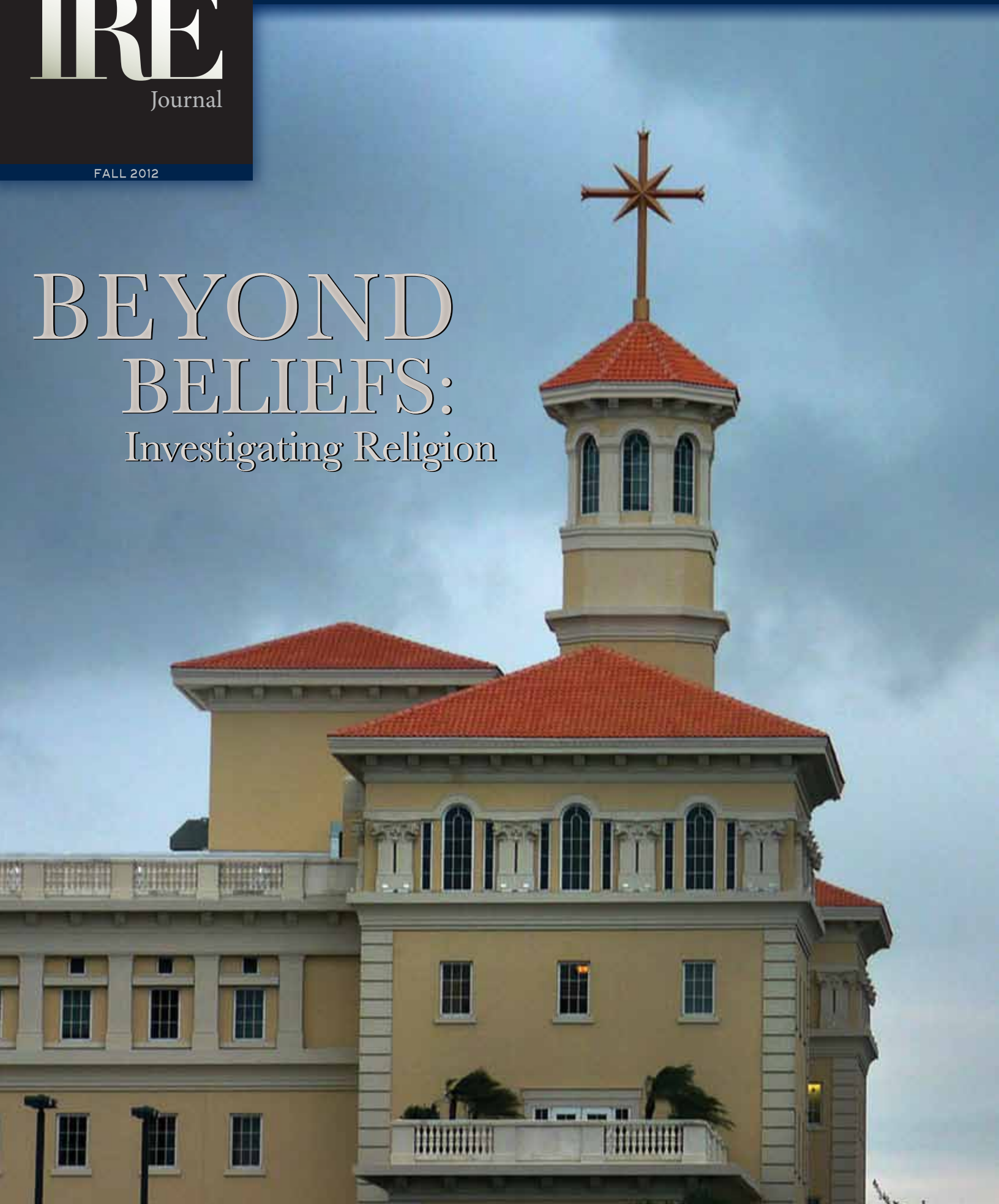
The IRE Journal

FALL 2012



BEYOND BELIEFS:
Investigating Religion

2013 CAR

Presented by IRE and NICAR

FEB. 28 - MARCH 3

Louisville, Kentucky

Looking to learn skills that will help you and your newsroom thrive?

Join IRE and NICAR in Louisville for our annual conference devoted to computer-assisted reporting, Feb. 28 to March 3, 2013 at the Hyatt Regency Louisville.

Come learn about tools you need to dig deeper into stories and give readers, viewers and your online audience the information they're demanding.

Register at:

ire.org/conferences/nicar-2013

Travel and Lodging

The conference will be held at the Hyatt Regency Louisville. The discounted room rate is available until Feb. 1, 2013, or until our room block is full (whichever comes first). Our room block has sold out prior to the deadline the past few years, so make your reservation early.

Hotel Details

Hyatt Regency Louisville
320 W. Jefferson
Louisville, KY 40202

The room rate is $129 (single/double) plus tax, which is currently 15.01%. Attendees staying in the IRE block at the Hyatt Regency Louisville will receive complimentary wireless Internet in their guestrooms during their stay.

If you need to cancel your reservation you must do so by 6 p.m. the day prior to arrival to avoid any cancellation fees of one-night's room and tax.

All reservations must be guaranteed by a major credit card or first night's room deposit plus tax.
If you have hotel or general conference questions, please contact Stephanie Sinn, Conference & Events Director, Stephanie@ire.org or 901-316-5192.

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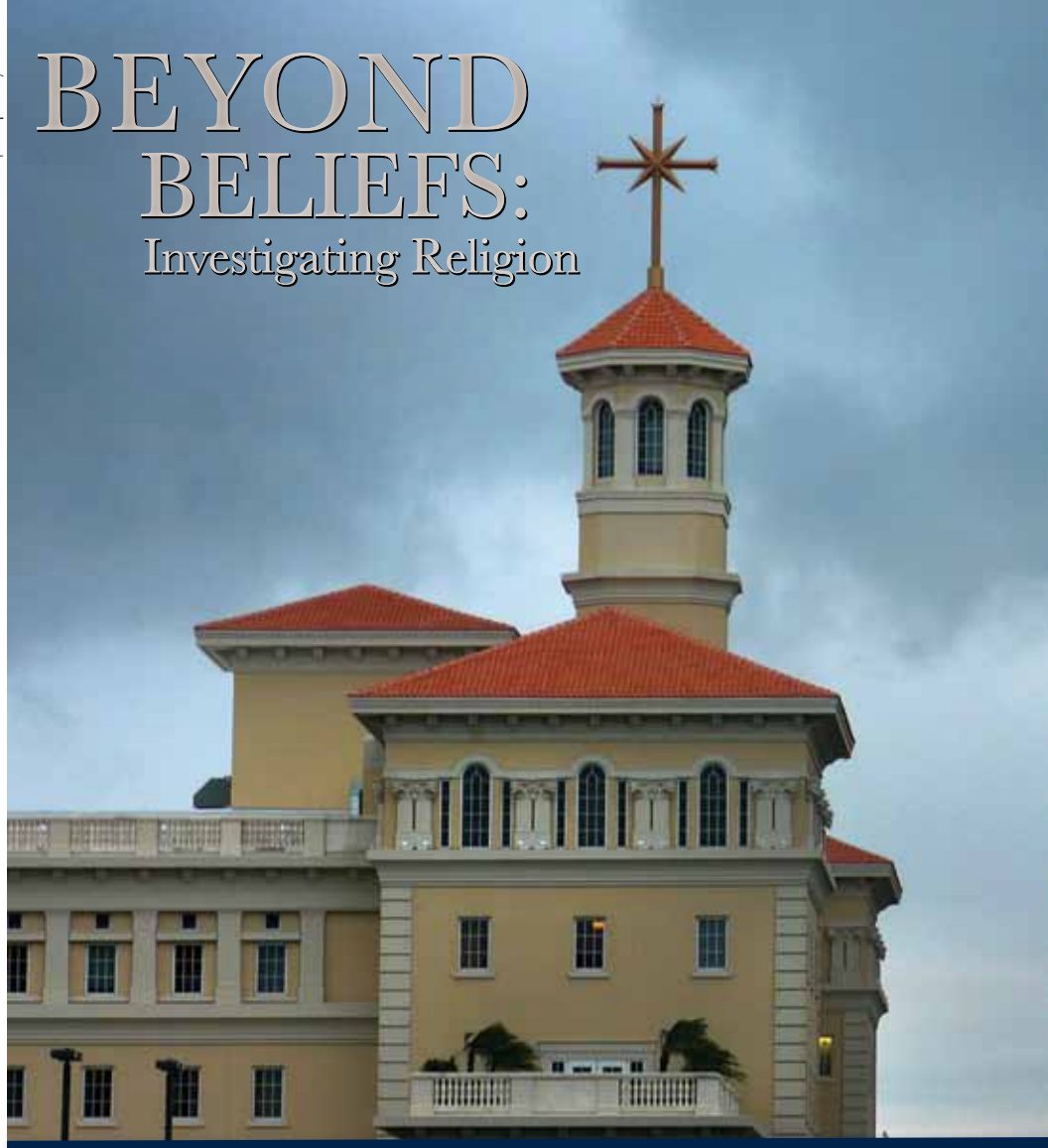
BEYOND BELIEFS:
Investigating Religion

Maurice Rivenbark | Tampa Bay Times



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A vote for CAR

BY MARK HORVIT

This past election has been cast as a turning point for data analysis in journalism.

Journalists like Nate Silver of The New York Times who analyzed poll results and crunched numbers did an infinitely better job of forecasting the outcome than those who didn't.

Shocking, I know.

I've been asked many times whether I view this as some sort of vindication for the kind of computer-assisted reporting training that IRE has conducted – and proselytized for – for more than 20 years.

I won't speak for the entire organization, but for me, the answer is pretty simple.

Nope.

That's not because these journalists didn't do great work – they did. And it's not because there isn't a benefit to all the coverage of the wonders of actually looking at data when trying to draw conclusions of fact.

It's just that I don't think we needed any validation.

I first experienced the value of being able to really crunch numbers in the early '90s when I worked with an amazing CAR reporter, Frank Bass, in Houston. I saw what Frank could do, and when I went to my next job, I attended an IRE-NICAR boot camp in Columbia, Mo., to learn how to do it myself.

I wasn't the same reporter after those six brain-draining days. I looked at sourcing differently, I approached stories differently, and every major story or project I was involved with from that moment forward had a data element as a key component. And every story was better for it.

That's what most journalists find after they begin to learn how to analyze data. IRE has trained thousands of them, and now that I have the honor to work for the organization, I see every month the impact of sending reporters and editors armed with CAR skills back to their communities. The stories they do – large and small – hit with more power, have longer lasting impact and bring about change.

It was heartening in the post-election days to see a growing awareness that those who actually took the time to crunch the data generally provided better pre-election coverage than those who didn't.

I've gotta be honest – I don't see why that's any sort of revelation. When I learned how to conduct better interviews, I had better stories. When I learned how to read and analyze documents, I had better stories.

When you have more skills, and when you can increase the scope and reach of your reporting, you get better results.

So yes, it was heartening in the post-election days to see a growing awareness that those who took the time to crunch the data generally provided better pre-election coverage than those who didn't.

But it's no surprise to the thousands of journalists who crunch data every day to provide better coverage of their communities.

And I don't think it's surprising to the readers and viewers who have come to rely on those journalists to give them a better understanding of the places they live.

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 honored

Jonathan Austin and Susan Austin of the Yancey County News are the winners of the 2012 Tom and Pat Gish Award for courage, integrity and tenacity in rural journalism, presented by the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues, based at the School of Journalism and Telecommunications at the University of Kentucky.

Jonathan Austin wrote about the experience of starting a newspaper and reporting on local corruption in rural North Carolina in the Summer 2012 IRE Journal.

IRE trains South African journalists as part of Power Reporting conference

African journalists face different reporting barriers than their colleagues in the U.S., yet they share the desire to learn investigative techniques.

IRE traveled to Johannesburg, South Africa at the end of October to train reporters at the annual Power Reporting: The African Investigative Journalism Conference.

More than 200 journalists attended the three-day conference, which included typical sessions, such as hands-on Excel training, but also addressed the risks that some journalists face.

The Dangers

Freedom of the press takes on a different meaning in Africa. Journalists have been murdered, exiled and imprisoned for publishing the truth.

Somalia remains the most dangerous country on the continent for journalists. As of the end of October, 17 journalists have been murdered this year – the deadliest on record in Somalia. A Somalian radio journalist died on Oct. 28 from gunshot wounds, according to AfrikNews.

At supper, a Nigerian journalist casually talks about having both legs broken and serving time in jail for his reports.

In some countries, defamation is criminal and even if reports are true, journalists face jail time.

Amazingly, conference attendees are eager to learn the latest techniques on how to dig deeper and produce even more impactful investigative stories.

Open Records

The majority of countries in Africa do not have open records laws. Ten of the 54 have access-to-information laws, but as in Western countries, the key is that governments abide by the laws.

Impactful Investigations

One of the presenters was Ghana journalist Anas Ameyaw Anas, who is known for his undercover work. Anas wore a mask during his conference presentation about his latest investigation into a doctor performing abortions and raping his patients.

Anas went undercover and placed a hidden camera in the exam room.

The three-month investigation captured the doctor raping more than 50 patients, usually in the middle of the abortion.

Anas' TV news story included graphic video of a blue bucket full of blood, close-ups of the womens' vaginas during the abortions and footage of the doctor raping his patients. The doctor was subsequently arrested.

There is some great investigative work being done on the continent. From a free-trade cocoa investigation to an in-depth look into Somali pirates, the investigations have worldwide impact. With such talented journalists learning even more investigative techniques last month, it's an area to watch.

IRE members **Joe Germuska**, **John Keefe, Ryan Pitts, Serdar Tumgoren** and **Derek Willis** were awarded Knight Foundation grants that will create online resources for journalists.

Their projects were among six winning news innovations intended to improve access to information on local communities, air quality, elections, demographics and more. In total, the winners received $2.22 million as winners of the Knight News Challenge: Data. The competition sought ideas "that make the large amounts of information produced each day available, understandable and actionable," according to a Knight Foundation press release.

Germuska of the Chicago Tribune and project partners Keefe of WNYC-New York and Pitts of The (Spokane, Wash.) Spokesman-Review were awarded $450,000 to continue work on Census.IRE.org, which was originally built as a volunteer effort organized by IRE and funded by the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute.

Germuska said the team plans to add the American Community Survey (ACS) data, which includes information about income, occupation, education, veteran status and quite a bit more. It will also improve the fundamentals of the site, designing more intuitive navigation and developing an easier-to-understand "profile page," which will be the starting place for learning about any city, county or other census geography. The team also has a number of ambitious "stretch goals" for other tools which will make census-based reporting easier.

