two segments – members serving a state or specialty / beat audience. Representative comments include:

- By this time, INN should be an even more fully staffed, multi-faceted organization that continues to be deeply respected and appreciated for the member-focused customer service it provides - like Search remains for Google. At the same time, I envision INN as a stronger marketer of the value of nonprofit news to potential funders, sponsors and other sources of revenue - a sustainability driver as well as an enabler for its members. Perhaps there are more partnerships, or even designated regional staff or contract agents, who can provide direct one-on-one assistance and advice in key functional areas (even for a price beyond the dues). I envision pro-active real-time updates on successes and struggles among our members and on industry trends. By this time also, INN should be a

more widely known brand and pitch artist for the value and accomplishments in nonprofit news.

- Bigger, more robust.

INN will help small member organizations. This theme emerged in two segments – members serving a state or national audience. Representative comments include:

- Doing everything it can to help the smallest members succeed, especially in states where there is no investigative reporting except what these small orgs produce.
- A network that primarily helps smaller non-profits find their footing, and navigate the business.

ASSESSMENT OF THE MISSION STATEMENT

Current Mission: To provide education and business support services to our nonprofit member organizations and promote the value and benefits of public service and investigative journalism. We will accomplish this by:

- Identifying operational and revenue-generating best practices and training our members on them.
- Establishing partnerships, collaborations and strategic alliances to advance our mission.
- Promoting public service journalism as a philanthropic investment.
- Leveraging funding to maximize impact.
- Developing business leadership among nonprofit news organizations.
- Offering affordable back-office services to individual organizations.

Accuracy of the Mission Statement

Members across all four segments are mostly satisfied with the accuracy of the mission statement. Sixty respondents rated the accuracy of the statement on a scale of 1-10, with one being low. The aggregate average of all sixty responses is 7.77. Listed below is the average rating for the individual member segments.

Segment	Average Rating
Local	7.73
State	7.50
National	7.71
Specialty/Beat	8.33

Changes to the Mission Statement

One common theme emerged across all four member segments regarding significant changes to the mission: **the mission statement is fine as is and does not need any significant changes.**

Representative comments for this common theme include:

- Current mission seems appropriate.
- I think the organization just went through this and got it just right.

An additional common theme about the mission statement emerged in two segments – members serving a state or national audience: **the statement is fine but implementation could be better.**

Representative comments for this common theme include:

- The mission is fine. Implementation isn't as robust as it can be.
- This is a good set of objectives, though execution has been uneven.

SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES FACING MEMBERS OVER THE NEXT 1-3 YEARS

Members across all four segments expect to face three significant challenges in the next 1-3 years: **(1) fundraising / financial challenges, (2) organizational / operational challenges, and (3) challenges related to marketing the organization and audience engagement.** There were more than fifty comments regarding financial challenges, more than thirty comments regarding organizational / operational challenges and over fifteen comments regarding marketing / engagement. Representative comments related to each challenge are listed below.

Fundraising / Financial Challenges

- It would be a shock to me if any organization does NOT list funding as its most significant challenge. That is certainly the biggest challenge at inewssource. We are growing, thanks largely to a handful of angel donors who believe in and are enthusiastic about what we do. But I don't sleep well any night when I contemplate what would happen if even one of them pulled their support. I need to diversify my funding varieties and sources.
- Sustainability. Pure journalism funding is on the wane. Backers and users are interested in impact. What will be the 21st Century model that meets these needs and excites the donor base?

- Raising enough funding to sustain the organization's current operations. Raising significant additional funds so that we can expand our ability to do groundbreaking investigative reporting in the public interest.
- Diversifying revenue sources--particularly developing earned revenue sources, such as a membership system, a sponsorship program.

Organizational / Operational Challenges

- Succession planning
- Help with board and organizational development - people issues, not just technology issues. INN talks about technology well, but there's not much talk about staffing, personnel, organizational leadership, etc.
- Education on how to operate a business, how to build a board, etc.
- Building our capacity

Challenges related to Marketing of the Organization / Audience Engagement

- Marketing. Nearly six years in, and plenty of people are still discovering us.
- Developing and implementing a broad marketing/promotional campaign in 2016 that ties together all the work that we do: our investigative and public service journalism, our health public forums and our high school journalism boot camps.
- Promotion: Moving SIRFs content beyond confines of Wall Street.
- Audience growth and engagement / marketing

CHALLENGES MEMBERS WOULD LIKE HELP WITH

Of the three common themes mentioned above, members across all four segments would like help with their **fundraising / financial sustainability challenges**. Members in three segments – those serving a state, national, or specialty / beat audience – would like help with their **organizational / operational challenges**.

Comments made regarding help with fundraising / financial issues include:

- Raising funds. I think INN's CEO should be available to come to high level fundraising events in my, and others', markets.
- Establishing a corps of major donors who are willing to consistently support the organization year after year.

- To get regional and local nonprofit foundations more interested in seeing organization like ours, which not only focuses on youth issues for a broad audience but also helps train youth in journalism and civics, become sustainable.
- INN has provided much appreciated help to GIJN in the areas of fiscal sponsorship, accounting, IT support, web design, and sustainability resources. I would urge you to continue to offer these services to the membership.

