

The Swedish Innovation Journalism Initiative and Fellowship Program

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The Swedish Innovation Journalism Fellowship Program

In 2003 VINNOVA published the program declaration introducing innovation journalism and outlined a strategy for developing it as a concept and community. This talk recapitulates developments to date.

1 The Swedish Innovation Journalism Program

In Spring 2003 VINNOVA¹, the Swedish Government Agency for Innovation Systems, launched an [Innovation Journalism Fellowship Program](#)². ‘Innovation journalism’ was a new term that would be useful, since innovation is complex for journalists to cover, and that journalists would exchange ideas about how to cover innovation properly and evolve best practice. The basic thrust of the program was to initiate a process where the concept and community of ‘innovation journalism’ would co-evolve: the concept defining the community and the community developing the concept.

1.1 Program Model

The fellowship program model was successfully tested in a [project involving Swedish university press officers](#), leading to creation of a national expert network satisfying journalists’ requests for sources, [Expertsvar](#), and an international alliance between similar networks in the U.S., UK and Germany³. The model has these ten essential steps:

1. Allocate a budget;
2. Find suitable publications in other countries who are interested in hosting fellows. Collect letters of interest from them;
3. Assign a program committee that assures integrity and screens fellowship candidates;

¹ VINNOVA, Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems, integrates research and development in technology, transport and working life. VINNOVA’s mission is to promote sustainable growth by financing RTD and developing effective innovation systems. <http://www.vinnova.se>

² “The Concept of Innovation Journalism and a Programme for Developing it” by D. Nordfors, VINNOVA Information VI 2003:5, ISSN 1650-3120, Nov. 2003. The paper has been re-published half a year later by Innovation Journalism, Vol. 1 No. 1, May 2004. <http://www.innovationjournalism.org/archive/INJO-1-1.pdf>

³ D. Nordfors, M. Bajuk, L. Norberg, J. Brinkmann and D. Forbush. ”[Introducing a Country to Internet-Enabled Expert Networks](#)”, Communications of the ACM, Nov 2003, Vol 46, No. 11 pp 127-132

4. Issue a national call for applications for fellowships. Include the names of the potential hosts and the program committee members in the call;
5. Receive applications and create a shortlist of screened candidates;
6. Send screened candidates the earlier collected letters of interest from the potential hosts, requesting the candidates to get in touch with the potential hosts and obtain a written personal invitation from one of them;
7. Award fellowships to candidates who have succeeded in receiving invitations from hosts and bring all of the fellows together at a kick-off seminar, where they get to know each other and set up a work/discussion group on the Internet;
8. Maintain the discussion list and stimulate fellows to interact throughout the time they are posted with their hosts abroad;
9. Arrange a conference or delegation visit or both, involving the fellows and their hosts;
10. After fellows return, arrange a workshop and set up pilot projects.

The program model integrates community-building on the Internet along with real-life interaction. The aim is to establish a working community around an interest area.

1.2 Carrying Out the Program

In early 2003 co-operation was established with the U.S. Council on Competitiveness⁴, and Profnet⁵, who initiated contacts with leading U.S. publications to interest them in hosting Swedish fellows. Letters of interest were obtained from several U.S. publications and one British one.

In June 2003 the first call for applicants was issued in Sweden and a program committee was set up by VINNOVA. Mats Svegfors, governor of Västmanland and former Editor-in-Chief of a major daily newspaper, accepted chairmanship—he is highly respected both in journalism and policy circles in Sweden, giving the program credibility in both camps, without which VINNOVA could not have arranged the fellowship programs.

