

Southland Investigative Reporting Cooperative

By Jonathan Mitchell, Tatum Pugh, Haoyi Jiang and Xinyu Wei

Introductions

Meet Carole Sharwarko

- Journalist with 15+ years of experience writing for newspapers and magazines
- Specialties include investigative and research-based reporting projects, along with personality profiles and nonprofit coverage
- Interested in social justice, environment, criminal justice reform and government oversight
- Currently works as a freelance content development expert
- Lives in Chicago's south suburbs with her husband, Chef Tim Dudik, and their daughter, Cleo



What is SIRC?

- Idea to create Southland Investigative Reporting Cooperative was born from a desire to bridge the gap between small local newspapers, which lack the capacity for investigative journalism, and major metro media outlets, which swoop in to cover only the most salacious stories
- SIRC serves readers on a hyper-local level as a vigilant and tireless source of investigative news
- SIRC is established with a nonprofit model as a means to avoid a funding system that relies on advertising and the outside pressure it sometimes instigates

Semester Overview

- Research most efficient, stable way to help fund SIRC's works
- Create a social media plan that will allow SIRC to interact with its readers and seek feedback
- Interview other publications similar in nature to understand how to get a publication off the ground
- Find ways on how to best differentiate SIRC from other non-profit, investigative publications
- Weekly skype calls with Carole to identify and adhere to clear set of goals over course of semester
- We found that relying entirely on crowdsourcing can be a dangerous way to finance a publication, and so we recommended a shift to focus more on using grants as the main source of income for SIRC

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

People: Carole has been a journalist for 15 years, knows the area really well and is incredibly passionate about serving her community

Stand out: Our comprehensive social media strategy will allow SIRC to diversify itself from other similar publications

Got money?: Multifaceted plan for how to fund SIRC including both crowdsourcing and grants, among other things

Opportunities

Pioneer advantage: We are the first team doing this in the Chicago Southland area, so the market is open

Background: In the wake of waning attention from larger news outlets, newspapers that serve only a few small towns shoulder even more responsibility for in-depth coverage

Market need: There is a need for in-depth, investigative journalism in this area of blue collar workers

Weaknesses

Fresh face: Since it's a new name, it could be challenging to spread the word about SIRC and its services to the entire community

Get in touch: Need to find an effective way to get feedback from readers/followers, have a two-way flow of communication between SIRC and readers

Good things take time: Between finding an attorney, filing a 501(c)(3), implementing a social media strategy, finalizing the website and finding freelancers, building a non-profit from the ground up is time consuming

Threats

Money: Because SIRC will rely on donations and grants, it could be difficult to build a stable business model with other publications possibly also seeking donations

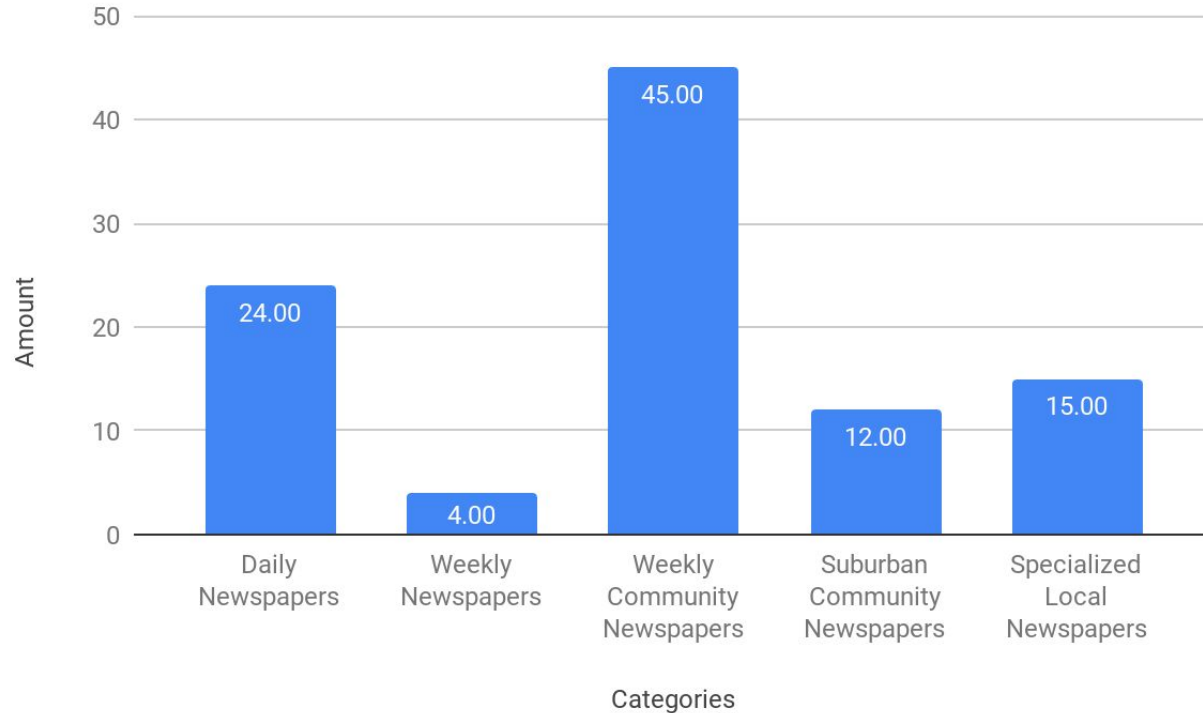
Uncertainty: We don't know if other organizations will enter into the market of local investigative journalism in the future that might pose potential threat

