

**CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
GRANT PROPOSAL SUMMARY SHEET**

Contact Information

Date 5/11/2024

Organization Name: Delaware Currents
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Website: delawarecurrents.org
Year Incorporated: 2016
FEIN: 47-5511000

ED/CEO Name: Meg McGuire
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Board Chair Name: Meg McGuire
Board Chair Approval (check here): **X**
Primary Contact Name: Meg McGuire
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Organization Information:

Field/s of Interest: Arts, Culture & Humanities Environment/ Animal Welfare
 Education Health Human Services Religion

Mission: Since 2015, Delaware Currents has been on a mission to champion the Delaware River and help reveal its wonders to the millions of people who drink its waters, hike its paths, camp in its forests and boat and fish in its waters. We believe in powerful, authoritative storytelling that not only speaks truth to power, but uses the best writing to speak to the hearts and minds of an audience that spans the four-state watershed. This river belongs to no one and everyone. The river connects us. We are all one watershed.

We are living in an ever-changing world where climate change can wreak havoc in a heartbeat. We need to know how to protect our natural assets, both for the bounty they give us and the respite from the grind they provide. All voices are welcome to this conversation.

Geographic Area Served: Chester County, Delaware River Watershed

Describe Population Served & Annual Number of People Served:

Delaware Currents aims to reach people of all ages and backgrounds. There are groups unifying around the cause of the river, bringing together understanding and bridge building. Unfortunately, the regular Jo(e) is not -- for the most part -- aware of all this. It's our humble ambition to include them in this conversation.

<u>Annual Budget \$ 70,000</u>	<u>1</u> # of Full-Time Equivalent Paid Staff
<u>82</u> % of budget for program expenses	<u>3</u> # of Board Volunteers
<u>13</u> % of budget for administrative expenses	<u>0</u> # of Active Non-Board Volunteers
<u>5</u> % of budget for fundraising expenses	<u>300</u> # of Volunteer Hours

Top 3-5 funding sources: William Penn Foundation, Individual Donors, News Match

Is this grant proposal for: Capacity Building or General Operating ?

Grant Amount Requested from the Community Foundation: \$7,500

Proposal Summary: At Delaware Currents, we aim to provide news stories that can help communities take action on issues they're passionate about. Our work can educate the public about electing officials who push for these policies, and how representatives vote or sign on to relevant policy measures. By covering news that crosses the political boundaries, we promote the work of and need for funding and actions by the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed and highlight gaps in communities with higher needs.

A largely one woman show, Delaware Currents punches well above its weight, publishing two newsletters per month, and approximately 70 articles per year. Our readers are located in the four major basin states: NY, NJ, PA, DE. We aim to make our news available to everyone, which is why we provide it for free to anyone who enters the website or signs up for newsletters.

II. CHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT PROPOSAL NARRATIVE

1. Nonprofit's history, goals, key achievements & distinctiveness

Stakeholders have transformed the Delaware River, parts of which were a smelly sewer 60 years ago, to a natural resource that can be enjoyed by all, embracing the wildlife connoisseur as much as the weekend walker and welcoming the diverse population that can share in its renewal. But there are still discrepancies in who can enjoy the river and who does, which can only be remedied by collaborative activities: 1. sharing information freely and through diverse channels to reach historically excluded audiences, 2. inviting people into conversations about our waterways and opportunities, and 3. providing programming that is welcoming for all. Delaware Currents aims to help with items 1 and 2, connecting with partners such as Grid Magazine and Riverways Collaboration in Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council regionally on all three approaches to connect to diverse communities and offer programs that are mindfully inclusive.

Our journalism supports the work of several groups unifying around the cause of the river, bringing understanding and bridge building, including agencies like the Delaware River Basin Commission, the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed, various nonprofits and industry collectives, and less formal collectives such as the Cobbs Creek Trail Partnership. We aim to bring everyday folks into this conversation.

