



Making sense of the Census

UNSAVORY EATS

Food vendors
inside stadiums
rack up violations

DEBTOR JAILS

Missed hearings
for unpaid bills
lead to lockups

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reap rewards in
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THE IRE JOURNAL

FALL 2010

- 4 Big duties in small towns**
By Mark Horvit
IRE Executive Director
- 6 DEBT LOCKUP**
Thousands get arrest warrants in Minnesota for unpaid bills
By Chris Serres
Minneapolis Star Tribune
- 8 HIDDEN PROFITS**
Colleges, credit card firms benefit from student debt
By Ben Protes
Huffington Post Investigative Fund
- 10 FOUL FOOD**
Inspectors find problems inside sports stadiums
By Paula Lavigne
ESPN
- 12 PAYROLL ABUSES**
Ferry system awash in wasteful spending
By Susannah Frame
KING-Seattle
- 14 Journalists in Sri Lanka face growing government control**
By Sonali Samarasinghe
- 16 AT&T case threatens records access**
By Charles N. Davis
Missouri School of Journalism
- 17 Working the big story**
By Maud Beelman
Dallas Morning News

- 18 BACK TO BASICS**
2010 Census form focuses on key data
By Steve Doig
Arizona State University
- 21 TREND TRACKER**
American Community Survey measures how we live and work
By Paul Overberg
USA TODAY
- 24 DIVING DEEP WITH PUMS**
By Ronald Campbell
The Orange County Register

Making sense of the Census

- 26 GRANTS, GRAFT AND GREED**
Digital document, records reveal a corruption ring in West Virginia
By Eric Eyre
Charleston (W.Va.) Gazette
- 28 SKY-HIGH COSTS**
New York pays top dollar for the mentally disabled
By Mary Beth Pfeiffer
Poughkeepsie Journal
- 30 SIDS OR NEGLECT?**
Database analysis finds questionable SIDS cases
By Franco Ordoñez
The Charlotte Observer
- 32 Snapshots from our blogs**



COVER STORIES:
Pages 18-25

ABOUT THE COVER

Since 1790, Americans have taken part in the 10-year census, which is mandated by the U.S. Constitution. Reporters can find a wealth of stories in the 2010 census results, as well as the annual American Community Survey.

Photo: U.S. Census Bureau

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FROM THE IRE OFFICE

Big duties in small towns

BY MARK HORVIT
IRE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

So much is changing so rapidly in the journalism world – and so much attention is being paid to that evolution – it's easy to lose sight of all of the reporters and editors in small communities who continue the proud tradition of local muckraking.

And easy to forget that some things about working as the watchdog of your community never change.

There are more than 4,000 newspapers outside metro areas in the United States, according to the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues. In Texas alone, there are more than 400. I met with reporters and editors from more than 40 of them in October at an event sponsored by the Texas Center for Community Journalism. The center, housed at the Schieffer School of Journalism at Texas Christian University, is dedicated to providing resources and training to the people who cover the news for most of the communities in the Lone Star State. And as the big dailies have pulled back their coverage areas for economic reasons, the role these journalists play becomes increasingly important.

"In small cities and rural areas, many newspapers are routinely fulfilling the watchdog role," center director Tommy Thomason said. "They often work in towns with entrenched power structures where they are literally the only independent voice asking the only independent questions."

The importance of such community watchdogs – and the sacrifices they make – was hammered home during the Missouri Honor Medal Awards Banquet this fall. As former (Portland) *Oregonian* editor Sandy Rowe accepted her award from the Missouri School of Journalism, she talked about growing up watching her dad run her hometown paper.

"In thousands of communities across this country, editors live with the people they write about," Rowe said. "They pass them on the street, they eat hotdogs at the same lunch counter in the local diner, and they deal with the fallout of their coverage in real time."

Consider Kathy Cruz.

She's a veteran reporter who works for the twice-weekly *Hood County News* in Texas ("More than a Newspaper. A Hood County Legend Since 1886.") She covers government – and plenty of other things – as part of a newsroom staff of about half-a-dozen.

Cruz got her start at the *Dallas Morning News*, before leaving the big city, and journalism, 11 years ago for a quieter life in a small community.

Quieter for a while, anyway.

About three years ago, Cruz went to work for the local paper and immediately started stirring things up. She's written stories exposing expensive city purchases, hefty raises for public officials, convicts with violent offenses getting weekend furloughs, and an examination of the way men are treated by local court in custody cases that required an exhaustive review of court rulings. All of which she had to fit in around her regular duties.

Hood County residents noticed. When Cruz wrote a story about her struggles to get records from City Hall and about how much the city wanted to charge her for a series of open records requests – about \$1,400, more than her budget would cover – some readers sent in contributions.

Not long after she started working at the paper, she learned how some would react to her work. "It was vicious, just vicious," she says. One elected official who took issue with one of her stories wrote an angry letter about her and sent it around the county. "I had to sit my younger son down and talk with him about it because that letter was sent to his school."

For Cruz, the reasons to tackle such tough topics and to use her weekends to do so are pretty basic. She sees a problem in the community, "and I have to do it."

To help such journalists, IRE and the Institute for Rural Journalism in Kentucky have established a fellowship to help send reporters from rural news organizations to IRE's computer-assisted reporting boot camp. The fund was made possible by a donation from IRE member Daniel Gilbert, who won the Pulitzer and an IRE Award for digging he did at the Bristol, Va., paper.

Gilbert's example was a high-profile reminder of the important work being done every day out of the spotlight, where it matters most.

Mark Horvit is executive director of IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. He can be reached at mhorvit@ire.org or 573-882-2042.

Rural journalists benefit from new fellowship

Reporters who serve a largely rural audience can apply for a new fellowship to attend an IRE computer-assisted reporting boot camp.

The R-CAR Fellowship was created by IRE member Daniel Gilbert to give rural reporters skills to help them uncover stories that otherwise would not come to light. The fellowship is offered in conjunction with The Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues at the University of Kentucky.

To seed the fellowship, Gilbert donated his \$10,000 prize from the Scripps Howard Foundation for winning the Community Journalism Prize in the National Journalism Awards. He also won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for public service for the *Bristol Herald Courier* for his stories about the mismanagement of natural-gas royalties in southwest Virginia. Gilbert attended a CAR boot camp, which gave him the database skills to produce his award-winning work.

The fellowships will be funded through Gilbert's donation, other contributions and a matching grant from the state of Kentucky. Each additional donation to the fund before April 30, 2011, will be matched by the state of Kentucky. For more information and directions on how to donate, visit the institute online at www.ruraljournalism.org.

For an R-CAR Fellowship application, see details online at <http://ow.ly/30ugK>.

Audio from 2010 IRE conference available

Audio from the 2010 IRE conference in Las Vegas is available for members to stream online. A DVD of the audio is available to order from the Resource Center. Conference attendees can obtain a copy for \$5 (to cover shipping/handling). Additional copies can be ordered for \$20 each. Members who did not attend the conference can purchase a copy for \$20 (price includes shipping).

Not all sessions were recorded. Audio recordings are available for panels held in the Champagne Ballroom 1, Champagne Ballroom 2, Champagne Ballroom 3/4 and Versailles 3/4.

An online order form is available at <http://ow.ly/30uHL>.

Webinars on various topics available for purchase

Miss an IRE webinar? The sessions are archived online and can be purchased for download. Prices are \$5 for members and \$10 for non-members. Details are available at www.ire.org/training/online.

Webinars are available on topics including broadcast investigations, Twitter tools for journalists, analyzing text with DocumentCloud, combing through campus assault data, online tips and strategies, and tracking stimulus spending data.

Newsroom training options updated

Custom IRE training for your newsroom or university remains one of the best bargains in the industry, with immediate results: new tools, skills, websites and approaches that bolster everyday beat coverage as well as enterprise stories.

IRE has expanded its offerings. In addition to hands-on training in using spreadsheets and databases, IRE offers presentations such as Census Data for Any Beat; Tapping into Twitter and Social Media; the Web for Watchdogs; and Mining Data and Documents on Campus. Full details are online at www.ire.org/training/specialized.

If you're interested in further information and a price quote for your newsroom, please contact an IRE training director: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281, or Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org, 614-205-5420.

MEMBER NEWS

Paul D'Ambrosio, regional editor for investigations at the *Asbury Park Press*, and staff writer **Shannon Mullen** were part of the team that won the 2010 APME Public Service Award, medium newspapers, for the series, "Fighting New Jersey's Tax Crush."

Seattle Times reporters **Ken Armstrong** and **Nick Perry's** book, *Scoreboard, Baby: A Story of College Football, Crime and Complicity*, was published by Bison Books.

Debbie Cenziper of the *Washington Post* won the National Association of Black Journalists' investigative reporting prize. The *Post's* **Cheryl W. Thompson** shared the "special project" prize with the *Contra Costa Times*.

J. Todd Foster is the new executive editor of the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. Previously, he was editor of the *Bristol (Va.) Herald Courier*.

Larry Henry, previously managing editor at the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, is special projects editor at *Northwest Arkansas Newspapers*.

The McCormick Foundation awarded a grant of \$75,000 to the University of Illinois for a consortium of public service reporting projects. **Brant Houston**, the Knight Chair in Investigative Reporting at Illinois, will coordinate the projects with professors in Indiana, Iowa and Wisconsin.

Cimaron Neugebauer, a reporter at the *Spectrum & Daily News*, has accepted a reporting job at the *Salt Lake Tribune*.

Dave Ress is now local editor at the *News Leader* in Staunton, Va. Previously, he was a reporter at the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.

California Watch has added two new reporters: **Susanne Rust** and **Ryan Gabrielson**. Rust, who recently completed a Knight fellowship at Stanford University, will focus on the environment. Gabrielson, who recently completed a fellowship at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, will focus on public safety and law enforcement.

Christopher Schnaars has joined the *Asbury Park Press* as a projects reporter. Previously, he worked at the *Bergen (N.J.) Record*.

Brad Schrade has joined the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* as an investigative reporter. Previously, he was a senior reporter and investigative editor at the *Tennessean* in Nashville.

David Wickert is now covering county government for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. Previously, he covered county government, education and the military for the *News Tribune* in Tacoma, WA.

Please send Member News items to Doug Haddix (doug@ire.org). Read updates online at <http://data.nicar.org/irejournal/membernews>.



Joy Uhlmeier says police arrested her after an Easter visit with her elderly mother and held her overnight – for missing a court hearing on an unpaid credit card debt.

DEBT LOCKUP

Thousands get arrest warrants
in Minnesota for unpaid bills

BY CHRIS SERRES
MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE

Every so often, the phrase “warrant issued” appeared in the database. We ran the numbers and found the phrase appeared in connection with 3,200 debt-related cases since 2005, with the numbers of such cases soaring 60 percent in 2009.

Normally, people who have fallen behind on their debts are reluctant to air their problems in the media. But there was something different about the families I interviewed this spring for an expose on the return of debtors’ prison in America.

These people were angry and eager to talk. They had spent up to 48 hours in jail for unpaid debts that were, in many cases, more than a decade old. Without exception, they questioned a legal system that treats debtors like hardened criminals.

One woman was cuffed and taken to a Minneapolis jail because of a \$250 J.C. Penney credit-card bill. There, she was groped by a male inmate and spent a sleepless night in a cell with women snorting drugs. I interviewed an elderly woman arrested along the highway while driving home from Easter dinner. In another case, police showed up at one mother’s house less than two weeks after she gave birth through Caesarean section.

Technically, the people I interviewed for the story, “In Jail for Debt,” had not been charged with crimes. But in Minnesota, local judges routinely issue arrest warrants when debtors do not appear for scheduled hearings. Bail is often set at the amount of the debt owed, with the money going directly to pay off an old debt. In effect, publicly funded jails and police are being used to collect private debts.

Our investigation into debtors’ prisons began with the discovery of a single phrase deep inside a giant database.

Early in 2010, my colleague Glenn Howatt and I set out to explain a dramatic increase in debt-related lawsuits in Minnesota. We heard reports that a new breed of highly sophisticated debt collectors, armed with technology and tools to track and find people, had become increasingly aggressive. We began by requesting five years’ worth of data on more than 300,000 Minnesotans who have been sued for their debts.

While sifting through the data, we made an odd discovery. Every so often, the phrase “warrant issued” appeared in the database. We ran the numbers and found the phrase appeared in connection with 3,200 debt-related cases since 2005, with the numbers of such cases soaring 60 percent in 2009. Why would this be happening? After all, a failure to pay a debt is not a criminal offense; and debtors’ prisons were largely abolished in this country in the mid-1800s.

Perplexed, I sought answers from court and law-enforcement officials. They initially assured us that while arrest warrants were being issued in connection with debt cases, they were largely ignored unless someone was being sought for an actual crime, such as theft or domestic abuse. We were assured that police and sheriff’s deputies did not have the time or resources to seek out people whose sole offense was to miss a court hearing over an unpaid debt.

As one court official told me, “It’s not like we’re operating some kind of debtors’ prison here.”

But these official claims proved untrue. We discovered that most of the people who were the subject of the arrest warrants did not have criminal records. When I called them at home, they told harrowing stories of being arrested and taken to jail in front of their families and co-workers. Some spent up to 48 hours in jail. It quickly became clear that police were actively seeking out debtors, even when they had committed no crime.

Then we made another discovery. One man who was arrested over an unpaid credit-card debt showed us the documents he received at the jail. We noticed that the bail was set at the exact amount of the debt owed – to the penny. A single parent, the man scrambled to borrow money from his landlord so his daughter, a severe asthmatic, would not have to spend a night alone. It was only later that he learned that the bail money went directly to pay off his old credit-card debt.

We compared his court documents with those of other arrested consumers and discovered that, in most cases, bail was being set at the amount of the debt owed.

We did some more digging. Based on interviews with dozens of attorneys, judges and debtors across Minnesota, it became clear how the system worked. In Minnesota, collection firms could ask judges to issue a warrant if someone did not appear in court to dispute a debt. They also could petition the judge to set the bail at the amount owed. Once the person was arrested, these same collection firms could ask for the bail money. Many judges rubber-stamped these requests.

It then became clear: Bail had become a vehicle to collect old debts. In some cases, people were so afraid to spend a night in jail that they borrowed money from family and friends to pay bail. When asked why he pursued arrest warrants, one collections attorney responded, simply, “Because it works.” It costs nothing for collection attorneys to request a warrant; and if people pay the bail, the debt collector gets the money.

We decided to dig deeper into the database to determine which firms were responsible for the dramatic rise in debt-related warrants. We expected to see a list of credit-card companies or major banks. Instead, the most active seekers of arrest warrants in Minnesota are firms with odd names, such as Portfolio Recovery Associates Inc. or Unifund, that buy debts for pennies on the dollar and then try to collect the entire amount.

The emergence of debt buyers poses special challenges. They go by unusual names and collect on debts that are, in many cases, more than a decade old. Many of the people we interviewed said they did not respond to the legal notices because they didn't recognize the names of the firms suing them. Others did not even recall owing the debts in question. We found that just three large debt buyers accounted for 15 percent of all debt-related warrants issued in Minnesota since 2005.

We now knew who was responsible for the increase in debt-related arrests. Our next challenge was to determine how widespread the practice had become. Was Minnesota an aberration or were debtors being arrested all over the United States?

It quickly became apparent that we wouldn't be able to answer this question using available court data. There are no national data on debt-related lawsuits. Most states do not keep a central registry of lawsuit data, which made it impossible for us to identify which states allowed people to be arrested for their debts. We discovered that some states did have centralized databases, but it would take months for them to send us the information, and there was no guarantee we would find information about those being arrested.

We turned to consumer attorneys across the country for help. National attorney groups, such as Legal Aid and the National Association of Consumer Advocates, operate national e-mail list serves that are read by attorneys who represent consumers. They e-mailed my questions to hundreds of attorneys across the country, asking if anyone had experience representing consumers who had been arrested.

