



**Institute for  
Nonprofit News**

# Futures Fellowships

**Transformative career  
paths for tomorrow's  
publishers, accelerating the  
growth of nonprofit news**



*“Students often ask me, ‘How did you get from where you were as a journalist to the business side of news?’*

*Developing career paths through cross-functional, hands-on work experiences — like you’re developing for the Futures Fellowships — will help graduates see and build the future for themselves and the industry.”*

*- Ebony Reed,  
Associate Professor, Director of Innovation,  
RJI Futures Lab, University of Missouri*

# The INN Futures Fellowships

## Transformative career paths for tomorrow's publishers that accelerate nonprofit news growth

Across North America, communities and journalists are building nonprofit newsrooms to provide trusted information to thousands of communities. Nonprofit, nonpartisan newsrooms have grown tenfold in the last decade. Ten years from today, we believe they will field a force of more than 20,000 journalists in the United States. But with this success comes a looming leadership gap: These newsrooms need a new generation of leaders with the skills and experience to fuel continued growth in nonprofit news.

INN is launching the News Futures Fellowships as a career ladder to leadership roles that will restore and reinvent public service journalism through new business skills and practices. Six year-long, post-graduate fellowships — 30 over five years — will be created to work with 120 nonprofit news organizations on transformative projects in audience, membership and revenue development.

### The fellowships address two needs:

- They create a **leadership pipeline** providing hands-on experience, entrepreneurial skills, and professional networks for the public service news leaders of the future.
- They **catalyze growth in this important area of journalism** by providing small but fast-growing newsrooms with recent graduates who will help them apply cutting-edge best practices to grow their audiences and the impact of their news coverage.

INN is partnering with three journalism schools to launch the program in June 2019 — Columbia, Missouri and Northwestern. More are expected to participate as the Fellowship program expands.

The Futures Fellowships kick off INN's 10th anniversary year. **At a time when journalism and democracy are both threatened, we invite you to join us.** By funding a leadership path for outstanding grads, we celebrate the past by forging a new future for journalism.

The benefits of this program extend beyond the Fellows. Each Futures Fellow will work with four nonprofit news organizations over the course of a year to spearhead a new initiative for each. This model gives the Fellows a broad understanding of how to apply new business models for news. They will leave their fellowships with the hands-on experience and connections to become the next generation of independent news publishers and entrepreneurs.

Fellows chosen for their interest in media growth and demonstrated leadership skills will speed the adoption of innovative approaches in audience development, revenue growth and diversification. **News organizations will be selected on the basis of well-defined projects that have transformational potential to help the organizations grow.** Fellows and news organizations will be supported by subject expert mentors, a program director and INN.

## Five-year outcomes: Journalism supported in 120 newsrooms. Thirty news leaders launched.

### At the end of each Fellowship year:

- Growing public sector news organizations will have implemented new practices, hurdled a jump in scale and be running at a higher level to support more journalism.
- Universities will have generated a faster transfer of knowledge from their premier programs to the field, fostered practical adoption of academic expertise and created a career link for graduates to one of the fastest-growing news sectors.
- The post-grad Fellows will have gained a range of creative and leadership experiences similar to multi-client consulting, a proven route to industry leadership, and they will be well-positioned to take mid-career roles with broad advancement potential.

### The need for sustainable and substantial investment in the future

The INN Futures Fellows program requires a budget of \$600,000 to support six Futures Fellowships in 2019-2020 and accelerate growth at 24 nonprofit news organizations.

- \$200,000 funds the spring 2019 launch of two Fellows supporting eight newsrooms
- \$100,000 sponsors a Fellow for a full year supporting four newsrooms
- \$ 50,000 provides a year-round mentorship to Fellows and newsrooms
- \$ 25,000 funds a Fellow for a quarter
- \$ 10,000 underwrites a Fellow for two newsrooms in underserved areas
- \$ 5,000 provides a challenge grant for a newsroom adopting a new practice

Your participation can be a **catalytic investment** that infuses this developing sector with the talent, leadership and practical application of knowledge it needs to make a thriving contribution to an informed, healthy democracy.