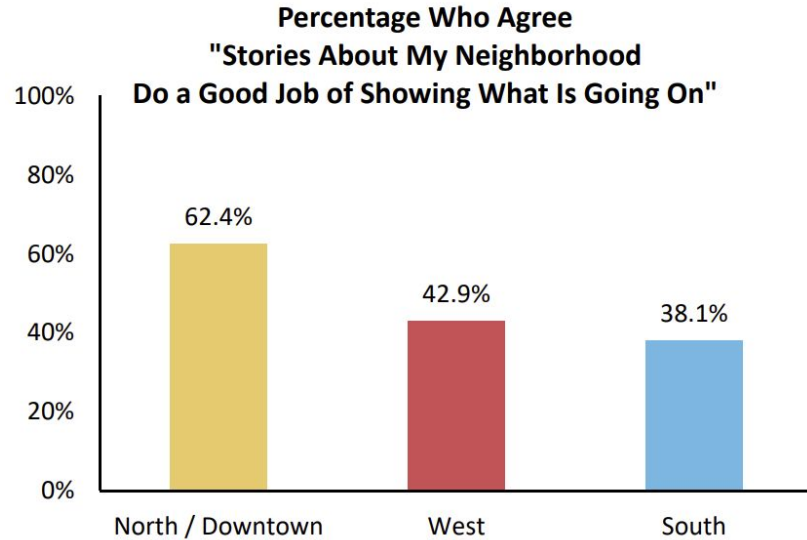
Parachute journalism: If a significant newsworthy event were to occur in the area, larger publications could try and steal the story



Let's talk numbers...

Newspapers in the Chicago area





Data from the Center for Media Engagement

Notes: Percentages combine "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree" responses.

Question wording: "Thinking about the stories from all local news sources that you've used in the past 30 days, please let me know whether you agree or disagree with the following statements...Stories about my neighborhood do a good job of showing what is going on." The response for the North / Downtown region is significantly different than the response of the other regions at the $p < .05$ level.

We asked respondents to describe the way that the Chicago news media thinks about their neighborhood. Responses are markedly different in tone and topic depending on where the respondent lives. We generated word clouds based on the frequency of mentions for each word or phrase across the three regions.

[illegible]