Delaware Currents aims to provide news stories that can help communities take action on issues they're passionate about. For example, we share information on hearings where public comments can be submitted, details of policies and plans that could be improved for environmental protection, organizations and advocacy groups working on specific topics, and decision-makers in charge of specific issues. With a strong commitment to providing information that allows readers to make their own decisions and do additional research, Delaware Currents can educate the public about electing officials who push for these policies and share information on representatives that have signed on to a given policy measure. By covering news that crosses the political boundaries defined by states, we also promote the work of and need for funding and actions by the Coalition for the Delaware River Watershed and highlight gaps in communities with higher needs. Chester is a great example of where we work to highlight and chronicle the impressive and effective coalescing of community groups through environmental justice activism.

The drivers that led to the creation of Delaware Currents are part of national and global patterns and problems, in support of local issues with big impacts. Meg McGuire, our founder, has been a journalist for a long time, starting as a reporter on weekly newspapers, then as a reporter on dailies. First it was the News-Times in Danbury, CT (circulation 30K), where she was hired as a features editor, then a columnist and Lifestyles editor, after which she became a health and human services reporter, and later was promoted to City Editor. After that, she went to the Oneonta Star in Oneonta, NY (circulation 20K) as Executive Editor. At the Times Herald-Record in Middletown, NY (circulation 95K) she was first managing editor, then director of strategic initiatives, and returned to the managing editor position.

So Delaware Currents' background is in what we call community journalism. This is a specific area in the journalism field, not as flashy as big-city journalism but just as likely to win Pulitzers while creating community conversations over important issues that matter to communities large and small: How good are our schools? How good is our police force? How effective are our town/county/state governments? etc.

Working in community journalism led Meg to an important realization, especially in today's political environment: communities can change by noticing (via stories in a local paper) what's happening with your neighbors, even when those neighbors are miles away. She was a health reporter when the AIDS crisis forced many young men home to die in communities that they never felt welcomed by. As those obituaries began to mount, and people recognized the guy on the football team from their high school, or the boy who always showed up for band practice, or that sweet boy who took your niece to the prom, the community began to embrace, if not the young men, then the families who were grieving. The response became humane. Our natural resources can sometimes seem very remote from our everyday lives. Delaware Current's stories aim to connect the concerns of the

community to the relevant issues on the way lands are managed, the policies affecting access to clean water and green space, and the ways these natural resources intersect with our everyday lives.

2. Funding request

Description of key initiatives: For a small operation, Delaware Currents punches well above our weight, publishing two newsletters per month, and approximately 70 articles per year. Our readers are located in the four major basin states: NY, NJ, PA, DE. We aim to make our news available to everyone, which is why we provide it for free to anyone who enters the website or signs up for newsletters. With funding from the Chester County Community Foundation, we can hire student journalists and recruit diverse professionals to contribute their voices and knowledge to our coverage of the watershed, the people living in it, and the issues that matter. We can bring more attention to the issues facing Chester County through a series of stories about the area.

Specific needs & issues to be addressed: People often think of water as a free and abundant resource, and we have been fortunate in our region to have regular access to drinking water and wastewater systems, to local rivers and streams. At the same time, so many communities, for example Chester, Philadelphia, and Camden, have inherited uneven and unjust living conditions, including inequity in safe access to our rivers. All 14+ million users of the watershed should have access to information on our drinking water and the ability to paddle and fish safely.

There has been a drastic reduction in the quality and quantity of news all over the United States. Many newspapers have closed, creating what we now call "news deserts." Most have half the staff they once had, and now, often half the circulation creating ghost newspapers. We are surprised how many people are unaware of this new reality and its consequences. When there are fewer reporters, fewer journalists, there is less ability to report on a wide range of important news. Added to that, thanks to the internet, we've got the notion that news is free.

It isn't. In order to be able to trust the news, we have to figure out a way that journalists can ply their trade AND make a living. If we don't have journalists ferreting out the truth, you end up with a thousand bloggers telling you what they think is true. And then an echo chamber takes over and a thousand half-truths get spread and amplified. Regrettably, as humans we gravitate towards what's hot and snappy -- the real world is usually way less dramatic and way more incremental. As newsroom staffs have shrunk, so have reporters dedicated to specialty beats: education, for one, courts is another, and the environment is another.

Why it is important to fund this now: Delaware Currents is a news project dedicated to telling the story of the Delaware River from its headwaters in the Catskill Mountains of New York to the Delaware Bay, where it meets the ocean. The website seeks to host an intelligent conversation about the river's future. Delaware Currents was founded in response to the presence of only two environmental reporters in the whole of the watershed, despite including Philadelphia, Trenton, and Wilmington. This work is needed at a time when we desperately need news about our environment, and to understand what miracles this watershed performs: providing drinking water to 14+ million people; home to many endangered species; home to three very different national parks and the largest freshwater port in the world.

