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# OUR NATIONAL CONVERSATION

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June 4, 2024

Herb Block Foundation  
1730 Rhode Island Ave, NW, Suite #507  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Members of the Herb Block Foundation,

## *Introduction*

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing on behalf of Our National Conversation (ONC) to express our interest in applying for the Encouraging Citizen Involvement grant. ONC is a youth-powered non-profit organization that reduces partisanship and promotes effective solutions to America's challenges through enhanced civic engagement and respectful political discourse.

Our journey began in February 2020 when our CEO, Jeff Hall, advertised on an intern bulletin board, Chegg, seeking students interested in developing a nonpartisan news media organization. By mid-March, as COVID-19 disrupted lives globally, many students found themselves without internships or job opportunities. Seizing this moment, Jeff offered remote internships, resulting in an overwhelming response with over 2,000 applications. From this pool, 92 diverse interns were selected for the summer 2020 ONC internship program, laying the foundation for our organization.

Since then, ONC has evolved far beyond our initial vision. We now boast a variety of teams and departments, including technology, journalism, media, and editorial. Our media team includes graphic designers, video production interns, and podcast interns, while our editorial team is comprised of skilled editors. Our core content team, composed of diverse interns, creates policy proposals and opinion pieces showcased on our website, inspiring a broad audience.

In today's fractured political landscape, meaningful discourse often takes a backseat to partisan rhetoric, impeding the development of pragmatic solutions to America's most

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pressing issues. Traditional avenues for constructive dialogue have become mired in partisan bickering, hindering progress on critical issues. Furthermore, there is a disconnect between younger generations and the political process, leading to disengagement and a need for more representation of their perspectives. OUR NATIONAL CONVERSATION (ONC) aims to break this cycle by fostering an environment in which nonpartisan dialogue thrives, guided by the insights and aspirations of the nation's youth, thus paving the way for a more inclusive and effective governance process.

### *Summary of Activities*

ONC seeks to become the premier media outlet for college students who wish to discuss politics in a safe and welcoming environment. We plan to launch a pilot program in Los Angeles to expand nationally through our kickoff initiative. Our target market comprises young Americans eager to explore politics and public policy in an open-minded and inclusive setting. To kick off our national presence, we will simultaneously conduct ONC's "coming out party" on several college campuses nationwide **on September 13, 2024**. This event will mark the beginning of our fall 2024 activities, including workshops, panel discussions, and interactive sessions designed to engage students in meaningful political discourse. Through these efforts, we aim to foster a culture of respectful and constructive dialogue on college campuses across the country.

### **Objectives:**

1. **Collaborate with Local Colleges and Universities:**
  - Partner with USC, UCLA, Loyola Marymount, Pepperdine, Santa Monica College, CSUN, Cal State Los Angeles, and other institutions.
  - Engage student interns to work with on-campus and local news outlets.
2. **Modernize Local News Outlets:**
  - Students will assist publishers with digital reporting, video production, social media management, and event organization.
  - Facilitate the integration of modern media practices into traditional news outlets.
3. **Organize and Lead ONC's September 13th Kickoff:**
  - LA-based students will plan and execute the kickoff event in Southern California.
  - Ensure a successful launch of ONC's national presence.
4. **Provide Real-World Experience for Students:**
  - High school and college interns will gain hands-on experience working with news outlets and ONC.
  - Students will contribute at no cost to publishers, receiving practical training in journalism and media.
5. **Host Community-Building Events and Projects:**

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- Schools, local news outlets, and retirees will collaborate on events and initiatives that strengthen community ties.
  - Promote civic engagement and local involvement.
6. **Secure Funding for Student Stipends:**
    - Obtain sponsorships and donations to fund stipends for student interns.
    - Ensure financial support for students participating in the program.
  7. **Train Future Journalists:**
    - Provide comprehensive training and professional development for aspiring journalists.
    - Equip students with the skills needed for successful careers in journalism and media.

***Anticipated Outcomes:***

1. **Enhanced Partnerships with Local Colleges and Universities:**
  - Strong collaborative relationships with multiple educational institutions.
  - Increased student involvement in local media and community projects.
2. **Modernized Local News Outlets:**
  - Improved digital presence and media practices for local publishers.
  - Greater engagement with audiences through updated reporting and production techniques.
3. **Successful September 13th Kickoff Event:**
  - High turnout and participation in the kickoff event.
  - Increased visibility and awareness of ONC's mission and activities.
4. **Real-World Experience for Students:**
  - Valuable practical experience for high school and college interns.
  - Free assistance for news outlets, particularly in digital media.
5. **Community-Building Initiatives:**
  - Successful execution of events and projects that foster community engagement.
  - Strengthened connections between schools, news outlets, and local communities.
6. **Financial Support for Interns:**
  - Adequate funding secured for student stipends.
  - Financial barriers are reduced for students participating in the program.
7. **Development of Future Journalists:**
  - A new generation of trained and skilled journalists prepared to enter the workforce.
  - Enhanced career prospects for student interns through practical training and experience.