Within hours after sending out the e-mails, the stories started to trickle in. There was a disabled man in Perry County, Ind., who was kept in a jail indefinitely until he came up with \$300 for an old lumber-yard debt. His arrest was later ruled unconstitutional. In central Illinois, people were being locked up for failing to make court-ordered payment plans of as little as \$25 a month on old debts.

However, there were not enough cases of people being jailed outside Minnesota to draw any sweeping conclusions. It was clear that, while some people were being jailed for their debts in some counties, it was primarily a local phenomenon. Even in Minnesota, there were wide variations from one county to the next. In some counties, sheriff's deputies would actively seek out debtors when they missed court appearances; in others, they would ignore such cases.

The variations struck many readers as arbitrary and unfair – as if justice depended on where one happened to live.

Many of the people who responded to the story focused on the frightening accounts of people who had been arrested, locked up and forced to spend a night in jail. However, without the data and the discovery of that single phrase – “warrant issued” – we never would have been able to tell their stories. In addition, it became more difficult for court officials and debt collectors to dismiss our questions once we were able to produce numbers showing that debtor arrests were on the rise.

The article on the jailing of debtors became the first in a six-part investigative series (“Hounded”) on aggressive tactics used by debt collectors. We explored how many debt buyers were seizing people's bank accounts or part of their paychecks without ever having to prove in court that the debt was even owed. In some cases, collectors were seizing government benefits, such as Social Security income, that was legally exempt from garnishment. In many cases, people went hungry as they tried to get their money back. We also wrote about firms that specialize in collecting the debts of deceased people, by trying to guilt surviving family members into paying debts that aren't even theirs.

The reaction to the “Hounded” series was immediate. In late September, Senators Al Franken of Minnesota and George LeMieux of Florida introduced legislation that would ban the use of arrest warrants by private firms. The bill would also require collectors to furnish consumers with more information about what they owe, including a breakdown of fees and interest. If passed, it would be the most dramatic expansion of federal protections for debtors since the Fair Debt Collection Practices Act in 1977.

In Minnesota, two state legislators have begun preparing legislation that would tighten the state's regulatory authority over debt buyers and set new standards for the issuing of arrest warrants.

There also is a less-publicized push by consumer attorneys and judges to reform Minnesota's court rules. A number of judges have objected to the practice of setting bail at the amount of the debt owed. They argue that it's a distortion of the purpose of bail, which is to ensure a person's appearance in court, instead of collecting debts.

A number of judges have objected to the practice of setting bail at the amount of the debt owed. They argue that it's a distortion of the purpose of bail, which is to ensure a person's appearance in court, instead of collecting debts.

Chris Serres is an investigative business reporter with the Minneapolis Star Tribune, specializing in coverage of financial services. Serres came to the Star Tribune in 2003 and has written extensively about business topics for 15 years.

Glenn Howatt/Star Tribune



Deborah Poplawski of Minneapolis says police should not become debt collectors because they have more serious issues to handle. She was arrested and taken to jail for not paying a \$250 credit card bill from J.C. Penney.

HIDDEN PROFITS

Colleges, credit card firms benefit from student debt

BY BEN PROTESS
HUFFINGTON POST INVESTIGATIVE FUND

College students, on average, are saddled with a record \$23,200 in unpaid loans upon graduation. They also leave school with some \$4,100 in credit card bills, up from \$2,900 four years earlier.

When we teamed up with a group of Columbia journalism students to launch a year-long reporting project, we quickly found our story.

College students accumulate lots of debt: tuition bills, student loan bills, credit card bills. You name it, they owe it.

Sure, earning a college degree can increase the odds of achieving financial success. But our young colleagues noted many students and graduates are drowning in debt.

College students, on average, are saddled with a record \$23,200 in unpaid loans upon graduation. They also leave school with some \$4,100 in credit card bills, up from \$2,900 four years earlier.

We hypothesized that cozy relationships between lawmakers, schools and lenders were perpetuating this burdensome cycle, but few investigations had been done on the topic. So our questions started to mount: Who exactly is profiting off the backs of students? What is the government doing to protect young Americans who are falling deeper in debt? How are special interests exerting pressure on Washington? Are schools complicit in, or even benefiting from, student debt?

Answering these questions was sure to take months. It was a project tailor-made for collaboration, and in dire need of a team of eager and energetic college graduate students.

The Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism at Columbia University was an ideal partner. The center helps train about 15 students each year (I was one in 2007), and is led by Sheila Coronel, a dynamo investigator who also founded the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

Sheila's ragtag band of student reporters was eager to dig in, and began by posting a call for tips and personal stories on our website (huffpostfund.org), hoping that some crowdsourcing would get the ball rolling faster. It did.

Within weeks, the young muckrakers unearthed several intriguing insights into the student debt industry. Ultimately, we produced a three-part series, "Hidden Profits, Student Debt," that ran during several months in 2010. (We also produced follow-up stories.) The stories resonated with parents, students, educators and lawmakers, and already have spurred changes in the way some schools deal with lenders.

Our work, which through a Creative Commons license was free for anyone to publish, was widely distributed. The stories ran on our site, were published and promoted by the Huffington Post and appeared in several newspapers, including the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Credit card colleges

The story that received the most attention was our examination of little-known affinity agreements between schools and credit card companies. Stabile student Jeannette Neumann and I found that some of the nation's largest and most elite universities stand to gain millions of dollars from selling the names and addresses of students to companies such as Bank of America. The quiet deals also grant the companies special access to school events and football games.

In turn, the schools and their alumni associations receive so-called royalty payments from the companies, often worth several million dollars. Some colleges even receive bonuses when students incur more debt.

The key to nailing this part of the series was to get as many documents as possible.

For three months, we collected three dozen affinity agreements, about half of which call for colleges to provide credit card companies with students' names, phone numbers and addresses.

Until this year, the substance of the deals had been secret. A little-noticed provision in the 2009 credit card reform law requires their disclosure at public and private universities alike. But even now, few schools post the contracts online and, of course, even fewer publicize their existence. Almost every school delayed or fought our requests.

It took weeks of calling and e-mailing the schools nearly every day before they finally released the contracts. When a school stonewalled us, we reached out to congressional aides who obtained the documents for us.

It wasn't easy, but our persistence paid off.

As we waited for the documents to roll in, we searched for students and recent grads who are battling credit card debt so that we could put a face on our stories. We called dozens of student advocacy groups and on-campus organizations, which led us to fascinating interviews. For instance, we spoke with Lisa Smith, who, despite having no full-time job or much in savings, easily and quickly secured her first credit card on campus. By the time she graduated, she had four cards and \$15,000 in credit card debt.

Our next step, urged by the Investigative Fund's executive editor, Keith Epstein, was to dig deeper into the credit card industry. So using LinkedIn and other Web resources, we tracked down two former credit card executives who had negotiated affinity agreements. They described for us, in detail and on the record, how they enticed schools into the deals. They also explained why student customers are so important to credit card companies: "Your first credit card is usually the one you keep."

We published our stories in June, along with multimedia features. Our multimedia editor at the time, Amanda Zamora, had the good idea to post each of the affinity agreements online in a searchable form. Why let all those documents go to waste? So she created a graphic (*Inside the Deals: Contracts Allow Credit Card Marketing to Students*) that lists the schools and allows readers to see just how lucrative each affinity agreement is. (Thank you to our interns Joseph Frye, Stephanie Gleason, Kimberly Leonard, Michael Ono and Lauyrn Smith for countless hours of reading, analyzing and uploading contracts to Scribd.)

Although we collected three-dozen affinity agreements, that's a small fraction of the likely 800 that exist. And while we don't have the time to hunt down the rest, we realized that our readers might.

So we decided to launch a crowdsourcing experiment. We compiled a list of the 50 largest colleges in the country, and asked our readers to track down their school's affinity agreements.

Sure enough, our site and others were flooded with more than 2,000 comments, tips and potential citizen journalists eager to seek out evidence of similar deals at schools we had yet to examine. We further recruited volunteers through Campus Progress and the Huffington Post College section.

Our reporting seems to have had an impact. Three universities amended their affinity agreements, which now prohibit banks from marketing cards to students. One member of Congress also told us that he might renew his attempts to crack down on such practices. And at least one alumna, outraged that her alma mater was selling students' names to banks, has stopped donating to the school.

Meanwhile, our story found its way onto the pages of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and the *Albany Times Union* – as well as the Hearst and *New York Times* news-wires. US News, Mother Jones, MSNBC and the Chronicle of Higher Education referred to our story, as did bloggers and other interested readers.

Congress' favorite lenders

As we were investigating student debt, Congress was considering a proposal to remake the nation's student loan system. The proposal, which ultimately was passed as part of the health care overhaul, will make the federal government the primary lender to college students. No longer will the government subsidize or guarantee loans made by nonprofits or by for-profit lenders such as Sallie Mae.

But through interviews and a review of documents and e-mails obtained through several public record requests, the Stabile students found that nonprofit lenders – including some accused of previous misconduct by state and federal authorities – actually benefit from the bill. The nonprofits persuaded lawmakers to award them the equivalent of no-bid contracts potentially worth millions of dollars apiece.

Before the bill was introduced, the lobbying group for nonprofit education lenders, the Education Finance Council (EFC), worked behind the scenes to craft its own legislative provision. The council wanted each nonprofit to receive a guaranteed annual contract to service government loans for up to 100,000 borrowers. The EFC's document was stamped "Confidential" and shopped on Capitol Hill. In the end, the council's language was included nearly verbatim in the House bill.

Using the Senate lobbying database, the Stabile Center students found that the nonprofits' clout stems in part from the council's connections in Washington. The council's president previously spent three years as the chief budget analyst for education and labor programs at the House Budget Committee. The council's senior vice president worked in the Education Department's Office of Postsecondary Education. And its vice president of communications was once a senior research analyst at the National Republican Senatorial Committee.

Nonprofit misconduct

Accompanying the nonprofit story was a sidebar about some troubled nonprofits. The Stabile students found that some nonprofit lenders have been dogged by allegations of misconduct.

By reviewing public records, lawsuits and inspector general reports, the students found that nonprofit lenders in at least 10 states ran afoul of state and federal rules between 1993 and 2008. Government investigators have exposed illegal payments to an alumni association, questionable executive compensation and perks, deceptive advertising and tens of millions of dollars in unwarranted federal subsidies.

Effective partners

Readers love stories about college students because many are either parents of college students, recent graduates, or are students themselves. We happened to unearth intriguing findings, but the project succeeded because the subject fascinated our readers, and they were even willing to help us investigate.

Of course, our investigation would have been dead in the water without the enthusiasm and energy of the Stabile Center students. This project was our first collaboration with outside journalists, and its success has since encouraged us to partner with newspapers and investigative nonprofits on several other projects.

In this era of shrinking newsrooms and investigative budgets, collaboration seems not only natural – but necessary.

Ben Protes is a staff reporter for the Huffington Post Investigative Fund, which has merged with the Center for Public Integrity.

A REPORTING GUIDE

This project is begging to be reproduced. Simply call your local colleges and ask for their credit card affinity agreements. Reach out to professors and student groups for reaction and help.

You are likely to face significant obstacles from the universities. But we've been there, and assembled a step-by-step reporting guide to assist you. It's a how-to of sorts; tips for what to watch for and resources for navigating those tricky public record searches. (<http://ow.ly/2Zy08>)

What to watch for:

- Many schools will be slow to get back to you if you aren't persistent. Follow up every other day with a call or an e-mail if possible; the law requires disclosure in a "reasonable time frame."
- If the press office refuses your request, contact the school's budget office or government affairs office. The university is required to disclose the documents to any member of the public under the Truth in Lending Act.
- School officials might say they can't provide the contract because it is administered through the alumni association. That claim is technically correct, but don't worry. The law requires schools to disclose contracts administered through "alumni groups." If they refer you to an alumni association official, resubmit the request to both parties, emphasizing the disclosure rule. When alumni associations still wouldn't cooperate, we asked them what they were hiding. This strategy worked every time.
- In addition to the contract, request any addendum, attachments or other memorandum related to the agreement.

... our site and others were flooded with more than 2,000 comments, tips and potential citizen journalists eager to seek out evidence of similar deals at schools we had yet to examine.



Dr. Robert Buchanan, director of the University of Maryland's Center for Food Safety and Security Systems, examines the stadium inspection data provided by ESPN.

FOUL FOOD

Inspectors find problems inside sports stadiums

BY PAULA LAVIGNE
ESPN

Fans visiting a professional sports stadium to cheer their teams can stomach spending \$6 for a hot dog or even \$10 for a grilled salmon sandwich. What they don't expect is a side of fruit flies and mouse droppings – and the potential that their meals could make them sick.

After reading stories about food-safety problems at sports stadiums in Anaheim, Cincinnati and Indianapolis, I wondered what we could find in a national review of stadium food safety practices. We considered focusing on just one league but decided to expand our analysis to all 107 professional baseball, NFL, NHL and NBA venues open in 2009 in the United States and Canada. By the end of our reporting, we had read thousands of inspection reports on cockroaches, rat feces, moldy food, expired milk and dirty hands.

"Outside the Lines" associate producer Lindsay Rovegno and I spent the next several weeks figuring out each agency responsible for inspecting each venue. In big cities such as Boston or Houston, the city health department inspected stadiums. In smaller cities, such as Green Bay, Wis., the county health department does the reports. And in a few places, most notably Florida and Alberta, Canada, food safety inspections are done at the state/provincial level. We obtained the data either by pulling reports off websites or submitting a public records request to agencies.

We sought copies of the last routine food safety inspection report for any place inside a stadium that sold food or beverages – which included concession stands, certain pushcarts, restaurants and central kitchens. We figured that using the most recent full inspection report would be a good benchmark for comparison.

Some inspectors issue letter grades, whereas others issue numeric scores. We needed something that would work across multiple jurisdictions. We quickly noticed that all jurisdictions

divided their violations into critical or major problems versus non-critical or minor problems.

Those definitions and standards stem from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration Food Code, which is a set of guidelines that most departments use for food safety inspections. (The Canadian rules are similar.) They define critical or major violations as those that pose a risk for foodborne illness. They include problems such as food not cooked to a proper temperature, raw food coming into contact with ready-to-serve food, and employees who don't wash their hands. However, not all departments were up to date with the most recent code. And because the food code is a guideline – not law – local departments were free to make changes, so there was some variance in the number of critical violations due to those discrepancies.

If reporting this story within the confines of a state or province, you'll probably have an easier time because the definitions are generally the same. But even then, you might find that some local departments, or certain inspectors, are more or less rigorous than others, and that can account for differences in the number of violations. (That could be a separate story.) If you find that a particular inspector never gives a critical violation, it might be worth examining. We heard from some health officials that companies have been known to "inspector shop."

Another thing to watch for is how departments schedule inspections. Are they visiting when the place is closed and there are no customers? It's kind of hard to know whether employees are washing their hands – one of the most serious violations – when there are no employees present. For example, Chicago stadiums had few if any violations, but were they really that clean? By comparing the dates of the inspections and the schedule of events at the facilities, we realized inspectors were visiting while the place was vacant. We made a point to mention that in our online piece to help explain why they appeared so spotless.

Overcoming data hurdles

Whether we were pulling the reports online or having the health department do it, we ran into one problem over and over again, which should have been obvious from the beginning: Do you know the actual name of any concession stand at your favorite stadium? Does it even have a name? Maybe it's called "Grill 10A, South Concourse." We couldn't search by the names of the outlets, and not very many agencies had their data stored in a way that let them query by the name of the stadium either. But every report *did* have an address, and the address of all the stands in one stadium should be the same. So we, and health department officials, often ended up pulling records by using the stadium address. This is something to remember for any type of venue, or venues, with multiple food outlets, such as a food court at a mall, state fair or convention center.

We had a few health departments send us nice, neat Excel spreadsheets and PDFs from which I could extract the text, or they pointed us to websites where we could download data en masse. Yet paper records – many of which were handwritten – were still the norm. We ended up doing a lot of data entry. For each venue, we calculated the percentage of inspected locations that had incurred one or more critical violations. Based on conversations with health inspectors, we decided that a good benchmark for concern would be if more than half the vendors at any location had critical violations. Using that as our threshold, we found that



Inspectors document all types of problems at food venues in stadiums.

at 28 percent of all venues, more than half of the food and drink outlets had one or more critical violation.

