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Letter of Intent (LOI) Project

Ends on Fri, Aug 29, 2025 11:59 PM

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Please submit this form by the end of the day (11:59 pm ET) on Monday, August 22

We're looking for a briefing on your work this year: key wins or progress, what's been challenging, what you're learning, and what's ahead. We welcome information about any milestones, shifts in strategy, or feedback that helps us understand your priorities.

The LOI informs our grantmaking by helping us understand what your organization is facing, where resources are needed, and how funding can have the greatest impact across the field.

We recognize that it will take people different amounts of time to complete, but we intend for the form to take no more than 3 hours. We do not want the form to pose a burdensome requirement. We welcome bullet points, as well as using information that you've already developed for other similar documents.

If you have questions, please email the Fund's director, Lizzy Hazeltine, at lizzy@nclocalnews.org (<mailto:lizzy@nclocalnews.org>), and cc info@nclocalnews.org (<mailto:info@nclocalnews.org>).

Is this LOI for a fiscally sponsored project?

 Yes No

Organization / Project name (required)

39 / 300 characters

If the LOI is not for a fiscally sponsored project, input the name of the tax-exempt organization.

If the LOI is is for a fiscally sponsored project, input the name of the fiscally sponsored entity,

Primary contact name (required)

First Name (required)

Last Name (required)

Primary contact email (required)**Primary contact phone** (required)**Do you want to add a secondary contact?**

Yes



No

Secondary contact name (required)

First Name (required)

Last Name (required)

Secondary contact email (required)**Secondary contact phone****Where and How Are You Showing Up?**

These are grounding questions to help us understand your reach and impact.

Where are you serving, by county? (required)

Mecklenburg

1 / 500 words

Please help us understand where your work is happening geographically. We use this information to map reach, density, and place-based connections across the network.

How are people using your work? (required)

Formed in the late 1970s as a nonpublic spot where African-American leaders could discuss Charlotte-Mecklenburg public policy, the Forum has maintained its focus on public policy, but since 1985 when it opened the doors to whites, has matured into a premier, weekly meeting place for people from communities across the city and county. It has also maintained its focus on being a place for information and collaboration, but not action – admonishing its participants to act on the information through the other organizations of which they are members.

Since 2004 – first through e-mail, then via a website and since 2015 via weekly video livestreaming – information has gone outside the room and now reaches hundreds of people, mostly Mecklenburg residents but also people throughout the U.S. The Forum does not collect phone numbers or addresses of newsletter recipients or viewers of livestreams. On Aug. 21, voluntary signups for weekly e-mails totaled 1,331.

Forum research and discussion of a 1980s airport bond referendum led to that bond issue being defeated at the polls, in part because there was no provision for ensuring that African-American entities would obtain a share of the contracts.

At the beginning of each Forum, first-time attendees are invited to identify themselves. It is rather common for people new to town to say that their friends or corporate colleagues told them, if you want to learn how Charlotte works, you need to go to the Forum.

Much more recently, with the staff reductions at area media, it is quite common for reporters to listen to the livestreamed meetings, whether in office or in pajamas, either to report on the presentations or to collect "string" for future reporting projects. The Forum does not claim any copyright over Forum-generated content of its website, precisely to encourage this re-use of the material.

302 / 500 words

Please tell us who you're reaching, how they're engaging with your work, what people are doing with the information or services you provide.

How does your team reflect the people you serve? (required)

As of Aug. 1, the team of volunteer facilitators totaled 12 adults, 11 of them African-American. The average age of all facilitators is 63. The average age of the four facilitators most recently added, however, is 40.

Attendees at Forum meetings skew younger than 63 but work commitments mostly bar young adults from weekday morning meetings. All people are welcome; about 20% of attendees at most meetings are white. There has been no particular outreach to Mecklenburg's Hispanic community; while presentations of general or particular interest to that community do attract some Hispanic presence, future outreach efforts would be impactful.