"U.S. Census data can be intimidating, but it also is key to grounding stories in the facts about a place," Germuska said. "Our project will distill the accumulated expertise of veteran census reporters so that all journalists can more easily use this information."

Willis of The New York Times and Tumgoren of The Washington Post were awarded $200,000 for their OpenElections project.

OpenElections will create the first comprehensive source of official election results.

"Finding consistent and accurate election results is too hard, with official returns scattered in different formats and locations among the 50 states," Willis said. "OpenElections aims to make it easier for journalists and developers to get what they need by identifying and organizing results in useful formats for federal and most statewide offices."

They envision the database will allow people who work with election data to download the information in various formats for data analysis or web applications and interactive graphics. It will also allow for the possibility of linking election results with other existing databases.

IRE will serve as the fiscal agent on both grants.

David Fritze took over as executive editor at Oklahoma Watch, a nonprofit investigative and in-depth reporting service.

Fritze had been a senior editor at The Arizona Republic, where he led a team of reporters that produced page one enterprise and investigative stories. He also played a leading role in the newspaper's coverage of the January 2011 shooting rampage near Tucson, Ariz., for which The Republic was a finalist for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize in breaking news reporting.

Read updates online or submit Member News items at ire.org/member-news.

Exonerations Uncover Errors

Texas investigation finds prosecutorial misconduct

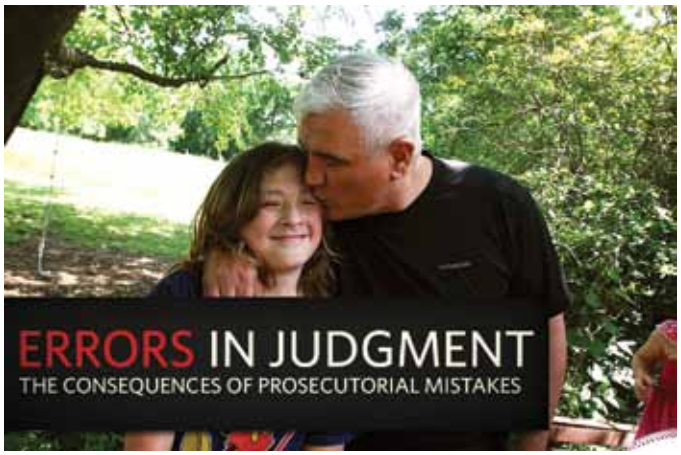
By Brandi Grissom
The Texas Tribune

In 2011, Michael Morton was exonerated after he spent nearly 25 years in prison for his wife's murder. The case fanned the flames of a fiery debate already under way nationally about prosecutorial misconduct.

In Morton's case, his lawyers alleged that the prosecutor in 1987 had withheld critical evidence that could have led to his acquittal. The Innocence Project, which had helped lead the fight for DNA testing that eventually proved Morton's innocence, argued that prosecutorial misconduct was happening on a larger scale than the public was aware. And, they said, it was mostly unpunished.

I wanted to find out how many other Texas exoneration cases involved allegations of prosecutorial misconduct and whether the prosecutors in those cases had ever been reprimanded.

Mark Graham



Former death row inmate Kerry Max Cook kisses his son Kerry Justice Cook.

My first task was be finding a list of all the Texas exonerations. I thought that would be fairly easy. Surely, I figured, one of the innocence organizations would have a tally. Wrong. I learned that professors at Northwestern University and the University of Michigan were compiling a list of the exonerations nationwide, but late in 2011, all they had was a list of names.

I started slowly putting together case profiles on each of the 80 Texas names on the list. But I wasn't sure exactly how to determine whether prosecutorial error had occurred. Just reading news reports about the cases wasn't enough. And the court records available on LexisNexis weren't always complete or detailed.

Then, in March 2012, the Northern California Innocence Project issued a report alleging that in 91 cases from 2004-2008, courts had ruled that prosecutors had engaged in misconduct or made errors. None of those prosecutors, the report stated, had been reprimanded.

I learned from their work that I needed to get the findings of fact in each case to determine whether the court had made a ruling on prosecutorial misconduct. I also learned that the fact that a prosecutor made a mistake did not necessarily mean the outcome was wrong or that the error contributed to a wrong outcome.

> There were 21 cases in which the courts had determined that a prosecutor's error had contributed to the wrong outcome. Next, I needed to figure out which of those prosecutors had been reprimanded by the State Bar of Texas.

In May, Northwestern University and the University of Michigan released the National Registry of Exonerations they had been working to compile. For me, this seemed like a godsend. The registry not only had a list of all the exonerations in Texas, but the researchers also had compiled valuable information about the details of each case. Included in the information was a column they had marked "Government Misconduct." I asked the professors who worked on the project if they would share the database they had compiled, along with the documentation they had gathered in each of the cases they identified with misconduct.

From there, I created binders with profiles of each case. I soon realized that what the researchers categorized as government misconduct was broader than just prosecutor misconduct. It included cases in which police or other law enforcement officials had made mistakes.

To ensure that I had a full understanding of each case and what the courts had found regarding the prosecutors' actions, I knew I had to find and review each ruling.

In Texas, the state's top criminal court, the Court of Criminal Appeals, makes rulings in cases that are reversed. Often, those rulings simply adopt findings of the lower court, which heard the evidence in the case and recommended the reversal. In some of the cases, the appeals court was able to provide me with an electronic copy of those findings. But many of the cases were old and located off-site. The dataset included cases that had been overturned since 1989. I asked the court to bring in the case files, and I spent days in the basement of the court building, combing through old files to locate the findings of fact in each of the 86 cases. I made copies of each one, along with other supporting material I found, and included those in the binder with the case profile.

Earlier, data reporter Ryan Murphy and I had created a spreadsheet with the information from the national registry. I reviewed all of the files from appeals court and added information into the spreadsheet about whether the court had found misconduct by the prosecutor in each case. By the time I finished reviewing the files, I ended up with four 2.5-inch binders filled with case profiles. There were court rulings, news stories and information from the Innocence Project in cases that organization worked on.

The spreadsheet showed me there were 21 cases in which the courts had determined that a prosecutor's error had contributed to the wrong outcome. Next, I needed to figure out which of those prosecutors had been reprimanded by the State Bar of Texas.

Officials at the State Bar informed me that the agency doesn't track prosecutor discipline separately from that of other lawyers. But the

chief disciplinary counsel, who had worked at the agency since 1985, said she could recall only three instances in which a prosecutor had been publicly reprimanded. None of those reprimands was related to the 21 cases with prosecutorial error.

Next, I wanted to talk to now-free defendants about how the prosecutors' actions and their years of wrongful imprisonment had affected their lives. One of the most tragic cases I had reviewed involved a couple convicted in 1989 of murdering the woman's 4-year-old daughter. The court ruled in that case that the prosecutor had withheld photos that showed that a pack of dogs had killed the little girl. Debbie Tucker Loveless and John Harvey Miller spent four years in prison before a lawyer appointed to help in their appeals found the photos and showed them to experts.

I spent weeks trying to find the couple, who had been released in 1993. The lawyer who helped free them had Alzheimer's disease and was in a nursing home. But his wife, who had been his legal assistant in the case, was able to remember many of the details. She had lost touch with the couple but provided me with all the phone numbers she still had. None of them led to Loveless and Miller. I was, however, able to interview the former prosecutor who tried the couple and is now in private practice. He was adamant that Loveless and Tucker were guilty and that he had not made any mistakes in the case. He made another key point, which I needed to make clear in my writing. Loveless and Miller, like a number of the other 86 names on the list from the university researchers, were not officially exonerated. Their convictions were overturned, but technically, they could still be retried.

Much to his dismay and frustration, Kerry Max Cook was not among those listed on the registry of exonerations. He was in the middle of a fight to prove his innocence, even though he had been released in 1999 from death row, where he spent more than two decades. Courts in Cook's case have ruled that prosecutors committed egregious misconduct, including withholding evidence that could help prove his innocence and making a deal with a witness who lied and then lying about the deal to the jury. But prosecutors in Cook's case insist that they did not commit misconduct and that he is guilty. We went to Dallas to videotape an interview with Cook and his son about his continuing fight to prove his innocence.

Because the Michael Morton case had launched this debate over prosecutor misconduct, I wanted to bring something new to the discussion of his experience. Morton's son Eric Olson, who had been 3 when his mother was killed and his father was sentenced to life in prison, agreed to an exclusive first interview with me. He and his wife talked about how his life had been shaped by a prosecutor who convinced a jury and his mother's family that his father was a cold-blooded killer. In his late 20s, Olson was getting to know his father for the first time. We also interviewed Morton on video about how he is reconnecting with his son and about his campaign to ensure accountability for prosecutors so that what happened to him doesn't happen to anyone else.

The Texas wrongful conviction interactive explorer.

We traveled to Dallas and Fort Worth to get the viewpoint of high-profile prosecutors. We interviewed them on video about the scope of the problem, about what leads to misconduct and about what, if anything, needs to be done to improve accountability for prosecutors. The prosecutors pointed out that while a court may use the words "prosecutorial misconduct" to describe what happened, that term is loaded in the eyes of the public. To face reprimand by the State Board, a prosecutor must have intentionally made a mistake that deprived a defendant of his or her rights. So, for the purposes of our story, we decided to use the term "prosecutorial error."

While I did the reporting and writing for the narrative stories, Murphy took the lead on creating the interactive data explorer that would accompany the story. We scanned the case profiles in each of the 86 overturned conviction cases from 1989 to 2011.

In planning the data explorer, we wanted to make sure every wrongfully convicted individual was equally represented. Getting basic demographic data was easy: All it required was a Web scrape of the National Registry of Exonerations listings for Texas. But the data did not include photos of each person. Thanks to the Innocence Project, we secured photos of a third of the 86 individuals. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice also helped, providing us with at least another third. But for the final third we had to do some sleuthing. We looked up each person without a photo on Google and found contacts and official sites for many of them. Through this, we were able to acquire the photos for most of the remaining individuals. Then, we built and scripted the simple interface, and it was ready to go.

In the end, we had four narrative stories that explained the results of the data and research but also focused on what that data meant for the people who were affected. We also produced a video package that addressed possible solutions for lawmakers who will be dealing with the issue of misconduct in 2013 when they return to the Capitol in Austin. And we had an interactive data application that allows viewers to examine all the data themselves.

Because Texas has more exonerations than most other states, this project would be less time consuming for others. The National Registry of Exonerations is a great launching pad. From there, the key is finding out how your state's court system works to track down the rulings and then learning who is responsible for prosecutorial oversight.

Ryan Murphy of The Texas Tribune contributed to this report.

Brandi Grissom is The Tribune's managing editor and joined the staff when The Tribune launched in 2009. In addition to editing duties, Grissom leads coverage of criminal justice issues. Grissom, along with Tribune multimedia producer Justin Dehn, received a 2012 regional Edward R. Murrow Award for investigative reporting.

Courtesy Michael Morton

Exoneree Michael Morton poses for a photo with his son Eric Olson.

The prosecutors pointed out that while a court may use the words "prosecutorial misconduct" to describe what happened, that term is loaded in the eyes of the public. To face reprimand by the State Board, a prosecutor must have intentionally made a mistake that deprived a defendant of his or her rights.

Konstantin Chernichkin | Kyiv Post

Inside a US registered tissue bank that allegedly operated illegally in Ukraine for more than a year.

Tissue Recovery

Investigating entities that harvest human tissues

By Kate Willson

Editor's Note: Kate Willson wrote this story as a member of The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. She recently left the ICIJ to advise student journalists at Oregon State University.

I don't speak German. I don't have sources within the South Korean Ministry of Health. I don't have the budget or the time to travel to a half-dozen cities across Ukraine. But there is a network that made this possible. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) is a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit with a staff of five. Yet our global ranks are filled with more than 160 of the world's best muckrakers in 60 countries.

Together we collaborate on in-depth transnational stories – providing stipends for freelancers, covering travel costs for reporters in the field, and relying on the enthusiasm of our members and the promise to share in a great story. Our projects stem from our members' work, from our own ideas and from whistleblowers. Once we complete a project, we offer the content for free to publications across the globe. Why do we give away a story that costs hundreds of thousands of dollars to produce? We believe in providing the global community with investigative reporting even when the established media can't afford to fund it.

Read the investigative project icij.org/tissue

Our most recent story about the global trade in human tissues is a good example of how we operate. Last fall, Australian editor Gerard Ryle took on the job as ICIJ director. Soon after introductions he asked if I was interested in body parts. "What kinds of parts?" I asked. He wanted to probe into a little-known industry that uses musculoskeletal tissue such as skin and bone in manufacturing medical implants. The Orange County Register in California had done a stellar series in 2000 about the tissue trade in the United States. But the industry had grown and globalized. Ryle believed there was a story there. And he was right.

After eight months of interviews, records requests and data analysis our team found:

Laws in most countries make it illegal to buy and sell human parts. But a caveat allows some publicly-traded companies to turn a profit by charging ill-defined "reasonable payments" to compensate them for obtaining and handling the tissue and parts, which can be used in dental implants, transplants and coverings for burn victims. The number of players doing business in the United States has quadrupled since 2002.

Florida-based RTI Biologics and its German subsidiary Tutogen Medical obtained significant amounts of tissue from Ukraine.

As we dug into the industry, we started to see a pattern. RTI and Tutogen have repeatedly obtained tissue from suppliers that were later investigated for stealing human parts. Four of those suppliers have been investigated for allegedly taking tissue after bullying families into signing consent forms or simply forging their signatures. Tutogen continued doing business in the country despite concerns raised in confidential corporate memos about the company's inability to track the money it sent into Ukraine or control middlemen in the country.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration hasn't changed the way it inspects tissue establishments' documents in spite of a global scandal involving a New York dental surgeon who stole body parts – some infected with HIV or sepsis – then filed forged, falsified and incomplete paperwork to his buyers.

The trade in human tissues is virtually untraceable at a global level. The United States is the world's primary supplier of human tissue, but U.S. officials don't track those exports. Nor can they systematically track tissue imported from overseas.

At ICIJ, we vet each potential project before calling on reporters in the field. I spent two months reading news stories, Congressional reports, and the website of the Food and Drug Administration – the U.S. agency tapped to police the trade. I filed more than 200 public records requests to the FDA, state agencies and public hospitals seeking records about the trade and safety of human tissue products. I talked to experts in the United States and Europe and reached out to high-profile felons and industry insiders. Once we narrowed the scope, we sent an invitation to our members through the ICIJ listerv. We invited reporters to do some digging in their own regions and join the team.

