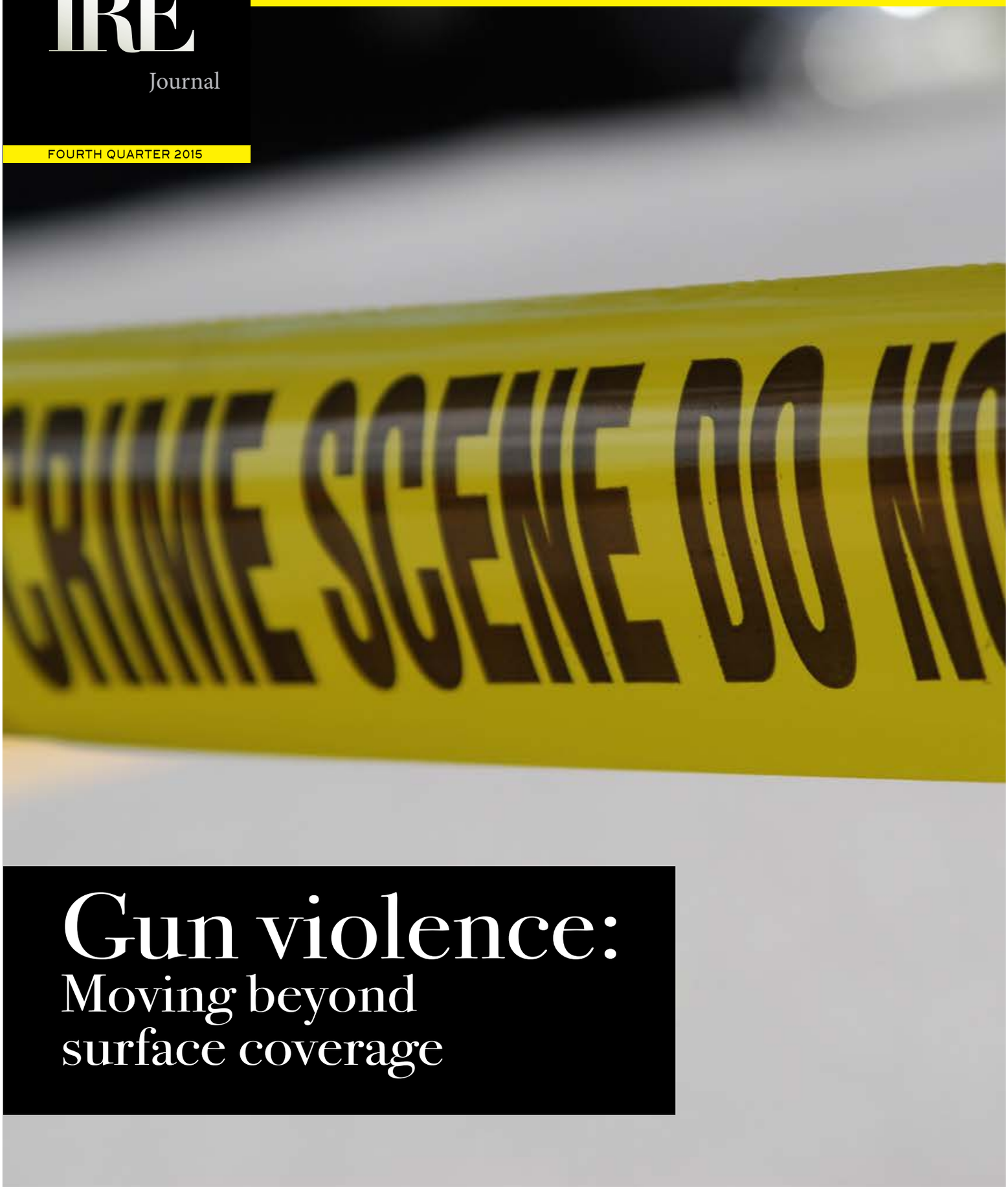
The IRE Journal

FOURTH QUARTER 2015



Gun violence:
Moving beyond surface coverage

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You can view demonstrations of some of these these tools here: bit.ly/1OQiFXJ. To learn more about how to sign up for these services, please email Amy Johnston at amy@ire.org.

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The cover photo was adapted from a photo by Tex Texin
More information can be found here: bit.ly/1JcmBha

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Breaking news brings out the best — and worst

BY MARK HORVIT

Covering breaking news has always been a minefield.

The desire to keep an audience up to date — and to be the first to do it — can lead normally careful reporters to cut some corners or take some chances they wouldn't usually take. The resulting mistakes can be credibility killing.

The pressure has only gotten greater as deadlines have been obliterated by the Web and the expectation to publish instantaneously and often has grown.

The increasing popularity of social media has only added to that pressure — no one wants to get beaten by That Guy On Twitter who is claiming to be an eyewitness or is posting what he says are photos from the scene.

And the ability to reach out to That Guy as an instant source creates its own nest of problems, as he may or may not actually be on the scene (and may or may not actually be That Guy, or whoever he says he is).

All of these factors — pressure to be first, competition with everyone who has a smartphone, the apparent ease in finding witnesses — create a perfect storm for mistakes, an El Niño of inaccuracy.

Those factors are also some of the main culprits often cited as major threats to investigative reporting. In-depth journalism will wither, plenty of pundits have said, because of the pressures to be fast, first and to constantly feed the online beast.

There's certainly some truth to that, and no one will argue that investigative reporting hasn't taken a hit over the past few years. (I've written about that plenty of times before and don't plan to tackle it here, except to say that the death of investigative journalism has been greatly overstated.)

But from what I've seen, those exact same pressures are actually behind a lot of the recent efforts newsrooms have made to rebuild their investigative and watchdog capabilities.

To see why that's the case, just think about the coverage you saw during any recent breaking event. Think about how many websites you visited, how many broadcasts you watched, how many reports you listened to. Now think about what differentiates any of them.

We all know that in any breaking story, the bulk of the coverage involves too many reporters chasing after the same sources and angles, or doing the same kinds of takeaways, or repeating the same speculation from the same sources. Not only does that not do anything to distinguish any given news organization, but more importantly, it does a disservice to everyone who is relying on the media to tell them not only what happened, but why and how, and to put it into context.

Perhaps the main skillset that news organizations want IRE trainers to help teach is the ability to do quick-turn enterprise work. When a plane crashes, a plant explodes, or — increasingly — when a mass shooting occurs, newsroom leaders realize that they need a staff that's trained to find credible information quickly and sift the reality from the rubbish. They also need reporters, editors and producers who know how to find the documents, data and sources that will allow them to provide meaning, context and exclusive new angles in the days that follow.

Nothing tests the mettle of a newsroom like a big breaking story.

Nothing challenges the ethics of a newsroom like the fear of falling behind.

And nothing reinforces the value of a newsroom to a community than when it rises above the competition to provide accurate, timely and crucial information when the public needs it most.

Mark Horvit is executive director of IRE and NICAR. He can be reached at mhorvit@ire.org or 573-882-1984.

2015 IRE Awards call for entries

It's time to gather your best stories of the year! The 2015 IRE Awards contest is open for submissions, and we can't wait to see what you've done. Please consider entering your best investigative work into the 2015 IRE Awards contest.

Among the most prestigious in journalism, the IRE Awards recognize outstanding investigative reporting across all media, including print, TV, radio and student work. Eligible entries must have been published or aired between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2015. The deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2016.

For details on how to enter, go to: ire.org/awards/ire-awards/faq/

Introducing NICAR-Learn: A new hub for on-demand training videos

Trying to boost your data journalism skills? We know it can be hard to learn on your own. For more than 20 years, journalists have used Investigative Reporters & Editors and the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting to share ideas, solve problems and discuss techniques for computer-assisted reporting.

We're excited to introduce NICAR-Learn, a new data journalism training tool you can access anytime, anywhere.

NICAR-Learn is a place for journalists to follow along with some of the best reporters, developers and editors in the business as they demonstrate tips and strategies for working with data. Unlike some online training platforms, you won't find any hour-long webinars on the site. Instead, we're developing a library of short videos – most under 10 minutes – filmed to address specific skills, problems and software.

To kick things off, we asked data journalist MaryJo Webster to share some of her favorite tricks from her popular "Excel Magic" course.