We also wanted to have a food safety expert weigh in on our findings. Officials with the FDA, which established the guidelines, recommended a few academics, including Robert Buchanan, director of the University of Maryland's Center for Food Safety and Security Systems. He also had worked 10 years overseeing food safety research at the FDA. He reviewed our methodology and scores and gave us some good context, saying, "That number [the 30 venues with a majority of food establishments having critical violations], based on comparisons of the data I've been able to find on restaurants in general, is substantially higher than I would have expected. Certainly, if you have a high rate of facilities within a stadium coming up with critical deficiencies, that to me strikes of systemic errors in either management of the stadium or in the infrastructure of the stadium, and both of them need to be corrected."

We were able to highlight only a few of the scores in our TV piece for "Outside the Lines," but we offered ESPN.com readers the full list via an interactive Adobe Flash graphic created by web designer Derrick Pina. He converted our Excel spreadsheet into XML and then parsed the XML with the E4X engine in ActionScript3, which he said was a "big upgrade" over previous efforts of working with XML in Flash. In order to present all of the stadiums and arenas on the map without looking too crowded, Pina broke them up into categories: Zero, 1 to 24, 25 to 49, 50 to 74, and 75 to 100. Readers could select a category, and all the venues in it would show up. When someone scrolled over a point, up popped an inspector's clipboard with the actual percentage and narrative about the violations.

Finding human sources

Our findings were great, but now we needed people to tell this story. We found a few fans who claimed to have fallen ill after eating contaminated food at a stadium. Most of those came from complaints that people had sent to local health departments, which we received under open records requests.

We wanted to witness a food safety inspection, but stadium managers, team representatives and concession companies all rejected requests to shoot video during an inspection. We needed another way to get a description of what goes on behind the scenes. I started looking for current and former stadium food service workers by combing through various job sites including Craigslist.org and Jobvertise.com. I entered the names of the stadiums and concession companies in the search field to find people whose resumes listed food service experience at any of the pro venues. I culled all the resumes that matched, and then called or e-mailed the applicants to see if they'd be interested in talking to us. I received several responses.

Meanwhile, the food service companies were taking steps to prevent their employees from talking to us. An executive with Aramark, one of the largest concessions contractors, sent an e-mail to company managers to warn them about me and our story. He instructed them to direct all questions to corporate communications. When the e-mail reached one manager, it instead prompted him to reach out to us with information on all sorts of food safety violations he said he witnessed at the Aramark-run stadium where he worked. He spoke to us on camera, although we shielded his identity because he feared he would get fired for speaking up.



Using bare hands to make a submarine sandwich is a violation of food-handling regulations.

The piece came together under the direction of Coordinating Producer Ronnie Forchheimer, Senior News Editor Dwayne Bray and ESPN.com Senior Editor Chris Buckle. We published and aired the package on multiple platforms in different ways: the original "Outside the Lines" video piece, an online package, a cutdown video version for other shows, like SportsCenter, localized versions on our ESPN.com local sites, in various ESPN blogs, and for ABC's "Good Morning America." The story really struck a nerve with sports fans – connoisseurs of anything served in a bun, on a stick or in a foil pouch. It turned into a viral hit for more than a week, with more than 11,000 Facebook posts and 1,000 retweets. And versions of the story were picked up by dozens of national and local print and broadcast media outlets.

While our goal wasn't to scare people out of ordering their next bratwurst, we did want to make fans aware of potential dangers. We also wanted to hold these companies accountable for the items they serve. If you're going to pay \$6 for a hot dog, you shouldn't have to worry about what it might do to you the next morning.

Paula Lavigne is an investigative reporter and data analyst for ESPN. Her work appears on "Outside the Lines," and she also writes for ESPN.com. The last thing she ate at a ballpark was a bag of prepackaged peanuts.

Spin-off stories

While our focus was on food outlets in sports stadiums, a similar story could be replicated in any market by looking at other large venues such as hospitals, malls, convention centers, state fairs, airports or government buildings.

Looking for a real news story for that upcoming wedding package? Check out the food safety scores for banquet facilities in your city. What will no doubt be found at many of these large venues is that a major company – Aramark, Centerplate, Levy, etc. – has a contract to manage and provide food service. Representatives with those companies will likely be the ones who respond to any violations.

Also, the Centers for Disease Control has a nifty foodborne illness outbreak database that allows for searches by year, state, type of location, the cause of the illness (e.coli, salmonella, etc.), and whether or not it was confirmed. The database is at: www.cdc.gov/foodborneoutbreaks. Stadiums are not among the locations listed, but the options do include restaurants, schools, wedding receptions, day care centers, nursing homes, etc.

We also wanted to hold these companies accountable for the items they serve. If you're going to pay \$6 for a hot dog, you shouldn't have to worry about what it might do to you the next morning.



PAYROLL ABUSES

Ferry system awash in wasteful spending

BY SUSANNAH FRAME
KING-SEATTLE

Our first story focused on how fill-in workers were allowed to abuse the scheduling system to collect thousands of dollars to drive to and from work.

The Washington State Ferry System is the largest ferry system in the country. Along with the Space Needle, a ferry is an iconic symbol of Seattle and the Pacific Northwest. In the early spring, we got a tip that despite the ailing economy, the popular ferry system was providing questionable perks to some of its workers, including paying them to drive to and from work. We submitted a public records request asking for the following information on all 1,800 ferry employees: their name, job title, and what they collected in travel time pay and mileage reimbursements, as well as their base salary, overtime and total compensation for 2009.

We hit the jackpot. Our first story focused on how fill-in workers were allowed to abuse the scheduling system to collect thousands of dollars to drive to and from work. Instead of choosing to fill in on a boat near their home, some were choosing routes as far away as possible to pick up the lucrative travel time pay and mileage reimbursement. We found a few employees who made more in 2009 in travel time and mileage than their base salaries.

There was a steep learning curve. All ferry employees are represented by a union, with 11 different bargaining units. We had a hard time sorting out who was doing what, why and how until we got down to the nitty-gritty of the union role. With the help of insider experts, we were able to decipher the various union contracts.

With that knowledge, we sorted the data again after the first story aired. We found out even more. There were several employees who were not fill-in workers, who belonged to a different union and made thousands of dollars in travel time and mileage. What were these employees doing?

I found the answer by making one phone call to a knowledgeable source. These particular workers were assigned to “special projects.” We found this perk wasn’t mandated in a union contract but was simply a ferry system tradition that employees on special projects were paid to drive to and from work. With that information, we submitted another public disclosure request asking about these employees’ special projects, how long they’d been on them, and how much they’d made in travel time and mileage.

We found some employees had been on a special project for eight, 10, 12, even 15 years. One worker had raked in nearly \$500,000 in travel time and mileage in the 10 years he’d been

on the assignment – driving to and from the same office building in downtown Seattle every day. After 30 years of funding this multimillion dollar expense, the ferry system cut off the benefit 10 days after our story aired.

Payoff from records requests

Tips and story ideas began to pour in – mostly from ferry employees who were uplifted to see that for the first time, a media outlet was interested in exposing wasteful practices and a lack of accountability. So far, executive producer Kellie Cheadle and I have submitted roughly 30 public disclosure requests. By sorting through the records and developing key contacts, we’ve produced 15 stories. We exposed a group of ferry engineers who collected millions of dollars of unnecessary, self-assigned overtime for years. We found the same group gamed the system in order to make double time, and even triple-time pay. A key manager resigned after we submitted the records requests regarding overtime.

After our initial overtime stories aired, we wanted to find out the total amount of overtime collected by the group. The ferry system had records available going back 10 years. We submitted a public disclosure request for the handwritten timesheets and went through each one. We found \$10 million in self-assigned overtime, travel time, mileage pay and other extras in the last decade – paid to 30 employees. After these stories aired, the ferry system put together an overtime policy. It’s the first such policy the system has had in 50 years of business. The goal is to save \$350,000 in the first year.

Our investigation took off in other directions. We got a tip about a ferry carpenter who’d been cheating on timesheets for several years. Two years ago, the state auditor conducted an investigation and found that this state employee was cheating by using state resources for personal gain. Again, management looked the other way. We investigated this employee further to find that even after he’d been caught by the auditor and the ferry system assured us he was being watched carefully, that he *still* was taking advantage of the state. A month after our story aired, the employee was allowed to retire after being told he would be fired otherwise.

Problems with ferry safety

We also found waste and a lack of accountability involving unusable equipment. The ferry system didn’t do the proper research before ordering \$5 million worth of generators that ended up being incompatible for use on its boats. Photojournalist Steve Douglas shot video of the equipment sitting in boxes in a warehouse. An anonymous telephone tip led to this story. And there was more to the generator story. Sources we’d cultivated for the overtime stories were able to provide us with key documents that led us to discover a frightening safety risk on two boats in the fleet that were supposed to get the new generators. Serious electrical safety problems existed on them that could lead to a “loss of life.”

We found that ferry managers knew of this potential for 18 months but didn’t do anything about it until we started asking questions. A few hours before our story aired, the ferry system called the Coast Guard to report the problem. Within days, the Coast Guard and ferry system engineers began conducting tests to fix the problem. Washington’s labor and industries officials

are now investigating as well.

Other results from our investigation include a freeze on a planned ferry fare hike. After an unprecedented reaction from viewers furious with the waste, the state transportation commission halted the planned hike. The governor ordered the state auditor to investigate payroll practices. She also ordered an expert panel to convene to find ways to improve the operation. The panel's recommendations came out in September, with a full action plan expected in November.

This type of investigation could be done in any market. While few markets have ferry systems, every city and state has some sort of transportation system. Can you think of a city, county or state agency where employees drive a lot? Perhaps road crews? Start with a request for records showing how much each employee has earned in travel time, mileage, overtime, total compensation and whether they belong to a union. Look for patterns such as who earned the most or who saw their base salaries increase by the greatest percentage.

The economic downturn means government cuts in spending. Viewers respond to these types of stories. We received thousands of e-mails, calls, letters and posts to our Web stories. We've never seen anything like it.

Susannah Frame is an investigative reporter for KING-TV in Seattle. Her "Waste on the Water" investigation continues.



Washington Gov. Christine Gregoire, left, called for an audit of the ferry system, including an expert panel to conduct a management review of the system.

The ferry system didn't do the proper research before ordering \$5 million worth of generators that ended up being incompatible for use on its boats.

Practical tips

Keep up the momentum. Push the public records people to make sure your investigation doesn't lose steam. We found record-keepers who were incorrectly interpreting the Open Records Act. One facet of the law requires that records be made available or disclosed as a subset of a larger request. The records are to be released as they become available, rather than all at once for the entire request. We pushed on this point, finding it especially effective with a rolling investigation. We needed records as soon as we could get them to keep the momentum going.

Make time to respond. After we aired about four or five stories, it was clear that the Washington State Ferry System and the state Department of Transportation wanted us to go away. By this time, though, we had ways around the stall tactics: lots of insiders. It was interesting to see how many state employees wanted to help us with their expertise and access to records. We took the time to respond to every single person who called or wrote. People were shocked that we personally contacted them, and it helped us cultivate sources. We also actively looked for retired ferry employees. Those retirees are obviously in better positions to gab. We found many by asking current employees to put us in touch with recent retirees.

Index key documents. Every time I get a daunting-looking stack of documents, I do the same thing before reading them. If I receive the records electronically, I print them, put them in chronological order and number them. I make an Excel spreadsheet with obvious categories of information such as page number, date, type of document, what happened and potential quotes. I add columns for additional information. After this process, the spreadsheet serves as an index of the records. I refer to it often and never have to re-read or scramble to find information in a document. Adopting this organizational approach has changed my life. -

- Susannah Frame, KING-Seattle

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Journalists in Sri Lanka face growing government control



BY SONALI SAMARASINGHE

The most challenging aspect of investigative journalism is the physical danger.

On Jan. 8, 2009, eight assassins on four black motorcycles surrounded the vehicle of my husband, Sri Lankan journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge. They bludgeoned him to death on a busy street in Colombo's High Security Zone, just yards away from one of the nation's largest Air Force bases. For details, see my post for the Nieman Report at <http://ow.ly/2RFpk>.

Wickrematunge was killed for his work. In 1994, he was founding editor of *The Sunday Leader*, which pioneered a vibrant brand of public service journalism and investigative reporting that captured the imagination of readers and catapulted his newspaper to cult-like status.

Four years after the newspaper was founded, I joined the staff as its main investigative reporter. I was a defense lawyer for six years before I became an investigative journalist, a craft I practiced for 11 years until I fled the country after my husband's murder.

The practice of criminal law is rich and eventful, but investigative journalism stands in a class by itself in Sri Lanka.

There are several privately owned media outlets that remain as independent as possible under trying circumstances, focusing on exposing corruption and government excess. In recent years, many private media organizations have been bought by individuals close to President Mahinda Rajapakse and his political family. Some other outlets are owned by people who either have chosen to associate themselves with the ruling regime and engage in lucrative business with government, or hold official positions.

The state-controlled media include the nation's largest newspaper group, two major television channels and a radio station. They are run by politically appointed chairpersons and editors, who owe their jobs and considerable perks to the government. Any attempt by a journalist or editor to demonstrate independence or balanced reporting is rewarded with dismissal, transfer or physical harm.

For instance, on Dec. 27, 2007, a powerful government minister stormed into the state-run Rupavahini Television Station and manhandled its news director, who had aired a speech that praised a political opponent. For the first time in the recent history of the state media, employees of the station rose up against the minister in protest.

No doubt, they were emboldened by a series of investigative articles in our newspaper about the minister and his son, which eventually led to the son's arrest. The series, "Gangsterism and Sri Lanka's Faulty Legal System," won the Global Shining Light Award in 2008. (www.gjjc2008.no/news/336)

Unlike many other media companies, Wickrematunge's newspaper was markedly different, focusing on high-impact journalism. It maintained a modest office and a small editorial staff that multi-tasked to publish the weekly paper. Many weeks, I wrote between 7,000 and 10,000 words, often more.

Government restrictions

One of the more challenging aspects for investigative journalism is the lack of information. Sri Lanka does not have a Freedom of Information Act, and speaking to journalists is actively discouraged. The "Establishments Code" prohibits public officials from disclosing information to the media. This has led to jumpy officials unwilling to confirm or deny information already in the hands of journalists, or even provide statistical information.

Investigative journalism becomes an undercover operation. Documents and information change hands at unlikely places and in surprising situations.

The most challenging aspect of investigative journalism is the physical danger. Sri Lanka's constitution provides for freedom of expression but the right is infringed upon via other laws. Emergency regulations, along with the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the Public Security Ordinance and other laws, give the government and armed forces wide powers to arrest without warrant. You can be detained without charge for up to three months. Officials are shielded from prosecution, provided they acted "in good faith."

The Official Secrets Act prohibits publication of any information the government deems secret and is just another piece of legislation that hangs like a sword of Damocles over the news media.

The Press Council Act of 1973 bans reporting on certain fiscal, defense and security information. It imposes fines and prison terms for publication of internal government communications or cabinet decisions, such as basic economic issues that may have an impact on price hikes or food shortages. (<http://ow.ly/32Akq>)

The government set up a Media Centre for National Security (MCNS) in 2006. In September 2006, the center ordered that all news related to national security must be sent to the center for vetting before publication or broadcast. The terms *national security* and *defense* were sufficiently broad and gave the government wide powers of interpretation to censor any news story related to the country's civil war, human rights violations, investigation into corruption in military procurements, or any kind of excess that involved either the Ministry of Defense, the armed forces or the police.

Media outlets understandably are wary of litigation. More than 20 years ago, I was working as a reporter in one of Sri Lanka's private newspaper organizations and was assigned with two other young journalists to investigate medical malpractice. We thought we had written a great story and submitted it to our editor. A week later, we were asked to meet with the newspaper's lawyer. It didn't go well. There were red lines crossing out almost every sentence, and the story didn't run.