By February we had assembled a stellar cast. Martina Keller in Germany had been reporting on the trade in human tissue for Stern and Spiegel. Vlad Lavrov at the Kiev Post was eager to report on an international project starring Ukraine. Mar Cabra in Spain offered her skills at cracking the European Union bureaucracy. Nari Kim, a TV reporter in South Korea, offered to reach out to government officials in Seoul. Alexenia Dimitrova at 24 Chasa in Bulgaria began to investigate leads in Sofia. Together with Thomas Maier at Newsday and Sandra Bartlett and Joe Shapiro at NPR in the U.S., we tackled records requests, interviews and government opacity. ICIJ Deputy Director Marina Walker abandoned her own investigation as we neared publication to help produce the series and work with media partners. Senior Editor Mike Hudson came to the rescue with a heavy edit of our copy. Multimedia editor Kimberley Porteous complied graphics and

Reporting Resources

The FDA lists more than 2,500 active, registered tissue banks all over the world. It's a billion-dollar industry that is growing and changing so fast regulators can't keep pace. You might decide to find out more about the industry in your area – to look at "traditional" tissue such as skin and bone or the emerging market in stem cells.

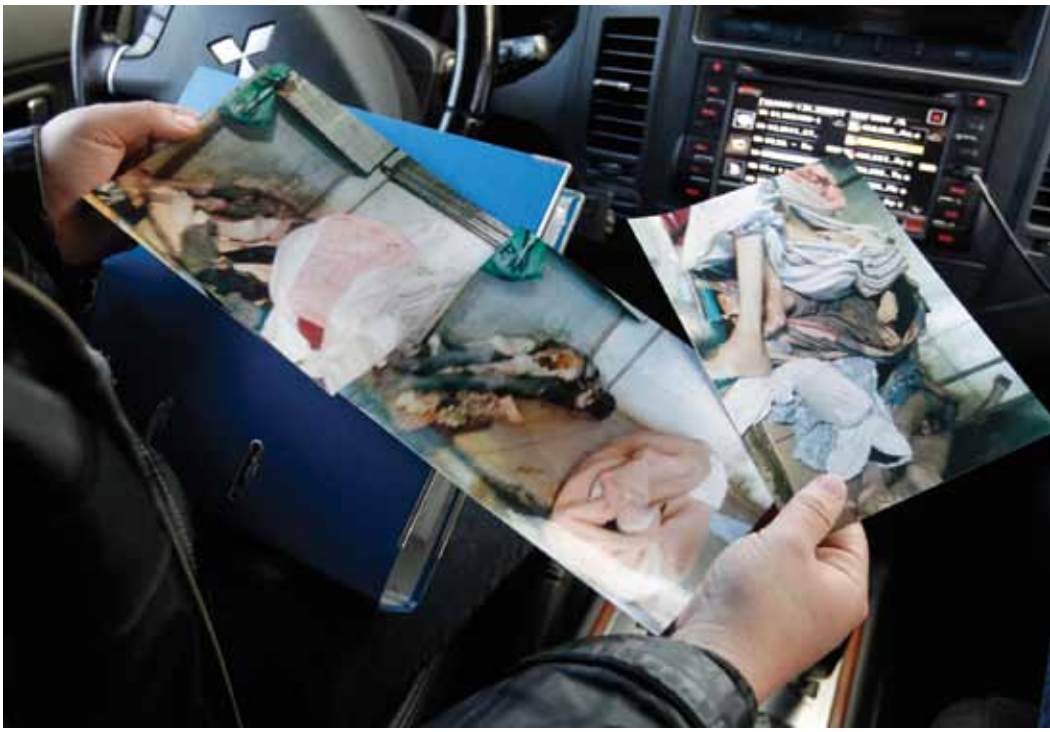
FDA Registry: Find out about tissue banks operating in your area.

Inspections: Have they undergone any FDA inspections? If so, look for any resulting in the codes "VAI" (Voluntary Action Indicated) or "OAI" (Official Action Indicated). Those will have generated a report called a 483. You can file a records request to obtain those documents – some of which are quite surprising. Your state or city might also conduct inspections.

Problems: The FDA maintains databases on deviations (when a tissue bank deviates from standard procedure, such as accepting a donor after the allowable 24-hour limit or not conducting proper infectious testing). Because many human tissues are made into medical devices, they are included in databases of adverse events (when something goes wrong with a product, causing injury or even death) and recalls. None of these are specifically for human tissues, so deciphering what is human rather than bovine or porcine can be a challenge.

Litigation: Look up tissue banks in state and federal court databases.

Konstantin Chernichkin | Kyiv Post



An owner of a nearby funeral home shows photographs he took inside a Ukrainian tissue bank. "We put the pressure on the police to open a criminal case," he said. "Back then, no one knew about the tissue recovery thing."

We filed hundreds of requests for records for FDA inspection reports, investigation files and hospital purchase orders. We also read Security and Exchange Commission filings for publicly traded companies that operated tissue banks, and 990 filings for tax-exempt, nonprofit tissue banks.

a mini-documentary using ICIJ footage along with that offered by A & O Buero productions in Germany.

ICIJ teams operate in a virtual newsroom. We meet over Skype, share documents through an online file-sharing system called Box.net, and exchange ideas and updates on a project-specific listserv. But if we have the budget, we try to organize an in-person gathering. The tissue team met in Brussels to share leads and divide the workload. This is a fun part of the job, but it's also key for a successful collaboration. These projects get stressful, and journalists will disagree. Meeting in person – and enjoying a few beers – tempers later frustrations and softens hard words.

What surprised us most about reporting on the trade in human-tissue implants was the lack of cooperation from the industry and the FDA. Reporters tried for months to start a dialogue with experts. But offers of on-record interviews were later rescinded. Other attempts were rebuffed. Still others were ignored. Industry representatives told us they had been burned in the past and didn't want to talk. As for the FDA, we found the press office had a culture of refusing to cooperate with reporters' requests.

To compensate, we filed hundreds of requests for records for FDA inspection reports, investigation files and hospital purchase orders. We also read Security and Exchange Commission filings for publicly traded companies that operated tissue banks, and 990 filings for tax-exempt, nonprofit tissue banks. We read key reports about the tissue banking industry produced by Congress, the FDA, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Office of Inspector General of the Department of Health and Human Services. We sought out industry insiders who would answer questions, including whistle-blowers and convicted felons.

For a more systematic look at the industry, I compiled data on imports, inspections, adverse events and accident reports filed with the FDA. David Donald, data editor at our parent Center for Public Integrity, guided my requests for data and trained me on the spot on how to clean and analyze the data in Excel and SQL Server. The limitations of the data highlighted the government's inability to track the global trade. In more than 900,000 import records that the FDA indicated could include human tissue, ICIJ could identify less than 2 percent as clearly containing human tissue. We also analyzed membership of the American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB) – the world's leading trade group. Executives of the group told us that virtually all entities that harvest human tissues were accredited, which means they must meet stricter guidelines than those of the FDA. But when we compared the AATB's list of accredited establishments to the FDA's registry, we found that only a third of those registered with the FDA were AATB-accredited.

Palantir, a technology company whose software is used to analyze big data sets and social networks, donated its platform so we could make unstructured data, like corporate filings and court documents, "talk to" structured data such as spreadsheets. I spent two months working with Palantir's team to input key documents and build out the network. It helped show how disparate entities and individuals were connected. And we were able to see how a corporation grew over time, and display geospatial patterns. It was as addictive and fun as playing video games.

We presented our findings during a summit last July on illicit networks sponsored by Google Ideas, which acts as a think tank for the big technology firm. Following our presen-

Dan Evans | Lodi News-Sentinel

Mandi Eisenbeis and her mother Patricia Towle sued the California organ bank that recovered Mandi's father's tissues after the funeral director called the recovery "a hack job."

tation, Interpol Secretary General Ron Noble asked how Interpol (the International Criminal Police Organization) could get access to the data. "As Interpol Secretary, I commit myself to trying to help organization member countries do something about this," he told the audience.

Our stories appeared in a dozen countries and more than 10 languages – in print and online, broadcast by radio and television. Publishing partners included The Huffington Post, Le Monde in France, Folha de S.Paulo in Brazil and the Asahi Shimbun in Japan. Lawmakers in the U.S. have begun to inquire about our findings and changes have been implemented in the way the U.S. military awards medical contracts for human tissue products. Tutogen Medical has since canceled its licenses to import Ukrainian tissue to Germany. Meanwhile, we continue to cover pending criminal investigations and court cases and are working on follow-up stories.

Kate Willson began advising student journalists at Oregon State University this fall after a career as an investigative reporter. Willson joined ICIJ in 2007 as an investigative reporting fellow after a career in newspapers during which time she received more than 20 regional and national first-place awards for her investigative, enterprise, and crime reporting.

Organizing your files

Everyone has her own way of keeping track of information. Organization is particularly difficult and critical during long projects when a reporter compiles libraries of documents. During our eight-month investigation, I read more than 1,000 documents and interviews. Here is how I keep track of findings:

Electronic copies: Paper is impossible to keyword search. It's clumsy and heavy to haul around. So I save everything as a PDF. When I receive paper documents from a source or from a records request, I immediately scan them and save them.

Adobe Acrobat Pro: After I have a PDF, my first step is to run optical character recognition. This can take a while for large documents, spurring fresh pots of tea, impromptu yoga poses and office chatter. Having searchable text saves time in the long run and makes my next step easier. I read through each document, creating bookmarks and highlighting important information. Then my colleagues can simply scan the file for the best bits.

Excel: Now comes the most crucial step. Imagine reading a document in December, but waiting until June to write the story. Would you remember all the content that document contains? I wouldn't. Before moving that PDF from my desktop to its proper place in my project folder, I go back through the document one more time, logging important information into a spreadsheet. Each fact or quote is given a subject tag. In that way, when I'm writing about a specific topic, I can "sort" or "filter" on that topic. I also include the source and the file name. That's important so I can access that file quickly when I write and when I insert footnotes for our fact-checking staff and lawyers.

Missing The Mark

Money meant for small businesses goes to large corporations

By Stephen Stock and Liz Wagner
NBC Bay Area Investigative Unit

It has been called the engine that drives the American economy. In fact, small businesses provide jobs for nearly half the nation's workforce. The federal government has a goal to give at least 23 percent of all federal contracts to small business.

Last year the Small Business Administration set aside more than $422 billion worth of federal contracts for small businesses.

But the NBC Bay Area Investigative Unit discovered thousands of contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars went to huge corporations. At least 24 companies, either based or with major offices in the Bay Area, had received at least 299 contracts labeled "small business" totaling $77 million since 2009.

Year after year NBC Bay Area found that the SBA has fallen short of that goal. Hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of contracts are going to companies such as Apple Inc., Microsoft Corp., AT&T Inc., Sprint Nextel Corp, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Northrop Grumman Corp., Sysco Corporation, Fujifilm Holdings, Sharp Corp., Johnson Controls Inc., and Shell Oil Co.

In 2011, NBC Bay Area found almost 29,000 contracts with a value of more than $3.5 billion went to companies with annual revenue of more than $25 million dollars.

The federal data shows all these contracts are SBA set-asides, and the contracts come from all types of federal agencies, from the departments of Defense, Agriculture, and Homeland Security to the General Services Administration.

In 2011, NBC Bay Area found almost 29,000 contracts with a value of more than $3.5 billion went to companies with annual revenue of more than $25 million dollars.

Getting the data

This is a story anyone in any market or town can do.

Start by going to the Federal Procurement Data System's website: www.fpds.gov.

This is where all federal government contracts are tracked. It can be intimidating to navigate, but there is a lot of great data here.

Search

The site has been made much easier to navigate by the "ezSearch" bar at the top of the page.

- You can actually type "'small business contracts', 'small business set aside contracts,'" and the site will give you pages of the types of contracts you request.
- You can type your town (for example, "San Francisco"), and it will give you contracts awarded either from a federal agency or to a vendor with offices in that town.

You can easily find vendors receiving contracts in your area. You won't look far before finding some of those companies are in fact large corporations.

NBC

Lloyd Chapman; President of the American Small Business League, a federal contract watchdog.

Results

For each result, the page shows:

- Action Obligation – the monetary value of the contract
- Vendor – company that got the contract
- Vendor's DUNS number – the company's unique ID
- Federal contracting agency – federal agency awarding the contract
- Date, Award Type, even the NAICS Code (the industry code)

You can download your search results as a PDF or CSV (comma separated values) file.

Details

You can see details of each contract on the website, including whether the contract is meant for a small business.

- Choose a contract in your search results, and click "View" (next to "Award ID (Mod#)").
- At the bottom of the next screen are two boxes, one labeled "Competition Information" and the last box labeled "Preference Programs/Other Data." If the tab has "Small Business" listed next to "Business Size Selection," the contract is meant for a small business.

Raw Data

We also obtained raw data in zip file form. This entails millions of records. But simply filter for Column H (CO_BUS_SIZE_DETERMINATION) looking only for "Small Business" and you get all contracts meant for small business. Filter further for the company annual revenue (column ED) or number of employees (column EE) and you quickly get very large corporations listed as receiving small business contracts.

You can sort the data by vendors that receive awards in your area or hometown.

Evaluating it

The SBA and Congress are both well aware of this problem. In fact, the SBA annually puts out a "scorecard" assessing whether it meets its goal of setting aside about 23% of all federal contracts to small businesses. But often even that assessment is flawed since many contracts counted by the SBA as "small business" instead go to huge corporations.

Find SBA scorecards here: sba.gov/content/small-business-procurement-goaling-scorecards.

There are also several recent SBA Inspector General reports that continually point out this problem.

Besides the obvious examples (Apple is NOT a small business, right?), you can rely on the SBA's own rules when determining if a company meets the legal criteria for a "small business."

Go to the website, where it has the U.S. Small Business Administration's Table of Small Business Size Standards: sba.gov/content/table-small-business-size-standards

There you can find the legal cutoff to determine whether or not a company is legally considered "small" for any business in any industry.

Several private groups have taken up the fight to make sure small business set-asides actually go to small businesses. They can help facilitate getting you raw data so that you can do your own sorting and filtering.

- We talked to the American Small Business League in Petaluma, Calif. Lloyd Chapman, the president, has testified before Congress on this issue. His communications team is eager to get the word out and helped us to obtain raw, unfiltered data. Their website is asbl.com.
- Another group that is outspoken on this issue is the Fairness in Procurement Alliance in Jacksonville, Fla. Raul Espinosa is the founder and CEO and is always eager to address this issue. Their website is fpaportal.org.