Learn more on NICAR-Learn's Getting Started page (learn.ire.org/getting-started/).

If you have ideas for videos, we want to hear from you!

You can email us at learn@ire.org.

IRE y NICAR lanza una lista de correo exclusivamente en español para periodismo de datos

(Editor's note: English translation available in the next column)

No importa si es la media noche o en un fin de semana, más de 2,300 miembros que participan en la lista de NICAR-L están dispuestos a contestar preguntas de como usar herramientas como Microsoft Excel, a cartografía avanzada, o como hacer codificación. Desde 1994, miembros del Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE, por sus siglas en inglés) han publicado más que 78,000 mensajes en la lista de correo dedicada al periodismo de datos. Y por décadas esta lista ha sido dedicada al habla inglés solamente. Pero recientemente la organización decidió expandir la lista y crear una version en español nombrada, NICAR-ESP-L. Como la lista original, NICAR-ESP-L es un foro donde periodistas que prefieren comunicarse en español y podrán discutir temas sobre periodismo de datos. También la lista de correo electrónico es un tablero de fijación para las organizaciónes de IRE y NICAR. Y como NICAR-L, la lista está abierta a todos; no importa si son miembros de IRE oficialmente o no.

Para subscribirse a NICAR-ESP-L puedes usar este enlace: bit.ly/1OP1xl9

Para solicitar ayuda: bit.ly/1TQPhm7

IRE and NICAR launch Spanish data journalism listserv

Whether it's the middle of the night or a holiday weekend, NICAR-L's more than 2,300 members are willing to answer questions on everything from Excel basics to advanced mapping and coding techniques.

Since 1994, more than 78,000 messages have been posted to Investigative Reporters and Editors' email list dedicated to data-driven journalism. We hope that this helpful spirit carries on with NICAR-ESP-L, our Spanish version of this list.

Just like the original, NICAR-ESP-L will serve as a forum for the discussion of subjects related to data-driven journalism.

It will also act as a posting board for new developments at IRE and NICAR. And just like NICAR-L, this list will be open to everyone, both IRE members and nonmembers.

To join NICAR-ESP-L: bit.ly/1OP1xl9

2016 IRE Conference to take place one week earlier than planned

Due to a booking conflict by the New Orleans Marriott, the IRE Conference will be held a week earlier. Please mark your calendars for June 16-19, 2016, and plan to attend the annual conference being held in New Orleans.

The best in the business will gather for more than 150 panels, hands-on classes and special presentations about covering business, public safety, government, health care, education, the military, the environment and other key beats.

Speakers will share strategies for locating documents and gaining access to public records, finding the best stories and managing investigations.

Join the discussion about how to practice investigative journalism for print, broadcast, online and alternative newsroom models. The conference begins Thursday at 9 a.m. and ends at 12:30 p.m. on Sunday.

For any questions on the new date or the conference, please contact Executive Director Mark Horvit at 573-882-1984.

DIGGING FOR ANSWERS

Test soil for toxins when regulators don't

Tony Schick and Courtney Flatt
EarthFix

Decades of dousing orchards with lead- and arsenic-based pesticides saved Washington state's famous apple industry, but it also left widespread contamination on land that was later developed.

Lead in a child's blood stunts growth, lowers IQ and causes behavioral problems. Health officials say no amount of lead in a child's blood is safe. Repeated arsenic exposure is linked to heart disease, diabetes and various forms of cancer.

After being introduced to this issue by a source, we wanted to report on how little was being done to address this contamination at people's homes. We also wanted to find people living on such contaminated soil. State agencies, however, weren't doing the kind of testing that would show whether people were residing on contaminated land. So we decided to do some testing ourselves.

How we tested for contaminated soil

We got a grant to do soil sampling from the Society of Environmental Journalists' Fund for Environmental Journalism. According to a state report, an estimated 187,000 acres of former orchard lands were contaminated.

So we started reading studies and reports, and we called regulators, academic experts and environmental advocates to learn where likely hotspots for contamination existed in the Pacific Northwest.

We settled on three locations known for orchard production: Yakima and Wenatchee in Washington and Hood River in Oregon.

We consulted government agency literature on soil sampling from the Washington Department of Ecology and talked with experts. We wanted our methods to match those employed by government regulators to avoid questions about the validity of our results.

There's little cost involved with taking soil samples. All you need are some rubber gloves, resealable zipper storage bags, a trowel and some soap and water. Be mindful of cross-contamination. Technicians with the Washington Department of Ecology wear multiple sets of rubber gloves. After handling each sample they take off one pair of gloves. It's also important to clean the trowel between uses. Based on expert recommendations, we took at least two samples from each property: one from two-inches deep and one from six-inches deep. Where property owners gave us permission for multiple sample locations, we took additional samples. We made note of whether we were digging in the

Courtesy of the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center.

A man in a bow tie sprays an apple tree with lead arsenate in the early 1900s. Orchardists say without the pesticide, the country's most productive apple growing region wouldn't have been able to grow apples.

property's original soil or fill dirt.

Soil sampling doesn't have to be subjected to a peer-reviewed journal to be valuable. Our goal was not to extrapolate from our samples or draw conclusions about contamination patterns. We did not have the resources for that. Had we gotten hung up on our limitations, we never would have done the sampling. We simply wanted to know whether lead and arsenic did exist in some of these places at potentially harmful levels.

Once you've got your results, don't overstate them. We didn't use this sampling as proof of a problem. We used it to supplement a lot of other reporting. The sampling process also led us to people who didn't know they were living on contaminated soil.

Getting samples tested is expensive. Your state's environmental or agricultural agency likely has a list of certified labs that can do such analyses. Traditional lab analysis could cost between $1,000 to $2,000 for around a dozen samples. Initially, we had planned to send our samples to one of these labs. Then we learned about X-ray fluorescence (XRF) machines, which are another tool used to detect certain elements, including heavy metals.

If you are looking for heavy metals, consider using XRF. These machines provide nearly instantaneous results. You can rent a portable one. We mailed out our samples to a company that supplies the Washington Department of Ecology with its XRF machines. They tested more than 70 samples for $1,000 and returned an Excel spreadsheet with results.

XRF is not considered as precise as laboratory analysis, but it is quite reliable. Agencies will often use it to screen properties and then do further lab analysis for results that are legally enforceable. But the XRF analysis fit our needs and allowed us to do more than we otherwise would have.

Your state likely has guidelines for what contamination levels (usually in something like parts per million) trigger cleanups or enforcement. We compared our results to these state levels. The Environmental Protection Agency and the Centers for Disease Control have similar guidelines for protecting human health.

Ultimately, about half of the properties we tested contained either arsenic or lead at levels that exceeded state cleanup standards.

How we reported the rest of the story

The results from our own testing were just a small piece of a larger story about how Washington state officials knowingly let contamination linger as area lawmakers and industries sought to quiet concerns about lead and arsenic to avoid a health scare that could hurt the apple industry.

We started reporting on orchard contamination throughout the entire Pacific Northwest, but soon we focused in on central Washington. The amount of contamination in the area, as well as economics and politics at play, made it the best place to tell this story.

One of the first things we found was a 2003 report from a task force the state convened to study soil contamination in Washington. Such reports can be a roadmap, or at least a starting guide, for the story. We mined the task force member list and found some of our best sources. We found a real estate agent who said the Washington Association of Realtors refused to let him give a presentation about disclosing soil contamination. We also found a scientist who has studied lead arsenate contamination for decades.

In toxic cleanup situations, keep any eye out for concrete recommendations so you can check to see if they were followed. We used many recommendations in the 2003 report to show that, over a decade later, many things that were supposed to be done to mitigate the contamination were not accomplished.

Cleaning up contaminated schools was a major recommendation of the task force. The state put quite a bit of effort into that, but it had done little to fulfill recommendations on studying exposure or addressing contamination at homes, parks and day cares — all places where experts say exposure to the chemicals is just as likely.