Up-and-coming

Crime

Violent

Poor

City worker

Dangerous

Unsafe

Middle class

Uneducated

Rich

Bad

Dislike

Quiet

Nice

Popular

Old

Suburban

Black neighborhood

Working middle-class

Political

On the outskirts

Low crime

Unemployed

Barack Obama

Normal

Crowded

Confused

Decent

Separate

Ghetto

Green

Financially strapped

Intellectual

Cultural

Food desserts

Working class

Organized

Well kept

Not a good neighborhood

No quality education

Not as bad as Chicago

Hell

Chummy

Not up-to-par

No violence

Faith

Dispicable

Warily

Throw away

Racism

Gentrified

Poverty-stricken

Advanced education

Unstable

Underprivileged

Seized

Fire

Change

Family-oriented

Residential

Politically influential

Middle-income

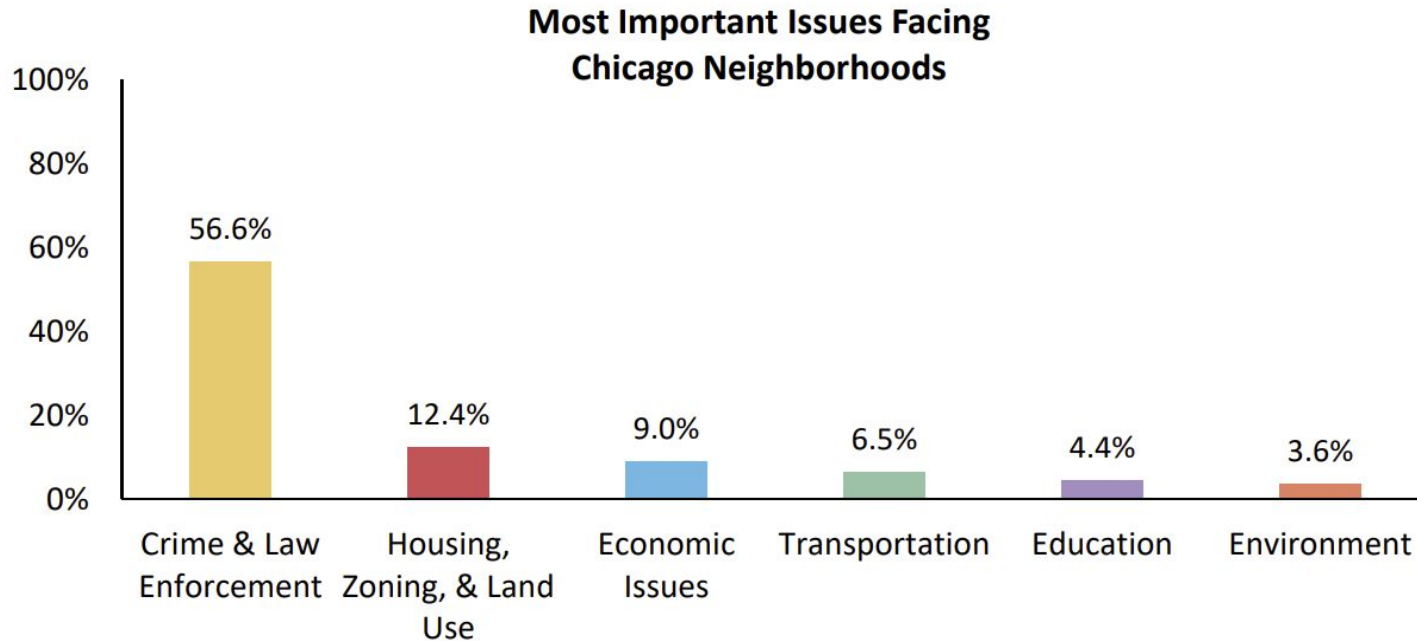
Underrepresented

Underdeveloped

Notes: Larger words or phrases indicate more mentions. Multiple responses permitted. Question wording: "If you were to describe the way the Chicago media thinks about your neighborhood, what two or three words would you use?"

CRIME, LAW ENFORCEMENT MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE FACING CHICAGO NEIGHBORHOODS

Overwhelmingly, Chicago residents think the most important issue facing their neighborhood is “crime and law enforcement.” Around fifty-seven percent of Chicago residents cite “crime and law enforcement” as an important issue facing their neighborhood.



Data from the Center for Media Engagement

In the beginning...

We started with crowdsourcing...

- Carole envisioned that SIRC would use crowdsourcing as its main source of funding
- After research and interviews with other publications we concluded that crowdsourcing can be a risky strategy
- Shifted focus from crowdsourcing to grants
- Grants are more stable than donations and can yield larger quantities of money
- Easy process:
 - Send in a proposition to an institute
 - Wait for a reply
- Found grants of all varieties for SIRC to use in the future

Interview process

- Looked for publications of similar size and content creation to SIRC
- Contacted founders and editors to ask them what it took to get their business off the ground
- Understanding the scope of these organizations helped us plan out SIRC's launch, and what was going to be necessary for it to be successful in the long run

Our findings



Founder: Lindsay Millar

Date: 2016

Area: Arkansas

Staff Size: Millar is in charge of everything. Freelancers produce the content.