***Potential Partners:***

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1. **Local Colleges and Universities:**
    - University of Southern California (USC)
    - University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
    - Loyola Marymount University
    - Pepperdine University
    - Santa Monica College
    - California State University, Northridge (CSUN)
    - California State University, Los Angeles
  2. **Local News Outlets:**
    - Los Angeles Times
    - LA Weekly
    - KTLA
    - KCAL9/CBS2
    - KCRW (Public Radio Station)
    - KNBC (NBC Los Angeles)
    - KABC (ABC7 Los Angeles)
  3. **Community Organizations:**
    - Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce
    - Los Angeles Public Library
    - Neighborhood Councils throughout Los Angeles
    - LA Works (Volunteer Action Center)
    - Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)
  4. **Media and Technology Companies:**
    - Google News Initiative
    - Facebook Journalism Project
    - YouTube (Google)
    - Twitter
    - Adobe (for digital media tools)
    - Microsoft (for technology and collaboration tools)
  5. **Professional Journalism Organizations:**
    - Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)
    - Online News Association (ONA)
    - American Society of News Editors (ASNE)
    - National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ)
    - Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA)
  6. **Local Businesses and Sponsors:**
    - Los Angeles Business Journal
    - Local advertising agencies and PR firms
    - Community banks and credit unions
    - Corporate social responsibility programs of local corporations
  7. **Non-Profit and Civic Engagement Organizations:**
    - Civic Nation
    - Rock the Vote
    - Common Cause
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- League of Women Voters of Los Angeles
  - ACLU of Southern California
8. **Educational and Training Institutions:**
- Poynter Institute (for journalism training)
  - Knight Foundation (for media innovation)
  - Journalism schools and departments at partner universities
9. **Retiree and Senior Volunteer Organizations:**
- AARP
  - Senior Corps
  - Experience Corps (AARP Foundation)
  - Local senior centers and retirement communities
10. **Funding Organizations and Foundations:**
- Herb Block Foundation
  - Knight Foundation
  - Ford Foundation
  - MacArthur Foundation
  - Annenberg Foundation

These potential partners can contribute resources, expertise, and support to help achieve Our National Conversation's objectives and anticipated outcomes.

*Population and Geographic Areas Targeted*

Our National Conversation (ONC) seeks to become the premier media outlet for college students who wish to discuss politics in a safe and welcoming environment. We plan to launch a pilot program in Los Angeles to expand nationally through our initiative. Our target market comprises young Americans eager to explore politics and public policy in an open-minded and inclusive setting.

*Planned Start Date and Duration of Proposed Activities*

To kick off our national presence, we will simultaneously conduct ONC's "coming out party" on several college campuses nationwide **on September 13, 2024**. This event will begin our fall 2024 activities, including panel discussions and interactive sessions on our social media channels designed to engage students in meaningful political discourse. Through these efforts, we aim to foster a culture of respectful and constructive dialogue on college campuses across the country.

*Funding Needed from The Herb Block Foundation and Other Sources*

Our National Conversation (ONC) is seeking **\$25,000** in funding from the Herb Block Foundation to support our mission of fostering respectful political discourse among college students and enhancing civic engagement. This funding will be utilized within

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the guidelines set by the Foundation, focusing on direct costs associated with launching our pilot program in Los Angeles, organizing our national "coming out party" **on September 13, 2024**, and providing stipends for our student interns.

Additionally, we are securing funding from other sources, including sponsorships and donations, to support our activities further. These combined resources will enable us to modernize local news outlets, provide real-world experience for students, and host community-building events, ultimately training the next generation of journalists and promoting a culture of constructive political dialogue. We will not use any requested funds for capital or endowment programs, sectarian religious purposes, lobbying, or partisan activities.

*Copy of our organization's IRS 501(c)(3) letter*  
(attached)

*ONC's current total operating budget and audited financial statement.*  
(attached)

We are excited about partnering with the Herb Block Foundation to further our mission of encouraging citizen involvement and promoting civic engagement. Thank you for considering our inquiry.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Everitt  
Our National Conversation  
Grant Writing Intern