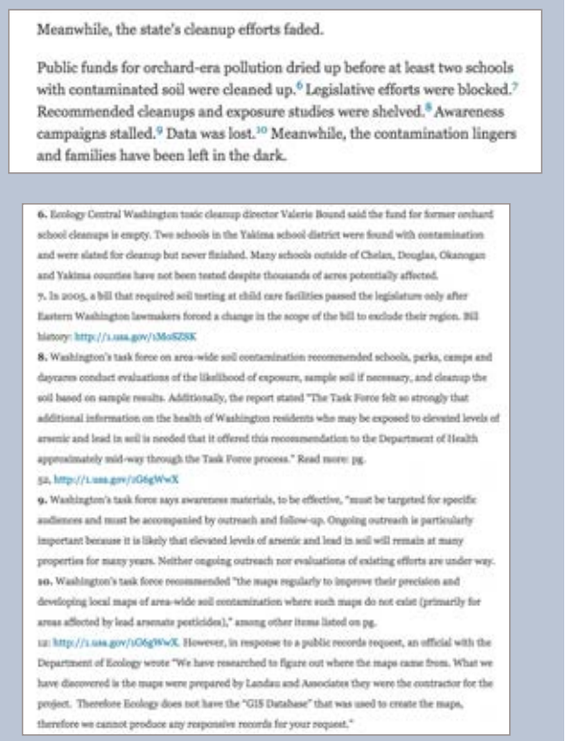
We requested a lot of records from state agencies. After a tip from a former Washington Department of Ecology employee, we requested records related to a Yakima subdivision where he lived. The files showed that the agency and the developer knew about soil contamination there in the early 1990s, a decade before new home construction began, but no cleanup was ever required.

In some cases, the records we couldn't get back were more telling than the ones we did. The state's health department could give us very little data on lead and arsenic exposure, which we found was a result of very thin monitoring despite recommendations for more exposure studies.

We requested a GIS database of suspected former orchard lands from the ecology department. The state was supposed to have this database, according to its website. In addition, according to recommendations, the agency was supposed to update it with new information over the years. In its response to us, the agency said it

Using endnotes for transparency in reporting

In the online presentation for this article, we did something we'd never done before: We annotated nearly every line with further clarification and links to source material on DocumentCloud. We do this type of footnoting internally during the fact-checking process, but we had never published it before. Previously, on larger projects, we tried inserting links to source material. But we heard complaints that the number of hyperlinks in the stories was overwhelming and distracting. In this version, readers simply clicked the number at the end of the sentence if they wanted to know more, and the page scrolled to the accompanying endnote.



Meanwhile, the state's cleanup efforts faded.

Public funds for orchard-era pollution dried up before at least two schools with contaminated soil were cleaned up.[6] Legislative efforts were blocked.[7] Recommended cleanups and exposure studies were shelved.[8] Awareness campaigns stalled.[9] Data was lost.[10] Meanwhile, the contamination lingers and families have been left in the dark.

6. Ecology Central Washington toxic cleanup director Valerie Bound said the fund for former orchard school cleanups is empty. Two schools in the Yakima school district were found with contamination and were slated for cleanup but never finished. Many schools outside of Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan and Yakima counties have not been tested despite thousands of acres potentially affected.

7. In 2005, a bill that required soil testing at child care facilities passed the legislature only after Eastern Washington lawmakers forced a change in the scope of the bill to exclude their region. Bill history: http://1.usa.gov/1Mo8Z8K

8. Washington's task force on area-wide soil contamination recommended schools, parks, camps and daycares conduct evaluations of the likelihood of exposure, sample soil if necessary, and cleanup the soil based on sample results. Additionally, the report stated "The Task Force felt so strongly that additional information on the health of Washington residents who may be exposed to elevated levels of arsenic and lead in soil is needed that it offered this recommendation to the Department of Health approximately mid-way through the Task Force process." Read more: pg. 52, http://1.usa.gov/1O6gWwX

9. Washington's task force says awareness materials, to be effective, "must be targeted for specific audiences and must be accompanied by outreach and follow-up. Ongoing outreach is particularly important because it is likely that elevated levels of arsenic and lead in soil will remain at many properties for many years. Neither ongoing outreach nor evaluations of existing efforts are under way.

10. Washington's task force recommended "the maps regularly to improve their precision and developing local maps of area-wide soil contamination where such maps do not exist (primarily for areas affected by lead arsenate pesticides)," among other items listed on pg. 12: http://1.usa.gov/1O6gWwX However, in response to a public records request, an official with the Department of Ecology wrote "We have researched to figure out where the maps came from. What we have discovered is the maps were prepared by Landau and Associates they were the contractor for the project. Therefore Ecology does not have the "GIS Database" that was used to create the maps, therefore we cannot produce any responsive records for your request."

The main reason for these endnotes is to increase the transparency of our reporting process. Showing the source material for the story's salient facts provides evidence for our readers — and the subjects of our stories — that our reporting is solid. Another effect of sourcing material this way is the ability to leave wordy attributions out of the story itself. We could simply state the facts and stay within the narrative, leaving some of the wonkier attributions for the endnotes. The only feedback we received was positive, and overall, this made for a better read.

couldn't locate the database.

Another use of public records was to find affected parties. We found a day care owner who voluntarily tried to clean up his property. We requested a list of all licensed child care operators from the state's Department of Early Learning and worked our way through phone numbers on the list — one of us from the top, the other from the bottom.

Over and over, people implied much of this inaction was the result of resistance to the issue from the agriculture industry, which is prominent in central Washington, east of the Cascade Range. Finding someone to discuss it on the record was difficult. Many people either did not want to talk to us or never returned our calls or emails. The issue was essentially dormant in Washington — it had been hot and controversial a decade ago, but many people had moved on.

Ultimately, we found a prime example of efforts to thwart cleanup in the state's legislative record. We ran keyword searches in the state legislature's online database and found a 2005 bill that would have enacted some of the key recommendations, including mandatory testing for child care centers. Curiously, the bill's language specified it applied only to facilities "west of the crest of the Cascade mountains."

Tracing the bill's history, we found the original version explicitly mentioned lead arsenate pesticide and applied to the entire state. Interviews and an audio recording of a legislative floor debate revealed that lawmakers from districts east of the Cascades forced the changes in the bill that removed all reference to pesticides and omitted the eastern two-thirds of the state.

From that, we tracked down Jim Clements, the retired lawmaker and orchardist who fought the bill and other efforts to require government agencies to test soil. Clements summed up the feelings of many in central and eastern Washington who opposed making lead and arsenic soil contamination a focus of public health and environmental cleanup efforts:

"My grandmother, my family, my extended families, my wife and I raised our children on these orchards," he said. "They played in the dirt, they played in the soil. We had gardens, we had fruit trees of every sort. And there wasn't anything that would ever indicate there was a problem."

The issue of exposure to these soil contaminants was a tricky one. We didn't want to overstate the health risk. After all, the contamination that did exist was at levels low enough that only chronic exposure could cause health problems. At the same time, lead and arsenic can do bad things if they build up in a child's blood stream, so people have the right to know what's in their topsoil.

In cases like this, it's possible no local studies have been done, and no cases of exposure have been documented in your area. In Washington, only 4 percent of children are tested for blood lead levels each year and there is no active testing for arsenic exposure. And if a child were to experience chronic exposure, there are no obvious symptoms.

If no studies exist, consider looking for studies elsewhere documenting the same exposure. In central Washington, only one study existed for lead levels in blood. We found studies of exposure to lead and arsenic in soil that were done across the country and in western Washington, where smelters left similar traces of heavy metals.

By the time our sample results came back, we knew exactly what they meant as a human health risk. And so did the families living with that pollution.

Don't quit on a story about contamination because of too little data. Go get your own and hold accountable the people who should have collected it in the first place.

Courtesy of the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center.

This is what Wenatchee, the self-described "Apple Capital of the World," looked like in 1924 with orchards as seen from Saddle Rock on the outskirts of town

Tony Schick, OPB/EarthFix.

This is what Wenatchee looks like today as seen from Saddle Rock on the outskirts of town.

Tony Schick is an investigative and data reporter who covers the environment beat in the Pacific Northwest. He is a graduate of the Missouri School of Journalism and Gonzaga University.

Courtney Flatt is an environment reporter in eastern Washington. She earned her master's in convergence journalism at the University of Missouri.

