

The Liberty Tree Initiative Grant Proposal to The McCormick Foundation, Journalism Program

About the Project

The Liberty Tree Initiative is an informal coalition of educators, journalists, librarians, artists and authors with a shared interest in building awareness of the First Amendment through education and information. It was founded in partnership with the American Society of Newspaper Editors, with help and support from the Knight Foundation, the McCormick Foundation and the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. The McCormick Foundation hosted a summit of these educators and leaders in October 2007 to develop concepts that would help build understanding of the First Amendment, particularly among younger Americans. (*Participant list attached.*)

The result: a nonpartisan and nonprofit organization that brings enlightening and thought-provoking programs to college campuses, tapping the talents of local and national experts and educators to illuminate pivotal First Amendment issues.

The Need for First Amendment Education on College Campuses

First Amendment education is in abysmal shape through the U.S. education system - with little or no real formal instruction, and precious little demonstration through the practice of free speech or free press at the elementary-to-middle-to-high school levels. As a result, Americans arrive as adults, either post-education or in college, with sparse academic exploration or practical knowledge needed to apply their freedom of religion, press, speech, assembly and petition.

We know from surveys of adults (and surveys of young Americans based on the First Amendment Center's adult surveys) that large numbers of citizens would surrender free speech rights to government officials, that there is widespread misunderstanding of the role and operations of a free press, and of religious liberty, and ignorance of the rights of assembly and petition. Intervention and education at the collegiate level is perhaps the best and last real opportunity to expose large numbers of Americans to the core principles behind the First Amendment's five freedoms.

The Liberty Tree Initiative on College Campuses

The Liberty Tree Initiative commemorates the elm tree near Boston Commons, where in 1665, America's earliest patriots first spoke of the need for a new nation founded on liberty. These programs will continue that tradition of constructive and collegial conversations about freedom in America.

I. Campus Programs

Grant funds will be used to provide seed money to colleges and universities to host a Liberty Tree Initiative program, focusing on educating the leaders of tomorrow about the importance of the First Amendment. College educators and administrators will be invited and encouraged to apply for the seed money. A selection committee composed of leading First Amendment educators, journalists and funding partners will select the 10 schools.

Applicants will be judged on the following three criteria:

- 1) A demonstrated interest and ability to host a one-day First Amendment conference and supporting programs.
- 2) A willingness to explore additional avenues for promoting First Amendment education on campus.
- 3) The ability to create a web presence for First Amendment content on their campus web site.

II. Using New Technology to promote the First Amendment

The second part of the grant will fund the creation of a general web site focused on the Liberty Tree Initiative, highlighting the First Amendment collegiate programs and sharing the ideas and programs developed by the colleges and universities across the country.

III. Administrative and Organizational Support

Finally, the grant will fund the campus programs, administrative and travel costs associated with the development, coordination and organization of the grant process, and the creation of a national web site.

IV. Preliminary Budget

10 grants for \$5,000 (grant will cover programming, promotion and offset travel costs for speakers)	\$50,000
Creation and hosting of a Liberty Tree Campus web site (funding for one graduate student for one full academic year = 20 hours per week for 3 semesters)	\$23,853
Program coordinator/administrative fees/ travel expenses/	<u>\$23,500</u>
TOTAL	\$97,353

The Liberty Tree Initiative hosted a pilot campus program at Miami University of Ohio on April 7, 2008. More than 300 students and educators attended the First Amendment Town Hall Meeting and both participation and feedback were very encouraging. Working closely with Professor Patricia Newbury, students developed their own website on First Amendment issues (www.mulibertytree.com) and an exhibit on campus depicting First Amendment heroes.

For a modest investment, the Liberty Tree Initiative was able to engage this campus and its news media on key First Amendment issues for a full day. The event was so successful that Dr. Richard Campbell, dean of the School of Communications, has already announced plans to hold the second annual Liberty Tree Day on campus.

We deeply appreciate the McCormick Foundation's past support of this effort and any consideration you might give to this request for additional funding.

Sandra Chance, Executive Director, Brechner Center for Freedom of Information and Professor of Media Law, College of Journalism and Communications, University of Florida

**Liberty Tree Initiative:
Growing Support for the
First Amendment in the 21st Century**

Cantigny Estate in Wheaton, Ill.
Oct. 30-31, 2007

Participants:

Andy Alexander, Washington bureau chief, Cox Newspapers
Gilbert Bailon, editorial page editor, St. Louis Post-Dispatch
Clark Bell, director, Journalism Programs, McCormick Tribune Foundation
Joan Bertin, executive director, National Coalition Against Censorship
Scott Bosley, executive director, American Society of Newspaper Editors
Bobbie Joe Buel, vice president, Associated Press Managing Editors
Brad Cerf, student, Northwestern University
Cristal Williams Chancellor, project director, American Society of Newspaper Editors
Milton Coleman, deputy managing editor, The Washington Post
Alex Davis, student, Northwestern University
Ed Esposito, chairman-elect, Radio-Television News Directors Association
Chris Finan, president, American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression
Josh Gilbert, senior brand strategist, Weber Shandwick
Charlotte Hall, editor, The Orlando Sentinel
Tom Hayden, chief marketing officer, Northwestern University
Bill Ivey, Harvie Branscomb distinguished visiting scholar, Vanderbilt University
John Kay, musician and songwriter, Steppenwolf
Judith Krug, director, Office for Intellectual Freedom, The American Library Asso.
Jack Leslie, chairman, Weber Shandwick
Rachel Liccardo, director, KRC Research
Jutta Maue-Kay, co-founder, Maue-Kay Foundation
Eric Newton, vice president, Journalism Program, John S. and James L. Knight
Foundation
Ken Paulson, editor, USA TODAY
Gene Policinski, executive director, First Amendment Center
John Seigenthaler, founder, First Amendment Center
Jennifer Sosin, president, KRC Research
John Sturm, president and CEO, Newspaper Association of America
Christie Tatum, past president, Society of Professional Journalism
Butch Ward, distinguished fellow, The Poynter Institute
David Westphal, Washington editor, McClatchy Newspapers
Kinsey Wilson, president, The Online News Association
Kurt Wimmer, general counsel, Gannett Co., Inc.