100 / 500 words

Please tell us to what extent your leadership and your team reflect the makeup of the communities who use your work.

Challenges, Celebrations, and Looking Ahead

This section is about what's working, what's hard, and what's on the horizon.

What challenges are you facing? (required)

Organization in the early years of the Forum was mostly a yearly planner in one woman's pocketbook. Programming tasks were shared among 2 to 5 people. In those years, perhaps no one thought it was necessary to create a 501(c)(3). But the decision proved providential: The Forum has maintained its independence, and stayed focused on its narrow mission. The long service of Sarah Stevenson meant that the Forum was not ripped apart by internal dissension. The Forum has met in donated space for more than 40 years, at churches, government or nonprofit buildings, or at restaurants that would charge attendees for the food they ordered. In years since 2004, a coffee pot fund has remained solvent via free-will (non-tax-deductible) donations.

Today, of the 12 volunteer facilitators (there is some overlap here), two carry the programming, four do most of the moderating of meetings, five own specific tasks during meetings, and several provide invaluable links to aligned community organizations.

Today's facilitator crew does not express the interest, energy or time to add additional Forum meeting times, or venues, or outreach to additional communities and to younger audiences. Such opportunities have been recognized and discussed for years internally. Many prospective recruits for Forum leadership have fallen away because they could not meet at the current weekday morning meeting time, or had young families and could not take on new challenges, or were being paid to do similar things elsewhere.

If the Forum decides to maintain its status quo, one challenge presents itself – absorbing technology costs carried by one volunteer. Recurring monthly costs are about \$3,500. Annual equipment purchases for coffee urns, computers and such vary from year to year, from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

For the purposes of this Letter of Intent, all challenges beyond tech costs are postponed, though some could be addressed in the near term with additional funding. To make of the Forum something more than it is now is likely to require paid talent: A paid mentor, for example, to shepherd unpaid student interns; additional and different meeting times; rental of new spaces convenient to additional

421 / 500 words

Please share any challenges you're navigating—whether internal, funding-related, environmental, political, or social. All organizations are works in progress—we expect this to be part of everyone's story.

What do you want to name as wins and celebrate? (required)

The Lion Publishers definition of sustainability might not easily apply to a thriving community institution from the 1970s that doesn't sell anything, has raised money only to support other organizations' needs, and has no paid staff. As other parts of this document suggest, the Forum's strengths are in the persistence, imagination, dedication, community connections and welcoming attitude of its attendees and volunteers. Oh, and a co-founder's decades of devotion to her community and its people.

The Forum met a key test with the 2023 passing of the co-founder, who insisted on decorum, respect for all, staying on topic, and three tablespoons of creamer in her coffee. Since the Great Recession, in-person attendance has more than doubled. Despite widespread public fears of gathering in groups, followed by full shutdown from March 2020 through February 2021 until facilitators agreed to virtual meetings, average attendance at the meetings grew during the pandemic. And more recently as livestream feeds were re-routed to where the people already were (i.e., Facebook and the Forum's website), overall exposure to the Forum's work has skyrocketed.

Even the Forum's barely noticeable de-emphasis of candidate forums is a win. The Forum was among the first organizations in the county to offer the public a comprehensive series of opportunities to meet and quiz candidates seeking their votes. Today, there are many organizations offering those important opportunities – so many, in fact, that such Forum events no longer always attract all contenders for a given office. But that's OK. And, gee, if only other organizations' get-out-the-vote efforts had been equally successful...

Facilitator Winston Robinson's lengthy marketing experience and street-fair smarts have had an impact on reaching young people. He initiated the creation of fliers about upcoming presenters and has effectively distributed them through his presence on social media. The Forum's Facebook and YouTube presences were put in place for livestreaming and await an owner to further develop those and other avenues of community exchange.

322 / 500 words

This doesn't have to be all about numbers. Feel free to highlight successes based on community impact, organizational health, finance, LION's definition of sustainability, or other metrics of progress.