EarthFix - News Fixed on the Environment is a public media partnership of Oregon Public Broadcasting, Idaho Public Television, KCTS9 Seattle, KUOW Puget Sound Public Radio, Jefferson Public Radio, KLCC and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

Secret settlements

How digging up documents revealed costly claims

Jamie Satterfield
Knoxville News Sentinel

It began in October 2013 amid a political firestorm over wrongful arrests due to clerical errors at the Knox County criminal court clerk's office. This was my beat, and I had a two-pronged approach for getting behind the politics: Follow the trail of the missteps through the chain of command and expose the systemic failures at play.

Amid a big document dump we requested from the clerk's office, there was one document that seemed out of place — a release of liability form signed by an inmate at the Knox County Detention Facility. I did a little digging on the form.

My first call was to a guy who knew all about inmates — a public defender. He'd never heard of such a form. I got fuzzy answers from the law department and the sheriff's office. I filed a public records request for release of liability forms involving every county agency funded by taxpayers.

The forms told me, in most cases, a dollar figure these folks received in return.

I broadened my records request, asking for documents related to each liability form. I got a stack of checks and invoices requesting payment for a settlement. The details of the actual claims just weren't there. But I hadn't asked for them.

This investigation hinged on garnering records. The story was right there for the taking if you knew what to ask for. The challenge was you had no clue what documents lurked in files you'd never seen.

And that's where beat reporting (the institutional knowledge one obtains through immersion in the day-to-day business of the courts) came in handy. I knew they represented settlements based largely on my own reporting experience and the little tells from the documents, such as, checks made out to an attorney in care of a client or citing a number I knew to be a civil lawsuit style case number.

There are three kinds of settlements: in court, out of court and under the table. All leave a paper trail. You just have to know the map for each one. In-court settlements are detail gold mines, rarely coming without some legal mudslinging. Out-of-court settlements generate less paperwork and less detail, but these documents point you to the players — the aggrieved citizens and the aggrieving employees.

The series taught me about the art of filing records requests, the necessity for independent sources in the toolbox and the value of beat reporting.

Under the table settlements aren't illegal. Let me make that clear. They are claims in which the county foul-up was so bad, so obvious or so incidental that the law department didn't spend a lot of time defending it. These are quick deals in which both sides are a little desperate to settle, though for disparate reasons. Records are scant but public in Tennessee.

I knew what information I wanted but I needed to know what specific types of documents to request. Civil law has never caught my fancy in terms of my natural curiosity. I study enough of it to accurately report on the big issues, the big cases. I needed knowledge, and the more unfiltered, the better.

I called up three experts of civil law. They schooled me on the nuts and bolts of not only the documents to specifically seek, but also what file to look in. Claims were ultimately approved by the law department, so that's where I wanted to focus my records request. The law department, though, would claim attorney work product privilege. Stymied again. But I was prepared this time. I had learned from my civil legal dream team that nearly every claim paid by taxpayers for county foul-ups passes through the risk management office.

I had never heard of this office. Turns out, most citizens don't know what this office does or how it's funded.

Every government must be insured against the risk of liability much the way we motorists must insure our cars. Risk management is the unit within government that is tasked with handling all claims filed against a government for liability and any claims the government itself may make against other insurers like when a utility company damages county property.

I decided to expand my search to city government, too. Surely, Knoxville city workers employed by taxpayers also had made costly mistakes.

This final public records request produced my series, "Costly Claims," which examined how and if governments are insured against risk, how damages awarded to wronged citizens were financed, the laws protecting government from risk, the inherent tension between a government told by taxpayers to guard the vault and a government that must fight its citizens to do so. It also presented to readers the stories behind these claims. These folks who were being paid for wrongs committed against them by government were you and I.

The series taught me about the art of filing records requests, the necessity for independent sources in the toolbox and the value of beat reporting. Equally important were the ability, the time and the manpower to drill down into the documents and weave stories readers actually want to read. What's a months-long investigation worth if no one but your mother reads it (and she might be lying)?

Our series examined a three-year period and discovered payouts of more than $5.3 million. We found repeat offenders kept on the payroll. We uncovered new details about cases of police misconduct. We highlighted abuses of the risk management process. The sheriff's office, for instance, had crafted its own release of liability forms, used its own lawyers and just sent the check request to pay the claim with little oversight.

But the real value in the News Sentinel's commitment to this series was the dialogue it created in the community. Real debates were had about real issues. What were agencies doing right or wrong in addressing patterns of bad behavior? Had governmental tort reform tilted too far one way or the other? It also added transparency to a line item in a massive budget — risk management — shrouded in secrecy by virtue of obscurity in the public record.

Jamie Satterfield covers law and crime for Knoxville News Sentinel.

DITCH THE PAPER PILE

Rev your reporting with DocumentCloud

Anthony DeBarros
DocumentCloud

Hunting for news in a pile of documents is no easy task, especially when you're nearing deadline and a government agency just gifted you with a 250-page report or 100 megabytes of email text.

Or maybe you're in the thick of a six-month investigation. On your computer, you've squirreled away thousands of PDFs related to the topic because you're sure they contain key information. But how do you find what you're looking for?

You might be tempted to print everything out, grab a coffee and start reading with highlighter and Post-it notes in hand. But that's not how it should be. Save yourself a lot of hassle – and tell a better story – by using DocumentCloud.

Yes, we're partial to DocumentCloud. After all, it's a service of IRE and perhaps one of the most successful projects to come out of the Knight News Challenge. But we have even more reasons.

Five years after opening its public beta, DocumentCloud holds more than 2.5 million documents containing 31 million pages contributed by news organizations around the world – many of them publicly searchable at documentcloud.org.

Contributors range from the biggest newsrooms to independent journalists. And best of all, DocumentCloud continues to play a role in powerful, award-winning investigative reporting and news applications.

Thanks to three grants from the Knight Foundation, the most recent in 2014, we've been able to expand the DocumentCloud team and focus on building a faster, more reliable platform with new features designed especially for delivering news on phones.

We're also working on plans to make DocumentCloud financially sustainable while maintaining a level of free access currently available for journalists.

Keep track of our progress at blog.documentcloud.org or follow us on Twitter @documentcloud for updates.

Haven't yet signed up for an account or gotten your newsroom involved? Consider these seven things you can do with DocumentCloud to rev up your reporting:

Upload easily

We know you don't have a lot of time, so we've made it easy to get started. Simply drag and drop files into the DocumentCloud workspace, fill out a couple of fields to name the file and start uploading. If you're dealing with breaking news, you can make the document public right away.

Otherwise, unless you say so, your files stay private, viewable only by you.

Find the newsy needle in the haystack

When you upload a file to DocumentCloud – the platform takes PDF, Word, Excel and image files, among others – it's passed through an OCR (optical character reader) engine that extracts the text. That's loaded in a database, where it's searchable alongside the text from all your documents. Load 10 PDFs (or 10,000), and you can easily find every mention of a key name or phrase. Try that with a highlighter.

Visualize key terms and dates

DocumentCloud passes the OCR'd text through Reuters' OpenCalais entity service, which looks for terms including people, places and organizations. The terms appear in the workspace with a visual cue of where and how often each appears in the document. The workspace also offers a timeline of every date in your document so you can visually understand the flow of events in, say, a court deposition.