Content: Health care, public corruption, juvenile justice, child welfare, environment, education and tax issues at state capitol

Business Model:

- ❑ Combination of grants and donations
- ❑ Most grants from local nonprofits for topical coverage
- ❑ Just raised **\$45,000** from **News match**
- ❑ Money is not a problem

Distribution Model:

- ❑ A mailing list including 20 to 25 media outlets around Arkansas
- ❑ Never charge for stories because media cannot afford



Founder: Karen Gadbois

Date: November, 2009

Area: New Orleans area's first non-profit, nonpartisan public-interest newsroom.

Staff Size: A full-time editor, one full-time and three part-time reporters.

Content: Investigated land use in the beginning, then expanded to environment, criminal justice, topics concerned after Katrina

Business Model:

- ❑ Planning grant from Open Society.
- ❑ Some funders are interested in specific topic areas, others
- ❑ just interested in independent nonprofit journalists.

Cost:

- ❑ Paying reporters by salary, because investigative work does not always result in a story.
- ❑ Website maintenance: **\$1,000 per month**
- ❑ Cost of reporting **fake subpoena: \$60,000**
- ❑ Pursued some lawsuits

Distribution:

- ❑ Everything has changed in a short time



Founder: Ken Martin

Date: April 1, 2010

Area: Austin, Texas; 2 million population in metro area

Staff Size: Four Board members, while Martin is the only one produces content

Content: Investigative Reporting covering mostly politics and public life. Over 1,000 words. Original documents posted

Business Model:

Startup funding was provided by a New Voices grant from the Knight Foundation

- ❑ A **\$25,000** grant paid out over three increments over a year. The rest (**\$8,000**) raised locally
- ❑ In 2018, enrolled in **News Match: \$39,000**
- ❑ Continued reporting operations depend entirely on tax-deductible donations.

Distribution Model:

Digital only without subscription

Posted + Facebook + Twitter

- ❑ Unregular: One piece over one week → months
- ❑ No partnership

CITYLIMITS.ORG

Investigating the City. Empowering Communities.

Interviewee: Jarrett Murphy, editor (joined for 12 years)

Date: 1976

Area: New York City

Staff Size: 10 Board members; 6 staffs; Internships; 50 freelancers

Content: Local investigative reporting including housing, transit, justice, economy, education, government, health and culture.

Business Model:

Combinations of grants and donations

- ❑ Largest source of revenue: **\$50,000** this year
- ❑ Grants for an **individual** projects or articles/certain activities
- ❑ Grants for **general**: support a wide range of coverage

Distribution Model:

Digital Only: Facebook + Twitter + Instagram

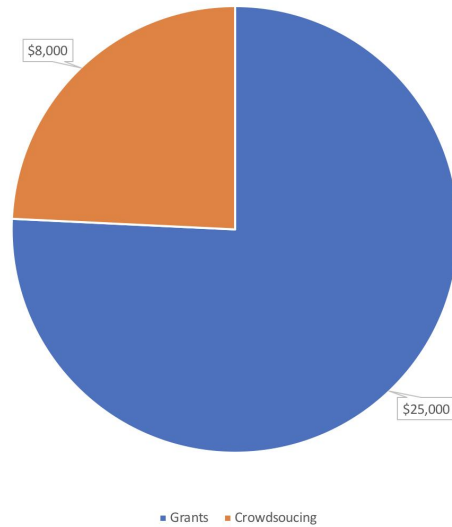
- ❑ Labor division: one full-time reporter; editor; training program; business development; social media
- ❑ 630,000 visitors; 3.8 million page views
- ❑ Freelance payment: **\$1,200** for **500** words
- ❑ Partnerships with other publications, TV Stations