By investing now, as INN celebrates a decade of exponential growth and seeks to **strengthen public service journalism** through the next 10 years, you have the opportunity to seed and shape this pivotal program. And you can strengthen newsrooms that are meeting communities' needs for quality information and engagement in ever more dynamic ways.

Please join us by contacting INN Executive Director Sue Cross at [sue@inn.org](mailto:sue@inn.org) or Futures Fellowships Director Patty Mitchell at [futures@inn.org](mailto:futures@inn.org). For more information about the Futures Fund and Fellowships go to [inn.org/futuresfellows/](http://inn.org/futuresfellows/).

*"The people attracted to apply for the Futures Fellowships don't want to be stuck in siloed jobs where they can't have an immediate impact or see their career path forward. The talent is there, but often it's hard to connect that to opportunities.*

*Today's graduates want to make a difference and will see the long-term benefit of this type of unique learning and work opportunity with real world responsibilities and results."*

- Jim Flink, Assistant Professor,  
Graduate Faculty Strategic Communication,  
University of Missouri

*"We are excited to be part of the initial Futures Fellowship cohort. We are very impressed with how smartly and thoughtfully you are approaching the conception and design of the program and appreciate the significance of the work INN does to support the profession today and look forward to the future."*

- Julie Hartenstein, Associate Dean, Career Development,  
Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

*"The Futures Fellowships are aimed at creating a critical mass of talent where American journalism most needs it: at the intersection of journalism, audience, product and revenue. It will help address what has been an existential challenge -- particularly in small and community-based news organizations -- building capacity for strategic executable innovation.*

*This program addresses the issue in an innovative way that will have powerful positive ripples across multiple newsrooms and benefit the larger news ecosystem that INN supports."*

- Raju Narisetti, Professor of Professional Practice,  
Columbia University School of Journalism

*"There's lots to like about the INN Futures Fellowship program. Talented graduates get a first job with the advantages of a consulting gig, giving them a range of experiences that sets them up for future leadership paths into this growing part of media.*

*Academic programs get an incentive to teach skills that can be used in real media organizations. And news organizations get a way to scale up and adopt innovations without needing to commit to funding, recruiting and training a full-time hire right away."*

- Rich Gordon, Professor of Digital Innovation,  
Medill School of Journalism,  
Northwestern University

## The challenges addressed



Nonprofit newsrooms are restoring and preserving community-based news as a public good. These newsrooms are a bright trend offsetting the economic decline of commercial news media, and they are increasingly vital to keeping millions of people informed.

Thanks to philanthropic and public support, nonprofit newsrooms are being founded at a fast pace, and news organizations established over the last decade are now seeking successors to carry on the work of their founders. All need business leadership.

Because nonprofit news is pioneering new models in community engagement and sustainable revenue streams, the **traditional routes to CEO, GM and publisher positions in media no longer apply.**

The raw talent is there for these new roles — journalism school enrollments are up, and today's graduates are mission-driven, entrepreneurial and digitally savvy. They have a grounding in new skills and approaches to building revenue, readership and community ties — yet graduates may not find early career opportunities that put them on clear leadership paths.

Through the INN Futures Fellowships, we will connect this talent with broader opportunities, provide hands-on experience and the network-building that together create new career ladders to the entrepreneurial side of public service journalism.

The Futures Fellowships also address a challenge that independent news organizations share with many entrepreneurs. **Achieving growth and sustainability isn't a steady climb, but a series of cliffs. To become sustainable, independent news organizations need short-term, intensive help to make leaps in scale.** Data from INN training evaluations shows the biggest impediment to growth, across the field, is the difficulty of finding or freeing staff for the short-term surge of work required to implement a new revenue stream, audience channel or best practice.

INN programs over the last four years showed us that short-term injections of capital or expert help can profoundly improve revenue and audience growth. INN has tested small grants and short-term consulting projects through university graduate classes. We found that even short-term concentrated help can successfully move news businesses to stronger business performance and a larger audience. And that means their reporting can serve more people and have more impact. This experience inspires and informs the Futures Fellowships.

## Overview of the Futures Fellowship program

Each **Futures Fellow** will work with four news sites over the course of a year, under the guidance of a program director and subject-matter mentors on specific projects with defined outcomes. Fellows also gain a community. INN will bring them to meet thousands of investigative and public service journalists at two annual gatherings of nonprofit publishers from across North America: INN Days at the Investigative Reporters & Editors Conference each spring, and the INN Business Intensive at the Online News Association fall meeting.