NBC

Fred Pourmirzaie owns a legitimate small business is frustrated by the SBA.

We also mined into the FPDS data to find small companies that actually got government contracts, and to see what their reaction to this issue might be. Some business owners were reticent to speak with us, fearing that they wouldn't get future contracts if they spoke out. Others agreed to talk about the issue and the frustration of trying to land contracts with the federal government. Almost every one (whether they talked on the record or not) acknowledged this issue as a huge problem and a concern for them.

We also worked with the American Small Business League to identify local small businesses that had attempted to land federal contracts but had been unsuccessful. That gave us a narrative to help frame the story.

Finally, we reached out to the SBA directly and to all the large companies we named in the report (as well as many of those we did not name.) Many would not return our requests for comment.

The SBA did make a spokesman available by telephone from Washington, D.C., to help explain why this happens. But they would not make anyone available to talk on camera. The SBA said many of these examples revolved around three issues: bad coding on the contracts, contracts awarded to a business that was small but then bought out by a large corporation, and human error.

Stephen Stock joined fellow IRE members Matt Goldberg, Tony Kovaleski and Jenna Susko in helping to form this year, from scratch, one of the country's largest local TV investigative units; a unit with 16 members and counting. In three decades, Stock has won a Peabody, a duPont, three SPJ Green Eyeshades (two Best of TV,) two Murrows, two Florida AP Best in Show, 10 regional Emmys and two IRE Finalist.

As an investigative producer with NBC Bay Area News, Liz Wagner has exposed dirty conditions at one of the largest food distributors in the country, examined gas leaks and repair delays at California's largest utility company and uncovered unchecked claims of sexual assault and racism in the California National Guard. In January Liz joined 15 other members of NBC Bay Area's Investigative Unit. She previously worked as a reporter and documentary producer in New York City.

Related Sites

Here's the SBA website: sba.gov.

You can watch our story here: nbcbayarea.com/investigations/Large-Firms-Land-Small-Business-Set-Asides-163194546.html.

You can also see other stories our investigative unit has done, including other federal spending investigations, here: nbcbayarea.com/investigations.

Books to work by

Suggested reading for investigative reporters


Fred Conrad | NYT

BY DIANA B. HENRIQUES
THE NEW YORK TIMES

It would be more impressive to report that the most influential book in my investigative reporting career was Robert Caro's "The Power Broker" or perhaps something by Proust. But the truth is that the book that most influenced my early career was "How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life," a classic time-management tutorial by Alan Lakein that has sold more than 3 million copies since it was published in 1973.

Back then, I was working as a Monmouth County Courthouse reporter for the Asbury Park Press. My week was built around the fixtures of the court calendar: motion days, grand jury days, trial dates. I struggled to follow up on some promising tip, only to be derailed by those darned courthouse cows that needed to be milked every morning, no matter what.

Barbara would weep - because too many investigative reporters confuse being tough with being rude.

Lakein's advice was simple: Set a big, meaningful goal and identify the steps necessary to reach it; incorporate some of those steps into your to-do list each day; if a step seems too big to tackle, break it down into smaller tasks that can be done in spare hours or even spare minutes. Before you know it, you're clicking off the steps that bring you closer to your desired destination – whether it's learning a new language or getting a new job.

I saw that Lakein's methods could be adapted to my life as a daily-news reporter trying to find time for investigative projects. Turning a neglected tip into a story became my goal, and I carefully analyzed the steps necessary to reach it – what I needed to learn, whom I needed to interview, what documents could help and where I needed to look for them. The result was a long, detailed list of discrete chores that I could tackle in the unscheduled downtime that is part of any courthouse reporter's life. That approach worked for me – and with a few tweaks, it is still working for me. I have used it to plan every investigative project of my career, including four books, and have found it helpful in organizing smaller projects with weekly deadlines.

Time management is such a fundamental tool for successful investigative reporting that we sometimes don't see it as an independent skill we need to develop. But it is – indeed, over the years I have found that disorganized, unmethodical investigative reporters are a danger to themselves and others. They waste precious resources of time and money, discourage and frustrate their editors and annoy their colleagues.

Okay, what about the second-most influential book in my career? Proust this time? Sorry, Marcel. That book would be "How to Talk to Practically Anybody About Practically Anything," the 1970 classic by the great Barbara Walters.

Over the years, thanks to the cubicle proximity in the various newsrooms I've occupied, I have listened to a lot of really awful interviews. Dead-end questions, triple-barreled questions, arrogant "still-beating-your-wife?" questions, arguments posing as questions. Barbara would weep – because too many investigative reporters confuse being tough with being rude. I have heard surly reporters rudely deliver puffball questions – and I have heard others, the great ones, ask devastating, granite-hard questions as politely as they would ask you to pass the cream.

Being tough but courteous is hard. I still struggle at it, and would have had no chance at all without my high-school debate team credentials and Barbara's book. So why bother? First and most importantly, because you almost always get better information that way. And second, because the dispassionate, fair-minded impression you deliver when you master the technique is your passport to credibility.

As the Walters book makes clear, source management is at least as important to a reporter's success as time management. We all know successful reporters who, like Walters, have a "solid-gold Rolodex." But how did they get it? They built it, business card by business card. But here's the trick: collecting a business card is just step one. The next steps are regular follow-up calls, friendly banter with the phone-answerers and careful notes about the source's interests and career. I remember a young reporter boasting to me that he had something like 4,000 names in his

address book. I smiled but thought, "How many of those people have *you* in *their* address book?" That's what turns a business card into a source – staying in touch, building a professional relationship, "collecting" people in the best sense of the word.

Okay, third most influential book? Surely Proust has a chance here? Well, not exactly – or, at least, not yet.

For the first two decades of my career, I defined myself in my head as "a reporter," not "a writer." While I could quickly assemble a fairly decent story, I didn't relish writing. I loved the hunt for that next elusive fact. Given an hour to do a story, I longed to spend 50 minutes reporting. Given a year, I preferred to spend 360 days reporting. But in time – as the news menu got more crowded and readers got busier and more distracted – I realized that this ratio was leading me in the wrong direction. Masterful storytelling cannot be an afterthought, something you put on the table when the reporting is done and some "writing" needs to be committed.

I confronted this imperative most forcefully when I began work on "The Wizard of Lies," my book on the Bernie Madoff scandal. How on earth could I engage readers when everyone already knew how the story ended? In my quest for powerful storytelling guidance, I found "The Writer's Journey" by Christopher Vogler, who encourages writers to seek inspiration in the archetypal stories embedded in human folklore, mythology and culture. I loved it – maybe you will, too.

Masterful storytelling cannot be an afterthought, something you put on the table when the reporting is done and some "writing" needs to be committed.

In any case, I strongly encourage you to make better writing one of your top priorities going forward. That is the only way investigative journalists can remain relevant and effective. "Tell me a story" is a universal demand. Digging up an ocean of facts does not exempt us from that imperative.

Diana B. Henriques, author of The New York Times bestseller "The Wizard of Lies: Bernie Madoff and the Death of Trust," has been a writer for The New York Times since 1989.

John Partipilo

BEYOND BELIEFS:
Investigating Religion

"Most religion reporting is about ideas, institutions, beliefs and spiritual practices. It involves visits to houses of worship, conversations with believers and clergy, and poring over sacred texts and the work of scholars….
It's not that I don't value watchdog coverage. But it doesn't come naturally on the God beat."

-Bob Smietana, The Tennessean

An Islamic woman goes to the Farooq Islamic Center to pray where vandals inscribed Muslims Go Home on the wall near the enterance. See Anti-Islam story on page 20.

INVESTIGATIONS
ON THE RELIGION BEAT

By Debra L. Mason
Director, Center on Religion & the Professions
Missouri School of Journalism

The advocacy site BishopAccountability.org lists stark numbers that make the case for media investigations into clergy sexual abuse in the U.S. Roman Catholic Church:

More than $3 billion paid out in settlements.

At least 5,679 people have participated in settlements.

These documented settlements represent only one-third of the 15,235 allegations bishops received as of 2009.

Yet investigations of religious groups and nonprofits are but a small fraction of investigations by journalists.

Some reasons are common sense to any reporter, including the fact that "churches" as defined by the IRS are not required to apply for formal nonprofit status. Churches of all denominations and faiths are not required to pay taxes or to file a tax form. A church must file a form 990 only if it has filed a 1023 application to become recognized as a nonprofit or if it makes more than $1,000 in "unrelated business income."

Courtesy of Religion News Service

Dallas pastor Bishop T.D. Jakes preaches on the Trinity Broadcasting Network. At left are TBN founders Jan and Paul Crouch.

Religion itself is fraught with minefields of potential errors or mistakes. Few topics are more complex or diverse. Even if a journalist understands one religion well, there are thousands more to learn, each with unique notions of the role of accountability or issues such as race, women, history, evangelization, geographical span, process for ordination, ritual, understanding of the Scripture, etc.

Pew Research Center surveys show most people are astonishingly ignorant of even the most basic facts about religion, including the growing diversity among U.S. faith groups. Many in the public – journalists included – assume that if they grow up in a church or synagogue, for example, that they have a sufficient understanding of religion – or at least one religion.

The result is a dauntingly high potential for making mistakes – in everything from religious titles used by key sources to misunderstandings of terms of church policy, which is vastly different from group to group. Faith groups also have different notions of individual congregational authority or the autonomy of clergy. It's akin to the diversity in management and organization of corporate America, but without any government mandates or regulations to safeguard against abuses.

The growing number of religion-specific media watch groups are delighted in finding media reporting errors and can have a chilling effect on reporters accused of religious bias or big-

> It's critical that you mute your own biases for or against a religion – particularly the bias of secularity – the view that people of faith are somehow backward, intellectually deficient or wrong-headed.

Resources for investigating religion

ReligionStylebook.com – A searchable database of terms about religion and their proper uses to serve as an appendix to the AP Stylebook.

PewForum.org – The most comprehensive and current data on public attitudes in regard to religion in politics and public life.

BishopAccountability.org – An indispensible resource for anyone investigating cases of clergy abuse.

ReligionLink.org – This site includes source guides on various faiths with links and contact information for key sources. See specifically the source guides.

GuideStar.org – This site provides the largest online repository of non-profits' tax returns, especially the 990s.

Courtesy of Religion News Service

It can be hard to follow the money when writing about churches.

Surveys of clergy and faith leaders show a tremendous distrust of media – beyond that expressed by the general public. Other research shows that the more religiously adherent a person is, the more likely they are to avoid mainstream media.

otry. Sometimes these groups are stridently anti-media, such as the Catholic League. Yet Jews, Mormons, Muslims and Scientologists all have active efforts to silence the media – or at the very least, call them out – for any story that these groups perceive paints their religion in a negative light. Media lawyers have learned to be wary of some religion topics because the backlash can be harsh.

This is nothing new. In the 1980s, when Charlotte Observer investigator Charles Shepard reported about televangelist Jim Bakker and the PTL ministry, some ministry supporters canceled their newspaper subscriptions. Stories of Scientology lawyers visiting newsrooms are easily found. The best defense is to document. Take screen captures, record and use any other means to be able to prove the veracity of your story.

The transient nature of today's media creates a challenge for investigations of religion. The heavy reliance on deep sourcing for these types of investigations and some of the other challenges delineated here mean such investigations can be time-consuming. Warn your editors up front that these sorts of investigations will take time and energy, to get their buy-in from the start.

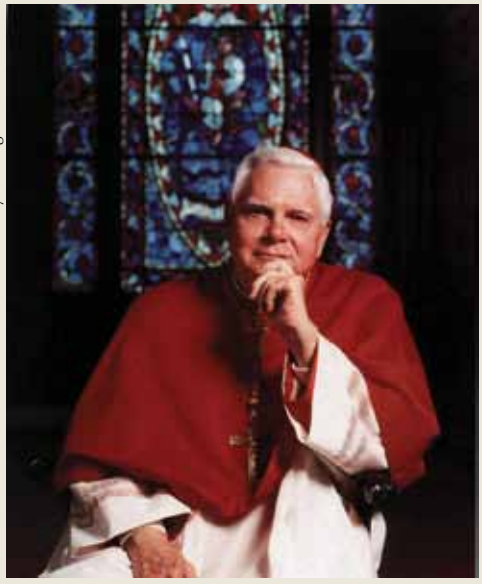
Investigate the people

Dallas Morning News reporter Jeff Weiss has an admonition about religions he often shares when explaining his award-winning approach to reporting about faith and values. Weiss says that the core beliefs of every religion – that is, the beliefs wholly based on faith – may seem fantastical or crazy to an outsider.

Weiss' caution, and mine, is that journalists must resist the urge to prove or disprove the faith-based beliefs of a religion. For some journalists investigating religion this is the biggest challenge: to get beyond this notion that they are investigating a particular religion. Rather, journalists should investigate the people who practice the faith, their motives, their stewardship of others' dollars, their honesty, their greed, their leadership, their actions, their ability to – like the rest of us – abide by the laws of the land within moral and ethical bounds.

To do this, it's critical that you mute your own biases for or against a religion – particularly the bias of secularity – the view that people of faith are somehow backward, intellectually deficient or wrong-headed. These biases will cripple you and blind you in your investigation. If you can't honestly check your religious stereotypes at the door, you need to find something else to investigate.

Courtesy of Religion News Service



A Pew Research Center survey shows most people know little about religion, including Catholicism.

Expect a chilly reception

It's probably fair to say that few politicians or public servants truly "like" the media. Many would likely prefer to operate without Sunshine laws or the Freedom of Information Act. But elected officials understand the watchdog role of the media and respect, or perhaps even fear it. They also understand in sophisticated ways how to try to manipulate media messages for their own gain. Not so for most local religious groups. Surveys of clergy and faith leaders show a tremendous distrust of media – beyond that expressed by the general public. Other research shows that the more religiously adherent a person is, the more likely he or she are to avoid mainstream media.

Faith communities, used to being ignored by mainstream media for decades, may not warm to sudden and intense media scrutiny – even when a religious group or nonprofit has operated in the most noble, responsible and legal of ways. This reality mandates that journalists use their most sophisticated interviewing and

Courtesy of Religion News Service

Jim Bakker, second from left, poses with his then-wife, Tammy Faye Bakker, and his parents, Raleigh and Furnia Bakker, in this 1986 file photo. In the 1980s, when The Charlotte Observer investigated Jim Bakker some ministry supporters canceled their subscriptions.

Courtesy of Religion News Service

The Church of Scientology transformed this former bank in downtown Clearwater, Fla., into part of its headquarters, where church members receive spiritual counseling.

COMING SOON!