Grants

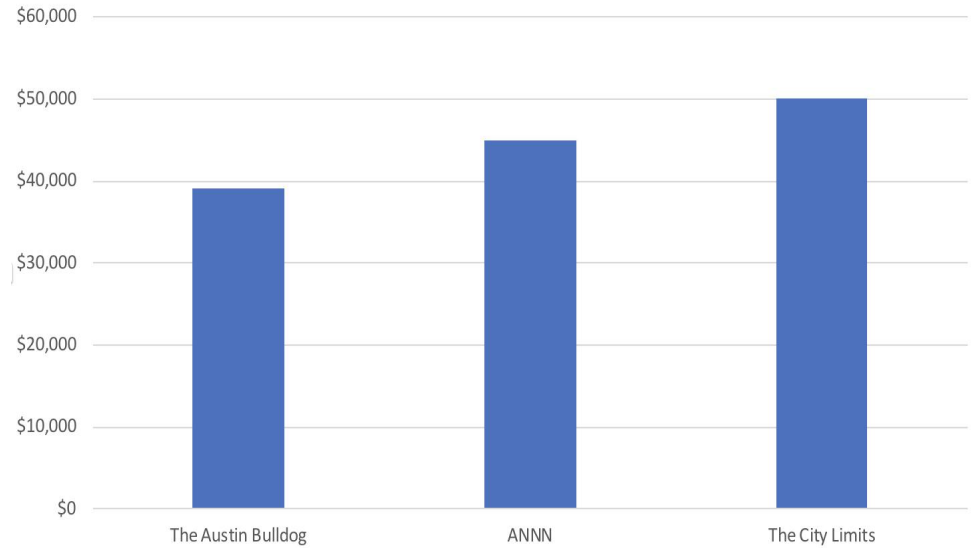
Grants became the focus

- Interviews showed grants are reliable way to fund a publication
- Offered potential for large sums of money with little downside
- Variety of options
- Simple application process, most of the time
- Extended reach to national organizations
- Can easily apply for multiple grants at the same time


When the Austin Bulldog was founded (2010)



Grants performance in 2018



Name of Grant	Sponsor	Location	Requirements	Period	Links	Contact information	Amount	Other details										
Below grants area local to the Chicago area hoory!!																		
Investigative Journalism Grant	Reva and David Logan Foundation	Chicago, IL	The Foundation only fun	No deadlines	https://www.grantinterface.com https://www.madfound.org/info/	312-664-3350 or email ;	N/A											
Chicago Commitment	John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation	Chicago, IL	Submit a brief descriptio	Making awards to four to five place-based initiatives eac		(312) 726-8000	N/A											
Watchdog Fund of Chicago Headline Club	Chicago Headline Club		To apply, complete this a	Applications must be received by January 19, 2019, and will	http://prod.headlineclub.org/scholarships/grants/watchdog	\$2,500												
Impact 100 Chicago	Impact 100 Chicago	Impact 100 Chicago,P.O. Box	LETTER OF INQUIRY	open to accept Letters of Inquiry on August 20, 2018, Tr	https://impact100chicago.org/	847-348-8701 info@impact100chicago.org	select \$100,000	accept applications in five Focus Areas: Culture, Education, Family, Health and Sustainability.										
#ILGive		Chicago, IL	Register for #ILGive by October 30th.	Register as a tax-deductible organization with the IRS by	https://www.ilgive.com/info/nonprofit-toolkit													
McCormick Foundation		Chicago, IL	Attest that your organization is compliant with applicable															
MacArthur Foundation		Chicago, IL		Winter Cycle : LOI portal opens August 15 and closes Septe														
				Summer Cycle: LOI portal opens December 15 and closes J														
Justice Grants of The Field Foundation of Illinois	The Field Foundation of Illinois	200 South Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606	Letter of Inquiry (LOI)	Fall Cycle: LOI portal opens April 15 and closes May 15.	https://fieldfoundation.org/abo	(312) 831-0910	\$10,000-\$50,000	The main form of grantmaking is through its traditional Program Grants that are accepted three times a y										
Huge potential for national grants!																		
News Integrity Initiative	Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism	219 W. 40th Street New York, NY 10018	Application process to gi	No deadlines	https://www.journalism.cuny.edu	(646) 758-7700 Email: i	N/A											
Type Investigations	H.D. Lloyd Fund for Investigative Journalism	Type Media Center 116 East 16th Street, 8th Flo New York, NY 10003	Send us a short story qu	No deadlines, check proposals monthly.	https://www.typeinvestigation.org	212-822-0240 Email:adr	For first time applicants the range is from \$3,500 to \$10,000											
						Fund for Investigative Jc Sandy Bergo, Executive 529 14th Street NW – 1; Washington, DC 20045 Phone: 202-662-7564												
The Fund for Investigative Journalism	Scripps Howard Foundation	Washington, D.C.	Letter of commitment	Generally, FIJ accepts applications with deadlines in Februar	http://fij.org/apply-for-a-grant/	E-mail: fundfij@gmail.co	Max \$10,000.											
				Every summer and winter. Proposals to Ethics and Excellen														
Ethics & Excellence Journalism Foundation	Ethics & Excellence Journalism Foundation	Oklahoma City, Ok	The application process		https://ineasmuchfoundation.org	405-604-5388,info@ina	N/A	Investigative Reporting:Through its support of non-profit investigative organizations and educatio										
In These Times Investigative Story	The Leonard C. Goodman Institute for Investigative Reporting	2040 N. Milwaukee Ave., Ch	Application form to get st	Upcoming deadline is April 29, 2019	http://inthesetimes.com/invest	Form on website to cont	N/A	Essentially people have to pitch a story idea to them and then they decide which ones to fund. All of the i										
Foundation Grant	Society of Professional Journalists	Indianapolis, IN	Application form in "links	February deadline	https://www.spi.org/foundation	317-927-8000	N/A	Examples for investigative reporting organizations in Chicago areas raising money through News Match: The Chicago Reporter: https://www.newsmatch.org/organizations/the-chicago-reporter Investigative journalism on race, poverty, income inequality, and solutions. Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting: https://www.newsmatch.org/organizations/midwest-center-for-investigative-reporting Holding big ag accountable through investigative and enterprise reporting Better Government Association:										
News Match	The Miami Foundation		Need to contact	From our interviews, people recieved fundings for three incr	https://www.newsmatch.org/	More details need to contact Josh Stearns	https://www.newsmatch.org/organizations/better-government-association											
	Journalism Based Grant																	
No color	Broad Grant																	
For Individual Journalists																		
Fund for Investigative Journalism	http://fij.org/																	
The Alicia Patterson Foundation	https://aliciapatterson.org/																	
International Women's Media Foundation	https://www.iwmf.org/programs/fund-for-women-journalists/																	
The investigativefund	https://web.archive.org/web/20170704203401/http://www.theinvestigativefund.org/about/10022how_to_apply																	



