

November 20, 2009

NYC nonprofit takes on a journalism assignment

The Community Service Society of New York is buying public affairs journal *City Limits* with plans to invest \$1 million to redesign the pub and its Web site.

By [Daniel Massey](#)

The Community Service Society of New York—a 160-year old advocate for the city's poor—has agreed to purchase the investigative public policy journal *City Limits* from City Futures Inc. for about \$200,000.

The group will immediately invest an additional \$1 million in the publication and plans to spin it off as an independent entity within six months.

“Clearly the news environment in New York City has changed dramatically,” said CSS President David Jones. “The discussion on many of the things we work on—poverty, the working poor and moderate income people—doesn't get much space in mainstream media.”

Veteran journalist Walter Fields, who has been CSS's vice president of government relations and public affairs for the past five years, will become publisher. Mr. Fields says he'll immediately revamp *City Limits*' Web site, which will soon include video and breaking news. He'll also redesign the print publication, which will come out eight times a year instead of four and will be available on newsstands. The journal's current staff will be retained, and it will keep its name.

The publication's board of directors and editorial staff will operate independently from CSS to avoid any potential conflict of interest, Mr. Jones said.

The deal puts the weight of a major New York City institution—CSS has a \$19 million annual budget and a \$125 million endowment—behind an experiment in independent investigative journalism. Similar efforts have cropped up in Austin, San Diego and Minneapolis. The CSS board of trustees has set aside money over three years for the experiment, though Mr. Jones would not say how much.

“Unbelievably, in the media capital of the world, many New Yorkers remain faceless,” said Mark Edmiston, the board's chair and former president of Newsweek.

Andy Breslau, executive director of City Futures, which also runs the policy think tank Center for an Urban Future, said he began looking into a potential sale because his group simply did not have the resources it needed to build up the publication.

“This will give it the bandwidth to grow at this moment, keeping people focused on issues that tend to escape easy attention,” Mr. Breslau said.