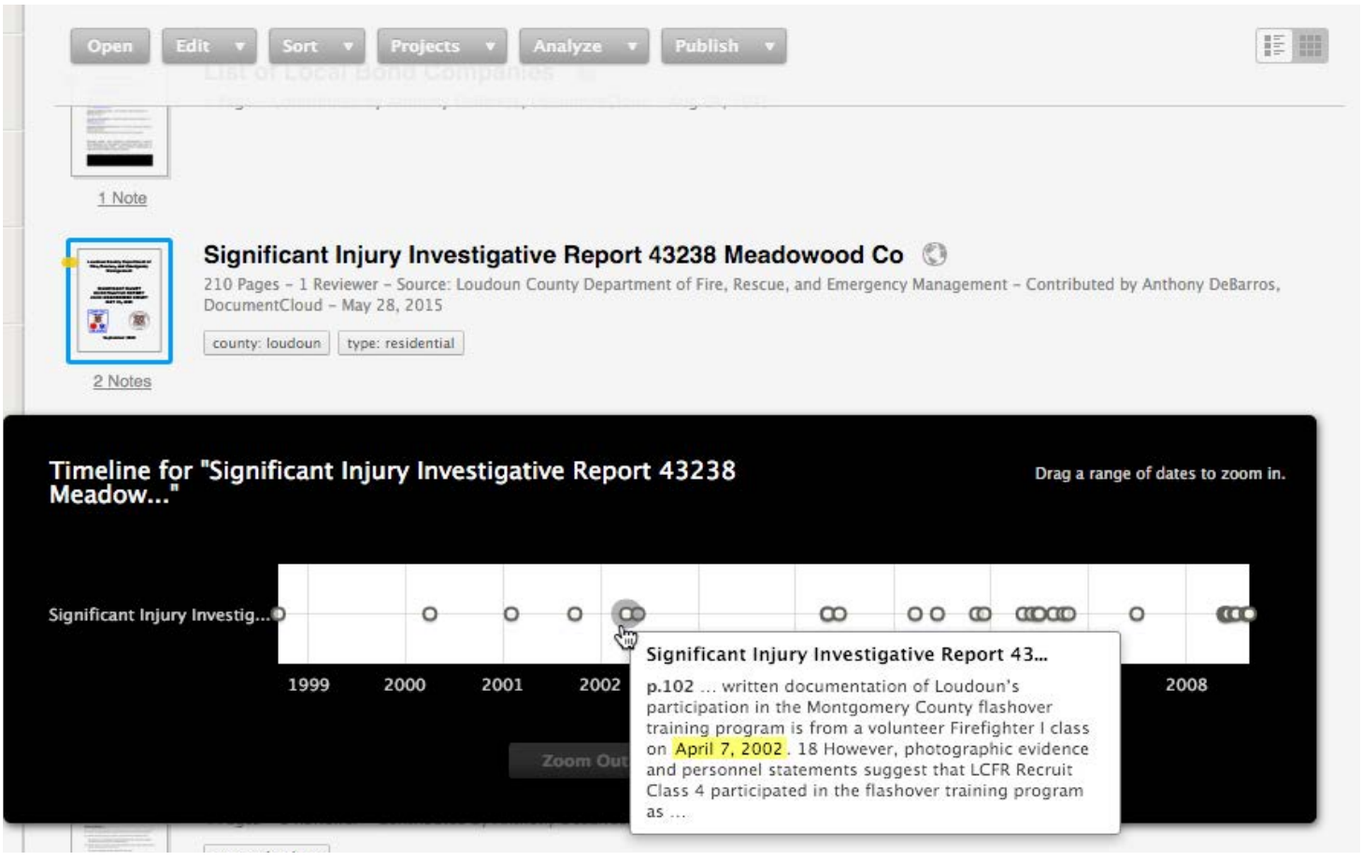
Five years after opening its public beta, DocumentCloud holds more than 2.5 million documents containing 31 million pages contributed by news organizations around the world - many of them publicly searchable at documentcloud.org.

Get organized

Create folders to group documents by project or subject. Add custom data fields to further refine how you classify your documents. When you want to find a document, it'll be much easier than upending a tower of paper on your desk.

Note key passages

Publishing a document online is a great reader service, but what's even better is helping readers find the news in it. With



Did You Know?

Already a DocumentCloud user? Here are three things you might not know about the platform:

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Add custom data:

You can add searchable pairs of keys and values to any document to classify, organize and search it. Right-click on a document and select "Edit Document Data." Fill in pairs of keys and values, such as "status: reviewed" or "year: 2015." For details, see our Help page at documentcloud.org/help/searching.

DocumentCloud's annotation tool, you can draw a box around key sentences or sections. Add headlines and descriptive text, and when you publish the document your notes are there to guide readers. Or, if you want, you can publish an individual note to emphasize a passage.

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DocumentCloud's embeds let you add documents, notes, pages and collections of documents right in your story. Or link directly from a story to any place in your document hosted on our site. It's easy to generate the code you need with our embed wizard. Thinking of how everything will work on mobile? DocumentCloud's new page embed is lightweight and fully responsive — perfect for phones and tablets.

How can you get started? Every news organization that contributes to DocumentCloud has at least one administrative user who can make an account for you. If you don't know who that is, or if your organization isn't a DocumentCloud contributor yet, please contact us via documentcloud.org/apply.

Anthony DeBarros is director of product development for DocumentCloud and a member of the IRE staff. Before joining IRE, his work for USA TODAY and Gannett Digital helped investigative teams win recognition including an Alfred I. duPont award for "Ghost Factories: Poison in the Ground" and a National Headliner Award for "Behind the Bloodshed: The Untold Story of America's Mass Killings."

IT

You 3.0: Upgrade your social media presence

Doug Haddix
Kiplinger Program, Ohio State University

Like it or not, every journalist is a brand.

That's always been true. Readers knew that Nellie Bly was a muckraker interested in sweatshops, asylums and political corruption. Viewers counted on Walter Cronkite for his straight-shooting CBS reports. And today, audiences easily can describe the brands of Bill O'Reilly, Rachel Maddow, or Don Barlett and James Steele.

How you appear online — across social media platforms, websites and in search results — contributes to your own personal brand as a journalist, beyond your stories alone.

In essence, your brand is how people describe you and your work to others.

Yes, your work speaks for itself — for people who see it. While your online brand evolves with no active effort on your part, you can strengthen it. Journalists who nurture their online presence can grow their audience and influence. Here's some digital food for thought:

Who am I? First, think about how you want to be viewed as a journalist. When people mention you or your work, what would you like them to say? Jot down a few key words and phrases. Now, label yourself professionally in 10 words or fewer. For example: watchdog reporter using data, public records to cover Columbus schools. Those key words and phrases should appear across your social media profiles and online bios. Consistency reinforces your brand. It also helps with search engine optimization when potential sources and whistleblowers are looking for an interested journalist.

Account name. Because journalists change jobs fairly frequently, it's better to use your name without attaching it to a specific employer. If you have a common name, tag it with news or reports or a similar term. For example, JaneSmithNews is better than JaneSmithNBC9.

Avatars. If you're still an egg on Twitter, it's way past time to hatch and become a full-grown bird. Using a tightly cropped headshot makes you recognizable instantly as "the journalist" — rather than someone else with the same name — on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter.

Bio. Use precise words to describe your current employer and interests. Include at least one Web link. Use About.me or a similar free service to create a personal profile page with a photo, short bio and links to all of your social media accounts. Then, use the link to your personal profile page on all of your social channels, as well as your email signature. If you prefer a profile page that allows you to upload PDFs of your best work, consider Folio Focus, MuckRack, Pressfolios or Wix.

Headers and backgrounds. Consider using your company's official logo as a visual identifier on accounts that you use primarily for work. On other social platforms, use visuals that say something about you. For instance, I like to travel, so I often use my own photos. Canva, a free online tool, helps you easily create headers, backgrounds and other visuals.

Contact info. If you welcome story ideas and feedback, make it easy for people to find you. To avoid spam bots, you can use something like John(dot)Reporter(at)Newspaper(dot)com in a profile.

Get verified. Each social platform has different rules for verification. Some, like Twitter, no longer accept applications and instead monitor accounts for the number of followers and interactions to determine whom to bless with the blue checkmark. Start with MuckRack, which has a detailed explanation for journalists (including freelancers) at muckrack.com/criteria.

Provide valuable content. If you only share links to your stories, you'll be seen — rightly so — as nothing more than a self-promoter. Share behind-the-scenes moments, links to useful resources and stories by other journalists, and a sprinkling of personal moments to stay human.

Use images. Research shows that posts with photos, graphics and links get far more traction than words alone.

Schedule posts. Use Buffer or a similar free service to spread out your social media posts so that you appear to be active throughout the day and week. Schedule posts in advance using TweetDeck or HootSuite.

Engage with people. Respond to comments on your Facebook posts. Interact on Twitter. Like other people's Instagram photos. Avoid being seen as someone with a megaphone shouting, "Look at me! Look at my work!"

Monitor your brand. Save streams on TweetDeck or HootSuite to track what people are saying about you and your employer. Explore more robust services for tracking and analytics such as Foller.me, FollowerWonk, Klear, Simply Measured, SumAll, TweetStats and Tweriod.

Smart strategies and simple tools can help you enhance your social media presence without devouring hours a day. Perform a social media checkup on your accounts, spend an hour polishing your profiles, and take another hour or so to create a personal profile page.