SIRC
Southland Investigative
Reporting Cooperative

Grants



- Newsmatch
 - National foundation aimed at supporting local journalism and art organizations by connecting founders to potential donors
 - In 2018, Newsmatch raised \$7.6 million for nonprofit journalism; It has raised more than \$14 million since 2016
- MacArthur Foundation
 - Goes to individual programs or projects with the potential to revitalize the neighborhoods around Chicago area
 - Awards to five place-based initiatives each year, with support for up to four years
- McCormick Foundation
 - Works with communities in Chicagoland and across Illinois to develop educated, informed and engaged citizens
 - Aims to assist communities, strengthen democracy and help ensure that families and children have the opportunities they need to flourish

More Grants



- News Integrity Initiative
 - Connects journalists, technologists, academic institutions, nonprofits and other organizations around the world
 - Supports platforms, newsrooms and media-related organizations worldwide working together to combat media manipulation toward more informed and engaged communities
- The Fund for Investigative Journalism
 - For more than 30 years, the Fund for Investigative Journalism has helped to finance exposés of wrongful conducts
 - The Fund has awarded more than \$1.5 million in grants to freelance reporters, authors and small publications, enabling the publication of more than 700 stories and broadcasts

Social Media Strategy

Social media timeline

- **Pre-launch plan**
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Newsletter
- **Post-launch plan**
 - Facebook
 - Twitter
 - Newsletter
 - Miscellaneous

Pre-launch overview (six months prior to launch up to launch):

- Utilize both Facebook and Twitter to grow audience of loyal readers
 - Most of SIRC's target audience will be present on these two platforms, so no need to worry about Instagram yet
- Post 2-3 times per week
 - Doesn't need to be original SIRC content
 - A shared article or retweet of another organization's post counts as one post
- Actively engage with followers
 - If they ask questions via comments or direct messages, respond in a timely manner
- Utilize multimedia elements to increase likelihood that followers will engage with posts
- Newsletter email blast once every month to update audience on SIRC's progress

Pre-launch: Facebook strategy

- 2-3 posts per week
- Consider boosting a handful of most important posts to a specific target group
- Slowly introduce SIRC, its mission, its creator, etc.
- Share posts from other organizations
- Share website and other social media links
- Be transparent about grant application process
- Thank donors
- Introduce freelancers and other staff
- Monthly recap detailing SIRC's progress towards launch
 - Good opportunity to include visuals such as PowerPoint videos / illustrations / infographics (utilize canva, piktochart, etc.)
- Countdown to launch
 - Weekly at first and then daily as you near launch
- Utilize strategic, branded hashtags to increase following

