PANDA

PROJECT	GRANTEE	INNOVATION	GRANT
PANDA	Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE)	A set of open source, web-based tools that make it easier for journalists to clean and analyze data	**$150,000**

Brian Boyer won the Knight News Challenge to create PANDA, a set of web-based tools to make it easier for journalists to work with federal, state, and city data. Smaller news organizations often lack the staff, knowledge, and tools to handle complex data sets. PANDA sought to help newsrooms share and make better use of public data, enabling more data reporting and stronger journalism.

THE INNOVATION

PANDA serves as a newsroom's data library, making it easier for journalists to import, search, share, and work collaboratively with large public data sets. The application also integrates data cleanup tools like Google Refine to help users find relationships among data sets and to help improve data sets for use by others. PANDA was designed to be used with Microsoft Excel, and to be easy enough to use to allow newsrooms without software developers to integrate it into their work.

IMPLEMENTATION

While working as a reporter at the *Chicago Tribune,* Boyer and his project team needed to quickly search and share public data sets. The *Tribune* had its own tool for this, but it was difficult to maintain and reporters were required to update the site every time they found new data. The project team was awarded News Challenge funding to develop PANDA for *The Chicago Tribune* and for other newsrooms around the world.

In an effort to understand and design the tool around their users' needs, PANDA conducted extensive interviews with reporters and editors and distributed a survey through Twitter and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted

Reporting (NICAR) listserv. The survey focused on determining the technical aptitude of users' newsrooms, the quantity of data they work with, and possible barriers to using the software. In February 2012, after six months of research and initial development, PANDA released a beta version of its platform. Among other features, PANDA allowed users to automate data imports, to search data sets using simple or complex search queries, and to set up automatic email alerts for news events related to newsrooms' data sets.

The project team aimed to market PANDA through social media, the NICAR listserv, and by conducting outreach and trainings at conferences. Because all four members of the project team held other full-time jobs while working on PANDA, turnover and time constraints were among the greatest hurdles to developing and marketing the tool. Around the time of PANDA's release, Boyer left his position at the *Tribune* for a job as the news applications editor for National Public Radio. Developers Chris Groskopf and Joe Germuska also left the *Tribune* during the two-year grant period.

In October 2013, PANDA revamped its website and marketing materials to target newsroom decision makers and to make a more focused case for data journalism, rather than concentrate its marketing efforts on data journalists themselves. Early users received it with excitement. However, PANDA continues to struggle to gain greater adoption in newsrooms. By early 2014, it has not received additional funding and is no longer in active development. Members of the original project team occasionally collaborate to fix bugs, and the open source community of PANDA users plans

to release translations of the software in additional languages within the coming months.

REACH AND OUTCOMES

Without the dedicated time to promote the tool or a sufficient marketing budget, PANDA struggled to gain the level of newsroom adoption it had originally envisioned. Although the project team is unaware of the exact numbers of PANDA users, Boyer estimates that journalists from around two dozen newsrooms had downloaded the tool by late 2013, representing about a tenth of PANDA's target adoption rate. At least four newsrooms are making heavy use of PANDA, including the *Chicago Tribune, Tampa Bay Times, San Antonio Express News*, and *Dallas Morning News*. San Antonio's news team uses PANDA to store data sets such as public employees' salaries and campaign finance reports. In one instance, *San Antonio Express News* reporters used PANDA to

quickly access state campaign finance records for a breaking news story, allowing them to produce a more detailed and time-sensitive piece than they would have been able to produce otherwise.

Despite its slower uptake in the United States, PANDA has received interest from the international community, and the project team ultimately released versions in Spanish, German, Italian, and Portuguese. PANDA maintains an active online community through its Google group, though adding additional features or further developing the software would require additional investment. Independent of the original project team, one dedicated PANDA user from the *Tampa Bay Times* has sought funding to continue marketing the tool through videos and case studies that demonstrate its value.