After that initial time investment, you can ramp up your social presence in less than 30 minutes a day with a few scheduled posts and regular monitoring.

Doug Haddix, a former training director for IRE, leads the Kiplinger Program in Public Affairs Journalism at Ohio State University. The program helps journalists strengthen skills in social media, smartphone video, data journalism and digital tools. Previously, he worked for more than 20 years as a newspaper editor and reporter. @doughaddix

Breaking

Going deeper after a shooting

BY GLENN SMITH • THE POST AND COURIER

The call came in around 9:20 p.m. as the night staff was putting the finishing touches on the next day's paper. Reporter Schuyler Kropf had just received an ominous tip from a well-placed source: A mass shooting had occurred at one of Charleston's oldest and most revered African-American churches.

"They're saying there are at least eight people dead at the AME church near your house," he told me. "You need to get over there."

I ran down the street that June night in flip-flops and shorts, clutching a notebook and pen as I frantically dialed the top editors and relayed the news.

Word soon circulated that nine people had died in Mother Emanuel, and that the gunman was a young white man who had made racist statements. The church's pastor, a state senator, lay among the dead in one of the worst mass shootings in modern South Carolina history.

Hold back to verify

Amid the chaos, we knew this much to be true: This shooting would soon be national news, the latest in a line of mass killings that have fueled tense debate over how best to curb gun violence in the United States. This tragedy would certainly be remembered in this city for generations to come. We were writing the first draft of history. We needed to get it right.

In those first moments, that meant holding back at times until information and rumors could be verified. The riots in Baltimore and Ferguson were front-and-center in our minds, as was the killing of Walter Scott, an unarmed black man shot in the back by a white police officer in nearby North Charleston. Our community was on edge, and we didn't want to add to the confusion, anger and alarm by putting out misleading or false information.

The pitfalls of rushing to be first were illustrated in the first hour when some media outlets reported that police had apprehended a man believed to be the shooter at a gas station near the church.

"Got him!" one television reporter tweeted triumphantly.

The man in question turned out to be a freelance videographer who bore a passing resemblance to descriptions of the gunman. He was quickly let go.

That incident drove home a point: People don't always remember who is first to report each breaking development in a rapidly developing story. But they do remember who got it wrong.

We took that lesson to heart and applied it throughout our coverage of this tragedy. The Post and Courier is a small operation compared to the national media outlets that parachuted in to cover this story. Our advantage: a deep understanding of the community, its complex history with issues of race and who to turn to for reliable information and context.

Make it easy for readers to find

That effort began that night, as reporters fanned out across the city pursuing various leads. Tony Bartelme rushed to the city's trauma hospital, where he found family members gathered to hear the fates of their loved ones.

The grandson of one victim told him, "I'm lost, I'm lost. Granny was the heart of the family. I don't even know if she's alive or dead." An hour and a half later, the young man's wails sounded across the hospital compound. He'd finally learned that his grandmother was among the dead.

We held the presses until well after midnight to accommodate a late news conference in which key details were presented. We continued to update our main story online through the night, while establishing the widely adopted #CharlestonShooting hashtag to break new developments on Twitter and other social media outlets.

The following day, we went to a large, home page takeover on our website to give readers a go-to spot where all articles on the shootings were consolidated. We generally went with one main story that was frequently updated, along with various breakouts.

Sunday, June 21, 2015

The Post and Courier

Photo illustration by Wade Spees
Design by Krena Lanham, Maureen Hartshorn and Chad Dunbar

Offer key context

Most of The Post and Courier's newsroom of about 80 staffers was drafted to help with the coverage, with an eye toward leveraging institutional knowledge to seek answers about what happened and why.

For example, while our crime reporters pressed police sources for information, projects reporter Jennifer Berry Hawes drew on her background covering faith issues to profile the difficult history of Mother Emanuel, the oldest AME church in the South. She provided critical context, including the fact that the shooting had occurred around the 193rd anniversary of a failed slave rebellion plotted by one of the church's founders. Her contacts on the religion beat also helped her connect with parishioners who had been inside the church on the night of June 17.

Those insider stories, along with additional accounts from community sources that projects reporter Doug Pardue had cultivated, proved indispensable in producing the definitive narrative of how the shooting transpired — a piece that ran just two days after the killings.

Like other journalists, we were deeply interested in what motivated the accused killer, 21-year-old Dylann Roof, and we assigned reporters to examine his background. But we also made a conscious decision to examine the deeper currents at work.

We thought hard about the definition of what's "news." Was it Roof's motivations? Certainly they were important. But we soon realized that something more profound was happening.

Instead of rage, the victims' families reacted with astounding grace and forgiveness. The community did so as well, as thousands gathered to link hands across Charleston's largest bridge. It soon became apparent that the community's response was an international breaking story, and we gave this the kind of coverage it deserved.

> Our decision to keep the focus on the community – its pain, unity and resiliency – struck a deep chord with readers. City leaders later told us they believed the approach helped keep Charleston united and calm at a time when outside activists were calling on young African Americans to take up arms and fight back.

Remember the human side of the equation

As parishioners prepared to return to Mother Emanuel to worship for the first time since the shooting, our design team and top editors came up with the idea of devoting the Sunday front page to a simple, but moving, tribute to the dead. The spare layout featured a bouquet of nine roses woven from the leaves of palmetto trees, along with the names of those killed and a few telling details about each. The roses are a ubiquitous symbol of Charleston and especially its black heritage.

That day's paper also contained a story about an online manifesto Roof had posted before the shootings outlining his plan to start a race war. That important story, and his photo, ran inside that day. It was a story

that needed to be told. But the worshippers at Mother Emanuel, and the community at large, didn't need to see his angry face staring back at them from news racks accompanied by the venom of his racist rant.

Our decision to keep the focus on the community — its pain, unity and resiliency — struck a deep chord with readers. City leaders later told us they believed the approach helped keep Charleston united and calm at a time when outside activists were calling on young African Americans to take up arms and fight back.

The morning after the shooting, we assigned separate reporters to each of the nine families who had lost someone. The reporters profiled those who died, wrote moving dispatches from their memorial services and stayed in contact with their relatives. This built trust with the families, which, in turn, helped further inform our coverage with first-hand accounts about legal proceedings and developments within the church.

The sources we developed would later prove crucial in helping us probe concerns that millions of dollars in donations that had been given to the church in the wake of the shootings were not making their way to the survivors and families of the dead. That led to us investigate previous complaints of financial mismanagement lodged against the man appointed to serve as interim pastor of Emanuel AME after the shootings.

Look for watchdog angles

As we stayed abreast of breaking events, we also looked for ways to explore the story in greater context. Editors talked throughout the day with their teams, then met at least twice daily to coordinate plans for coverage and share ideas for enterprise pieces that would follow. We sought input from the entire staff, from sportswriters to political reporters, to find fresh angles to pursue and assemble a wide web of sources from which to draw. We kept track of everyone's assignments on a giant whiteboard that mapped out stories over a two-week span. We also emailed detailed assignment lists to the staff to avoid people duplicating the efforts of their colleagues. We knew we had to communicate early and often to keep the story on track.

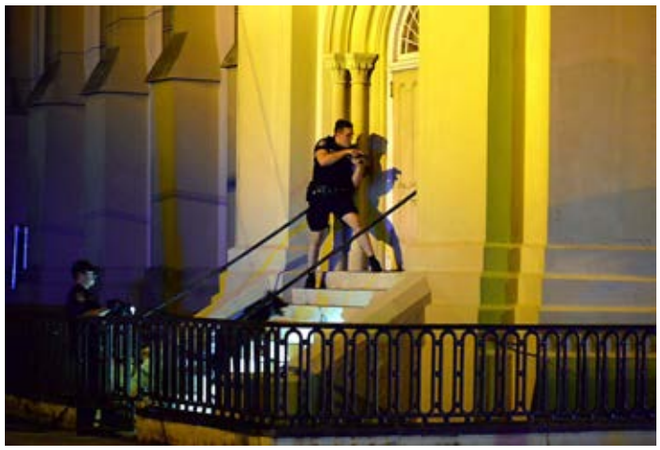
As always, it was important to take a step back and keep watchdog angles in mind. How did Roof get hold of a gun with prior criminal charges on his record? Where did the process break down? Did any prior contacts with law enforcement raise flags that could have alerted authorities to his plans?