Pre-launch: Twitter strategy

- Post 2-3 times per week
- In general, can post in a more engaging, conversational way (such as with a gif or a picture)
- Use more as a vessel to get people to look at Facebook content and website than be a source of original content
- Retweet other publications' stories, and big happenings in the area
- Utilize strategic, branded hashtags

Pre-launch: Newsletter

- Monthly update on SIRC's progress
- Can consider doing it by short videos and share on all platforms. (e.g. Fund Intelligence's monthly top stories)
- Include similar information as the monthly recap on social media mentioned above but more formal, more specifics, more numbers, etc.
- Consider weekly newsletters in the weeks leading up to launch

Post-launch: Facebook Strategy

- Stay consistent with two to three posts a week, possibly more if a story is being published that week
- Maintain positive relationships with other news organizations by sharing their content
- Consider more playful, weekly posts with clever hashtags
 - #freelancerfriday
 - Feature a new freelancer every week
 - #missionmonday
 - Remind following of SIRC's mission
 - #whatwedowednesday
 - Give an inside look into SIRC's operations
 - Highlight investigative works that have had a positive impact on the community
 - Story of the week

Post-launch: Twitter strategy

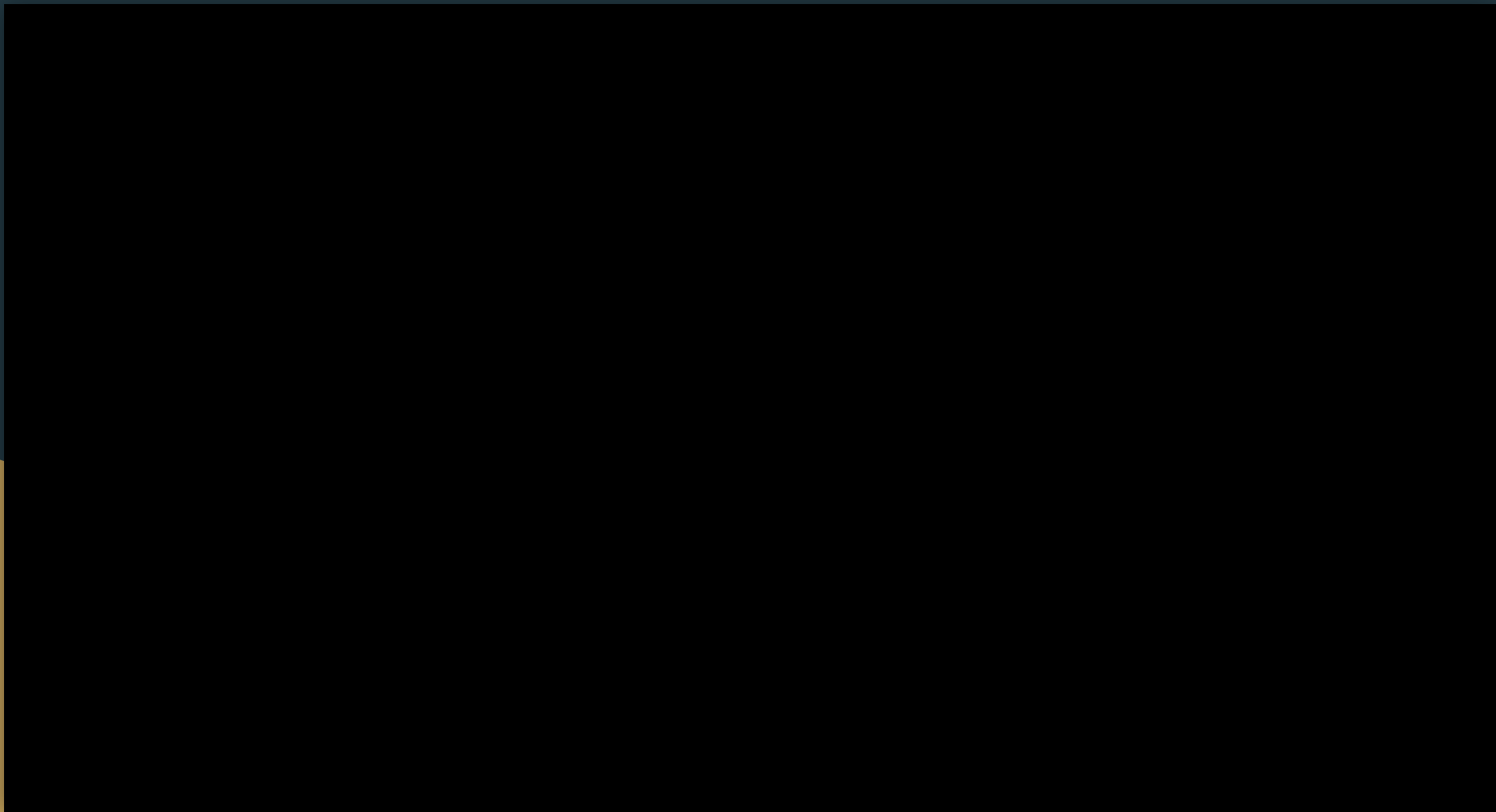
- Use as a way to give live updates to your audience.
 - What you're covering, how you're covering it, and why you're covering it
 - Reminder: No need to share every detail, since it might impact the accessibility of the source or the information you are going to gather
- Consider more playful, weekly posts with clever hashtags
 - Same hashtags as Facebook
 - Highlight investigative works that have had a positive impact on community
 - Story of the week

