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South Sound Journalism Fund at the PARC Foundation

The South Sound Journalism Fund addresses the decline in local media, empowering a connected and healthy South Sound. By providing stable, community-level financial resources, we aim to foster informed and engaged citizens who can hold their governments accountable.

The South Sound Journalism Fund will be hosted within the PARC Foundation, providing an operational framework and leveraging the foundation's existing infrastructure and resources. As a distinct entity, the fund will maintain its dedicated funding and grant distribution mechanisms while benefiting from the foundation's reputation, administrative support, and extensive network. The South Sound Journalism Fund will oversee day-to-day operations, project selection, and stakeholder engagement, while the PARC Foundation will offer strategic guidance, fundraising assistance, and administrative support. This collaborative approach ensures maximum impact and long-term success for journalism initiatives in Thurston County.

Problem: the decline in local media has had a negative impact on our communities

A connected and healthy South Sound requires informed and engaged citizens. Citizens should be able to monitor progress on community goals and hold their governments and community accountable with measurement and transparency. This has been difficult since the decrease in professional news coverage and the increasing complexity of our community.

Recent research has pointed to the damage that the decline in local news coverage has had on communities:

- When newspapers close, the loss of government monitoring can substantially **increase the cost of local government for taxpayers.** With fewer watchdogs, deficits increase and borrowing costs go up by 5 to 11 basis points. An additional 10 basis points increases the cost of an average bond issue by $650,000. Source: Brookings Institute.

- **Voting behavior becomes more polarized.** With less information on local issues, voters rely more heavily on available national news or partisan rhetoric to make voting decisions. Source: Journal of Communication.

- **Fewer people participate in civic life.** Fewer are willing to run for office when news coverage of local government declines. Source: Urban Affairs Review. Researchers also found evidence that fewer people end up voting. Source: Strauss Institute on Civic Life (UT Austin).

Goal: Provide stable, community level financial resource to journalism in Thurston County through charitable funding

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The newspaper industry is a microcosm of how the economics of advertising have impacted local communities. As the interest of advertisers in newspapers has declined, newspaper owners have cut newsroom jobs. If news organizations cannot be sustained by traditional means, it is an open discussion on how to best fund local news coverage.

One such funding source that has been part of that discussion is local charitable and non-profit funding. According to a recent study, 89% favor funding from local residents through donations and memberships and 76% favor funding from philanthropic organizations. One interesting aspect of this research shows that donations and memberships (rather than subscriptions) is more likely to be supported by 18 to 34-year-olds than any other age group. Source: Knight Foundation.

The goal of the South Sound Journalism Fund is to increase civic agency by both informing and engaging residents. That will lead to increasing transparency and accountability in achieving community goals.

The South Sound Journalism Fund would be an interest-specific fund housed at another non-profit with a larger investment pool. The South Sound Journalism Fund would provide financial support to projects in two funding areas:

- *Reporting that brings common understanding to common issue:* Media that is focused on regular coverage of government beats in the South Sound (city, county government, and school districts)
- *Community-based, solutions-based journalism:* Local communication networks that serve to diversify and strengthen sources of information, amplify and connect community voices, and improve resident involvement in local decision-making.

Examples of other local interest specific funds to support local news coverage include:

- Investigative Journalism Fund at the Seattle Foundation
- Detroit Journalism Engagement Fund at the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan

Guidelines

The South Sound Journalism Fund would have three broad expectations from supported projects:

- Transparency about the funding of their operations;
- Maintaining editorial independence from all revenue sources. This is meant to ensure news judgments are made in the interest of the communities they serve; and
- Project content must be made available to the public.

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The South Sound Journalism Fund will observe both an Editorial Independence Policy and a Donor Transparency Policy, in addition to standard grant agreements required by the host non-profit. We hold all contributors, donors, and grantees to these same standards. This commitment is reflected below:

Editorial Independence Policy

In order to guarantee editorial independence, the host non-profit would require projects within the South Sound Journalism Fund to:

- Maintain a firewall between news coverage decisions and sources of all revenue. Acceptance of financial support does not constitute implied or actual endorsement of donors or their products, services, or opinions.
- Make news judgments independently and not on the basis of donor support.
- Carefully consider accepting support for the coverage of particular issues or topics while maintaining editorial control of the coverage; the grantee will not cede review or influence of editorial content, nor of unauthorized distribution of editorial content.
- Disclose any relationships with donors to the SSJF or the host organization if they are mentioned in or become part of an editorial story.
- Agree to make public all donors who give a total of $1,000 or more per year. A current list of donor names, including but not limited to individuals, sponsors, and grantors, will be published on the project website for all donations whether they come through the South Sound Journalism Fund or another source.
- Agree not to accept anonymous donations

Donor Transparency Policy

The South Sound Journalism Fund is committed to transparency in every aspect of funding our organization. All donors to the South Sound Journalism Fund acknowledge the following:

- Accepting financial support does not mean that the housing non-profit or the projects within the South Sound Journalism Fund endorse donors or their products, services, or opinions.
- The South Sound Journalism Fund will accept gifts, grants, and sponsorships from individuals, organizations, and foundations to help with general operations, coverage of specific topics, and special projects.
- News judgments are made independently – not based on or influenced by donors. We do not give supporters the rights to assign, review, edit, or distribute content.
- All donors who give $1,000 a year or more will be made public.
- South Sound Journalism Fund will not accept donations from anonymous sources

Proposal: The PARC Foundation of Thurston County becomes the fiscal sponsor and organizational and development hub of the South Sound Journalism Fund

The South Sound Journalism Fund will be hosted within the PARC Foundation as an interest-specific fund. This hosting arrangement will provide a framework for the fund's operations while leveraging the existing infrastructure and resources of the PARC Foundation. By being nested within the foundation, the journalism fund will benefit from the foundation's established reputation, administrative support, and access to a wide network of stakeholders.

The journalism fund will be integrated into the existing structure of the PARC Foundation, working closely with the foundation's development staff. The fund will operate as a distinct entity within the foundation, maintaining its own dedicated funding and grant distribution mechanisms. However, it will also have the advantage of utilizing the administrative and operational support services provided by the PARC Foundation, such as financial management, legal compliance, and development.

The roles and responsibilities of both parties in managing the fund's operations:

1. South Sound Journalism Fund:

    - Overseeing the day-to-day operations and decision-making processes related to the fund's activities.
    - Identifying the specific journalism projects and initiatives to be supported through grant funding.
    - Engaging with journalists, news organizations, and community stakeholders to assess needs and determine funding priorities.
    - Monitoring the progress and impact of the supported projects, ensuring alignment with the fund's objectives.

PARC Foundation:

- Providing strategic development guidance and support to the South Sound Journalism Fund.
- Assisting in fundraising efforts by leveraging the PARC Foundation's networks, resources, and expertise in donor cultivation.
- Offering administrative support, including financial management, legal compliance, and grant management, to ensure the smooth functioning of the journalism fund.
- Collaborating with the South Sound Journalism Fund to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of the supported projects.

By clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of each party, the hosting arrangement ensures a collaborative approach, leveraging the strengths and resources of both the South Sound Journalism Fund and the PARC Foundation to maximize the impact and long-term success of the journalism initiatives in Thurston County.

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