With the advent of *The Sunday Leader* in 1994, the character of investigative journalism was revolutionized. It became vibrant and sexy. The newspaper lived up to its motto – unbowed and unafraid – and made great sacrifices to maintain its independence.

Independence meant no government advertising, and many private advertisers feared offending the government. At least two heads of state, including the present one, have personally called heads of government corporations and threatened them with dismissal if any advertising was given to *The Sunday Leader*.

This meant that the newsroom often locked horns with the paper's marketing staff.

In 2006, I delved into a shady privatization deal between one of Sri Lanka's largest business conglomerates and the government. The investigative exclusive was set to run Oct. 1. Hours before the paper went to print, we received a call from the marketing department saying that the company under investigation had purchased a full-page ad that week. "We can't afford to have them pull out our advertising; hold back the investigation," the head of marketing told my editor. I stood my ground amid vociferous protests by the advertising manager. Public interest won the day. We held the ad and ran the story, plus an equally hard-hitting sequel the next week.

A risky struggle

In February this year, the Media Centre issued directives preventing security chiefs and personnel from giving comments or interviews to the media. It also ordered the media to seek official approval to report on any information regarding promotions or transfers in the security forces. Media

institutions also must get written approval from the defense secretary for any interviews with security forces.

Even though the 27-year-old civil war ended in 2009, the government has not given up its war on independent thought. It publicly and unapologetically equates democratic dissent to treason. A white government van that abducts its perceived enemies – including journalists, many of whom are never to be seen again – has become a symbol of untold dread. State-controlled media and websites are used for hate speech. Blogs and mass e-mails are employed to personally vilify journalists, political opponents and human rights activists.

On Sept. 8, Sri Lanka's parliament overwhelmingly passed an urgent bill removing term limits for the president. The constitutional amendment also gave the president unlimited power over judicial, police and other public service appointments and removed constitutional safeguards of the electoral process.

The new amendments mean that both the private and state media are under a duty to comply with directions issued by the elections commission, which is controlled by the president. This would severely undermine the free flow of information during crucial election time and allow for the ruling party to manipulate the media (<http://ow.ly/2RFBD>).

It's not easy practicing one's craft in a country rated third for danger for journalists, just behind Iraq and Afghanistan. Yet every day, dedicated journalists continue to risk their lives for their work and the greater good.

Sonali Samarasinghe is an award-winning investigative reporter and editor. In 2005, she was founding editor of The Morning Leader and was consultant editor of The Sunday Leader until she fled Sri Lanka after her husband was killed and she was subjected to death threats. She was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. The Morning Leader published its last edition Feb. 25, 2009.

It's not easy practicing one's craft in a country rated third for danger for journalists, just behind Iraq and Afghanistan.

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To keep their watchdog teeth sharp, journalists need to stay connected with the latest news and trends about public records and open meetings at the federal, state and local levels.



AT&T case threatens records access

BY CHARLES N. DAVIS
MISSOURI SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

The 3rd Circuit's opinion opens a rich new vein for claims, however specious, that records produced and held by corporations that come into the federal government's hands could "stigmatize" the corporation if released.

If you think the trade secrets exemption to the federal Freedom of Information Act is a headache, wait until you hear what the corporate secret keepers have in store.

The Supreme Court has agreed to review a 3rd Circuit court opinion that held that corporate entities have a right to personal privacy.

You heard that right: a court held, in perhaps the most astonishing extension of the "person as corporation" argument to date, that the FCC could not turn over results of an investigation into "irregularities" in AT&T's billings to a Connecticut school under a special telecommunications access program because it would, well, embarrass the corporation.

"Corporations, like human beings, face public embarrassment, harassment and stigma" because of their involvement in law-enforcement investigations, Judge Michael A. Chagares wrote for a unanimous three-judge panel.

Get beyond the Harry Potter-like transmutation here as the corporate state gains flesh and bone, and you're left with a fundamental argument: Was the word "privacy" inserted into FOIA to protect corporate actors? If so, why was Exemption 4 (the trade secrets exemption) created?

The government's position, signed by then-Solicitor General Elena Kagan, who has recused herself from the case, states that the 3rd Circuit ruling, if upheld, "threatens to impose barriers to the public disclosure of government records concerning government malfeasance in government programs that the public has a right to review." It also would "revolutionize" the processing of FOIA requests by introducing a new factor into decisions on whether to release certain documents, Kagan said – and in doing so, highlighted the real issue here.

AT&T asserts, and I am sure the rest of the corporate world would giddily concur, that whenever companies pop up in federal enforcement records – say, because they polluted the Gulf

beyond recognition – they then could claim a privacy interest, seeking to bar disclosure of those documents, by claiming that said information is "embarrassing." No doubt it is, from their perspective.

The courts would likely knock down most of those claims and hold that the rights of the public outweigh any corporate privacy interest in such cases, but imagine the judicial logjam that will occur. The federal FOIA is not exactly lightning quick on the best of days.

But at least in the FOIA world we live in now, corporate documents are either trade secrets or they are not – there is no other avenue for closure. The 3rd Circuit's opinion opens a rich new vein for claims, however specious, that records produced and held by corporations that come into the federal government's hands could "stigmatize" the corporation if released. There will be no end to the lawyering.

It's that "chilling effect," the government says, that will decimate the FOIA. I agree, and add only that should AT&T prevail in this case, the clear message to federal agencies will be to resist release of anything that names a corporation in order to avoid such suits. The government thus becomes the defender of corporate secrets, on behalf of the corporate state.

The heart of the legal arguments is AT&T's contention that because the FOIA defines "persons" to include corporations in its preamble, Congress clearly intended for the "personal privacy" exemption to apply to law-enforcement records, under exemption 7(c) of the Act.

Exemption 7(c) waives from mandatory disclosure records compiled for law-enforcement purposes to the extent the production of those records "could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy."

"AT&T argues that the plain text of [the law enforcement exemption] indicates that it applies to corporations. After all, 'personal' is the adjectival form of 'person,' and FOIA defines 'person' to include a corporation. We agree. It would be very odd indeed for an adjectival form of a defined term not to refer back to that defined term," the 3rd Circuit said in its ruling.

No federal court ever before had translated the adjectival form of person to equate to a privacy right. Let's hope that the Supreme Court, which has grown fond of the corporate personhood doctrine of late, stops short of giving it flesh and bones and a psyche capable of "public embarrassment, harassment and stigma." To animate the corporate state in such a way is to divorce its collective behavior from its collective responsibility.

Charles N. Davis is an associate professor at the Missouri School of Journalism. He is co-author, with David Cuillier, of "The Art of Access."

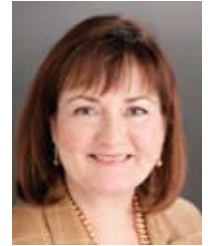
To animate the corporate state in such a way is to divorce its collective behavior from its collective responsibility.

IRE members have learned invaluable lessons during years of refining their investigative skills. They generously share their wisdom so others may benefit.



Working the big story

By Maud Beelman
Dallas Morning News



Working on a project or big enterprise story is a team sport. Even if you're the lone reporter, you'll be working with photographer-videographers, graphic artists and editors, each of whom may have valuable perspective. So share the wealth, especially if you're fortunate enough to be part of a reporting team. Remember, team investigations are like compound interest – the more you share what you know, the more you know.

Here are suggestions for making it work, whether you're a reporter or an editor:

Do your homework. With tighter budgets and timeframes, every project needs to be justified. So before pitching an idea, know what has and hasn't been done, anticipate questions, think about how broad (or narrow) your scope should be, determine whether you'll need to travel or buy documents/data, and estimate that cost. Ballpark how much time you're likely to need, then give yourself a cushion (better to finish early than late).

Do the cost-benefit analysis. Figure out what is the least you might get on a story and what could be the most. Then ask yourself, even if I get only the least, is it still worth the time and effort? Create benchmarks to help judge progress.

Be organized. Up-front planning is key. Develop a reporting methodology and an organizational scheme so that information from sources, documents and data can be shared and leveraged across the team. Good organization saves time and breeds confidence – on the team, with your editor, up the chain.

Think big. Are there regional or national angles that would give your story broader appeal or impact? Are there similar problems, or solutions, in other cities, states or countries? Do your findings have national implications? You don't necessarily have to spend more money to have reach.

Structure the process. Most projects follow a natural progression. The first phase is typically focused on research and planning, filing FOIAs, requesting data and early brainstorming with photographers, graphic artists or Web colleagues. The next phases are given over to reporting, retooling, drafting outlines and writing copy. The final phase involves editing, fact-checking, layout/presentation and, if necessary, pre-pub legal review.

Build your foundation. If your foundation is data analysis, do that as early in the project as possible. The last thing you want to be doing near the end of a project is trying to get your reporting to match your data. Use people to bring your story to life and exemplify what your stats show.

Do outlines. They reveal what you have and, perhaps more importantly, what you don't. There's no one way to do an outline, but it's not a notebook dump. It's a blueprint that outlines the project's main idea and component parts.

Build timelines/chronologies. They often show you connections or holes you did not realize existed. For the same reason, build a cast of characters as you go.

Write memos. Memos are especially important if there's more than one reporter on a project (leveraging individual knowledge strengthens overall effort). Writing memos in "publishable" format (with quotes, names, titles, as they would appear in print) saves time in the final draft. And, like outlines, memos can reveal gaps in information or logic.

Meet regularly. Meetings serve as mini-deadlines, especially on long-term projects. They allow reporters and editors to assess progress, compare notes, and share ideas, sources and leads. Editors, take notes during these meetings because reporters often discuss the best or essence of what they're learning. They talk "in the moment," so taking notes allows you to capture color or details that might be lost in the long write.

Manage expectations. If you're a reporter, keep your editor apprised of your progress and, especially, any obstacles or problems you encounter. If you're the editor, do the same for your boss and include "resource implications" – basically the amount of time, money and personnel needed to complete the project.

Backstop each other. Editors can bolster the reporting by reading key documents, court records and/or interview transcripts. Editors typically have an overview of the work and might see dots that need connecting. If the investigation is controversial or your reporters are under attack, consider sitting in on key interviews, as a show of institutional support.

Confront early. Sounds like heresy, but information or perspectives may emerge from confrontation interviews that you didn't know or hadn't considered. Doing these interviews early gives you time to consider, analyze and incorporate, and can buttress you against allegations of bias or malice.

Write as you go. The best of the best do it because it makes the writing easier and better and helps guide your reporting. If you wait until the end of a long project to start writing, you can become overwhelmed by the information and lose color and detail.

Use footnotes. Footnoting your copy with source material helps streamline the editing, fact-checking and legal review process.

Write a budget line, write a headline. Doing this is a good self-check. If you cannot summarize the overall theme and findings of your project in a few words, then maybe you need to refine your thinking or adjust your reporting.

Maud Beelman is the deputy managing editor for projects and enterprise at The Dallas Morning News.

Making sense of the Census

U.S. Census Bureau



U.S. Census Bureau and Broward County officials launch the 2010 Census in Schools program at an elementary school in Davie, Fla.

BACK TO BASICS

2010 Census form focuses on key data

By Steve Doig
Arizona State University

It's that time of the decade again – the U.S. Census Bureau soon will be spewing out the decennial numbers it has spent most of 2010 gathering and crunching. As always, good stories will be found in the coming data deluge.

For the shell-shocked veterans of the 2000 census cycle, there is good news – the 2010 Census is much simpler.

This time around, the only data collected is very basic: age, race, Hispanic origin, gender and type of housing unit. The much more varied data about income, education, employment, language, etc., now is being collected on a rolling basis in the American Community Survey. (See accompanying article by Paul Overberg.)

So if all of the detailed stuff is in the ACS, why should we care about the much sparser census data? Unlike the sampled data from the ACS, the census data is gathered from everybody; therefore, you can go down to tiny census blocks, with no worries about sampling error. As a result, the data lets you do some important stories at a micro level that can't be done with the ACS.

Here's a look at the key Census 2010 data release dates, and the stories you can do:

Reapportionment

The first peek at the 2010 data will happen by the end of this year. By law, the Census Bureau must deliver to President Obama no later than Dec. 31 the official count of the population of each of the 50 states. These numbers are then used to determine how many members each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives for the coming decade. In fact, the need to redistribute fairly congressional representation among the states is the reason the U.S. Constitution mandated a national census every 10 years, beginning in 1790.

The formula used since 1941 for apportioning the 435 congressional seats among the states is complicated (see <http://ow.ly/2LKJr> for details.) The results of the calculation, though, make for great stories. The reason is that reapportionment is a zero-sum game – for every state that gains one or more seats, others states are losing seats. The states that gain seats are those where the population has grown faster since 2000 than that of the losing states. The major stories that come out of this process are political ones, of course. In the losing states, incumbent members of Congress will be playing musical chairs. In the gaining states, new opportunities will open for ambitious politicians.

Another important angle to consider on the state population counts is fiscal. More than \$400 billion in federal funds – for anything from building highways to supporting schools – is allocated to the states based at least in part on each one's share of the total population. This is another zero-sum game, where every person counted in one state represents money that some other state won't get.

The combination of political and fiscal impact also means that newsworthy arguments over the count are inevitable. Lawsuits likely will be filed by states that insist the Census undercounted their population, thereby depriving them of congressional seats and more federal money.

Census timeline

All 2010 Census data products will be available online at the American FactFinder site: <http://factfinder.census.gov>. Here are key releases in coming months and beyond:

December 2010

The Census Bureau delivers population information for each state to the president. The official population count will be used for apportionment – figuring out which states lose representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives and which ones pick up additional seats.

Early February to late March 2011

Redistricting data is delivered to the states for use in redrawing congressional district boundaries. The data will include state population counts for race and Hispanic ethnicity, along with state housing unit counts by occupancy status (occupied or vacant units).

May 2011

Data is released for group quarters, which include college residence halls, residential treatment centers, skilled nursing facilities, group homes, military barracks, correctional facilities and workers' dormitories.

Demographic profiles also are scheduled to be released, with population and housing characteristics for cities, counties and congressional districts.

June through August 2011

Much of the rest of the data will be released, including Summary File 1. That will include population counts for 63 race categories and Hispanic ethnicity down to the block level. In addition, selected population and housing characteristics will be available at the block and tract levels.

U.S. Census Bureau



Census Bureau director Robert Groves urges Washington, D.C., residents to mail back their 2010 Census forms.



An inflatable 2010 Census form sits in New York's Times Square as part of efforts to publicize the 10-year census.

Redistricting

The next critical set of decennial data will start to flow out of the Census Bureau perhaps as early as February. Public Law 94-171 requires the bureau to deliver to each of the states by April 1 a detailed data file that gives the official population count, down to the block level and broken out by race, Hispanic origin and voting age. This file is the raw material used by the states to redraw the boundary lines for their congressional and state legislative districts.

As with the reapportionment data, this process means important political stories. The ostensible goal of redrawing the political lines is to ensure, at least at the start of the decade, that each district represents the same number of people. So watch for a shifting of legislative power that will occur if some parts of a state have grown faster than others.

But the actual drawing of the lines is where the real political fun occurs. Ideally, district lines are drawn to accomplish social goals, such as to make it possible for minority candidates to have a chance to be elected or to create competitive districts where neither party dominates. Much more commonly, though, lines are drawn – “gerrymandered” is the term – to help or hurt certain political parties or candidates, such as when two incumbents are thrown together to fight it out in a redrawn district. One way to measure the influence of behind-the-scenes pressures in proposed district plans is to use the PL94-171 data to draw your own politically blind districts maximized for compactness.

Making sense of the Census

Race and Hispanic origin

The PL94-171 data can be used for another important do-right-away story: measuring the degree of racial and ethnic integration/segregation in your city, state or across the country. Again, the data file contains a count of the number of people of each of the six races (white, black, Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native/Pacific Islander and other) and whether or not the person being counted is of Hispanic origin. That means you can look at the residential patterns right down to the neighborhoods among as many as 12 different race/ethnic groups (non-Hispanic white, black Hispanic, etc.).