Fellows may be based at a client site or work remotely. This flexibility gives them the opportunity to work with news companies that have the strongest projects and prospects, regardless of geography, and it supports diversity. By working on a range of projects within three years of graduation, they rapidly expand their range of accomplishments and widen the types of opportunities they're in a position to take post-fellowship.

And at a time when college graduates are seeking meaningful careers and tangible ways to build skills and community, **these Fellowships serve the public and our democracy, directly and immediately.**

### Support and mentoring

Fellows will receive training on how to be effective advisors to their “client” newsrooms, along with competitive compensation and a health insurance stipend. As needed, participating news organizations will receive a small challenge grant upon completion of the Fellowship projects, to help bridge from implementation to ongoing operations.

In addition to Fellows' compensation, the program supports stipends for training, subject mentors, travel to industry conferences, and the fellowship director. Participating news organizations each will be asked to contribute \$5,000 to their Fellow's compensation and site visits. In order to enable a diverse set of news organizations to apply, the program budget includes funds to waive host fees for applicant sites that report for underserved communities and have strong projects but otherwise might be unable to participate.



Fellows will be responsible for spearheading the projects and working with their client news organizations to refine and execute the project plans, with regular check ins and feedback from program mentors and the Fellowship director. Fellows also will meet together as a cohort to share experiences and further develop professional connections.

The program director will oversee recruitment, relationships with academic partners, the Fellows and participating newsrooms throughout the year. INN will help Fellows find potential leadership roles and track their career trajectories for five years following their Fellowship.



### **Academic Partners**

Columbia, Missouri and Northwestern, as well as other potential academic partners, have invested deeply in analyzing the changing news industry and best practices. The Futures Fellowships leverage the investments made by these universities and harnesses them to the practical experiences and needs of growing, independent newsrooms.

Fellows will be selected from recent graduates based on their leadership qualities and their career interests in new models of news media, community engagement, data analytics and revenue to support original, high-quality reporting. Each host site will be chosen based on its transformation project, the organization's momentum and its ability to commit staff to work closely with the Fellow throughout the year for each project.

If you have any questions about the Futures Fellowship program, please contact Patty Mitchell, Futures Fellowship Director at [futures@inn.org](mailto:futures@inn.org).

## The time to fund the future is now

INN is committed to long term sustainable investment in the growth of public sector news and its leaders.

Our intention is not to create a one-year opportunity, but an ongoing pipeline program that benefits diverse talent, powers nonprofit newsrooms with practical tools and programs, and supports the investments and work that leading universities have made in thinking about and educating journalists toward new ways of delivering news.

The INN Futures Fund is seeking partners who are likewise committed to the vision and the opportunity to address these challenges, not just for the first year, but to support a program that will award at least six fellows each year for the next five years. **The INN Futures Fund has a goal of raising \$3 million to fund support for 120 sites and 30 Futures Fellows across five years.**

Independent, public service journalism now offers a promising alternative to faltering and polarized commercial media. It represents a broad movement to generate a new kind of civil society news coverage, rooted in facts, trust and independent reporting.

Your support of these newsrooms and the young journalists committed to leading them will help us ensure that a free and independent press informs and brings together future generations.



Sponsors who wish to fund fellowships supporting specific newsrooms by geographic area, coverage topic or type of publication are welcome to designate their support. Please contact INN Executive Director Sue Cross at [sue@inn.org](mailto:sue@inn.org) to explore what's possible.



**Institute for  
Nonprofit News**

The Institute for Nonprofit News supports and leads the fast-growing field of independent investigative and public service news, as the backbone organization for a network of more than 200 nonprofit, nonpartisan newsrooms across North America. Together, these growing news outlets are strengthening the sources of trusted news for thousands of diverse communities.

Read more about [INN](http://inn.org) at [inn.org](http://inn.org).

Please join us in supporting the next generation of news leadership through the INN Futures Fund. Contact INN Executive Director Sue Cross at [sue@inn.org](mailto:sue@inn.org) or Futures Fellowships Director Patty Mitchell at [futures@inn.org](mailto:futures@inn.org).