The program committee for the Swedish Innovation Journalism Fellowship Program comprises individuals with expertise and credibility from journalism and publishing, academia and innovation:

⁴ The Council on Competitiveness (CoC), represented by Chad Evans and Jennifer Sue Bond. The CoC is a forum for elevating national competitiveness to the forefront of national consciousness. The membership is comprised exclusively of CEOs, university presidents, and labor leaders: <http://www.compete.org/>

⁵ The Profnet, represented by its founder and CEO Dan Forbush. ProfNet (Professors Network) is dedicated to linking reporters quickly and conveniently with expert sources. ProfNet today links reporters to more than 1,000 colleges and universities in North America and Europe.: <http://www.profnet.com>

Program Committee (2004-5):

- Chairman: Mats Svegfors, Governor of Västmanland, Former Editor-in-Chief, Svenska Dagbladet (daily news);
- Eva Krutmeijer, Executive Director, Royal Swedish Academy of Science;
- Elisabeth Höglund, Vice Chairman, Sveriges Radio (the national public radio);
- Lena Norberg, Norberg Network Consulting, fmr Journalism Lecturer at Stockholm University;
- Johan Hjelm, Senior Specialist, Ericsson Research, Former Editor-in-Chief, Nätvärlden (computer magazine);
- Michel Bajuk, CEO PingPong AB, fmr Executive Director of the Swedish Federation for Investigative Journalism (GRÄV).

In 2003/4 six senior innovation journalists from major Swedish publications—from Editor in Chief to writers from daily, business, technology and science publications—were placed as fellows with news publications for periods of four to six months.

- Adam Edstrom, Editor-in-Chief, Elektroniktidningen, the largest Swedish electronics magazine. Hosted by Fortune Magazine;
- Jan Sandred, Founder & Editor, Biotech Sweden, the largest Swedish biotech magazine. Hosted by San Francisco Chronicle;
- Patric Hadenius, Editor, Forskning och Framsteg, a leading Swedish popular science magazine. Hosted by the Technological Review;
- Johan Jorgensen, Editor, Affarsvarlden, a leading Swedish business weekly. Hosted by Business 2.0;
- Magnus Hoi, Feature Editor, Computer Sweden, the largest Swedish computer magazine. Hosted by Fast Company;
- Marcus Lillkvist, Journalist, Vasterbottens-kuriren, a regional Swedish daily newspaper. Hosted by the Wall Street Journal.

The first round of Innovation Journalism Fellowships:



Västerbottens-Kuriren

Swedish publications:

Affärsvärlden
Biotech Sweden
Computer Sweden
Elektroniktidningen
Forskning & Framsteg
Västerbottenskuriren



US hosts:

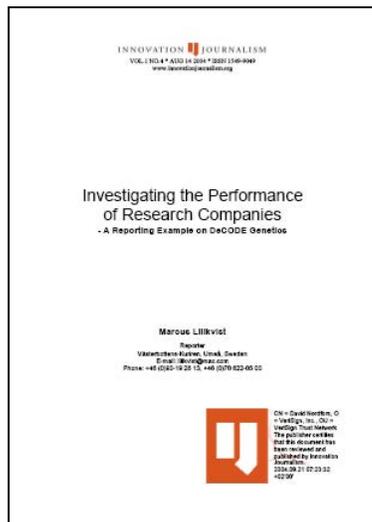
Business 2.0
Fortune Magazine
San Francisco Chronicle
Technology Review
Wall Street Journal
Fast Company

All the fellowships would be carried out in the U.S. VINNOVA had good relations with the Stanford Center for Innovations in Learning (SCIL) and Prof. Stig Hagström. I was offered the opportunity to co-ordinate the program from SCIL.

The fellows and I were linked in a mailing list (Yahoo-group) and one year exchanged close to two thousand email messages. The fellows and many of the hosts participated with other innovation journalists, academics and policymakers from the U.S., Sweden and Finland in [The First Conference on Innovation Journalism at Stanford University](#)⁶ in April 2004.

The online journal "[Innovation Journalism](#)" was created as a result of the conference. It publishes reviewed articles for and by practitioners and researchers. The articles cover various topics and angles, ranging from collegial advice about how to investigate innovation-based companies to academic proposals on the role of journalism in innovation systems.

⁶ The First Conference on Innovation Journalism, Stanford University, Wallenberg Hall April 14-16, 2004. Conference program & speaker presentations: <http://www.innovationjournalism.org/archive/INJO-1-2.pdf>. Conference papers: <http://www.innovationjournalism.org/archive/INJO-1-3.pdf>



After the conference, VINNOVA decided to prolong the program. In the second round, all current U.S. hosts (and more) wanted to continue hosting innovation journalism fellows and little effort was needed to allocate interest from additional publications. Since the Swedish program budget allowed only six fellows, sign-up was discontinued beyond ten interested potential hosts, fearing that potential hosts left without fellows might be disappointed.