Comments made regarding help with organizational / operational issues include:

- Board and organizational development.
- Sample newsroom structures with job descriptions, along with case studies. All I know about is nonprofits that failed after the founder left.
- Educating board members about the proper role of the BOD vis-a-vis editors and staff.

MEMBERS’ ASSESSMENT OF HOW INN MEETS THEIR NEEDS

Members across all four segments are fairly satisfied with their membership in INN. Fifty-nine respondents provided a rating for their level of satisfaction using a scale of 1-10, with one being low. The average of all fifty-nine responses is 6.71. The individual ratings ranged from 2 to 10. Listed below is the average rating for each member segment.

Segment	Average Rating
Local	6.73
State	6.78
National	5.86
Specialty/Beat	7.58

Representative comments made by members regarding the factors that influenced their rating are provided below.

Factors influencing ratings of 2 to 4

- INN is of essentially no help to us, but also no harm. We participate out of obligation to the sector. (Comment accompanied a rating of 2.)
- Some services -- legal insurance -- are great. --INN seems to live in a different world from most members (excluding the handful of large, extremely well-funded organizations) who live almost hand-to-mouth, often doing good work in areas that have

become news deserts. --Communication from INN to members is poor, at best. (Comment accompanied a rating of 3.)

- Services don't adequately match our needs; our greatest need is funding to sustain our reporting and to increase it. (Comment accompanied a rating of 4.)

Factors influencing ratings of 5 to 7

- It's important for INN to ask its members what services it needs. I think communication has been poor (not during Denise's tenure) and the needs of all the organizations, especially the smaller ones, have been ignored. It's not even clear to me what services -- in the area of tech help, for example, are even available to members. (Comment accompanied a rating of 5.)
- Our organization is on the outer edge of INN members and its services are not consistently relevant to our needs. (Comment accompanied a rating of 6.)
- 1. Published some excellent reports on fundraising and business practices. 2. Developed Largo. 3. Conducted conferences and workshops on publishing topics, (Would like to see professional development offered to cohorts of news organizations that have similar characteristics, i.e. it doesn't help us much to hear what the Texas Tribune is doing.) (Comment accompanied a rating of 7.)

Factors influencing ratings of 8 to 10

- 1. Everyone at INN is terrifically welcoming, helpful, professional and responsive. 2. We love our Largo website. 3. Peers are generous with sharing experiences and opportunities. (Comment accompanied a rating of 8.)
- 1. Hearing from others in this small field. It's easy to forget you're I'm [sic] the only one doing this. Mutual support goes a long way. 2. Encouragement and sounding-board services from the staff. 3. Annual INN day at IRE (see No. 1). (Comment accompanied a rating of 9.)
- 1. Outstanding service from INN staff. 2. Programs that distribute funding and/or save money in our budget. 3. Peer learning from other INN members. (Comment accompanied a rating of 10.)

MEMBERS' ASSESSMENT OF INN'S SERVICES

Members were asked to rank nine INN services from most to least valuable to their organization. Twenty-one respondents ranked the services in order from 1-9. Thirty-seven respondents used the 1-9 scale to evaluate the services, and used some scale numbers more than once. In a few instances, respondents in the group of thirty-seven also incorporated a 0 or 10 for their evaluation. Lastly, a handful of respondents in the group of thirty-seven rated only a few of the services. Therefore, BCG is reporting the data separately to reflect the different approaches of

the respondents. For the executive summary, BCG summarized the aggregate data as shown in the two tables below. The full summary report shows all of the responses to this question, organized by audience type.

SERVICES RANKED FROM 1-9		
<i>N=21</i>	<i>1 is least valuable, 9 is most valuable</i>	
Services that were ranked primarily in the 7-9 category	Largo platform	12 rankings of 7-9 2 rankings of 4-6 7 rankings of 1-3
	Networking	11 rankings of 7-9 5 rankings of 4-6 5 rankings of 1-3
	Training in best business practices	10 rankings of 7-9 4 rankings of 4-6 7 rankings of 1-3
Services that were ranked primarily in the 4-6 category	Tech support and tips	6 rankings of 7-9 15 rankings of 4-6 0 rankings of 1-3
	Reviews of best digital tools	4 rankings of 7-9 12 rankings of 4-6 5 rankings of 1-3
Service ranked primarily in the 1-3 category	Insurance referrals and subsidies	4 rankings of 7-9 2 rankings of 4-6 15 rankings of 1-3
Services receiving a more even distribution of rankings	Data analysis and visualization	6 rankings of 7-9 8 rankings of 4-6 7 rankings of 1-3
	Custom consulting	6 rankings of 7-9 7 rankings of 4-6 8 rankings of 1-3
	Arranging legal services	4 rankings of 7-9 8 rankings of 4-6 9 rankings of 1-3

The data from the group of thirty-seven, who evaluated each service individually rather than ranking them, is less reliable than the data above since some of the respondents used a different scale than others, incorporating a 0 or 10 in their evaluation. Even so, the table below shows the average rating for each service.