There are good statistical tools for quantifying the degree to which people of different race/ethnic backgrounds live amongst each other. One is the segregation index (also called the index of dissimilarity, or the Gini coefficient), which measures how well the demographics of neighborhoods across a city match with the city's overall mix. It compares the mixing of two groups at a time, such as white and black. In a perfectly integrated city, every neighborhood will have exactly the same proportions of the two groups as does the city as a whole; in a perfectly segregated city, every neighborhood will be entirely populated by one group or the other.

Another way to look at integration is with the diversity index, which was created by precision journalism godfather Phil Meyer. The concept is simple (and easy to explain to readers and viewers); it is just the probability that two people picked at random from a given area will have different race/ethnic backgrounds. (IRE Tipsheet 3306 by Jennifer LaFleur and David Donald explains how to calculate these types of statistics. You can search tipsheets by number at www.ire.org/resourcecenter/tipsheets.php.)

Change over time

As you prepare for the 2010 data release, be sure to gather the equivalent data from 2000 and perhaps even earlier. This will let you measure population growth or decline across your area during the decade. This can be a great way to examine the local impact of the housing collapse, the recession and the efforts in some areas like Arizona to exclude undocumented immigrants. So-called “ghost subdivisions” of homes abandoned to foreclosure should stand out starkly when you map population change at the neighborhood level.

Tools

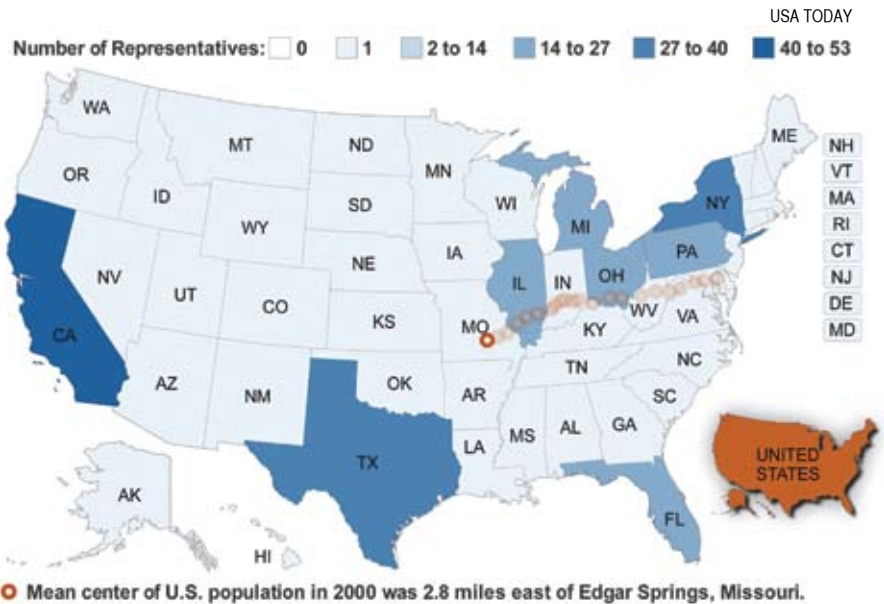
Fancy software or exotic statistical techniques aren't required for working with the 2010 Census data. If you are comfortable with a spreadsheet or a database program like Access, you have the basics. But the Census is very much a “where” story, so learn to use a good data mapping program like ArcMap. You should also subscribe to CENSUS-L, the NICAR list serv where your questions will be answered by reporters who have been working with this data for years. And look for IRE online webinars about the census in coming months. When you're done with that, you'll be tossing around acronyms like ZCTA and PUMS and FIPS with the best of them.

Steve Doig has been working with census data since the 1990 Census, when he was research editor of The Miami Herald. He is the Knight Chair at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication at Arizona State University.

TREND TRACKER

American Community Survey measures how we live and work

By Paul Overberg
USA TODAY



You can't accuse the Census Bureau of rushing into the American Community Survey.

Back in the 1980s, its statisticians began talking about scrapping the huge "long form" survey that piggybacks on the census every 10 years and replacing it with a smaller annual survey.

One reason was obvious: The long form's data was the last to be published after each census, usually in the "3" year. By then, it already was outdated for many areas. And a decade is a long time to wait for the next update in a society changing as quickly as the United States.

Another reason was at least as important to the Census Bureau. The long form, with pages and pages of questions on everything from how much you pay to heat your home to your annual income, was a logistical nightmare. Just unfolding and keypunching or scanning it was far more time-consuming and error-prone than the short form, which carries the handful of basic questions asked of all households.

Plus, households were more likely not to mail back the long form than the short form. This meant that the Census Bureau had to recruit, hire, train and pay thousands of extra part-time workers to travel the land to persuade someone in millions of homes to answer the questions in person. This cost tens of million of dollars and precious extra weeks in the tight schedule to get numbers published by the end of the census year.

So in 1993, serious research on an ACS design began. The first four test sites were set up in 1995. By 2000, a third of the nation was being surveyed each year. By 2005, ACS became a full-fledged national survey of 2 million households each year.

But only in the next few months will the bureau finally round out the ACS product cycle, producing data compiled in 2005-09 for every neighborhood, town, county and state – and a lot of other geographical areas in between. For small areas, it will be the first detailed demographic update since Census 2000.

For some journalists, ACS already has become the "census," the newsroom shorthand for the government source of demographic and housing data. Now journalists covering small towns, big-city neighborhoods and rural counties also can find local ACS data.

Three aspects of ACS make it critical for journalists. Call them the three T's:

- **Topics.** Most of the social statistics that journalists depend on weren't on the 2010 Census form. Instead, they now appear each year on the ACS. Among them: education, income, poverty, occupation, commuting method and duration, housing costs and features, military service, disability, citizenship, language, marital status and history.

New this year: the field of your bachelor's degree.

- **Timeliness.** For large areas, ACS data is published each fall for the preceding calendar year.

- **Trending.** For larger areas, annual ACS data points can be linked in a trend line. This just wasn't possible with census data that came every 10 years. Now, you can craft stories using an annual poverty rate for your metro area. Or a citizenship rate. Or a migration rate.

All these benefits come with tradeoffs:

- ACS is much bigger than its Census 2000 counterpart. It pours out several thousand distinct reports, or tables, for every geographical area. They come in almost a dozen flavors, ranging from pure data to highly formatted and footnoted narratives. To cope: Watch the fall schedule, because the data comes in waves. And it pays to learn some pathways through American FactFinder (factfinder.census.gov), the Census Bureau's web data portal.
- ACS data may be more fuzzy than its Census 2000 counterpart. The Census Bureau can't afford to survey 1 in 7 households each year, as it did with the Census 2000 long form. Instead, ACS reaches 1 household in 65 each year – about 1.5 percent. To cope: Don't make a big deal out of small differences.
- ACS data is more complicated. The Census Bureau releases data collected in a single year for places with more than 65,000 people. But each year it also releases data collected across the three previous years for places with more than 20,000 people. And now it will release each year the five-year data mentioned above. That will be published for census block groups, which average 2,000 people, and all larger geographical areas.

Using ACS data means that for each story, we have to think

History of the American Community Survey

1993: Research begins on prototype.

1995: Data collection begins at four test sites.

1999: Testing expanded to 36 counties in 24 states.

2000: Testing expanded to 1,200 counties and benchmarked to Census 2000.

2005: Expanded to full national sample: 3 million households a year.

2008: First 3-year data (for 2005-07) for areas with as few as 20,000 people.

2010: First 5-year data (for 2005-09) for areas with as few as 4,000 people (December).



Kiosks explaining each of the 10 questions on the 2010 Census form were part of outreach efforts in communities across America.

about the tradeoff between timeliness and precision, something we're not used to doing. It also means wrapping your head around the idea of multi-year data as a unit, such as "the 2005-09 ACS data." And with multi-year data, it means avoiding simple but meaningless comparisons like 2006-08 data vs. 2007-09 data. Instead, it means waiting long enough to be able to compare distinct periods – such as 2005-07 with 2008-10.

If you could use 1-year ACS data – for a congressional district, large city or county – why would you ever sacrifice timeliness by using 3- or 5-year data instead?

One reason: Precision. Multi-year ACS results are based on more data, so they have smaller error margins.

ACS is a survey, just like any public opinion poll. Each has its error margins – the plus-minus squishiness we can calculate for each result based on statistical rules. The plus-minus tells us how widely the result would vary just by chance if we did the survey many more times and accepted that once in a while the result would fall outside a typical range. For most polling, that would be 1 time in 20 – a 95 percent confidence interval. For ACS, it's 1 time in 10 – a 90 percent confidence interval.

Here's an example: For 2008, Jacksonville, Fla., had a poverty rate of 11.9 percent, +/- 1.3 percentage points. For 2006-08, its poverty rate was 12.8 percent, +/- 0.7 percentage points. With

three times as many survey responses, the three-year ACS data can offer an error margin that's just more than half the single-year data. That could be critical if you're trying to rank the poverty rates of Florida cities.

Census 2000 long-form data also had error margins, but the only way to find them was to plow into the technical documentation for the formula and calculate it for each number yourself. Instead, most journalists ignored it.

That's impossible with ACS data. Every data point's error margin is published right next to it. You can often see at a glance whether error margins for two numbers overlap enough to make a comparison valid.

This is so-called sampling error, which every survey has. ACS has larger error margins than the census long form, but it probably has much less error from other sources. Statisticians call that "non-sampling error," an unhelpful term that basically means all the real-world woes that plague surveys: People forget or lie or misunderstand or skip items. They fail to return forms. Some types of people get missed more than others, and some get counted twice.

The effects of all this are harder to pin down, but on basic tests ACS stacks up well. Benchmarked against independent measures, the 2008 ACS covered 99 percent of housing units and 94 percent of Americans, including 90 percent of blacks and 93 percent of Hispanics. Its response rate, boosted by a full-time staff doing

ACS by the numbers:

- 48 questions per person, 21 per housing unit (2009).
- 250,000 questionnaires mailed monthly.
- 85,000 phone calls and 40,000 visits monthly to households that don't respond.
- 979 base data tables
- almost 1,400 counting variations.

USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR COMMUNICATION & JOURNALISM

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting

Prize: \$35,000

The Selden Ring Award for Investigative Reporting underscores the critical importance of investigative journalism in today's society. The prize recognizes published investigative reporting that has brought results. Full-time or freelance reporters working for a general circulation United States newspaper, wire service, magazine or online publication are eligible for the award. Editors, publishers, educators, journalism organizations and others may make nominations.

For a nomination form, visit annenbergschool.usc.edu/seldenring

Deadline: **February 1**



President Barack Obama fills out his 2010 Census form. On the question of race, the president chose black only -- although he had the option of also picking white to reflect his bi-racial background.

follow-up by phone and in person, measured 98 percent. All of these top comparable Census 2000 long-form rates. Completion rates for most questions also topped those of the long form.

If you haven't used ACS much, it can seem daunting. Here are a few ways to get your feet wet:

- If you're focusing on a single area for which 1-year data is available, look on American FactFinder for its ACS comparison profile. This table will list dozens of statistics for each of the three most recent years. Even better, the error margins have already been calculated and a statistically significant change between any of those years is marked with an asterisk. That doesn't make the change journalistically significant -- you have to figure that out yourself. But a comparison profile lets you quickly scan trends in many subjects. It lets you focus on changes that are most likely to be more than just chance variation.
- Look for ACS subject profiles. On the spectrum of data products, they stand about midway between a detailed table, which has a very narrow thematic focus and is best for comparing many geographical areas, and data profiles, which cover dozens of subjects for just one geographical area. Subject tables have a handful of breakdowns on each subject and are framed somewhat like the way journalists think about issues. This is evident in their names: "Educational Attainment," "Movers Between Regions," "Language Spoken At Home."
- The newly redesigned ACS website (www.census.gov/acs) features plenty of explanatory material. Among the best: a series of handbooks called Compass guides written for specific audiences. Look for those for journalists, teachers and the general public: www.census.gov/acs/www/guidance_for_data_users/handbooks.

Paul Overberg is a database editor at USA Today. He helps to coordinate its demographic coverage and analyzes data on a variety of subjects. Since 1997, he has led training in using census data for hundreds of journalists, including a series of special IRE workshops before Census 2000.

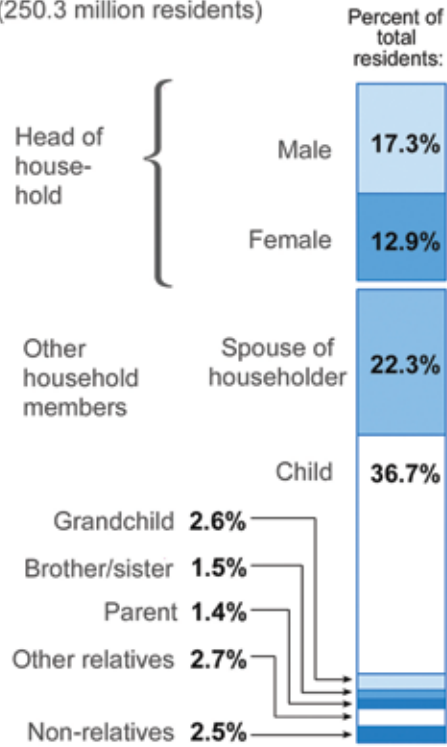
LIVING TOGETHER

Some households consist of families, while others include people who are not related to each other. The makeup of family and non-family households:

► Family households

Head of household was related to at least one person.

(250.3 million residents)



► Non-family households

Source: Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 2009
USA TODAY

Making sense of the CENSUS

DIVING DEEP WITH PUMS

By Ronald Campbell
The Orange County Register

You can find answers to many basic questions in American FactFinder, the Census Bureau's nifty online tool.

But for the subversive questions that reporters love to ask – such as “How many public school teachers send their own children to private school?” or “Are young men more likely than young women to have roommates?” or “Do immigrants really take jobs from natives?” – you need to dig deeper.

You need PUMS, the Public Use Microdata Sample.

Every year, the Census Bureau interviews millions of households nationwide for the American Community Survey. It asks dozens of multiple-choice questions and summarizes the results on FactFinder.

Most of the time, FactFinder is good enough because we're trying to answer fairly simple questions. For instance: How many people live in a particular place? What's their average income? What percentage own their homes?

But sometimes, we need more. This is where PUMS comes in.

PUMS consists of raw survey results for 1 percent of the households in each state. Everything is there except for respondents' names and addresses. (The closest thing to an address in the file is the respondent's “Public Use Microdata Area,” or PUMA, a region with about 100,000 residents.)

There are literally thousands of ways to slice and dice PUMS.

Is traffic a big issue in your town? You can find out whether people with long commutes earn more money or are more likely to own their homes than people who walk to work.

Is the high school dropout rate high? FactFinder will tell you how many people in your town never graduated from high school. PUMS will tell you much more, including their salaries and the kinds of jobs they're working.

Are many homeowners “under water?” That's the term for paying high mortgages for houses that have lost value. Use PUMS to find out how many people are paying big mortgages for houses they bought at the height of the boom.

One of the journalistic pioneers of PUMS is Steve Doig, now at Arizona State University. In 1995, while at the *Miami Herald*, he used PUMS to show that 18 percent of Dade County public school teachers were sending their own children to private schools. The headline, “I'm a parent first,” said it all.

PUMS need not be devoted to, ahem, serious issues. Paula Lavigne, then at the *Dallas Morning News* and now at ESPN, proved that with a computer-assisted feature in 2005. She used PUMS to establish that adult males are much more likely than adult females to have a roommate.

I used PUMS extensively in a September series exploring the role of immigrant workers in the California economy. I found that a third of California workers are immigrants; they dominate low-end jobs but also fill a big share of high-wage professions such as computer software design. (See www.ocregister.com/investigations)

Historic data from IPUMS, a free service of the Minnesota Population Center (<http://usa.ipums.org/usa/>), put immigrants' economic impact in a broader context.