The second call for applicants was launched in June 2004. It received similar interest to the first call, resulting in six new high-quality fellows:

- Johan Boström, Editor and Writer, Göteborgsposten, a major regional newspaper. Hosted by IDG News Service;
- Andreas Cervenka, News and Feature Editor, Affärsvärlden, a major business magazine. Hosted by Fortune Magazine;
- Birgitta Forsberg, journalist, Veckans Affärer, the largest Swedish business weekly. Hosted by the San Francisco Chronicle;
- Marie Granmar, Editor, Process Nordic, a new publication for the process industries. Hosted by Science.
- Niklas Johansson, journalist, Veckans Affärer. Hosted by Fast Company.
- Anders Lotsson, journalist, Computer Sweden, the largest Swedish IT publication. Hosted by Business 2.0.

The Second Round of Innovation Journalism Fellowships:



Swedish publications:

- Affärsvärlden
- Veckans Affärer (x2)
- Computer Sweden
- Göteborgstidningen
- Process Nordic

US hosts:

- Science
- Fortune Magazine
- Fast Company
- IDG News Service
- San Francisco Chronicle
- Business 2.0

The first round of fellows are planning a lecture series, “An Introduction to Innovation Journalism,” for interested journalists. We are investigating the possibilities of delivering some lectures via video conference from Stanford University. We are looking at possible co-operation with initiatives in other countries, especially Finland— which in 2004 became the first country to offer a university course in Innovation Journalism.

2 Expected Results

Building on experience from the previous Swedish fellowships, the following results may be expected from the International Innovation Journalism Fellowship Program:

- Improved coverage of innovation, business and technology, improving clusters or innovation systems, improving economic development;
- Improved understanding of the innovation economy;
- Recognition of Innovation Journalism, bridging marketing and engineering;
- Increased understanding of the role of journalism in innovation systems;
- A community of innovation journalists, strengthening independent reporting, decision processes in innovation systems and ultimately the innovation economy;
- Friendships between fellows and hosts, enhancing international networking;
- International alliances and cooperation between fellows and/or hosts;
- Innovations in the fellows’ work environments at home;

- Greater mobility within the news media and corporate communications on some of the fellows' home markets.

3 Discussion

The program model is successful and should work in other countries. If several countries engage in fellowships, further opportunities should appear through internationalization, co-ordinating the national initiatives in creating a truly international innovation-journalism community.

Fellowship success can be explained by the strength of the Innovation Journalism concept, combined with building the fellowship program, which avoids compromising journalistic integrity. It balances and satisfies the fellows' interests, their home publications, the hosts, the government agency and participating academia. The fellows and hosts like the program—in the second round more interested hosts were stimulated among high-level US publications than the Swedish program could offer fellows. So the opportunity exists to expand activities, spreading the concept to more countries worldwide where efforts are being made to enhance the innovation economy.

Sweden is a small country and a world leader in innovation⁷, so the Swedish Innovation Journalism Fellows often already know of innovation and of each other when they start the fellowship. An international fellowship program should start by gathering the fellows, for example at Stanford, for some time, for them to get to know each other better before starting work at the hosting publications.

Since fellows are hosted by the world's best publications, some—after returning to their previous jobs—will seek new environments in which to develop their new ideas. Since their CVs are crowned by their positions at prestigious home publications and their participation in the fellowship program, involving close connections with world-leading US publications, these journalists should soon rotate to leading roles in journalism or professional communication.

4 Acknowledgment

I wish to acknowledge all the people who have participated in making this program succeed, my colleagues and friends at VINNOVA, Stanford, my Finnish friends, The Competitiveness Institute, and all the excellent individuals without whom the Innovation Journalism fellowship program would have not taken off or would have crashed early.

⁷ European Innovation Scoreboard 2003, World Economic Forum 2003 (Innovation Capacity Index), Fondazione Rozelli/Corriere della Sera 2003 (System Innovation Index).

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