In collaboration with Debra Mason, Director of the Center on Religion & the Professions, IRE is adding a new beat book to the series.

Investigating Religion:
An Investigative Reporter's Guide outlines several religions, how to request public records and databases and what is available to request under freedom of information laws.

There are also chapters on 990s, finding reliable sources within the religious community and best practices on the religion beat.

Print and e-version will be available for purchase here: http://store.ire.org.

sourcing skills if they are to get anywhere within often tight-knit, private communities.

Verification and documentation become doubly important as reporters work to investigate individuals whose public identity in legal challenges remains murky. Documents can vanish from the web as soon as you find them. Archive and save everything you can. That said, journalists could easily make a case for "public figure" status for any clergy member who speaks regularly, who advocates in public forums and who has a sizable following. Just keep in mind that unlike news that occurs on public property with public figures, religious groups are private and their offices or places of worship are private property.

Look for illegalities

Likewise, journalists need to remember that faith groups are not democracies. "Majority rules" may apply to national church dictates, but they are just as likely to be handed down to practitioners from a single authority. Religious groups are free to decide their form of governance themselves and journalists must be wary of viewing a highly hierarchical church structure as being inherently either good or bad.

Similarly, the Supreme Court often takes up issues of religious freedoms. Journalists are on stronger ethical footing when they investigate the ways religious groups violate laws that apply to everyone, such as in cases of failing to seek medical treatment to save the life of a child. It may offend our common values as citizens if a faith teaches against sending children to school beyond eighth grade, prohibits military service or excludes women from ordination. Yet the same First Amendment that guarantees journalists the right to investigate faith groups also guarantees the right to religious groups to practice according to their tenets.

Religious groups know how to use the First Amendment, too. Response to your stories may seem over the top and conspiratorial. One Sunday I was working on the city desk when I received a call from the subject of a recent story about his televangelist operation. It was only after a few minutes of his berating and questioning that I learned our conversation was being aired live on his radio broadcast. Another pastor made me the subject of a postcard campaign, flooding my desk with handwritten complaints.

By preparing ourselves with background and context before any investigation of religion and by knowing what to expect once the story airs, we can keep our credibility both inside and outside the newsroom.

Debra L. Mason is a former award-winning religion reporter who serves as publisher of the non-sectarian Religion News Service and Executive Director of Religion Newswriters Association. She's also a professor at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

Courtesy of Religion News Service

Jim Jones founded the Peoples Temple in San Francisco and led more than 900 followers to commit suicide in Guyana.

Dipti Vaidya | The Tennessean

An opponent argues with a supporter over the building of a mosque and community center following a peace rally in a public square of downtown Murfreesboro.

RELIGION WATCHDOG

SCRUTINIZING THE ANTI-MUSLIM MOVEMENT

By Bob Smietana
The Tennessean

With an American flag as a backdrop, Bill French of the Nashville, Tenn.-based for-profit Center for the Study of Political Islam paced back and forth like the Church of Christ ministers he had heard growing up.

His message: Creeping Shariah was undermining the very fabric of American life.

It was the fall of 2010, at the height of the controversy over a proposed new mosque in Murfreesboro, a college town about half an hour southeast of Nashville.

Critics of the mosque, like French, believe Islam is not a religion. Instead, they see Islam and its doctrine and rules – known as Shariah law – as a totalitarian ideology.

In his 45-minute speech, he outlined a kind of Ten Commandments of evil – no music, no art, no rights for women – taken from his book "Sharia Law for Non-Muslims."

When he was done, the 80 or so mosque opponents, including several local politicians, gave him a standing ovation and then began buying French's books to hand out to their friends.

For more than a year and a half I'd been trying to find catch a glimpse of French.

We corresponded by email, and I read some of his work. But he refused to meet with me and most of the places he spoke were off limits to the media.

He's one of the leaders of a national anti-Islam movement that's become particularly strong in Nashville.

Its members believe that Islam is an evil religion rooted in hatred and nurtured by violence. American Muslims, they claim, are part of a conspiracy to destroy the United States from within.

In Nashville, that message is spread in meetings held in churches, community centers, and homes and through books, movies, websites and online social networks. The goal is to prohibit the free exercise of Islam in the United State by social, political and legal pressure – opposing mosque construction, opposing any religious accommodations – like time off for prayer and being excused from lunch during Ramadan in schools – and passing legislation that paints Islam as incompatible with the American way of life. Brigitte Gabriel, the leader of Act for America, a leading national anti-Islam group, described their attitude toward Muslims in this way: "They must be stopped."

Unnatural approach

I didn't know any of this back in late 2009.

At the time, my boss had been encouraging me to do more watchdog coverage, and I'd been skeptical about it.

It's not that I don't value watchdog coverage.

But it doesn't come naturally on the God beat.

Most religion reporting is about ideas, institutions, beliefs and spiritual practices. It involves visits to houses of worship, conversations with believers and clergy, and poring over sacred texts and the work of scholars.

By nature most religion reporters are explanatory journalists.

Our time is spent deciphering the texts and beliefs of a wide range of groups – from Baptists to Baha'is to Sikhs and Sunnis – and then showing how those beliefs and texts shape people's behavior.

God beat reporters cover life, death, and everything that comes between and afterwards. We cover politics and public policy, international development and bioethics, hermeneutics and religious marketing.

But we don't do a lot of investigative work.

That's because most religious groups operate with little public scrutiny.

Churches and other houses of worship don't file the same IRS forms that other charities do and don't have to share their financial reports with the state.

Their meetings aren't subject to sunshine laws and their emails and reports aren't available under the Freedom of Information Act.

Though I'd covered religion for a decade for magazines, a wire service and a newspaper, and had done long-form explanatory reporting and a couple of books, before 2009 I'd never done an in-depth investigation.

That changed after my boss sent me a three-word email.

"Got a minute?" she asked.

It turned out that she'd heard that a local megachurch had shown a movie that portrayed Muslims as Nazis.

My boss told me to make some calls about the film and figure out what was going on.

For the past three years that's what I've been doing.

What I found is the movie – "The Forgotten People: Lessons from the Holocaust" produced by a Nashville-area nonprofit called Proclaiming Justice to the Nations – was part of a larger anti-Islam movement growing in Nashville and around the country.

Like any reporter, I wanted to answer some basic questions about this movement – who, what, where, when and why.

But even those basics are hard to find in the anti-Islam movement, where members are anonymous, leaders use pseudonyms and meetings are often off-limits to the press.

Gabriel, for example, is really Hanan Kahwagi Tudor, a Lebanese Christian immigrant who used to work for Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network.

Reporting on this movement meant a fundamental change in my approach.

I had to become an investigative reporter. That meant questioning everything.

It started with simple questions about leaders of the movement, such as "What is your real name?"

Even answering that simple question was time-consuming.

Take Brigitte Gabriel, the head of Act for America and author of best-selling books such as "They Must Be Stopped" and "Because They Hate."

To find her real name, we pulled Act for America's 990 tax returns to get the names of leaders.

Tudor's full name was not listed on the returns, but her last name and address were. Her husband's name was listed there as well. We then looked through property records and business records of their video production company until we found her real name.

We also found her address in Virginia, which was listed in the phone book.

The Tennessean used her real name in our stories despite the objections of Act for America, which claimed we'd endangered her by revealing her name.

With the help of my former Tennessean colleague Kate Howard, we also tracked down the real name of Bill French, who uses the pen name Bill Warner.

French is a former physics professor at Tennessee State University who now lectures around the country and overseas and claims that the only real Muslims are violent Muslims.

We learned that French's Center for the Study of Political Islam wasn't a nonprofit, despite the fact it raised donations on its website. Instead, the center is really a company called CBSX LLC, a for-profit publishing company, funded by a conservative businessman and former Tennessean columnist.

We found those details again by looking at business records, pulling his personnel records from Tennessee State University, and interviewing of people who knew him.

Another break came by heeding some advice I got at a workshop on investigative reporting run by the Religion Newswriters Association, a professional organization for religion writers.

Melissa Nann Burke, who's now a reporter with The News Journal in Wilmington, Del., told us about an investigation she'd done of Angel Food Ministries, a now-defunct charity based in Georgia.

Along with asking a nonprofit for its 990 tax return, she also suggests getting copies of the 1023 application that a charity uses to ask the Internal Revenue Service for tax-exempt status.

That application details a nonprofit's programs and business operations – or at least how the nonprofit's leaders told the IRS they planned to run the organization.

> It's not that I don't value watchdog coverage. But it doesn't come naturally on the God beat.

Sometimes what a charity tells the IRS and what they actually do are two different things.

The 1023 also includes any letters between the charity and the IRS.

Those letters and the application can be great sources for an investigation, she said.

Melissa was right.

Six figure salaries

I got 990s and 1023s for a number of anti-Islam groups.

In many cases, running an anti-Islam group was a lucrative business. Most leaders earned six figure salaries, and their nonprofits took in millions of dollars in donations.

We also found that The Investigative Project on Terrorism Foundation, run by former journalist Steve Emerson, had paid millions to a management company over a three-year period. That company is owned by Emerson, who is also chairman of the board and executive director of The Investigative Project on Terrorism Foundation.

Paying Emerson's company violated specific instructions that the IRS had given the Investigative Project. When the charity first filed for nonprofit status, it had told the IRS that it would hire a management company. That was fine with the IRS, as long as that company was independent. The Investigative Project also told the IRS it would not do any business with companies that had ties to its leadership.

In looking at Emerson's nonprofit, we also discovered that although he'd claimed to have founded the group in the 1990s, it didn't apply for nonprofit status until 2006. For years the group collected donations and foundation grants without having tax-exempt status.

Equal opportunity investigator

It wasn't just the anti-Islam groups that we reported on.

We also reported that the Council on American-Islamic Relations lost its tax-exempt status in 2011 for not filing tax returns for three years running. When CAIR's status was re-instated, we reported that as well. CAIR, as of late September 2012, had not filed its missing returns and we continue to press the group for those documents.

John A. Gillis | DNJ

Mosque opponent Nancy Cavazos and supporter Hudson Wilkins square off as groups opposed to the building of a mosque on Bradyville Pike and in support of religious freedom held counter rallies.

Much of my reporting on anti-Islam groups came during a controversy over the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro. A group of Muslims from that city planned to build a new mosque in 2010.

They got approval from the county commission to build in May of that year. Once the news got out, the anti-Islam groups organized mass protests in the streets and filed suit to block construction.

One key to reporting on the anti-Islam movement was showing up everywhere.

Any time I heard about a rally or church gathering or meeting in a politician's garage, I showed up. Often people were unhappy that I was there – and I got threatened once – but I kept showing up until someone would talk to me.

Which is how I ended up meeting Bill French – in a meeting organized by Sally Snow and Howard Wall, two wealthy Murfreesboro developers who helped fund the lawsuit against the mosque.

Lastly, my editors were not satisfied with simple answers. They wanted to know what makes this anti-Islam tick.

The simple answer would have been to use the label "Islamophobia."

But the real answer is more complicated.

It turned out that a mix of factors – the economic downturn, a rapid rise in immigration, fear among evangelical Christians that they were losing home-field advantage in America, the rise of Christian Zionism, concerns over homegrown terrorism, and the maturation of the Muslim community in Tennessee, such that Muslims were beginning take a more active role in local politics and culture – had created fertile ground for the anti-Islam movement.

It's a story that won't go away anytime soon. Until it does I'll keep following my boss's orders – following the money, asking people what their real names are and showing up even when I am not wanted.

Bob Smietana has covered religion for a living since 1999 and for the last five years as religion writer at The Tennessean in Nashville. He's also a correspondent for Religion News Service and a freelance religion writer whose stories have appeared in magazines such as Christianity Today, The Christian Century, Sojourners and U.S. Catholic.

TEXAS TELEVANGELISTS
SEE WHERE THE TITHES ARE GOING

By Darren Barbee

Some reporters are fond of the phrase "digging into a story." My first foray into investigating a televangelist involved actual digging – through garbage – that contained documents, often stained with foul, rotting food.

Exclusive: Someone had a hankering for Chinese food.

The Trinity Foundation, a Dallas organization that tracks televangelists, made "trash runs" in which they snatched religious organizations' refuse. The foundation granted me access to their soggy files after a tip about televangelist Mike Murdock's having exotic animals (a lion) on his property.

The revolting work turned up internal memos detailing Murdock's use of the nonprofit's staff to tend his home and clean his garage so his Jaguar could slide in next to the Corvette and even directions for preparing his carrot juice (fresh).

Getting into the guts of a nonprofit or church requires time, patience and thick skin. I was once warned, rather direly, not to question a man of God: "If you do, bad things happen to you." And while you may have ink, televangelists have television. And ink. Murdock printed and mailed out thousands of messages to his followers referencing a despicable reporter who interviewed his father. (That would be me.)

Religious organizations can be tough to investigate – especially churches.

The Internal Revenue Service doesn't require churches to disclose finances, so ferreting out details can be problematic. However, gathering information on an official's home and other property through public records is usually easy (though occasionally hidden by a shell corporation). Check for lawsuits in local and federal courts through Public Access to Electronic Court Records at pacer.gov, liens through the county clerk and other typical sources. You may just turn up unpaid personal property taxes – paid by the church.

Congregants are particularly protective of their church, especially when bad things are happening. At a large church, talk to community leaders (politicians, members of school or city organizations) who attend. They're used to talking to the press.

Many church websites also archive newsletters that contain volunteers' contact information. Even obits can be of use, as they may contain information about survivors connected to the church.

In some cases, the subject of your examination may be popular and well-liked. In one case, a pastor abruptly resigned from a large, well-respected Metroplex church. While there were hints of problems, confirming was the challenge. I suggested to my editor running a straightforward story, as prominently as possible, about the pastor and the nice new job he was taking.

The next day, angry church members spilled information about the pastor's use of church funds for personal expenses. Sources also confirmed that an audit of the Rev. Claude Thomas' spending showed a European trip in which he exceeded an already sizeable $25,000 budget by thousands. The extra cash was accounted for by tucking it in the Sunday school budget.

Thomas disputed the figures. He eventually withdrew from a new job at a prominent seminary.

In another case, the Daystar Television Network, a national network based in Dallas-Fort Worth, was organized as a church, presenting a challenge. However, with something on a scale that large, our checking Daystar's operations in other states resulted in some financial disclosure. The network had a station in Arizona, which then required reports of income, expenses, assets and liabilities. (Arizona has since passed legislation that no longer requires such filings, though older reports are still available online.) Federal Communications Commission records were also useful and eventually showed financial oversight lacking at some stations. (Daystar also provided some financial information though it didn't have to do so.)

And Murdock and the trash? It appeared he had fallen into "founder's syndrome."