The historic data, spanning the years from 1970 to 2008, showed that immigrants filled most of the new jobs created in California in the past four decades. They were crucial during the 1990s, when a recession and the end of the Cold War devastated the state's aerospace industry and sent a million U.S.-born workers elsewhere.

PUMS also convincingly showed that education pays. In 1970, a worker with a graduate degree earned about twice what a high school dropout did. By 2008, he earned four times more. And during that same period, immigrants replaced natives in the ranks of ill-educated workers.

PUMS is a treasure chest of data for reporters. But right next to the gold and jewels are a couple of landmines.

First, the data is hard to use.

Don't bother trying to crunch PUMS in Excel or a database program. You'll need statistical software such as SPSS, SAS or R. I used SPSS, purchased in distant days of yore when my newspaper had money. R is free and has an online community of users.

If you only need to ask a few questions against a limited set of

AN INVESTIGATION BY RONALD CAMPBELL
PART ONE OF FOUR

CALIFORNIA IS HOME TO 9.8 MILLION IMMIGRANTS. TOGETHER THEY MAKE UP ONE-THIRD OF THE STATE'S WORKERS - MORE THAN ALMOST ANY OTHER DEVELOPED ECONOMY ON THE PLANET. IMMIGRANT WORKERS EARNED \$260 BILLION IN 2008.

IN SHORT, THIS IS ...

A STATE POWERED BY IMMIGRANTS

Today, half of California's software developers, one-third of its nurses and a quarter of its CEOs are immigrants. So are most of its housekeepers, cooks and gardeners. Most of them are here legally, the product of the largest wave of legal immigration in a century. Long after residents of other states gave up on California, immigrants are still coming, bringing muscle and ideas to the state's economy. **NEWS 3-7**

SERIES AT A GLANCE

SUNDAY California relies more on immigrant labor than any other state and almost any developed country. That's the result of decades-long economic and demographic shifts as well as political choices.	SEPT. 19 More than 10 million undocumented immigrants have moved to the United States since Congress voted a crackdown in 1986. A key reason: the government's failure to lock them out of jobs.	SEPT. 26 Immigrants have driven down wages in low-skilled trades. But they've made life easier for middle- and upper-income Californians.	OCT. 3 Changing U.S. immigration policy means grappling with polarizing choices - such as amnesty and a national ID card.
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Front page of *The Orange County Register* on Sept. 12, 2010, is dominated by statistics-based story on immigration.

data, IPUMS' online data query is a quick and relatively simple alternative to stats software. But if you need to dig deep, there is no substitute for doing the analysis yourself using your own software.

Software isn't enough. You need to be comfortable, or at least conversant, with basic statistical concepts. IRE offers an excellent statistics boot camp each year using SPSS. Most community colleges teach cheap introductory classes in statistics. If you do buy SPSS, I recommend *SPSS Guide to Data Analysis* by Marija J. Norusis, which is both a step-by-step guide to the software and a good statistics textbook.

Second, since PUMS is by definition a sample, you must deal with margins of error.

Here the Census presents you with a nasty surprise.

In every once-a-decade census from 1940 through 2000, the government sent a "long form" questionnaire to a gigantic sample of the U.S. population – one in every six households in 2000.

The American Community Survey by contrast goes to 3 million households a year, one in every 10 households over the course of a decade.

That translates into much wider margins of error for ACS data than for the old long forms.

I had set myself a goal in the immigrant workers project: to report results only if the margin of error was 5 percent or less at a 95 percent confidence interval. I did this because immigration is a controversial topic, and I wanted my findings to withstand the inevitable attacks.

When it came time to calculate the percentage of immigrant workers in each occupation, the 2000 data produced significant results for 186 occupations out of nearly 350. With the 2008 data, I got significant results for just 44.

I solved that problem by using three-year data (2006-2008) instead of 2008 alone. This yielded 108 occupations where the foreign percentage was statistically significant. And while 108 out of 350 jobs may not seem like much, they were the right 108: Together they accounted for 84 percent of the state's workers.

I also used the 2006-2008 data to calculate the percentage of foreign-born workers in each of California's 233 PUMAs, getting significant results from all but 17. When I tried this with the 2008 data alone, only a handful of PUMAs were significant.

High margins of error will be a challenge for every reporter using PUMS. There are only two clear ways around the problem: Stick to very broad measures, ignoring the temptations to go deep and to provide PUMA-level results; or use multi-year data.

It boils down to this: Great stories await you in PUMS. But imagination and skill won't be enough. You will also need to be cautious.

Ronald Campbell is a staff writer for The Orange County Register. He pioneered computer-assisted reporting at the Register in the days when MS-DOS was considered state of the art.

Online resources

American Community Survey housing questions:
<http://ow.ly/2MuXl>

ACS people questions:
<http://ow.ly/2MuYB>

A brief explanation of PUMS:
<http://ow.ly/2MuZU>

Download site:
<http://ow.ly/2Mv2u>

IPUMS:
<http://usa.ipums.org/usa>

RESOURCES

IRE has created a one-stop resource center online for covering Census 2010 and the ongoing American Community Survey. The site – www.ire.org/census – contains relevant tip sheets, Census Bureau resources, key websites, and other information designed to help IRE members understand and use census data.

Training opportunities

Webinars: Look for a series of online IRE webinars in early 2011, put together by *USA TODAY* database editor Paul Overberg and IRE training director Doug Haddix. Once the online training modules are ready, you can decide which ones to download for viewing at your convenience. There will be a minimal cost for IRE members.

CAR conference: Census sessions – as well as hands-on training classes in using spreadsheets, databases, mapping and statistical analysis software – will be featured at IRE's 2011 Computer Assisted Reporting conference. It will be held Feb. 24-27 in Raleigh, N.C. www.ire.org/training/conference/CAR11.

CAR boot camps: Intensive boot camps to learn spreadsheet and database software – invaluable for crunching census data – will be held Jan. 9-14 and March 27-April 1 at IRE headquarters at the University of Missouri. www.ire.org/training/bootcamps.

Business journalism workshops: The Donald W. Reynolds National Center for Business Journalism plans two free workshops on mining the census for local business stories. The instructors will be Steve Doig, Knight Chair in Journalism at Arizona State University's Cronkite School, and Paul Overberg, database editor for *USA TODAY*. The workshops will be held Jan. 31 in Philadelphia and April 7 in Dallas. For more information and to sign up, check out www.BusinessJournalism.org.

Web resources

American Communities Project: This effort, led by John Logan at Brown University, includes research on various topics using census data, along with online mapping. www.s4.brown.edu/S4/Projects_ACP.htm

Brookings Institution: The nonpartisan public policy group conducts extensive research and data analysis. Census data will be useful on a variety of topics. www.brookings.edu

Carsey Institute: This University of New Hampshire center does extensive demographic analysis. <http://carseyinstitute.unh.edu>

City University of New York census mapping: The Center for Urban Research at CUNY's Graduate Center plans a national online, interactive mapping service. Users will be able to zoom in on their community to quickly map population patterns and key characteristics since the 2000 Census. The free service will be patterned on the "Census Hard to Count 2010" project, online at www.censushardtcountmaps.org. Watch the center's website at www.urbanresearch.org for details on the new national service.

National Bureau of Economic Research: This research group uses census and other data to analyze economic trends and topics. www.nber.org

Pew Research Center: This nonprofit organization maintains an "All Things Census" site for detailed analysis. <http://census.pewsocialtrends.org>

Population Association of America: Scientific research on population issues, trends and demographics are featured on this site. www.populationassociation.org

Population Reference Bureau: Population, health and the environment are key research areas for this organization. <http://prb.org>

Population Studies Center: This center at the University of Michigan has a special census section with resources, links, experts and tools for analysis. www.psc.isr.umich.edu/dis/census

State data centers: The Census Bureau works with data centers in all 50 states to process census information. Many of the offices analyze census data and post results online. A searchable list of state data center sources and office contacts is online at www.sdcbidc.iupui.edu/network_members.html.

GRANTS, GRAFT AND GREED

Digital document, records reveal
a corruption ring in West Virginia

BY ERIC EYRE
CHARLESTON (W.VA.) GAZETTE

By using a hex editor,
you can see the exact
contents of a file,
view data and see
who “touched” the
file through various
revisions.

In 2009, Comar Inc. was on a roll in West Virginia: lucrative state contracts, a fast-growing Internet marketing subsidiary and two profitable, glossy magazines. But Comar had an unfair advantage. A state official was secretly funneling federal employment training grants to the marketing firm, where her son worked as a company executive.

During the next year, the *Charleston Gazette's* series of reports about corruption at the state Workforce West Virginia office and Comar sparked state and federal investigations, multiple resignations, a grand jury probe and the convictions of four people on felony embezzlement charges.

The story started with a tip that Comar's chief technical officer, Martin Bowling, was being held at a regional jail, awaiting transfer to state prison.

Bowling was a nationally known computer and website developer. He specialized in “search engine optimization,” which increases the visibility of websites in search results, and “on-line reputation management,” or buffing one's image on the Web. He also had created a popular website called Zi.ma, which shortened website addresses.

Bowling's three-year jail sentence took everyone by surprise. His arrest and conviction on computer fraud charges had completely flown under the radar – going uncovered in the *Gazette* and other local media. His crime seemed bizarre, uncharacteristic of a marketing firm executive.

Bowling admitted that he used stolen credit cards to buy \$700 in cigars, artwork, Victoria's Secret clothing, a beer-brewing kit, kitchen blender, Xbox video system and a “robot” litter box for his four cats: Mr. Bones, Thumbalina, Mac and Cheese.

The day after I reported Bowling's conviction and sentencing, his friends started an online campaign to spring him from prison. They established a “Free Martin Bowling” page on Facebook. Letters of support poured in from Bowling's 1,300-plus Twitter followers. In response, a judge released Bowling and reduced his sentence to home confinement.

As publicity about Bowling swirled, I started receiving anonymous calls from people who said there was much more to the story than stolen credit cards and litter boxes.

A tipster informed me that Bowling's mother, Mary Jane Bowling, worked as a grant manager at Workforce West Virginia – the former state Bureau of Employment Programs. Mary Jane Bowling, I was told, had helped prepare Comar's grant applications, which she would later approve and administer.

I did some preliminary digging and filed a state Freedom of Information Act request. Workforce West Virginia officials initially stonewalled me. They defended Mary Jane Bowling, saying she played no direct role in awarding funds to Comar. Show us proof, they said.

That proof would come in the form of a computer Word file delivered in a brown envelope to our office late at night. The file contained a draft copy of a Comar grant application. Mary Jane Bowling was listed as the author. Why was the state official in charge of approving and administering grants also writing a grant application for a private company?

To take a closer look at the file, I turned to the *Gazette's* information systems technician, Jenny Lilly. We used Cygnus Hex Editor (free edition) to analyze the Microsoft Word file. By using a hex editor, you can see the exact contents of a file,

view data and see who “touched” the file through various revisions. The analysis showed that Mary Jane Bowling had written the grant application along with another woman, whose name I didn't recognize at the time. (I would later learn she played a pivotal role in the grant scheme.)

With the Word file in hand and “supporting materials” stacking up in response to additional FOIA requests, I was able to show how Mary Jane Bowling improperly influenced the \$100,000 grant and other state contracts, hand-delivered payments to Comar, then tried to conceal her misdeeds.

I discovered that employment training money paid for work never done and for lavish hotel stays, expensive bar tabs, an



Chris Dorst | Charleston (W. Va.) Gazette

Martin Bowling received a six-month prison sentence after pleading guilty to felony embezzlement charges involving misuse of state contracts.

anti-aging conference and even hotel pet fees. Comar also broke promises to create jobs, partnering with dubious employers, such as the West Virginia-based “Cunningham Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation Institute.”

Three weeks after my initial stories were published, the FBI and state authorities started investigating. Federal subpoenas were issued. In a search warrant unsealed at the newspaper’s request, the FBI repeatedly cited the *Gazette*’s coverage and outlined how Mary Jane Bowling and others tried to thwart my reporting through an elaborate cover-up. The scheme included altered credit card receipts, phony documents, forged signatures, fake invoices and backdated checks.

Records obtained from my FOIA requests showed that the same woman whose name turned up in the hex editor analysis – Christine Gardner – also was hired by Comar as a “professional adviser” and paid \$5,000 from the \$100,000 grant that Mary Jane Bowling secretly approved and administered.

Comar’s CEO, Al Hendershot, denied that Bowling and Gardner – who headed a local university-affiliated economic development center – were anything more than acquaintances. But I tapped voters’ registration, property tax and employment records to show that Mary Jane Bowling and Gardner had shared the same address for at least eight years.

To nail down the story, I also reviewed hundreds of e-mails sent by Mary Jane Bowling to Gardner, fellow Workforce West Virginia administrators and to Martin Bowling.

The e-mail messages to her son spoke volumes.

In a February 2008 e-mail, Mary Jane Bowling contacted Martin Bowling, asking him to send her information about Comar so she could write a grant application for the firm.

“Stay on top of making the contact. Don’t want my precious getting in trouble,” Mary Jane Bowling wrote in a message sent from her state office computer. The e-mail was signed, “mompee.”

Another message from mother to son stated, “Get mo’ money. The mompee is going to have as much of that as possible...We’re all about those slow days and making \$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$.”

And there was this e-mail exchange after Martin Bowling received a check from the state: “I can give the mompee some, and maybe mompee can write me a check, too,” Martin Bowling wrote.

“You’re feeling it too – huh, sonpee!!” Mary Jane Bowling responded. “It’s amazing how quickly that \$\$\$ can go.”

In the wake of our reports:

- Mary Jane Bowling, Gardner, Hendershot and Martin Bowling all pleaded guilty to felony charges in federal court. Martin Bowling received a six-month federal prison sentence. The others were sentenced to home confinement, probation or work-release programs. Plea deals led to the reduced sentences.

- The state suspended a \$100,000 grant to Comar, and withdrew a separate \$1 million federal grant request that Workforce West Virginia had sought on Comar’s behalf.
- The state launched an audit and ordered Comar to return misused grant funds.
- A state medical school terminated a \$200,000 contract with Comar, while the state agency that oversees community colleges in West Virginia suspended a \$24,000 contract with the marketing firm.
- Workforce West Virginia’s executive director resigned, Mary Jane Bowling stepped down, and Gardner was fired.
- The West Virginia Secretary of State office administratively dissolved Comar’s business registration. The company’s business license expired. One magazine was sold, the other folded.

The *Gazette*’s coverage also led to sweeping reforms at Workforce West Virginia. The agency overhauled its grant approval division, reassigned employees, required administrators to sign conflict-of-interest statements and changed the way federal grant money is awarded. Workforce West Virginia’s 400-plus employees were ordered to review and sign an ethics code of conduct.

Until his conviction, Hendershot repeatedly denied any wrongdoing, insisting that every penny of the workforce training money was spent as the federal grant intended. From the outset, the Bowlings and Gardner declined comment when I contacted them by phone and e-mail. But Martin Bowling declined comment from the outset, but he was a Twitter disciple and sometimes “tweeted” reactions to my phone calls on his Twitter page, which I subsequently quoted in the newspaper. Bowling’s Twitter entries, which were archived, helped me keep track of his whereabouts. He also posted pictures of himself and colleagues goofing off at conferences and events paid for by federal grants. I used the photos to confirm his attendance. The Twitter messages stopped the morning Bowling reported to federal prison.

Through much of 2009 and the early part of 2010, I wrote 35 stories on the grant scandal (the series is available online at www.wvgazette.com/workforcewv). In addition, as the lone business reporter at the 40,000-circulation *Gazette*, I continued to cover my daily beat. Publishing the articles as a rolling or running investigation kept the story fresh. Readers followed the coverage as it unfolded, posting dozens of comments and calling me with additional tips.

At the sentencing hearing, the federal judge commented that the grant scandal likely never would have come to light, if not for the *Gazette*’s investigative reporting.