What is next for your organization? (required)

This Letter of Intent focuses on smallish matters that would sustain the Forum's outreach via broadcast. Left for later: Engaging a fiscal agent; succession planning, both for broadcast, meeting operations and strategic vision; adding in-person meeting venues; widening the web of personal contacts among programming facilitators that would broaden the range of Forum topics; better exploring the challenges faced by Mecklenburg residents of color living in neighborhoods not along the Beatties Ford Road corridor.

About strategic vision: Columnist David Brooks was prescient in 2018. When the current dystopian era fades, America will need many weavers to rebuild the sense of community. No telling just what that will look like. But this LOI is an appeal for support to raise the likelihood that the Forum will be in a position to be part of the answer, just as it has been on a hyperlocal scale in the past.

147 / 500 words

Please help us understand what you're prioritizing, as well as anything you're intentionally putting on pause. We don't expect any one organization to do it all.

Ecosystem View

In the spirit of collaboration and an ecosystem approach, we're also interested in how additional investments across the network could strengthen your work – for example, partners you collaborate with or organizations you rely on to serve your communities and audiences.

Who else is doing work that strengthens or complements yours? Where would more funding across the network help you accomplish your work? (required)

Recent grants arriving in Mecklenburg boost the potential for continued media amplification of the topics the Forum explores – and resident interest in community institutions. A growing band of local funders will help attract residents who bring culture, norms and expectations not necessarily traditionally prioritized by the button-down, business-first culture of 20th Century Charlotte.

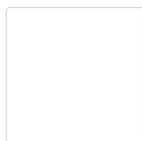
The following may occur organically, but some resources tucked into the right corners could be most helpful: All large N.C. cities have outgrown their Dillon rule guardrails, their dependence on regressive funding mechanisms, and older generations' reliance on lessons learned when horse stables thrived on Tryon Street, conformity in all things was the holy water of acceptance, and teach-to-the-test education stifled talent and crushed dreams. Investments that spotlight the skills and mindsets of young in-migrants will help prepare the community for its future.

A number of Forum leaders have direct experience with the difficulty of engaging area higher educational institutions in the work of community building. There are glimmers of change. But there are many scars, too, that must be healed.

174 / 500 words

Please consider sharing about the specific organizations you work with, and how investments in them would help you accomplish shared goals. Be generous in your thinking about where more resources would move your work and community service forward, as well as the broader ecosystem.

Budget (required)



Tuesday_Forum.xlsx



No more files may be attached here.

Acceptable file types: .doc, .docx, .pdf, .txt, .xls, .xlsx

Please share your last year or current budget to help us understand a snapshot of your organization's financial picture. We welcome you to use our budget template, but it is not required. [Download or make a copy of the budget template here](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a53vFWwTCuCVfgtpU6xfZKMN3lwnwH0alowj2ewgnt0/edit?gid=0#gid=0) (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1a53vFWwTCuCVfgtpU6xfZKMN3lwnwH0alowj2ewgnt0/edit?gid=0#gid=0). (https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/

d/1a53vFWwTCuCVfgtpU6xfZKMN3lwnwH0alowj2ewgnt0/edit?gid=0#gid=0)

Optional Closing Thoughts

Anything else you want us to know that we didn't ask you?

The late Andrea Harris was the co-founder and President of the North Carolina Institute of Minority Economic Development in Durham.

In 2013, she wrote the Forum:

"Oh, I wish my local community, Henderson, as well as others, had a Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum. Because you are so close to it you may not always appreciate its true value, but this is so good and powerful. Our community must have ways to stay connected and to communicate. I learn from you, and I appreciate you."

Ms. Harris was asked to call together a group in Henderson so that Forum volunteers could visit regularly, share information about how the Forum has been sustained, and encourage their work to plant a Forum-like experience that met local needs. But Ms. Harris's time was short, and it was not to be. She died in 2020.

The offer still stands – in Vance County, and 98 others.

151 / 500 words

Any major changes for the organization that you want us to know about?

Limit: 500 words

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