This term and several others are mentioned in an unofficial rulebook posted online by the Texas Association of Nonprofit Organizations, which offers some excellent guidance on what to look at in a nonprofit:

Founder's syndrome: A CEO or president who is also the founder feels he "owns" the organization.

Shadow board: The executive director controls everything and the board simply rubber stamps decisions, if they vote at all. (Note: Some board members don't know they're board members, including a police chief who said he was unaware of his affiliation. Also, occasionally decision makers are dead and have been for years.)

Nonprofit Sector Overview

Tax-Exempt Organizations	Registered with IRS (over $5,000 in gross receipts)	Filing Annual IRS Report (over $25,000 in gross receipts)
Under 501(c)(3)	1,117,219	609,935
Private Foundations	76,210	65,977
Charitable Nonprofits	1,041,009	543,958
Under Other 501(c) Subsections	446,691	275,426
501(c)(4) social welfare	111,561	61,497
501(c)(5) labour/agricultural	56,269	37,458
501(c)(6) business leagues	72,582	51,119
501(c)(other)	206,279	125,352

NOTES: Does not included religious organzations. Data from 10/2009 Business Master File and may not match other figures on this page.

SOURCE: NCCS Data Web, National Center for Charitable Statistics
http://nccsdataweb.urban.org/©2009

You don't have to be a CPA to realize a small-revenue charity probably doesn't want anyone to know it bought a Lexus... Is that how donors envisioned their contributions being used? And will they know unless you tell them?

Donations are solicited deceptively or by using a telemarketing service, which keeps nearly all of the money as a fee.

High on the hog: Foreign travel, luxurious board meetings, club memberships, massages and clothing are all problematic.

Hoarding cash: Little money is used for the charity's stated purpose.

Big salaries.

Following my inquiries, Murdock shuffled his board, fired his accountants, had his operations audited and increased his spending for the poor from its previously meager 1 percent of expenses.

While your editor will almost certainly veto dumpster diving, there are organizations out there that don't have such qualms. Private organizations, bloggers and the occasional university professor are watching religious organizations and have solid information. Using information obtained by questionable means is an ethical decision for your outlet. (Caution: The groups almost always have a theological agenda.)

Also, take time to explore state laws. For years, Texas attorneys specializing in open records laws told me nonprofit financial documents were off limits. As it happens, state law requires many nonprofits to cough up the records.

Failing a handy piece of legislation, the basic tool for examining a public charity (not a church) is the Form 990, a tax return that doesn't necessarily mean what it says.

This document can seem daunting though recent changes by the IRS have made it somewhat more user-friendly. Many 990s are available online from Guidestar. If not, ask for the 990 at the charity in person and you should get three years' worth of forms in a day or two. (Note: Submit a written request and the charity has 30 days to respond.)

Evaluation methods vary.

The Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, a Christian accreditation agency, asks churches and ministries to adhere to "Seven Standards of Responsible Stewardship." While some of ECFA's requirements are unlikely to interest journalists (such as doctrinal matters), its rules on governance and financial oversight can help to show where a religious charity falls short in the eyes of its peers.

CharityNavigator has its own set of metrics for program, administrative and fundraising expenses. Comparisons, such as the ratio of charity expenditures to overhead costs, can be useful. But keep in mind that nonprofit accounting is sometimes loosey-goosey. One charity counted a Cadillac SUV, Cadillac truck and Silverado as part of its charitable spending.

When in doubt, call a certified public accountant who deals with nonprofits. Your state is also likely to have an association of nonprofit organizations. The Texas association, for instance, also compiles data on charities.

Fortunately, not everything on the 990 requires a mathematician to decipher. You don't have to be a CPA to realize a small-revenue charity probably doesn't want anyone to know it bought a Lexus, such as one organization listed on its tax form. Is that how donors envisioned their contributions being used? And will they know unless you tell them?

Loans to insiders are also a sign of a potential problem. Typically, lending to employees is OK. However, loans to directors, officers or members of a nonprofit are explicitly outlawed in some states, such as Texas.

One evangelistic organization I wrote about reported a $319,523 loan to the organization's president to finance his home. The loan was nearly half of the ministry's annual budget.

Even if such lending isn't unlawful in your state, it's still questionable. BoardSource, formerly the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, notes that the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (created to address Enron-type scandals) generally prohibits loans to corporate insiders.

BoardSource "strongly" recommends that nonprofits avoid lending to directors. (If nothing else, the practice can signal a conflict of interest.)

The go-to source of state and national data is Guidestar, which is also quite cooperative with journalists. By request, it generated a list of the highest compensated nonprofit directors in Texas, which lead to an outlier: Kim Clement, a relatively unknown evangelist.

Of his organization's $2.7 million in revenue, Clement's cut was nearly a third: $852,800 when tallying compensation, benefits and an expense account. (The organization's grants were meager by comparison: $35,000.)

The details are out there, many just waiting for a web browser to stop by. With state and federal regulators vastly outnumbered by charities, it falls to you to do the digging.

Darren Barbee has been a reporter at daily newspapers for more than 15 years, most recently working as an investigative reporter and CAR specialist at the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. He is senior editor at Hart Energy in Houston.

Nonprofit Charitable Organizations, by Asset Size, Tax Year 2007

[All figures are estimates based on samples – money amounts are in millions of dollars]

Asset size	Returns		Total assets		Total revenue	
	Number	Percentage of total	Amount	Percentage of total	Amount	Percentage of total
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Total	313,121	100.0	2,683,444	100.0	1,445,932	100.0
Under $100,000 [1]	129,212	41.3	4,271	0.2	15,396	1.1
$100,000 under $500,000	74,100	23.7	17,965	0.7	24,440	1.7
$500,000 under $1,000,000	29,183	9.3	20,891	0.8	16,664	1.2
$1,000,000 under $10,000,000	61,080	19.5	197,460	7.4	161,273	11.2
$10,000,000 under $50,000,000	13,347	4.3	284,952	10.6	189,950	13.1
$50,000,000 or more	6,199	2.0	2,157,903	80.4	1,038,209	71.8

[1] Includes returns with zero assets or assets not reported.

NOTES: Data are from Forms 990 and 990-EZ for nonprofit charitable organizations tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3) and exclude private foudnations, most organizations with receipts less than $25,000, as well as most churches, and certain types of religious organizations. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Maurice Rivenbark | Tampa Bay Times

An eight-point Scientology cross tops the church's "Super Power" building in downtown Clearwater. Under construction since 1998, the massive building has yet to open.

INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY
INVESTIGATING A SECRETIVE ORGANIZATION

By Joe Childs and Thomas C. Tobin
Tampa Bay Times

In the summer of 1991, the Church of Scientology sent out a directive warning its security personnel around the world to be wary of certain situations.

The document cited 11 church policies, including one on "counter espionage" and another on "infiltration." It discusses checklists for dealing with disaffected parishioners and other potential security risks: "Newspaper reporters, psychiatrists, psychologists, police" and anyone connected with an intelligence agency.

Scientology strives to be counted equally among the world's religions, but often stands apart by virtue of the characteristics that show up in this and other documents like it.

While the church extols its human rights and social betterment programs, it also can be insular and combative, displaying an impulse to control those who come within its orbit.

For reporters seeking the truth about what goes on inside, the challenges are obvious and formidable. Our experience shows they are surmountable.

The Tampa Bay Times, formerly the St. Petersburg Times, has covered Scientology closely since the organization moved its spiritual headquarters to Clearwater, Fla., in the mid-1970s. Since then, the church has alternated between periods of tranquility and turmoil.

In 1977, after church operatives infiltrated the IRS and Justice Department, the FBI raided Scientology's offices in Washington and Los Angeles. Eleven Scientologists were arrested and convicted, including the wife of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard.

In the 1980s, a power struggle after Hubbard's death nearly caused the church to implode, even as it battled the IRS for tax exempt status.

The 1990s began with a huge success as the church reached a truce with the IRS. But by the end of the decade, Scientology was reeling from the legal and public relations tsunami brought on by the unexplained death of 36-year-old Lisa McPherson after she spent 17 days in a church facility in Clearwater.

By the early and mid-2000s, the church seemed to reach calm waters. Its leader, David Miscavige, proclaimed that a "renaissance" was under way and Scientology was experiencing "explosive" growth.

Which brings us to late February 2009, when a former top Miscavige lieutenant named Mark C. "Marty" Rathbun surfaced for the first time since his departure from the church in 2004. Internet reports had speculated Rathbun was dead. Yet here he was starting a new website and offering to help other former Scientologists adjust to life outside the church.

With four credible, well-placed sources now speaking on the record, we separately interviewed them multiple times, both in person and by phone, gaining more details with each encounter. Their stories meshed and didn't vary over multiple rounds of questioning.

A very different portrait

We had dealt with Rathbun extensively in the 1990s and early 2000s during the McPherson saga, often in contentious settings as he aggressively defended his church.

We contacted him to see if he would discuss his experiences inside the church. He agreed and sat for interviews over two days at his home in Texas. More mellow and a bit grayer than we remembered, he told of a culture of violence and abuse at the hands of Miscavige – a very different portrait than the one Scientology was projecting to the world. He also said the claims that Scientology was growing weren't true.

It was a stunning reversal – from long-time loyalist to whistleblower.

But there were no documents and no video to back up Rathbun's story. No one on the church's staff ever filed a police report when church staffers physically assaulted one another.

The church's religious order, the Sea Org, handles such matters internally. Filing a police report on a colleague, much less the leader, is just not something a Sea Org member would do.

We pressed to find others who saw what Rathbun saw and could corroborate. The Times' policy against publishing information from anonymous sources meant that we needed them to speak for attribution.

It was a tall order. Rathbun faced potential consequences for speaking out, including church litigation and the standard Scientology tactic of harassment with private investigators. But it was easier for him than most because he had no family or business connections with anyone still in the church.

Those who break from Scientology can count on being quickly "disconnected" from relatives, business associates and friends.

We focused on Mike Rinder, Scientology's long-time spokesman, who quietly left the church in 2007. Having dealt with him many times in the past, we flew to Denver where Rinder was living, knowing in advance he was unwilling to speak but hoping a face-to-face encounter would make a difference.

We also traveled to central Florida to meet in person with Tom DeVocht, once a high-ranking church official in Clearwater, who left in 2005.

Joseph, Jr. Garnett | Tampa Bay Times

Ringer, left and Rathbun pictured together near Denver, CO.

Corroborating stories

Both men told us on deep background that Rathbun's portrayals were true, but said they faced family-related risks if they spoke on the record. Over the next few weeks, we persisted in asking them for on-the-record interviews. We also let them know that we respected the unique obstacles they faced.

They still had feelings for the institution they joined when they were teenagers. Though many of their former colleagues now considered them "suppressive persons," enemies of the church, Rinder and DeVocht still thought of them as friends.

Clearly too, it was difficult for them to wrap their heads around the idea that they were talking to reporters, known in the church as "merchants of chaos."

If they ever spoke to us for attribution, it would be on their own timetable.

Hearing of our inquiries, a team of two lawyers and two church officials paid Rinder a surprise visit in Denver, the kind of tactic the church typically employs to shut down public relations threats. Rinder had led many such missions himself during his years in the church. The Scientology lawyers wanted to know what he had told the newspaper and asked if there were any issues he wanted to settle with the church. He declined to speak with them.

After a few more weeks of nudging from us, Rinder and DeVocht decided to talk on the record. Both said Miscavige had physically assaulted them and others. Rinder said it happened to him about 50 times. The church was adamant that Miscavige had never hit anyone.

We also located Amy Scobee, another long-time church manager who had left in 2005 and was willing to talk.

With four credible, well-placed sources now speaking on the record, we separately interviewed them multiple times, both in person and by phone, gaining more details with each encounter. Their stories meshed and didn't vary over multiple rounds of questioning. When they didn't know an answer or couldn't recall an event, they told us so.

Together, they corroborated Rathbun's initial account that Miscavige had physically attacked subordinates and encouraged an abusive environment in Scientology's upper ranks. It was a detailed and unprecedented look inside the church.

The church's view

We presented our findings in face-to-face interviews with two church public affairs officers and two lawyers, sitting with them for 25 hours over four days.

The first day, they confirmed several elements of what the defectors told us, including that Miscavige subjected church officers to a bizarre game of musical chairs and that errant

Sea Org members often were ordered to jump into water with their clothes on.

The church also argued that Rathbun, Rinder, DeVocht and Scobee were bitter "apostates" and incompetents who were covering up their own misdeeds and could never be trusted to tell the truth about their former church. They said we were missing the real story: Miscavige had engineered a Scientology renaissance, expanding the church worldwide.

We had asked in our initial request to interview Miscavige as well as several of the church workers mentioned in the accounts of Rathbun and the others. Several weeks later, the church introduced us to more than a dozen church employees who gave us rehearsed statements. Most would not answer our questions.

The church team said Miscavige would talk to us in person but added he was busy and would not be available until six weeks after our initial request for a response.

We knew from experience that the church worked hard to shut down negative stories or at least try to weaken their impact through delay.

With a robust church response in hand, we went to press with a three-part series titled "The Truth Rundown."

An avalanche of tips

The response was massive. We heard from the general public, from former Scientologists, even from current members who had doubts about the church but were "under the radar."

Church officials responded by writing critically about our interview techniques in Scientology's Freedom magazine, which was mass mailed to households around Tampa Bay.

Of the dozens of e-mails and phone calls we received, one stood out. A former church member from Hawaii left a message with the City Desk: "Thank you so much and keep going. There's much more."

Five weeks after the "Truth Rundown," we followed with a story quoting 11 additional former members about dehumanizing treatment they had witnessed and been subjected to under Miscavige. Four of them said the leader had physically attacked them too.

Over the next three years, we pursued an avalanche of tips. For the first time, long-time Scientologists began voicing concerns about problems with church management that had been apparent to them for years but went unchecked in a culture that strongly discourages dissent.

Some gave us mountains of information we judged not to be news. More often, people gave us tips but declined to go on the record.

Over and over, with dozens of nervous sources, we repeated the delicate process of trying to get them to talk on the record. We traveled across the country several times just to make a personal connection that might persuade them to tell us what they knew.

Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn't.

Additional stories over the next three years explored several more themes that emerged in our long conversations with the increasing numbers of Scientologists who had decided to step away from the church.

Among them: Scientology's extraordinary efforts to track down and intimidate staffers who run away; the stories of female staffers who say they were pressured to have abortions; and the unusually strong pressures the church places on parishioners to donate money and buy materials, often landing them deep in debt.