Eric Eyre is the business writer at the Charleston Gazette. His investigation of Comar and Workforce West Virginia was a finalist in the 2009 IRE Award small newspaper category.

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SKY-HIGH COSTS

New York pays top dollar for the mentally disabled

BY MARY BETH PFEIFFER
POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

Across the country, many people with Down syndrome and autism still live in high-cost institutions while waiting lists grow for better and cheaper community care.

After a half-dozen document requests and forays into dust-dry spending plans, I finally had an answer – and on a single page, no less.

The cost to care for the mentally disabled residents of a local institution, operated by the state of New York, was \$4,556.

Per person. Per day.

I did a double take. Could that be right? I broke out the calculator. It came to \$1.7 million a year. I ran it past some folks in disability care. They asked me to repeat it. I told my editor. He asked me to repeat it.

The per-diem Medicaid rate was no mistake. But there was one giant and invisible asterisk beside it. That's where I found my story.

During the next few months and after numerous Freedom of Information requests, I'd learn that the rate was three to four times the actual cost of care. To boot, it was four times the nation's next highest rate, at a Tennessee institution. And it applied to every one of eight other facilities in New York, making this a statewide story.

Because the feds paid half the rate, New York's state institutions were bringing in so much federal cash that they effectively were propping up community care in the rest of the system, turning

institutional residents into what one former official called "cash cows."

Beyond this, I'd discover evidence that the state had for years delayed the release of residents from at least two of its institutions – our local facility among them – who should have been placed in more appropriate, and less costly, community homes. Each resident meant \$831,000 a year in federal revenue.

And I'd connect the historical dots:

- The state adopts a plan in 1991 to close its institutions by 2000, believing – after a horrific scandal named for the former Willowbrook State School in Staten Island, N.Y. – that community care is better.
- The Medicaid reimbursement rate is set at just \$39 a day in 1975 but climbs so precipitously through the 1990s – 25-fold by 1995, 50-fold by 2000 – that it reaps hundreds of millions in federal cash annually.
- The state quietly abandons plans to close those institutions, maintaining now that roughly 1,100 institutional beds "will always be required for individuals who cannot safely be housed in community settings." However, 11 states have closed all of their institutions.

A reliable tipster

The phrase *Medicaid reimbursement rate* doesn't normally add up to a story that many of us find compelling. A good dose of fortitude is needed to penetrate the arcane world of this particular entitlement program, not to mention the federal agency that administers it. At its heart, however, this was a story about care of disabled people and whether the system was doing right by them.

And while New York's rate is singular, there are lots of other rows to hoe in a system that costs plenty, offers mediocre care in many states and grapples with court mandates to place the disabled in what's called the least restrictive environment. Across the country, many people with Down syndrome and autism still live in high-cost institutions while waiting lists grow for better and cheaper community care.

Here's a bonus for interested reporters: Two academic institutes offer a wealth of state-specific data to get you started. You'll find per-capita spending, bed counts, annual Medicaid expenditures, state rankings, institution-specific Medicaid rates, and numbers served in community and institutional programs over time. They are the Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota [<http://rtc.umn.edu/main>] and the State of the States in Developmental Disabilities Project at the University of Colorado [<http://ow.ly/2NJau>]. Their resident experts are available and enthusiastic.

Consider this nugget: Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and New Jersey have the highest per-capita rates of institutional beds – up to four times the national average – figures that should be questioned in an era of widespread deinstitutionalization.

Or this: California accounts for 12 percent of income taxes to Washington but gets just 6 percent of Medicaid money for the developmentally disabled. New York gets back twice the proportion it sends.

Medicaid Residential Reimbursement Rates by Program/Service
FY 2005/06 through 2009/10 - Taconic DDSO

Rate Year	Programs:				
	ICF- Maple	ICF-Pryor	ICF-Riverview	ICF-Cedar Ln.	Dev. Center
4/1/05 - 3/31/06	\$440.07	\$574.71			\$3,283.83
4/1/06 - 3/31/07	\$488.21	\$639.23			\$3,715.04
4/1/07 - 12/31/07	\$499.69	\$651.44			\$3,754.13
1/1/08 - 3/31/08	\$497.33	\$648.37			\$3,736.46
4/1/08 - 3/31/09	\$538.83	\$705.05	\$611.42		\$4,115.54
4/1/09 - 3/31/10	\$568.51	\$741.26	\$649.88	\$526.28	\$4,556.13

This story began, as many do, with a tip. It came from a good-hearted local resident who had, during the 20 years I'd known him, advocated tirelessly for better land planning and government accountability. He'd given me lots of leads but never a story with punch.

This time he suggested I look at a 714-acre state institution that held 4,500 residents in its heyday, when it was known as the Wassaic State School for Mental Defectives.

"I heard it costs a million dollars a year for every resident," he said. That was enough.

It took time and extensive use of FOI to unravel this story, which is still developing. New York's Medicaid rate, with all of its implications, was a well-guarded secret – so much so that when the state was asked for its institutional rate by the Minnesota research institute, it reported not the Medicaid figure but the far-lower actual cost of care. I filed a records request for the rate – and reported that discrepancy.

Among my other FOI requests:

- Basic budget, staffing, census and unit data. Using them, I learned that the state had built 11 locked units since 1994, some akin to prisons, where mentally disabled people with behavioral problems were kept for open-ended periods. Another FOI request revealed that these residents were classified like inmates – by "offending behaviors" such as sex offense or arson; yet nine of 10 had no known criminal convictions. Further, the state did not even know how long, on average, people stayed there. I surveyed 11 other states and found that New York had seven times the average number of locked beds.
- Figures on capital construction projects. These showed that the state was pouring millions into its aging, inefficient and anachronistic institutions. At our local facility, \$28 million was spent since 2006, including \$7 million to upgrade a power plant that once served a community of thousands, now reduced to 150. Another campus in Queens was completely rebuilt since 2007 at a cost of \$97 million – for 120 beds. All these costs fed into the Medicaid rate.
- Energy expenditures. I knew downsized centers had lost any economy of scale. The per-resident energy cost demonstrated this, with annual costs at selected centers from \$14,000 to \$21,000, money spent just to keep the power on.

Sources also helped me track down old annual reports and internal papers that declared the state's commitment to closing its institutions. I used the state's payroll database to identify sources and find relevant salary and staffing data. And there was even a little-known book, by a former agency insider, on the evolution of New York's Medicaid system for the developmentally disabled; it was a godsend.

Other essential sources included state-contracted nonprofit agencies (which run group homes and the like at far less cost than the state, making officials eager to talk); client support groups; institutional boards of visitors; organizations like the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, and legal advocates for the disabled. Every state is mandated to have one or more designated "Protection and Advocacy" organizations; I contacted one and learned about an unreported lawsuit charging the state with letting people languish in institutions.

Lack of oversight

But this story also was significant for what I didn't find: oversight. No state or federal audits. No state or federal inspector general reports. Not even a routine review by the feds. That was a prominent conclusion in my first story.

The package, four parts so far, has begun to yield results, some perplexing.

Although the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services pays half the tab, it was apparently unaware of the rate it had approved. As I reported in a breaking story, the feds demanded in July that the state produce documents to show how the rate was set and whether it exceeded a "reasonable...upper payment limit."

The most intriguing line in the federal letter to the state: "It has come to CMS attention that several New York state-operated developmental centers currently claim ... daily Medicaid rates in excess of \$4,500 per beneficiary." (Significantly, the feds refuse to answer any of my questions about the rate.)

The state Office of the Medicaid Inspector General also has vowed to take a look, in particular at whether residents have been kept in institutions longer than necessary.

This was a complex story with shades of gray that made it difficult to figure out and harder to tell. New York once had 27,000 people in its institutions; now it has just 1,400. That's great progress, made possible by incentives in the state's Medicaid formula to release people from institutions to the community. The more released, the higher the rate.

But at some point, New York's progress in placing people in the community, which made rates soar, became an impediment in itself. Institutions now generate about \$850 million more in federal revenues than the cost of care. Closing the facilities would, as I wrote in part one, "shut off a gushing faucet of cash in a state dogged by deficits."

Few want that. Institutions provide union jobs. They pay for community services that have strong and vocal advocates. In short, the focus of this series hasn't pleased everyone.

But the questions should be asked, in New York and elsewhere: How well do we care for the developmentally disabled? Who pays the highest cost?

Mary Beth Pfeiffer, a journalist for 30 years, is projects writer at the Poughkeepsie (N.Y.) Journal. A former Soros Justice Media Fellow, she is author of "Crazy in America: The Hidden Tragedy of Our Criminalized Mentally Ill."

Story tips

Use graphics to tell this numbers-driven story. Help readers understand trends in population and funding, relative costs among states, timelines and costs per resident.

Post online elements such as university and research reports, archival photos of institutional care, state-federal Medicaid agreements and Q&A's with officials.

Suggested sources include legal advocates, academic researchers, boards of visitors, nonprofit service providers, unions, parent groups, inspectors general and comptrollers.

New York's Medicaid rate, with all its implications, was a well-guarded secret – so much so that when the state was asked for its institutional rate by the Minnesota research institute, it reported not the Medicaid figure but the far-lower actual cost of care.

SIDS OR NEGLECT?

Database analysis finds
questionable SIDS cases

BY FRANCO ORDOÑEZ
THE CHARLOTTE OBSERVER

In several cases, officials said that a ruling of sudden infant death syndrome – considered a natural and unpreventable death – kept them from filing criminal charges.

The 911 caller described a terrifying scene: A man in a convenience store parking lot was choking an infant. He was holding 1-month-old Makayla Peek in the air by the throat as bystanders begged him to stop. He put her down and stormed off. Later that night, Makayla's mother awoke to find her dead.

An emergency room doctor told police that Makayla suffered a skull fracture, likely from being shaken or hit on the head. Local police suspected homicide.

But a Gaston County medical examiner ruled the cause of death undetermined – “consistent with SIDS.”

No one ever was charged.

The case was one of hundreds that *Charlotte Observer* reporters reviewed in an eight-month investigation of unexplained child deaths. In several cases, officials said that a ruling of sudden infant death syndrome – considered a natural and unpreventable death – kept them from filing criminal charges.

In the six-part series, the *Observer* found widespread and questionable use of the SIDS label in North Carolina, even though the likelihood of accidental suffocation or other causes could not be ruled out.

The *Observer* told about the N.C. Office of the Chief Medical Examiner and its philosophy behind diagnosing SIDS, which conflicted with recommendations from federal health officials and was out of step with best practices in other states and counties. The stories presented frustrated law enforcement officials who felt handcuffed in pursuing suspicious deaths labeled SIDS

and one prosecutor's efforts to bring justice in cases when few others even tried.

The newspaper also wrote about the emotional debate over babies sleeping with parents, about safe sleep guidelines and one mother who struggled to come to terms with the possibility that her daughter didn't die of SIDS, but likely suffocated while they were sleeping together in bed.

The stories elicited response from the medical community and prompted calls for state hearings. State legislators considered a review of the state medical examiner's office and said they would explore more in-depth child death investigations.

Two child death investigations featured by the *Observer* were revisited by law enforcement as a result of the coverage.

But SIDS was not the original focus of the *Observer* investigation.

Create a database

Reporter Fred Clasen-Kelly was curious about statewide promises to reduce child deaths from suspected abuse or neglect in North Carolina. He learned that repeated promises made by state legislators over the years were not fulfilled. He looked at available public data: deaths of children who had been under the care of social services within the year before they died. State law required a complete investigation and a public report on every such death.

He found the numbers had risen for the most recent five-year period. He pulled all 136 state reports for those deaths between 2004 and 2008 and began collecting other records, including autopsies.

Medical writer Karen Garloch and I were asked to look into specific family cases, including one death classified as homicide though charges never were filed.

Reporter Lisa Hammersly created a database breaking down how each of the 136 children died and other circumstances, including problems with state and local agencies cited by investigators and whether anyone was charged or convicted of a crime.

The database was so large that the printout covered much of the wall of an editor's office.

When it was finished, team members wondered why the single largest category of deaths – 36 – involved sleeping infants who died of SIDS or suffocation. They were usually sleeping with one or more adults on adult beds or sofas, or died from being wedged between a mattress and the wall. That category was larger than any other, including deaths of all children by abuse, all other neglect deaths and illness. The SIDS deaths in particular seemed curious. SIDS is considered an unavoidable and natural death, but all cases in the database involved suspected neglect or abuse. In addition to DSS suspicions in these cases, the agency had asked more than once in state reports for the state medical examiners' office to seek more training in how to diagnose SIDS deaths.

Garloch was asked to look more closely at the deaths of infants by SIDS or suffocation. At the time, reporters and editors thought the SIDS issue could make up one day of the series.

Next, the team requested autopsies from the N.C. medical examiner's office on all infants who died of SIDS from 2004 to 2008, the most recent complete five-year period. All of the reporters took turns going through more than 550 autopsies to put together another spreadsheet on what was known about how each child died, including where they were found, whom they were sleeping with and whether police responded.



Lisa Vallee, a nurse educator for Charlotte's Presbyterian Hospital, shows the proper way to place a baby to sleep in a crib: in a "sleep sack," instead of a traditional blanket, to reduce the risk of suffocation.

Philip Hoffman | Charlotte Observer

The more we learned, we began to wonder if North Carolina was applying the SIDS label too often and incorrectly, compared with national standards and practices. Our data showed that the supposedly unpreventable and natural SIDS deaths were happening to infants found sleeping with as many as four other people on a bed, or with a blanket wrapped around the head or under other suspicious circumstances. We also learned that the best practices for medical examiners call for using the SIDS diagnosis only after a thorough investigation of the death scene -- which often wasn't happening in North Carolina -- and when all other possibilities such as suffocation had been ruled out.

Yet despite incomplete or missing investigations by police and autopsy reports that suggested other possible causes of death, the state medical examiner's office consistently labeled those cases SIDS.

From our spreadsheet, we found that two-thirds of SIDS autopsies described risks that raised the possibility that babies suffocated because of unsafe bedding or sleeping with another person.

Only about 25 babies, or 5 percent of those thought to have died of SIDS, were apparently sleeping safely, on their backs in their own cribs without dangerous bedding.

For several suspicious cases, we reviewed court documents and interviewed multiple law enforcement officials, family members and witnesses. Among the cases:

Ten-week-old Autumn Rose Brown died on Nov. 20, 2007. Her death was ruled SIDS. But the Alamance County sheriff and some of Autumn's relatives think she was unintentionally smothered. Autumn died while sleeping with her father, who had another infant child die in a mysterious sleep-related death. Jeffrey Thurston, Autumn's grandfather, and the police believe her father negligently suffocated the baby while crashing from a cocaine high. The father told the newspaper that he had nothing to hide and didn't roll over onto his daughter.

The case sat dormant for 16 months until *Observer* reporters began asking questions about Autumn's death. Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson later reopened the investigation.

'Old-school' approach

Repeated visits and conversations with the state chief medical examiner and other experts shed more light on the situation.

No one has more control over investigations of babies' deaths in North Carolina than chief medical examiner Dr. John Butts.

Butts told the *Observer* he believes unexplained baby deaths should be ruled SIDS unless there is concrete evidence, such as a witness or a confession, that the child suffocated.

He admitted his philosophy was rooted in practices developed before he joined the chief medical examiner's office in 1975.

Yet he criticized other states -- saying they've regressed to the Dark Ages -- that have found new ways to classify those deaths if circumstances suggest babies may have suffocated while sleeping with adults or in unsafe bedding.

Experts familiar with Butts' philosophy on SIDS said his compassion, while honorable, was getting in the way of science.

"The worst truth is better than the sweetest lie," said Dr. Ljubisa Dragovic, chief medical examiner in Oakland County, Mich. "We have an obligation to the public to serve them with truth. It's the crux of public service. It's important to start with the facts."

We found that the N.C. medical examiner's office appeared to be ignoring or dismissing widely accepted research from groups such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

To see how widely he differed from other medical examiners, we contacted more than 20 state and county medical examiners' offices across the country.