To get started on this path, we needed to have access to whatever documents and recordings were available to help us tell this story. We quickly filed Freedom of Information requests for all police incident and supplemental reports on the shooting, as well as for 911 and dispatch recordings, dash cam footage and police call logs. We used the State Law Enforcement Division's database to run a criminal background check on the accused shooter, then methodically checked with courts and police agencies to look for evidence of other legal troubles and run-ins with the law. Among other things, this led to records from Roof's parents' divorce, which provided illuminating facts about the family's history. We used a paid background check service, tlo.com to track down the suspect's relatives, neighbors and past addresses.

We also scoured the web for documents and posts on white supremacist websites looking for links between their writings and Roof's online manifesto. This path led us to confront and profile a supremacist blogger whose works inspired Roof. The man was operating out of quiet suburb near Charleston.

Reporter Andrew Knapp ran down Roof's criminal history and found he was awaiting trial on a felony drug charge that would have made him ineligible to purchase a pistol. This, in turn, led us and others to report on flaws in the government's background check system, which allowed him to purchase a gun after a three-day waiting period even though the necessary checks were still pending.

The key was to probe each new development and follow whatever trail it offered, from tracking down friends who had known Roof in the months before the shooting to speaking with experts on the growing number of threats from lone wolf killers who often fly under the radar of law enforcement. The discovery that a church surveillance camera had captured key images of the shooter led to a broader piece on security measures employed by houses of worship in an age of mass shootings.



Matthew Fortner/The Post and Courier

Police officers search for a shooting suspect on the grounds of a nearby church in downtown Charleston, South Carolina on Wednesday, June 17, 2015.

Get readers involved

In his manifesto of hate, Roof posed in several photographs holding guns and Confederate battle flags. These images prompted renewed debate over whether South Carolina should continue to fly the flag on its Statehouse grounds, a point of rancor for years.

State officials and pundits, however, said it was unclear whether sufficient political support existed to remove the banner, as a two-thirds majority was needed in both chambers of the General Assembly to take down the flag.

The Post and Courier decided to find out, launching a poll in which a team of reporters called up all 170 state lawmakers to determine their stance on the issue. We created a Google spreadsheet in Google docs which allowed multiple reporters to simultaneously enter their results. We posted the results online in real time. Our interactive editor, Emory Parker, used D3 software to create pie charts to illustrate the tally and then wrote a program that allowed the results to automatically update as they came in.

We pointed out the lawmakers who had ignored our calls and invited readers to contact them. To help, we provided phone numbers and Twitter handles of lawmakers who were missing in action. It proved to be a very successful exercise in public engagement. One reader wrote to say the effort prompted her to call her elected representatives for the very first time. Another lawmaker, on the receiving end of a barrage of calls, reached out to us, saying he wanted to weigh in on the issue and make the callers stop.

On June 29, 12 days after the killings, we were able to call the vote and show that the South Carolina Legislature had amassed the support necessary to remove the Confederate flag. Less than two weeks later, the official votes came in and the flag came down, ending its more than 50-year presence at the Capitol.

Glenn Smith is the Watchdog/Public Service Editor for The Post and Courier in Charleston, South Carolina. Smith, a longtime crime reporter, is a member of the four-person team that won the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service, the George Polk Award and several other honors for their series on domestic violence in South Carolina, titled "Till Death Do Us Part."

Gun Violence

The Victim

How to respectfully approach shooting victims

BY SCOTT FRIEDMAN • KXAS-TV

None of it seemed real to Logan Burnett. Not the muzzle flashes. Not his friends falling to the floor. All of it felt like a scene from a movie, until he realized some of the blood was his.

Burnett had taken three bullets from the gun fired by Nidal Hasan, the U.S. Army psychiatrist who suddenly opened fire on a room full of soldiers inside a processing center at Fort Hood, Texas, killing 13 people, including some of Burnett's friends who had served alongside him.

Now, years after the attack, Burnett was on the phone with my producer and me, listening as we tried to convince him to speak to us in a television interview. We wanted to tell the story of how Burnett and other victims of the Fort Hood attack were fighting to receive Purple Heart medals and the benefits that come with them. These were medals they had been denied, unlike other soldiers wounded in attacks overseas and even in the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon.

We knew Burnett's voice could be a powerful one in the story. But he was reluctant, to say the least. He recalled other encounters with reporters in the flurry of news coverage immediately after the shooting. He described how some badgered him and his family. He didn't care much for the media now, nor did he care for the thought of recounting the events that still left him struggling with post-traumatic stress.

So how could we convince him that it was important for viewers to hear from him?

First, let me make an honest confession: Calling someone who has been the victim of a tragedy is not my favorite thing about being a reporter. I know I am not alone. It's hard to find joy in asking someone to recount painful memories or publicly share grief.

But it is part of my job. And, over the years, I have seen many times how the voices of victims are essential to telling investigative stories that resonate with our audience, hold decision makers accountable and affect change.

The strongest, most powerful voice in a story is often the smallest voice. Ordinary people who have suffered through heartache and loss often possess a unique power and wisdom to explain how things could be better.

The challenge we face as journalists is convincing victims to speak with us while still being thoughtful and sensitive to the victim and cognizant of deadlines and newsroom demands.

There are a number of strategies that have worked for me and my team. You may have developed strategies that are even better. But I share these ideas in hopes that they spark a conversation about how we can all be understanding and respectful of victims while also being effective in approaching them when their voice is essential to an important story:

1. Before picking up the phone, it's homework time

Read everything you can about the person you hope to interview and any previous accounts of the tragedy in which they were involved. Social media can also help give you window into someone's personality and help you tailor your approach.

People will take your request more seriously if you can show them you are genuinely interested in them and their story. If you can show them that you took time to research and understand the issue you plan to cover, they will at least be more likely to listen to your pitch.

Research shifts the conversation from, "Will you talk to us?" to a more thoughtful discussion that follows the lines of, "We've been looking into this, here's why we believe this is a really important story, and this is why we think people need to hear from you."

2. Consider meeting in person first

When we ask victims to speak with us, we are asking them to talk about their pain and darkest moments. That's extremely personal. They are often more likely to do that if you reach out to them in a personal way. Talking first without a camera may give them a comfort level with you and help them see you as a person —- not a television personality.

KXAS-TV

Reporter Scott Friedman interviews shooting victim Logan Burnett after he and other victims received Purple Hearts.

Face-to-face meetings also give you a chance to gather background information and to assess your subject's credibility. It helps you see how the interview will go and where they will be the strongest.

Don't overpromise. Occasionally a victim will want to know if you are going to essentially help them seek revenge against the person, organization or company that hurt them.

Pledge to tell their story accurately and completely — nothing more.

Also, if you are willing to meet with a victim in advance of the on-camera interview, consider whether you should offer the same to the person or organization on the other side of the story.

3. Address reluctance head-on

Ask questions like, "What's your worst fear about talking to us?" Or, "You seem reluctant, why is that?"

You can't overcome someone's reluctance without understanding what is holding them back.

Offer to show them examples of your past work to demonstrate how you have handled other sensitive topics in a responsible way.

4. Give them a reason to say yes

I read once that psychologists found people are far more likely to say yes if they are given a reason to say yes.

For example, if I were to yell at you on the street, "Hey, move your car!" you probably would not react well.

But if I say, "Hey, move your car. The paramedics need to park here to help a guy who's having a heart attack," then you would probably say yes because I gave you an important reason to do so.

If you can convince someone that their story will help shed light on something in a way that no one else can, they are more likely to agree.

Appeal to their sense of right and wrong by asking questions such as "Don't you think you're in a unique position to tell this story? It seems like you have information few other people have; if you don't share this, who will? How long will this go unheard if someone doesn't speak out?"

5. Be upfront about the topics you plan to cover

We don't give people lists of questions in advance. But sometimes people are reluctant because they worry you are going to hit them with questions they don't know anything about, or they will look caught off guard or uncomfortable on camera. Talking through general topics that will be discussed in the interview creates confidence.

6. Be patient and respectful

It's often hard to be patient in a business that moves at breakneck speed. But it's important to remember that each victim's healing process is different. We don't want to re-victimize.

For more thoughtful insight on how to approach victims with sensitivity, the DART Center for Journalism & Trauma has a great website: dartcenter.org/topic/interviewing-victims.