Civil and bankruptcy court records proved valuable in many of these stories. In addition, many parishioners produced records from their private files. But the bulk of our work was in mining and understanding personal stories against the backdrop of Scientology's unique culture.

Along the way, we viewed our mission this way: We were reporting on a large institution in our coverage area that was experiencing a major internal upheaval.

As such, we did not focus or pass judgment on the core beliefs of the Scientology religion, which are often ridiculed in the media as evidenced by the recent coverage of Tom Cruise and Katie Holmes. Those beliefs were not at issue.

That decision, we think, built trust with former members we interviewed who still held their Scientology beliefs dear, even as they rejected the church and its management. We also sought to be thorough and organized. We recorded most of our interviews, tried not to overreach and stayed patient. We supplemented our print stories with video interviews that allowed readers to assess our sources' credibility for themselves.

For your reporting

Some suggestions for those seeking to cover Scientology:

Get to know its culture, just as you would when preparing to write in-depth stories about any organization. Former insiders can tell you what it's like, what got them interested in Scientology and why they stayed. Invest the time necessary for long, rambling conversations with former members. Listening to that is far from boring and very helpful.

Find videos of Hubbard and of large Scientology gatherings, all readily available on the Internet.

Know that Scientology is a by-the-book organization with its own unique lingo and a strong instinct to follow the founder's words in every situation. In addition to writings that lay out his "technology" for mental healing, Hubbard wrote thousands of directives on how Scientology organizations should run. Many of them are in the public domain, and reading them helps one understand the organization's behavior and tactics.

As you study, you will learn that Scientologists believe that every being exists perpetually through a succession of lifetimes, each lived out in a new body. They value the present but also regard it as a speck of time in their eternity. As a result, they tend to view the world with a long-term perspective.

Reporters who cover them should do the same. Scientology is not a group that is easily or quickly understood.

James Borchuck | Tampa Bay Times

Tom DeVocht, a former Scientology official in Clearwater who spoke to the Times in 2009.

Joe Childs is Senior Editor/At Large of the Tampa Bay Times. He ran the newspaper's Clearwater operation for several years and supervises its Scientology coverage.

Thomas C. Tobin has been a Times reporter since 1988. He has covered the Church of Scientology off and on since 1996.

Former insiders can tell you what it's like, what got them interested in Scientology and why they stayed. Invest the time necessary for long, rambling conversations with former members. Listening to that is far from boring and very helpful.

RELUCTANT GUIDE TO INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

WHAT A VETERAN FEATURES REPORTER LEARNED INVESTIGATING A TELEVANGELIST

By John Blake
CNN

I never liked investigative journalism. It's a difficult thing for a journalist to admit, but it's been true for me ever since I entered journalism 25 years ago.

The prospect of digging through public documents, real estate records – the whole "All the President's Men" zeal for taking down powerful and corrupt officials. It never appealed to me. I always saw myself as a feature writer, someone who loves writing profiles and about race, politics and religion.

If I can investigate, you surely can. One of the most popular stories I've ever written was an investigative piece, and folks have asked me to share what I learned from the experience.

First, some background:

I was a religion reporter with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution in 2005 when I was assigned to write a story on a charity that Bishop Eddie Long, one of the nation's most powerful televangelists, had created. The story idea came from Jim Walls, then the investigative editor for the AJC. I mentioned to him once that someone should do an investigative piece on megachurches. I said pastors such as Bishop Long received so much money but had little accountability.

We wouldn't normally have been able to peek into the finances of a pastor and church because IRS laws shield churches' finances.

> Long was powerful, popular and litigious – I knew any error I made would be pounced on. I wondered if I would lose my job if I made a mistake.

But because Long created a charity and charities are required to file tax returns, we were able to get a look at how Long and his church operated.

I pursued the subject for several months and wrote a story that revealed the following: Long had created a charity to help the needy, but he became the charity's biggest beneficiary.

The charity, Bishop Eddie Long Ministries, Inc., had given him use of a million-dollar home and $350,000 Bentley automobile, and more than $1 million in salary over four years, including $494,000 in 2000. My story sparked a congressional investigation into Long as well as other televangelists who appeared to take advantage of lax nonprofit laws to establish opulent lifestyles for themselves and family.

Here are three lessons I learned:

Don't be intimidated

I actually remember my heart racing a little quicker when I sat down for the first time with my editor and realized the enormity of the story. Long was powerful, popular and litigious – I knew any error I made would be pounced on. I wondered if I would lose my job if I made a mistake.

As I dug into the process, though, I realized that investigative reporting isn't a solo effort. It's a team effort, and there are plenty of people in your news organization and outside who will provide the expertise you may not have.

Jim Walls was a great editor. He was a gruff former hippie who still wore a ponytail in his middle age and dressed as if he had slept on someone's couch the night before. But he was a bulldog with documents. He seemingly knew every source – GuideStar, Secretary of State records, real estate records – that uncovered the dealings of Long's charity.

Tiny details matter

"One death is a tragedy. A million is a statistic."

That quote comes from someone who knows something about death, Joseph Stalin, one of the 20th century's most notorious mass murderers.

Stalin never wrote a story on deadline (he actually studied to be a priest in his youth), but I think that quote applies to investigative pieces.

Numbers don't really grab people. The individual details – the tiny details that illuminate a story – are crucial.

For example, I spent almost half a year pouring through documents and finding these impressive numbers. I poured them into the story, hoping readers would talk about the $3.07 million that Long's charity had awarded him, and the "gotcha" documents that showed how Long had transferred assets from the charity to himself.

But when the story came out, I noticed hardly anyone talked about all those numbers. All they seemed to talk about was the shiny Bentley Long drove. That offended people more than the million-dollar price of the home Long's charity bestowed on him.

Long's comments also stayed with people.

The stakes for the story were so high that I couldn't get any interviews with Long or his lawyers without submitting questions in advance. It's not something I would normally do, but it was the only way to get access. In some ways I liked it, because there was a written trail of all our exchanges – they couldn't say I misquoted them because I had their written responses via email.

When I finally interviewed Long, a group of lawyers he had assembled did all the talking. Long just sat in silence at a long conference table. But then I asked him a pointed question: How could he justify his lifestyle as a Christian minister?

Long delivered an impromptu sermon.

As his lawyers rolled their eyes in exasperation, Long launched into a defense of his charity, saying that "Jesus wasn't poor," and "We're not just a bumbling bunch of preachers who can't talk and all we're doing is baptizing babies." He's a man who "deals with the White House," with Tony Blair, and is like a CEO.

Everybody seemed to remember those comments.

Nobody seemed to remember all the numbers.

Don't let numbers and official documents overwhelm the stories. Use concrete details to make the numbers come alive and get strong voices in the story.

Tell a story

Details, however, don't matter if they're not fit into a larger frame.

Don't forget to tell a story.

I didn't just become an authority on Long's charity. I became an authority on his life. I read books he had written about his life; talked to church members, people he'd grown up with; learned about his parents and watched sermon after sermon on YouTube.

I also read about charities like Long's. IRS rules governing churches had become outdated. They were made during a time when megachurches didn't really exist, and the notion of a pastor as an international CEO was remote.

I fleshed out all the numbers in the stories with the story of Long's life: how he gained absolute control in his church, how his father's failures as a minister shaped him; how he fit into a larger trend of charismatic pastors who prospered with virtually no scrutiny from the IRS.

In the end, I think I had a story, not just a collection of numbers.

Those are the tips that helped me. I hope they help you.

And, oh, what happened to Long? The congressional investigation faded from public view. It didn't seem to damage his ministry, and he continued to expand.

What hurt him, though, was a sex scandal. In 2011, Long settled a lawsuit filed by four young men who accused him of pressuring them into sexual relationships while they were teenagers and members of the congregation. Long denied the allegations. His ministry has never recovered.

John Blake is a writer/producer with CNN.com, where he writes about politics and religion. Before that, he worked 20 years at The Atlanta Journal Constitution. He is the author of "Children of the Movement," a book that looks at the lives of the children of the greatest civil rights leaders and their segregationist foes. He is a native of Baltimore, Md., and a graduate of Howard University.

IRE RESOURCES

Extra! Extra!

Inspiration Network draws scrutiny
The Charlotte Observer published a two-part investigation into the Inspiration Network, which has become one of the world's fastest growing religious broadcasters largely by repeating this on-air pitch: God brings financial favor to those who donate to the network. Those contributions have turned the network's CEO into one of the nation's best-paid non-profit leaders, with compensation exceeding $1.5 million a year. The broadcaster has also secured millions in relocation incentives from the state of South Carolina, but has failed to live up to many of its development promises, the paper reported. (2009)

Special Benefits for Religious Groups
Diana B. Henriques of The New York Times, with computer analysis by Andy Lehren and research by Donna Anderson, examined the quiet expansion of special benefits for religious groups. "In recent years, many politicians and commentators have cited what they consider a nationwide 'war on religion' that exposes religious organizations to hostility and discrimination. But such organizations – from mainline Presbyterian and Methodist churches to mosques to synagogues to Hindu temples - enjoy an abundance of exemptions from regulations and taxes. And the number is multiplying rapidly." (2006)

The IRE Journal

"AID For Faith: Funding boosts Christian groups' influence abroad"
Baron discusses the 18 months of reporting, travel, and FOIA negotiations that went into the Boston Globe's 4-day series, "Exporting Faith." The series delves into the foreign aid impact of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. The Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives created a windfall of funding for religious aid organizations. Baron describes the steps taken by the paper to determine which organizations received funding, what they were preaching overseas, and how other foreign aid organizations were affected. (2007)

"Political Tithes: Easily overlooked political donations reveal churches making campaign contributions"
John Fritze explains how he used campaign finance data that is available online to show that Maryland churches had given more than $30,000 in campaign donations since 2000. He discusses how he found the information, and they how he checked it and wrote the story. (2006)

The IRE Resource Center is a major research library containing more than 25,000 investigative stories – both print and broadcast – and more than 3,500 tipsheets available at ire.org/resource-center or by contacting the Resource Center directly, 573-882-3364 or rescntr@ire.org.

Stories

No. 25179: Associated Press
This AP investigative series has found that the NYPD has secretly conducted widespread spying on Muslim communities

No. 25163: Render Unto Rome
Author Jason Berry investigates the Catholic Church's finances and breaks new ground on several fronts including fiscal mismanagement, embezzlement and abuse.

No. 24105: CBS News
The story exposes one of the nation's top televangelists, Kenneth Copeland, and his extravagant lifestyle through the donations from members of his church. Records obtained show that Copeland purchased a $20 million dollar jet, expensive cars and motorcycles and an 18,000 square foot home.

Tipsheets

No. 3607: Tips for Investigating Church Issues and Scandals
Judy Thomas takes you step by step on how to cover religion in your community. She gives tips on how to prepare for your story and how to deal with the likely outcome of strong emotional reaction.

No. 3179: Belief is in the document: Tips on investigating religion
Eric Gorski discusses various aspects of covering religion. The tipsheet includes advice about where to find church records such as 990s, applications for property tax exemptions, and articles of incorporation. The tipsheet also explains what each type of record could reveal about the church.

Stakes high in state FOI Supreme Court case

BY CHARLES N. DAVIS
MISSOURI SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

The United States Supreme Court's recent decision to hear the case of *McBurney v. Young* offers an opportunity for the Court to do great good, or great mischief, to state freedom of information laws.

The case confronts one of the countless obstacles tucked away in state FOI laws that limit access for some classes of citizens. In this instance, Virginia's FOI law limits access by definition to state citizens, though it does make an important exception for out-of-state news outlets that circulate or broadcast within the commonwealth.

Two non-Virginians who ably demonstrate the folly of making access hinge on state residency brought the suit. Rhode Island resident Mark McBurney sought Virginia documents to support his claim that the state bungled enforcement of a child-support order against his wife. Roger Hurlbert, a Californian, conducts business nationwide obtaining real estate documents for private clients, but can't obtain those documents in Virginia.

The non-residents argue that the Virginia-only language violates the privileges and immunities clause, which aims to put citizens of all states on an equal footing, as well as the "dormant commerce clause," which bars discrimination against interstate commerce. That's essentially what the plaintiffs in a 2006 3d Circuit Court of Appeals decision striking down Delaware's residents-only provision argued.

The non-residents argue that the Virginia-only language violates the privileges and immunities clause, which aims to put citizens of all states on an equal footing.

But the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the Virginia law, ruling that the McBurney's request was of merely "personal import" and that the infringement on Hurlbert's business was only "incidental." So we have two federal circuits in conflict – a situation ripe for Supreme Court review.

The Court will answer the question definitively, to either the cheers of FOI advocates or to the permanent detriment of FOI laws nationwide. As always when the Court is involved, the stakes are high.

The arguments by FOI proponents weighing in with amicus briefs underscore the importance of the case. The Coalition for Sensible Public Records Access, a non-profit association of data companies, argues convincingly that the collection and dissemination of public records has become a highly organized national business, one that clearly meets the judicial standards of interstate commerce.

This is an important argument to make to a pro-business, First Amendment-oriented Court, and one that illustrates just how monumental a case this is, for it's not just the immediate facts that are at stake. Restrictions like those in Virginia's law could sorely tempt other states to fashion all sorts of limits to FOI applicability should the Court agree with the 4th Circuit's crabbed view of the effects of such restrictions on the myriad national businesses that seek access to records from across state lines.

Several other states, including Arkansas, Tennessee, New Hampshire and Georgia, have similar provisions or policies restricting access to state residents only, according to legal analyst Tony Mauro, the First Amendment Center's legal correspondent, who aptly described the growing "balkanization" of public records laws.

In an era in which state governments already chafe at FOI requirements and see narrowing the ambit of their laws as a winning budgetary argument in tough economic times, judicial approval of residency requirements could send precisely the wrong signal to statehouses.

A ruling upholding Virginia's residents-only provision could usher in a wave of similar restrictions, with devastating impact on newsgathering as well. An amicus brief by the American Society of News Editors warns that not only do such provisions hamper reporting on state figures suddenly thrust into national prominence, such as political candidates, but they seriously impede national reporting on state issues.

FOI requests to multiple states can shed light on interstate issues. State FOI requests may inform coverage of cross-border water disputes, national migrant labor issues and interstate industrial siting incentives, to cite but a few of the examples in the ASNE brief.

Many regulatory frameworks rest on federal policy (and subsidies) coupled with state implementation. No more timely example exists than implementation of the recently enacted federal healthcare law. Provision after provision calls for states to implement the law on the ground – and without the ability to make FOI requests in all 50 states, journalists and other interested citizens have no airtight way to examine the law's rollout.

Should Virginia's provision stand, we'll be left with a patchwork quilt of access rights and a likely push to add even greater obstacles to FOI laws at the state level.