SERVICE	AVERAGE RATING
Largo platform	5.32
Networking	6.78
Training in best business practices	5.80
Tech support and tips	5.49
Reviews of best digital tools	4.41
Insurance referrals and subsidies	5.94
Data analysis and visualization	4.37
Custom consulting	4.52
Arranging legal services	4.25

The final question in the assessment of services category asked members to identify any new services that INN should provide. One overarching common theme emerged from all four member segments: **Members would like help obtaining funding.** Representative comments supporting this common theme are listed below.

- Facilitating meetings between members and funders. This could occur as an annual event where members give presentations to a large number of program officers who are broadly interested in funding nonprofit news organizations.
- INN has a fundraiser but for INN, not members who need guidance and practical help and often don't have the resources or experience to know where to look.
- It would be great if INN could take a leadership role in trying to help members (get) funding from community foundations.
- I really think much more focus should be on helping members find funding specific to their own mission, type of journalism, and location.

MEMBERS’ ASSESSMENT OF INN’S GOVERNANCE PRACTICES AND STRUCTURE

Level of satisfaction with INN’s performance of governance practices

Members rated their level of satisfaction with INN’s performance of six governance practices using a scale of 1-10, with one being low. The average scores for each member segment are shown in the table below.

	Members Serving a Local Audience	Members Serving a State Audience	Members Serving a National Audience	Members Serving a Specialty / Beat Audience
A. Setting the overall strategic direction of the organization	6.69	6.12	5.08	7.42
B. Making policy	6.23	5.76	4.77	7.30
C. Making strategic decisions	6.23	5.65	4.64	7.18
D. Overseeing / monitoring the organization’s performance	6.17	5.18	5.15	6.45
E. Ensuring financial sustainability	5.92	5.82	4.83	7.00
F. Ensuring overall accountability	5.83	5.29	4.69	6.82

Members’ level of confidence in INN’s governance practices

Members also rated their level of confidence in INN’s governance practices using the same scale of 1-10. The average scores for each member segment are shown in the table below.

Segment	Average Rating
Local	6.62
State	5.65
National	5.46
Specialty/Beat	7.25

Most significant weaknesses of the governance structure

There is one overarching common theme regarding the most significant weakness in the governance structure: **members feel there is a lack of transparency / accountability in the organization.** This common theme surfaced in all four member segments. Representative comments about this theme include:

- I would say they have to emphasize on transparency. Maybe just a report twice a year from the Board would be good for members.
- Lack of transparency with members. Particularly with the shift in mission and name.
- Governance structure doesn't conform to standard nonprofit governance and accountability procedures. The board is employing some quasi-definition of a membership organization which allows it to call INN a membership org but which also allows board to operate outside the usual nonprofit board accountability standards for a membership org, esp. one with a vitally interested membership base.
- Transparency was a problem in the recent "unpleasantness" but that may be behind us.

A second common theme regarding weaknesses of the governance structure emerged from three segments – members primarily serving a local, state or national audience: **there is a lack of dialogue / connection / communication between the membership and the board.**

Representative comments for this theme include:

- The most significant weakness of the governance structure is that the membership has not been consulted in advance of major strategic decisions, such as changing the name and mission of the organization. We appreciate that you are seeking our input now.
- Perception that members aren't being included in key decisions.
- Lack of communication

A third common theme regarding weaknesses of the governance structure emerged from three segments – members primarily serving a state, national, or specialty / beat audience: **the makeup / structure of the board needs work.** Representative comments for this theme include:

- Need more members representing member orgs on the board and fewer public members.
- The governance structure disempowers INN members and vests complete authority over the organization in the board, while also limiting the number of board members who directly speak on behalf of the members. That needs to change. If this isn't a membership organization, then it shouldn't charge membership dues.
- Too many people on the board (10!) especially public members - it's not clear how they are identified, vetted, etc.

The ideal governance structure for INN

One overarching common theme emerged across all four member segments regarding the ideal governance structure for INN: **the current structure is sufficient**. Representative comments for this theme include:

- I think the structure is fine. I feel what has been lacking is overall accountability between the board and staff and then to the membership. BTW: I have been one of those INN members who has attended almost every INN board meeting at IRE meetings, and I was completely blindsided by the upheaval re: Kevin Davis' departure.
- We are satisfied with the 4:6 ratio of elected to public members. We would like more transparency from the board with the membership, however, including notice of board meetings, distribution of minutes, etc.
- Current board structure makes as much sense to many as any other though the knowledge, commitment and accomplishments of individual board members is what makes the most difference. I like the idea of outside "public members" who are accomplished and have a high enough profile and can use their influence to move INN and its member organizations forward.
- The structure seems fine. Most important is leadership, which needs to ensure that INN is professionally run, responsive to its members, and that it stays true to its core mission - - which is not to make money but to support and strengthen its members and nonprofit news media.

A second common theme emerged from two segments – members serving a local audience and members serving a state audience: **members should be more involved in the governance structure**. Representative comments for this theme include:

- More member representation on the board and/or more committees that involve members who may or may not be board members. These committees can serve to bring the member perspective to the board through a consistent formal framework.
- More open, more attention paid to member organizations' needs, more governance by actual INN members (as opposed to public members).