Post-launch: Newsletter

- Monthly update on SIRC's progress
- Could consider doing it by short videos and sharing on all social platforms (e.g. Fund Intelligence's monthly top stories)
- Include similar information as the monthly recap on social media mentioned above but more formal, more specifics, more numbers, etc.
- Include SIRC related events
- Include stories released that month

Post-launch: Miscellaneous

- Collaborative videos/podcasts with journalists from other investigative reporting organizations
 - Could consider posting once a week or once every other week
 - Get in touch with investigative reporting organizations nationwide
 - Can start with taking advantage of places we found earlier this semester
 - The purpose is to enlarge the public awareness of the importance of having local investigative reporting
 - Use either as a plug for the other journalist's organization, a discussion of a hot topic (usage of anonymous sources in investigative reporting), or just a comment on the current state of news (fake news, economy of news, etc.)



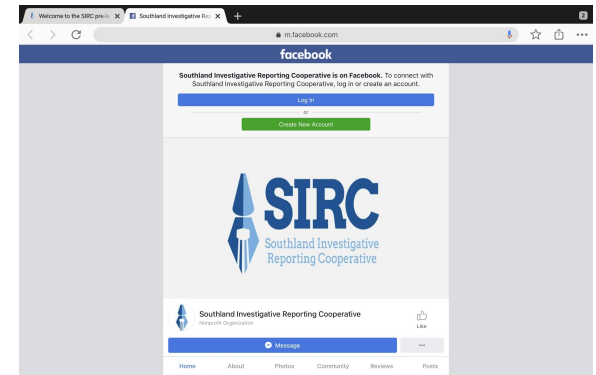
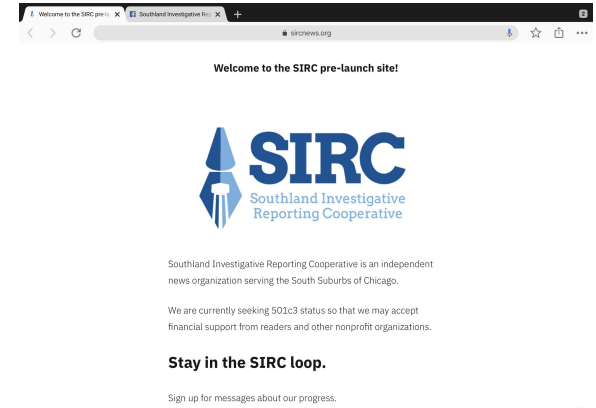
Conclusions

Takeaways

- Large and diverse community of investigative, non profit publications- it's been done before, it can, and will, be done again
- Crowdsourcing can work
- Grants will just work better
- Opportunity to stand out on social media
- Can utilize multiple mediums and platforms to circulate SIRC
- Opportunities for partnerships with other publications to help support each other

Hopes for the future of SIRC

- Website link:
 - <https://sircnews.org/>
- Social links:
 - https://www.facebook.com/Southland-Investigative-Reporting-Cooperative-1003478109856660/?modal=admin_todo_tour
- Lawyer through Loyola Chicago
 - <https://www.luc.edu/law/academics/clinical-programs/index.cfm>
 - 501(3)(c)
- Implement pre-launch social media plan
- Launch May 2020



Questions?