How impact & results will be demonstrated: As with most news sources, we measure impact and success on the audience reached and number of stories produced:

- Publish 26 newsletters per year, on average, every other week
- Publish 70 stories annually on subjects such as Fracking, Flooding and Drought, Regulators and Watershed Organizations, People and Places, Water Quality and Quantity, Fish and Wildlife
- Write about 3 timely Special Topics: Flooding & Environmental Justice, Climate Change & Chester County's activism
- Perform well over 100 interviews
- Reach 5,000 people through the website, newsletter, Twitter and Facebook
- Time on website 5-10 minutes, as a measure of engagement on the site. This time has increased from 1-2 minutes to 5-10
- 2 student journalists

Outcomes:

- Sharing of information that sparks support for Pennsylvania's, New York's, New Jersey's, and Delaware's environmental protection and environmental justice movements
- Guides on policies and decision-makers that are key to driving change
- A more informed public on the watershed itself and issues local to readers throughout the basin
- Readers with an understanding of the issues that tie us together across the whole watershed
- Coverage of topics that cross the typical state and county boundaries that tend to define news geographies
- An informed public that is then able to make their voices heard or form opinions about decisions and management affecting their environments and water systems

Articles we have published to date on Chester County include:

1. [Batten down the hatches!](#) Meg McGuire, January 5, 2024
2. [EPA seeks to improve dissolved oxygen levels and water quality in urban stretch of Delaware River](#), Meg McGuire, December 19, 2023.
3. [Harmful 'forever chemicals' more prevalent in lower urbanized areas of Delaware River, report finds](#), [Susanna Granieri](#), November 15, 2023.
4. [The Delaware River, already a major route for cargo, is poised to become even more competitive](#), Hugh Morley, October 31, 2023.
5. ['If we forget our connection to the natural world, the real world, we are lost as a society, a nation and a species,'](#) Meg McGuire, October 3, 2023.
6. [Plan to transport LNG by rail to Delaware River port hits yet another snag](#), Chris Mele, September 7, 2023.
7. [LNG plan on Delaware River in Chester, Pa., draws criticism for targeting long-suffering city](#), Chris Mele, August 25, 2023
8. [Myths, mistakes and misconceptions about flooding](#), Meg McGuire, August 24, 2023
9. [Hazardous-waste polluters on the Delaware River will fund more than \\$1.3M in environmental restoration work](#): The federal government reached settlements with a Philadelphia salvage yard and a former DuPont landfill in Wilmington that released PCBs and other harmful substances, Chris Mele, February 20, 2023
10. ['We're not going to beat Mother Nature':](#) Tackling climate change in the Delaware River basin. Environmental officials say urgency and innovative thinking are needed, Chris Mele, February 1, 2023.
11. [How will the infrastructure bill benefit the Delaware River watershed?](#) Chris Mele, February 14, 2022
12. [Next step in cleaning the Lower Delaware comes with a hefty price tag.](#) Meg McGuire, March 24, 2021
13. [27 miles to go: getting the last piece of the Delaware swimmable and fishable.](#) Meg McGuire, January 8, 2021.
14. [I Know How Painful Racism Is But We Can't Give Up on Voting.](#) Let your voice and your vote be heard, if you want to make change happen. Congressman Antonio Delgado (NY-19), June 4, 2020

III. ATTACHMENTS

1. 501 (c) (3) federal tax-exempt letter
2. Board of Directors, with their affiliations
3. Most recent annual report & financial statement, audited if available
4. Organizational operating budget with results for prior fiscal year & current fiscal YTD
5. **N/A**
6. Current strategic plan: Delaware Currents does not have a strategic plan. Our work is relatively straightforward. We have aimed to grow each year and have been able to increase the number of contracted writers and continue to publish our regular newsletters and articles. We have begun seeking new funding to make room for growth, and in the coming year we plan to develop new strategic goals around adding outreach and community engagement, expanding our newsletter, and diversifying our writers to include students and writers from more diverse backgrounds.