We learned that there was ongoing debate within the medical examiner community on the best practices for addressing SIDS. As one state medical examiner put it, philosophies typically fell along generational lines. Butts' views were seen as "old school" and "traditionalist."

Some deaths considered SIDS in North Carolina would very likely be identified as "undetermined" or even "homicide" in some jurisdictions in Maryland, Michigan or South Carolina.

Educate readers

We ended the series with an educational component. Millions of parents across the country sleep with their babies. But studies show the practice of adults and babies sleeping together can increase the risk of SIDS and asphyxiation.

In addition to writing about the dangers of co-sleeping, the *Observer* also created an easy-to-read, full-page graphic advising parents on the best practices of putting a baby to bed. The mega graphic, created by graphics editor Bill Pitzer, has since been specially reprinted for hospitals and day-care centers.

Observer videographer Phillip Hoffman and photographer/videographer John Simmons also created a series of videos that included step-by-step instructions on putting a baby to bed in a safe environment.

The *Observer* received some criticism from supporters of co-sleeping, but also heard from many families who said they had long questioned the diagnosis of their child's death. Many said they felt they were the only ones this had happened to until reading the series.

Doctors thanked the *Observer* for shedding light on issue that deserved more attention. "As a community pediatrician for over three decades, being called to the emergency department to help resuscitate a 'dead on arrival' infant victim of SIDS, and then giving the tragic news to the family, are two of our most depressing assignments," wrote one doctor. "I do not remember a SIDS death in which the baby was definitely found on his/her back in his/her own crib Thank you again for your efforts to educate your readership about the most common cause of death in babies in NC, and promoting safe sleeping conditions for all babies."

Franco Ordoñez is an award-winning minority affairs and investigative reporter for the Charlotte Observer. Prior to "Cradle of Secrets," he worked with a team of reporters looking at how poultry companies boost profits by denying medical care to their largely immigrant workforce.

Jeff Wilhelm | Charlotte Observer



North Carolina chief medical examiner Dr. John Butts defends his approach to labeling certain infant deaths as SIDS cases.

Some deaths considered SIDS in North Carolina would very likely be identified as "undetermined" or even "homicide" in some jurisdictions in Maryland, Michigan or South Carolina.

New and expanded blogs on IRE's website provide tips, success stories and reporting resources. Here are excerpts from a few recent blog posts, in case you missed them or haven't explored the new online offerings.



Snapshots from our blogs

From "Quick fix to tame PDFs," www.ire.org/training

By Jaimi Dowdell
IRE training director

A couple of weeks ago, I was teaching at a computer-assisted reporting boot camp in San Diego. The class had been through spreadsheets and databases, and I was finally demonstrating how to deal with PDF's. After showing some online options, I walked the class through my old stand-by: XPDF. If you've used it before, you know that once you get the hang of it, it's quite simple. But learning it for the first time can be a bit daunting, as it uses the command line. That's right, I said: The. Command. Line.

I've learned that newcomers to CAR aren't thrilled with DOS commands or scary, empty windows that don't allow dragging and dropping. This training exercise can return pained, frustrated faces – that is, until now.

Shortly after demonstrating XPDF, Chris Milholland, a senior at San Diego State University, politely leaned over and said something to the effect of, "You know there's an easier way to do this." In the time it took to walk the group through XPDF, Milholland had figured out how to change the properties of the tool to turn XPDF into a thing of blissful simplicity. With a few small tweaks, he'd made XPDF as easy as dragging and dropping your PDF file onto an icon. No more command line, no more furrowed brows, out spits a text file.

Milholland was kind enough to detail how you can conquer XPDF in IRE Tipsheet No. 3440, available at www.ire.org/resourcecenter/tipsheets.php.

From "Be active with records requests," www.ire.org/training

By Doug Haddix
IRE training director

Getting public records often takes far more effort than filing a written request and simply waiting for the juicy documents to arrive. "It's reporting, not requesting," says Shawn McIntosh, public editor of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

The best reporters realize that a written public-records request usually is just one step to get the information they need, she told participants in an IRE Better Watchdog Workshop hosted by CNN in Atlanta. In most cases, reporters need to keep working sources, finding ways around obstacles and navigating through bureaucracies.

She offered a variety of practical tips and advice to the more than 70 journalists and students at the workshop. They included:

- To counter expensive charges, ask for an itemized bill. Sometimes, that alone will prompt the office to reduce the price.
- Practice law without a license. If you need to appeal a denial for public records, cite specific statutes and attorney general opinions. Copy your company lawyer on the letter, which sometimes can show an agency that you know your stuff and mean business.
- Use the power of the pen. If denied records or quoted a high cost, write a letter expressing your disappointment and requesting a follow-up meeting to discuss why the public can't get this information without spending lots of money and jumping through bureaucratic hoops. Signal that you're considering writing or airing a story about how the office is denying the public information or charging exorbitant prices for something that's already paid for through taxes.
- Understand what records exist by examining a retention schedule or other list of records required to be maintained by the office. Narrow your request so that it's reasonable and relevant.
- Consider partnering with other news organizations to mount a legal challenge.



Shawn McIntosh, public editor of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

From “Make chronologies easier with TimeFlow,”www.ire.org/training

By Jaimi Dowdell
IRE training director

If you’ve ever been involved in an investigative story or in-depth project, you understand how important chronology can be. I’ve often sketched timelines on notebooks, napkins or white boards. For trickier tasks or more data, I’ve turned to Excel, but I’ve never been completely satisfied with how it works.

TimeFlow, released last week, just might change all that. Funded by Duke University, the minds behind this project include IRE Board member Sarah Cohen, Fernanda Viegas and Martin Watenberg. It’s free and open source; you can find it at <http://github.com/FlowingMedia/TimeFlow/downloads>.

To install, download and unzip the files to your computer – it really is that simple.

Importing data is easy with CSV files. Data in TimeFlow can be viewed as a timeline, calendar, bar chart and other formats. Features include a filtering option. You can also see frequencies and spot missing values. I expected the tool to be much more complicated, but within 20 minutes, I was able to install the software and create a timeline of IRE’s upcoming training events.

From “Dig into local leaders,”www.ire.org/training

By Doug Haddix
IRE training director

Reporters should make one to three calls a day to sources whom they don’t need for a deadline story. That’s the most effective way to develop sources who’ll come through for you later with ideas and help, according to Ryan Gabrielson of California Watch.

Gabrielson spoke during an IRE Better Watchdog Workshop at San Francisco State University. He covers public safety issues at California Watch, a project of the nonprofit Center for Investigative Reporting. He offered tips for bolstering local reporting:

- Track tax dollars by getting an electronic log of active contracts for agencies and offices that you cover. Then use state business filings to locate the people behind the partnerships or corporations. After that, examine financial disclosure forms of politicians to look for links to personal gain from public money.
- Beyond basic salary information for public officials, seek out documents and records that show all forms of compensation, along with any special service contracts for side jobs.
- If possible, get the auditors’ working papers and correspondence that are produced during an agency audit.
- Routinely request calendars and e-mails of top officials to monitor their appointments and correspondence.

From “Sharpen your interviewing skills,”www.ire.org/training

By Doug Haddix
IRE training director

Studies have shown that the actual words account for only about 7 percent of communication between two people, according to Amy Herdy of the University of Colorado.

Body language makes up 55 percent of communication, with tone accounting for the other 38 percent, she told journalists during an IRE Better Watchdog Workshop in Denver.

For instance, she said, reporters and producers should not approach a reluctant source with a notebook or microphone in hand. Be aware that the tools of the trade can intimidate sources. Persuade them to be interviewed first, and only later pull out the notebook or digital recorder.

“Remember that the interview is not about you,” Herdy said. “It’s all about the source.”

Besides considering the best initial approach and the effect of nonverbal signals, journalists can sharpen their skills by talking to police and attorneys about their interviewing techniques, according to co-panelist Deborah Sherman of 9News-KUSA in Denver.

Among the other tips from Herdy and Sherman:

- Get beside a source whenever possible, rather than sitting across a desk from them.
- Slowly mimic or mirror the source’s body language in a subtle way to build a subconscious bond. If the source puts his left arm on the table, after a few minutes, do the same.
- Really listen during the interview, rather than rehearsing your next question. Be adept at shifting your line of questioning if a source surprises you with an answer.
- If you have a limited chance to question a key source, ask the tough question first. Or, if the source knows what you’re after, sometimes it’s best to say: “We both know why I’m here, so let’s talk about X.”
- Too much extraneous information or detail from a source could be a sign of lying – a way to try to distract you.



Amy Herdy, left, and Deborah Sherman

What's happening?

I am a Pulitzer Prize award-winning investigative reporter.

140

Tweet

What's happening?

I am a student journalist working on my first big story.

140

Tweet

What's happening?

I am a criminal justice blogger tracking the stories others miss.

140

Tweet

What's happening?

I am a television reporter working undercover.

140

Tweet

What's happening?

I work with every medium – print, online and tv to share my stories – all from my cell phone.

140

Tweet



are you?

learn why YOU should join
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573-882-2042

IRE SERVICES

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS AND EDITORS, INC. is a grassroots nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the quality of investigative reporting within the field of journalism. IRE was formed in 1975 with the intent of creating a networking tool and a forum in which journalists from across the country could raise questions and exchange ideas. IRE provides educational services to reporters, editors and others interested in investigative reporting and works to maintain high professional standards.

Programs and Services:

IRE RESOURCE CENTER – A rich reserve of print and broadcast stories, tipsheets and guides to help you start and complete the best work of your career. This unique library is the starting point of any piece you're working on. You can search through abstracts of more than 20,000 investigative reporting stories through our website.

Contact: Beth Kopine, beth@ire.org, 573-882-3364

IRE AND NICAR DATABASE LIBRARY – Administered by IRE and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting. The library has copies of many government databases, and makes them available to news organizations at or below actual cost. Analysis services are available on these databases, as is help in deciphering records you obtain yourself.

Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281. To order data, call 573-884-7711.

ON-THE-ROAD TRAINING – As a top promoter of journalism education, IRE offers loads of training opportunities throughout the year. Possibilities range from national conferences and regional workshops to weeklong boot camps and on-site newsroom training. Costs are on a sliding scale and fellowships are available to many of the events.

Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281; or Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org, 614-205-5420

Publications:

THE IRE JOURNAL – Published four times a year. Contains journalist profiles, how-to stories, reviews, investigative ideas and backgrounding tips. The Journal also provides members with the latest news on upcoming events and training opportunities from IRE and NICAR.

Contact: Doug Haddix, doug@ire.org, 614-205-5420

UPLINK – Electronic newsletter by IRE and NICAR on computer-assisted reporting. Uplink stories are written after reporters have had particular success using data to investigate stories. The columns include valuable information on advanced database techniques as well as success stories written by newly trained CAR reporters.

Contact: David Herzog, dherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127

REPORTER.ORG – A collection of Web-based resources for journalists, journalism educators and others. Discounted Web hosting and services such as mailing list management and site development are provided to other nonprofit journalism organizations.

Contact: Mark Horvit, mhorvit@ire.org, 573-882-1984.

For information on:

ADVERTISING – IRE staff, 573-882-2042

MEMBERSHIP AND SUBSCRIPTIONS – John Green, jgreen@ire.org, 573-882-2772

CONFERENCES AND BOOT CAMPS – Stephanie Sinn, stephanie@ire.org, 573-882-8969

LISTSERVS – Amy Johnston, amy@ire.org, 573-884-1444

Mailing Address:

IRE, 141 Neff Annex, Missouri School of Journalism, Columbia, MO 65211

OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM



(CHECK ONE CATEGORY ONLY)

FOR OUTSTANDING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN:

NEWSPAPERS Highest single day circ: _____

- ____ Circulation less than 100,000
- ____ 100,000-250,000 circulation
- ____ 250,000-500,000 circulation
- ____ More than 500,000 circulation (or wire service)
- ____ Local-circulation weekly

TELEVISION Market size: _____

- ____ Network or syndicated program
- ____ Top 20 market
- ____ Below Top 20 market

*International entries will be placed into appropriate categories by IRE staff. Contest judges can then move entries into other categories. IRE can award a special citation for deserving international work.

PARTNERSHIP/COLLABORATION _____

OTHER MEDIA

- ____ Magazine/Specialty Publication ____ Radio
- ____ Book ____ Online

SPECIAL CATEGORIES:

- ____ Tom Renner Award (any medium, any size)
- ____ IRE FOI Award (any medium, any size)
- ____ Student Work (any medium, any size)
- ____ Breaking News Investigations (any medium, any size)

GANNETT AWARD FOR INNOVATION IN WATCHDOG JOURNALISM _____

(CHECK ENTRY FEE)

MEMBER (membership # _____)

____ \$55 entry fee (Current IRE Member)

____ Free entry (Current Student Member)

Name of member involved in entered work:

NONMEMBER

____ \$115 entry fee (Non-IRE Member)

____ \$25 entry fee (Non-IRE Student Member)

Payment must accompany entry.

If checking nonmember entry, you must designate one of the contributing reporters listed below to receive one-year membership. Provide all contact information: (Please type or print clearly)

Name: _____

News organization: _____

Mailing address: _____

Phone number: _____

Fax number: _____

E-mail: _____

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE

By entering this contest, you and your news organization grant IRE permission to use the entry, including the information on this form and the questionnaire, for educational purposes. Such uses may include: 1) print, video or online resources, 2) IRE compilations, feeds or award tapes and 3) streaming video from IRE's website. The **authorized signature** of at least one entrant or the contest coordinator, by and/or on behalf of the respective news organization is **required** for contest entry.

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE _____ **DATE** _____

To be completed by person submitting the entry. (Please type or print clearly):

Contact person: _____ News organization: _____

Mailing address: _____

Phone number: _____ Fax number: _____ E-mail: _____

Title of Entry: _____ Length (time) of radio or TV entry _____

Reporters involved in effort: List significant contributors in the order they should appear on IRE plaques or certificates. If this entry is named a winner, only those people listed will be entered into our official records. Check the box next to the contributor if he or she is a current IRE member. Attach additional sheet if necessary.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	Name	Title	Member
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

Payment may be made by personal or company check payable to IRE, or credit card. Please complete the section below regarding your payment method.

Please do not submit entries without the required entry fees.

AmEx _____ VISA _____ MasterCard _____ Discover _____ Card Number: _____

Check: _____

Exp. Date _____ Authorized Signature _____

Check Number: _____



Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.
Missouri School of Journalism
141 Neff Annex
Columbia, MO 65211
www.ire.org

IRE AWARDS 2010

ENTRY FORM INSIDE

The annual contest of Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.

**DEADLINE: Postmark
by Jan. 14, 2011**

Categories

- Newspaper, TV, Magazine/Specialty Publication, Book, Radio: An IRE Medal for Outstanding Investigative Reporting or an IRE Certificate of Recognition.
- Breaking News Investigations: An IRE Medal for Outstanding Investigative Reporting or an IRE Certificate of Recognition for investigative work done within 30 days of a news event or development. (Limit of 5 stories.)
- **NEW** - Partnership or Collaboration: An IRE Medal for Outstanding Investigative Reporting or an IRE Certificate of Recognition for a partnership or collaboration among various entities.
- Student Award: An IRE Certificate of Recognition and a \$250 cash scholarship for Outstanding Investigative Reporting.
- IRE FOI Award: An IRE Medal honoring an individual or organization whose actions further open records or open government.
- Tom Renner Award: An IRE Medal for Outstanding Crime Reporting and a \$500 prize.
- **NEW** – Gannett Award for Innovation in Watchdog Journalism: The award recognizes the use of digital innovation in the gathering and/or delivery of watchdog and investigative news to its audience. It honors work that stands out for its creative use of digital tools to further a news organization's ability to serve as a watchdog in its community. This comes with a \$5,000 prize from Gannett.

* If submitting an entry in the Renner or FOIA as well as another category, you must submit a separate, complete entry packet for each category.

The contest recognizes the best investigative reporting in print, broadcast and online media, and helps identify techniques and resources used by entrants.

For entry forms and additional information, visit our website at www.ire.org/resourcecenter/contest