The brief submitted by Judicial Watch makes perhaps the strongest argument of all against such provisions. Turning to the common law history of access, the brief concludes that "the right of access to public records is a basic right of all persons in democratic societies."

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."

Data viz helps show governor's travels

BY KATE GOLDEN
WISCONSIN CENTER FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

The story started as a hand-me-down from my colleague Bill Lueders, the Center's Money and Politics Project director. He got a year's worth of Gov. Scott Walker's official calendars then gave them to me, the data geek.

Sure, the records included that well-publicized February 2011 prank call from a blogger who was pretending to be David Koch, a major campaign supporter. But that wasn't a narrative. There were no Mark Sanford-like sallies; there were a lot of redactions. Our colleagues at the Wisconsin State Journal, writing about these same records, had largely focused on their sparseness.

We had a hunch we could go deeper by treating the calendars as data. Walker had raised unprecedented amounts of money and become a national conservative celebrity. We wanted to shed light on how he'd done it – and how it was affecting his day job.

The Center eventually produced a three-part series on the governor's first 13 months in office. The major findings:

- Walker halved the time he spent at work over the course of the year, as more of his efforts went to fundraising and fighting an impending recall election. By January 2012, he was sometimes taking whole workdays as personal time.
- The governor spent epic amounts of time on the road. And he spent more time in Washington, D.C., Utah and Arizona than he did in the northern third of the state, where he rarely ventured.
- As Walker told a Goldwater Institute audience, he was preaching to the choir, so they would sing. But we detailed just how true that was: Walker spoke to the national Fox News more than any other news outlet, and five of the seven top media professionals he granted interviews to were conservative talk show hosts.
- You didn't have to be a big campaign donor to gain an audience with Walker, but it sure didn't hurt in 2011. Employees of or PACs associated with more than half of the companies mentioned in his calendars had donated to Walker, and a third of the CEOs he met with were donors.

At first, we weren't sure the effort would be worth it. Then we got a call from Chris Hubbuch, a reporter at the La Crosse Tribune in western Wisconsin, one of the many Wisconsin newspapers that run our stories. He'd gotten the governor's calendars through a parallel records request, but he wasn't quite sure how to analyze them.

We joined forces.

Calendars to data

Walker's office took about a month to respond to the Center's request for his calendars.

It might as well have been paper, almost. Walker's office gave us PDFs of his Google calendars that had been printed out, heavily redacted, and scanned back in. We couldn't readily convert the PDFs to data, so we had to create our own table and enter the information by hand.

Table design was a tough decision. We wanted to wring as much information as we could from the records, but needed to finish well before the June 5 recall election. We opted to err on the side of exhaustive detail – which, as a warning, was sometimes exhausting.

Lukas Keapproth | Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

Gov. Scott Walker giving his State of the State address in the State Capitol building, Madison, WI, on January 25, 2012.

Michelle Stocker | The Capital Times

Wisconsin Democracy Campaign director Mike McCabe speaking at the Alliant Energy Center in February 2012. He told People's Legislature attendees that labor unions are foolish to try to compete dollar-for-dollar in campaigns against deep-pocketed business interests.

I could immediately see that Walker's sharp increase in personal time corresponded with an equally sharp decline in scheduled work time. Personal time was, as far as we knew from news reports, basically fundraising time.

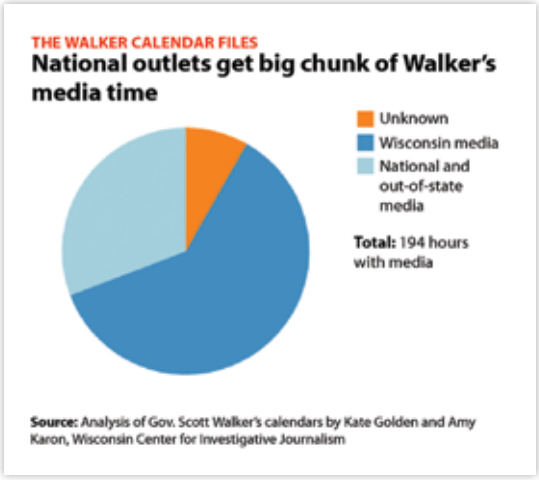
We also flagged interesting entries, like Walker's January 2011 meeting with Fred Malek, a major conservative power broker who is controversial for having counted Jews in the Nixon Administration. The meeting predated the governor's celebrity from the collective bargaining fight.

We logged more than 4,400 calendar entries in Google Docs spreadsheets. The project couldn't have been finished before the recall election without extra help from journalism students, as well as Hubbuch at the Tribune.

We created columns for dates, starting and ending times, activity types and notes.

The spreadsheet evolved as we got a feel for the calendars. We saw that many weeks, Walker spent little time at the Capitol and much on the road doing public relations, and we craved a more meaningful categorization of his time. We went back and labeled each entry: public relations; legislator time; media time; redacted; meetings with company officials; other work; and personal time, which usually appeared as "PERSONAL 1" on the schedule. And we recorded the location for each entry as a Google-able address.

Then we gave the spreadsheet a thorough and grueling cleaning in Google Refine.



Cleaning it posed challenges

We standardized locations, geocoded them in Refine using the Google Geocode Service, and determined the county and other political boundaries using the Data Science Toolkit assembled by coder-journalist Pete Warden. I mapped the locations as a Google Fusion Table to spot-check hundreds of them and track down any geocoding errors that showed Walker in, say, the Seychelles. But given the automation, we accepted some potential error.

It was a big challenge to keep track of the various versions of our spreadsheets. Google Spreadsheets is stored in the cloud and updates seamlessly (more or less, anyway) with edits from multiple users. But Fusion Tables, Refine and Tableau Public, a free data visualization tool, all required manual updates between versions.

Standardizing the more than 1,000 people, companies and groups – what we call entities – was also tough. Refine's faceting and name clustering turned out to be very handy.

By this time our data had grown unwieldy. Each entry could have multiple entities, and each entity could appear in multiple calendar entries. Some of the tools we used, such as Fusion Tables, require a single flat table. Some, such as Tableau Public, use multiple linked tables. Refine has a hybrid. So we were constantly picking the data apart and sewing it back together.

Analyzing the data

After our data was in shape, I imported it into Tableau Public. I could immediately see that Walker's sharp increase in personal time corresponded with an equally sharp decline in scheduled work time. Personal time was, as far as we knew from news reports, basically fundraising time. This was the heart of our first story.

For Part Two, Karon took a closer look at public relations time – check presentations, ribbon-cuttings, factory tours, speeches – labeling the primary policy issue related to each event Walker attended. The most time went, unsurprisingly, to jobs events. Walker wasn't getting far with his promise to make 250,000 jobs in Wisconsin, but the economy was clearly his main focus. Perhaps more surprising was how much less time he spent on any other issue.

Meanwhile, I tallied up how much time each reporter or media outlet mentioned in the calendar got with Walker. Again, the results were striking and the story immediately obvious: The national Fox News cable channel and conservative talk show hosts topped the chart.

Does money buy access?

In Part Three, we ran the people and companies Walker met with through Wisconsin's campaign finance database. It's a useful way to examine the connection between support and access – though imperfect. Donating is far from the only way companies can support Walker and far from the only reason he'd want to meet with them.

We had hoped to automate the process. But differences in how names were formatted or spelled meant a mass query would miss a lot of matches. People who work with Google Refine have attempted some solutions to this problem, but we'd love to see an easier method for journalists. In the end, we manually searched for each name in two databases of individual and PAC contributions maintained by the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign. (Corporations can't directly contribute to campaigns in Wisconsin, but employee and PAC contributions are a common proxy.) Sometimes it's just faster to do things by hand.

Back in Tableau Public, we once again found striking results as Walker's campaign donors peppered the screen. PACs or employees of more than half the companies named in the calendars had donated to Walker. We saw the now-famous Diane Hendricks, who gave Walker $500,000, not only at the fateful January 2011 meeting where a videographer filmed Walker telling her about his "divide and conquer" strategy – but at two more meetings with him in April. We saw that no company seemed to monopolize Walker's official time, but that companies with several meetings had also made donations. And we noticed countless calls to CEOs, a third of whom had donated to Walker.

We posted a list of every company that appeared in the calendars, ranked by how many times it appeared, along with its campaign contributions.

The entire project is posted here: wisconsinwatch.org/walkercalendars.

Kate Golden produces data visualizations, multimedia and stories for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism (WisconsinWatch.org). She may be reached at kgolden@wisconsinwatch.org. Amy Karon, former Center intern, is now a statehouse reporter for the Wisconsin Law Journal and The Daily Reporter. Bill Lueders is the Center's Money and Politics Project director.

Snapshots from our blogs

Updated SBA 7(a) data available in data library

By Liz Lucas, NICAR Database Library Director

Which businesses in your community have loans backed by the Small Business Administration? Find out using NICAR's recently updated SBA 7(a) loan data, which includes loans from 1953 through September 2012.

What's in it?

The 7(a) program is the SBA's most common loan program. It provides loans to small business owners who can't obtain financing through traditional channels. The program operates through private-sector lenders who provide loans that are, in turn, guaranteed by the SBA. The SBA 7(a) program itself has no funds for direct lending or grants.

The data contain information on the business getting the loan, including address and industry code; the bank lending the money; the amount loaned; the interest rate; and (where applicable) whether the loan was paid in full or charged off.

What format?

SBA 7(a) data come in .dbf format, easily imported or linked in Access and other database managers. If you'd like something different, we'll do our best to help you out. Email datalib@ire.org or call 573-884-7711.

What can I do with it?

You can identify the businesses in your area with loans backed by the Small Business Administration, and find out which financial institutions are making those loans.

Journalists can use 7(a) data to explore repayment of SBA loans by businesses in their communities, find out which financial institutions are major SBA lenders and find out what types of businesses are getting the loans. The data can also help you investigate how the SBA works with state and local agencies to lend money to small businesses.

For more information on the data, go to www.ire.org/nicar/database-library/databases/sba-7a-business-loans, or contact the Database Library at 573-884-7711 or datalib@ire.org.

If you have any questions, or want to discuss the merits of linking over importing in Access, please call or email us.

From 'Behind the Story: Investigating lost war records'

By Sarah Harkins, IRE

In 2011, reporter Peter Sleeth was working on a historical account of a battle he had witnessed during his time as an embedded reporter in Iraq. His work on the piece stalled while researching Sgt. Jacob Butler, a soldier who had died in battle at As Samawah, Iraq, in 2003. No one in the Army had records of his death. The problem, U.S. Army historians told him, was that the Army was missing huge swaths of data from two wars. The missing data, Sleeth found, was a result of poor communication between the U.S. Central Command in Iraq and the Army, and confusion within units about the preservation of classified documents.

Sleeth put his historical account on hold and partnered with ProPublica and The Seattle Times to create a series entitled, "Lost to History: When War Records Go Missing." He found that the loss of records had complicated veterans' efforts to file for disability and may spread farther into issues of national security. He recounted the beginning of his investigation as part of ProPublica's "How This Story Came About" series.

For his work with ProPublica, Sleeth began by submitting FOIA requests to military agencies. Initial requests to the National Archives and Records Administration provided the foundation for his investigation. As his research progressed, his requests through the U.S. Army Records Management and Declassification Agency brought him to a dead end.

"FOIA in the military is a whole different ballgame," he said. Denials of his requests became "comical." Even one wrong word would be enough for a denial, he said.

He overcame these obstacles with help from a few Army employees. Sleeth developed relationships with workers who were disappointed that the Army was moving away from its long history of record keeping. His sources wished to remain anonymous, but they were ready to become whistle-blowers. They helped Sleeth fill in the gaps in his research, and they explained how to navigate the military's FOIA process. With their help, Sleeth was able to obtain records through the U.S. Army Center of Military History.

An Army spokesman was uncooperative with his investigation, refusing to participate in more than a one hour interview. So Sleeth relied on these reports as his official sources.

"In 30 years of reporting, I've never used FOIA so much," he said. He still has unanswered requests from FOIA submissions he made in April. He doesn't expect these remaining requests to be fulfilled without a lawsuit, a fact he feels the military uses to its advantage.

Despite these setbacks, Sleeth plans to continue reporting on the absence of military documentation. He remains in contact with the whistle-blowers who helped him with FOIA requests.

"They've been there for decades. They know it inside and out," he said. He will be reporting on hearings Congress will hold over the missing military records, and his next piece will cover the national intelligence problems that resulted from the lack of military records management.

One day, Sleeth plans to return to his historical account of the battle he witnessed in 2003 at As Samawah.

"I am probably the most knowledgeable person about that battle," he says. He believes that with or without the official records, Americans should know about the events that transpired there.

Peter Sleeth may be reached via pdsleeth@yahoo.com.

"Behind the Story" is a weekly IRE.org series exploring the investigative process.

CAR 2013 offers training for all skill levels

By Jaimi Dowdell, IRE

So you're thinking about coming to the CAR Conference, but you're wondering, "Is this for me?"

Whether you're a reporter, editor, producer, developer, edcuator, blogger, student, etc., chances are your life has become increasingly electronic. To stay competitive in the workplace and continue to produce compelling journalism you are required, at some level, to interact with data.

No matter your job title or skill level, this conference can help you out. Read below to see what we have to offer, and stay tuned: In the coming months we'll post suggestions from veteran IRE members on making the most of the conference.

For those just starting out, we offer a solid foundation: What is data journalism and how can you get started. Reporters will come away with hands-on skills and plenty of story ideas to take back to the newsroom. We even offer a mini-boot camp to jumpstart your skils and get you on the right track.

For attendees who know their way around SQL and can duke it out with the toughest of PDF files, we offer next steps and additional tools.Dive deeper into mapping and data visualization, or learn a programming language and make your first news app.

For those at the next levels, we'll offer advanced sessions in mapping, data visualization, data science, machine learning and more.

For everyone, we promise plenty of ideas and a taste of what's possible. At no other conference will you find such an eclectic group of folks with these similar passions: data and excellent journalism. We hope to see you there.

Still not convinced? Feel free to contact me with more questions: jaimi@ire.org

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS & EDITORS, INC.

is a 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.

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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 25,000 investigative-reporting stories through our website.

Contact: Lauren Grandestaff, lauren@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: Elizabeth Lucas, liz@ire.org. 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 conference 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 Megan Luther, megan@ire.org, 605-996-3967

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: Megan Luther, megan@ire.org, 605-996-3967

UPLINK – An online publication 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, ddherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127

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MAILING ADDRESS:

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

Investigative Reporters and Editors, Inc.
Missouri School of Journalism
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