Burnett ultimately decided to meet with us for that interview. He spoke eloquently about the shooting, his fallen friends and his ongoing battle against what he saw as an injustice on the part of the U.S. government.

More than a year later, as I prepared for an IRE panel on interviewing techniques, I reached back to Burnett to ask him what it was about our pitch that convinced him to speak to us.

"You weren't overbearing," Burnett said. He told me other reporters who had approached him "seemed to be turning out stories for numbers and not for people." He expressed appreciation that we had taken time to understand him as a person and that we didn't make him feel bad for being reluctant.

That conversation convinced me to ask other victims the same thing in the future. How could we have done better? Could our approach have been more sensitive and more effective? The voices of victims can also teach us how to be better reporters.

Scott Friedman is Senior Investigative Reporter at KXAS-TV/Dallas-Fort Worth. His work has been recognized with honors including national Edward R. Murrow & Sigma Delta Chi Awards and a National News and Documentary Emmy Award for outstanding regional investigative story.

Gun Violence

The Shooter

Convincing a suspect to talk

BY JUDY THOMAS • THE KANSAS CITY STAR

The Jewish Community Center in Overland Park, Kansas, was bustling on a stormy Sunday afternoon in April 2014. Youth from around the region were auditioning for KC SuperStar, an American Idol-style competition, and in another part of the community center campus, a performance of "To Kill a Mockingbird" was about to get underway.

Then came a blast of gunshots from a back parking lot, sending people scrambling for shelter. Within moments, it was over. A 69-year-old physician lay dead next to his pickup from a direct hit to the head. His 14-year-old grandson — who had come to try out for the competition — was crumpled in the passenger side. He was pronounced dead at an area hospital, but not before his mother pulled into the parking lot in hopes of catching her son's performance and instead came upon the horrific scene.

Minutes after the community center shooting and less than a mile away, gunfire erupted in the parking lot at Village Shalom, a Jewish retirement center. A 53-year-old occupational therapist who was there to visit her mother was gunned down near her car.

The suspect, a man in his 70s, was quickly arrested as he waited just down the street in an elementary school parking lot.

The breaking news brought back memories of a deadly shooting five years earlier in Wichita, Kansas, when an anti-abortion extremist from Kansas City shot a physician in the head as he was serving as an usher in his church. In both cases, my reaction was the same: First shock, then dashing to the office to help with coverage.

At first, it was unclear whether the Jewish center shootings stemmed from an argument or a domestic dispute, or if they were acts of terrorism. But the locations of the shootings and the suspect shouting "Heil Hitler" as he was loaded into a police car indicated a possible hate crime. The date — the eve of the Jewish festival of Passover — also raised questions about the motive.

Within hours, the suspect's name was circulating in online white supremacist forums: Glenn Miller, an avowed neo-Nazi and familiar figure to those who have covered the white supremacist movement. Long known for his anti-Semitic and racist rants, Miller was a Vietnam veteran who in 1980 founded the Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and later created the White Patriot Party. He moved to Missouri in the mid-1990s after doing prison time for weapons violations, and then ran for public office multiple times, the last campaign as a candidate for the U.S. Senate in 2010.

I must admit it's unsettling to be covering a violent attack only to learn that the perp is someone you know from your beat. The same thing happened the day the doctor was murdered in Wichita. I'd covered the abortion issue for 20 years and had written about the suspect earlier when he was charged with carrying potential bomb-triggering materials in the trunk of his car. And in another deadly shooting case, I had spoken on numerous occasions to an anti-abortion activist before he gunned down an abortion doctor and the doctor's bodyguard in Pensacola, Florida, in 1994. (I later interviewed both in prison. The Florida shooter has since been executed.)

After the Jewish center shootings, Miller, then 73, was booked into the Johnson County Jail as Frazier Glenn Cross. Although he still was commonly known as Glenn Miller, he had taken the name Cross when he entered the federal witness protection program after testifying against other white supremacists in a 1988 sedition trial.

The next day, I wrote to Miller at the jail and requested an interview, providing my cell and office phone numbers. In the letter, I explained that I had been covering the white nationalist movement for years, was extremely familiar with his background and had read his self-published autobiography, "A White Man Speaks Out." I kept it simple, saying that I wanted to talk to him about the events that occurred on the day of the shootings and what prompted him to take the actions that he did.

I also worked my sources in the white nationalist movement,

John Sleezer/ The Kansas City Star

F. Glenn Miller Jr. returns to the courtroom saluting and saying "Sieg Heil," after a closed door meeting with his defense team and the judge in February 2015.

many of whom I have remained in contact with for more than two decades. One was a former KKK imperial dragon now serving a 40-year prison sentence for sending a mail bomb to a diversity office in Scottsdale, Arizona, that severely injured the director. I wrote to him, and when he eventually called, told him I wanted to interview Miller. Before long, I got a call from a white nationalist in Tennessee who was a longtime friend of Miller's. After a series of interviews with him over the next several months, he encouraged Miller to contact me.

The first call came on Nov. 11, 2014. Miller was eager to talk, but he wanted to control our coverage. He said I had to agree in writing to email the complete recording of the interview to his friend in Tennessee. I told him it was our policy not to release our work product, including recordings, to anyone. He called the next day, again wanting to know if we'd meet his conditions. I said we weren't backing down. He called again on Nov. 13, and after ranting that the media are "controlled by the Jews," he said, "OK, I'll give you a statement."

The first words out of his mouth: He didn't realize one of the victims was only 14 years old, and he thought all of his victims were Jewish. In reality, the three he killed were Christian.

Then Miller confessed to the shootings in graphic detail, saying he went there "for the specific purpose of killing Jews." He said he was dying of emphysema and was running out of time to take action.

Miller described how he'd staked out both Jewish centers several times and revealed how he was able to acquire the guns even though he was a convicted felon. He'd convinced an acquaintance to buy three long guns for him by telling the acquaintance that his previous crimes were misdemeanors. He said the man bought one gun at a Walmart and the others at a gun show. (That man was charged with being a "straw buyer" in the Walmart purchase. He pleaded guilty in October and is awaiting sentencing.)

After Miller's explosive confession, the editors and I decided the story had to include a discussion about why it needed to be told. We interviewed Jewish leaders and those who monitor extremist groups who said the public must pay more attention to people who promote racist and violent views to understand what motivates them and to prevent future tragedies. They also said Miller's actions only served to bring the community together in a show of support for all races and religions. Before publishing, we contacted the victims' family members to let them know the story was coming and offer them an opportunity to comment. They chose not to.

The story ran on Nov. 16, 2014, with a chilling quote from Miller as the headline: "Every Jew in the world knows my name now." Some readers were angry, saying we gave Miller a platform for his venomous hate. Many others, however, thanked us for raising awareness about the white supremacist movement and domestic terrorism issues.

Miller was convicted in September after a two-week trial and sentenced to death. Chances are he will die in prison before that sentence is carried out.

Judy Thomas is a projects reporter for The Kansas City Star. She has specialized in covering the abortion issue, priest sex abuse scandals and right-wing extremists and is co-author of "Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War."

How to get the interview and what to do after

- Write to the suspect immediately and request an interview. Many jails and prisons require inmates to put visitors and callers on a list that must be approved by corrections officials. Some facilities limit the number of people the inmate can have on the list at one time.
- Set up a prepaid phone call account. For federal prisons, you can do this by going to the Bureau of Prisons website and locating the inmate at bop.gov/inmateloc/. You'll need to answer some questions about yourself and provide a credit card number. For local jails, you can often find information on their websites about how to contact an inmate, or you can call the PR person to ask about the procedure.
- Some prison systems, including the Federal Bureau of Prisons, also allow prisoners to send electronic messages to those who agree to communicate with them. One service is called CorrLinks at corrlinks.com. To use it, you'll need to register by providing your name, email address and a credit card number. Some facilities charge a fee to send messages.
- Another service is called JPay at jpay.com, which allows you to send messages to inmates at many state corrections departments or county jails.
- While it's preferable to interview a prisoner in person, if the jail doesn't allow recording devices, then a phone call might be better so you can tape it.
- Remain calm while interviewing, even though the subject may call you names or try to shock you with graphic details of the crime. Keep in mind that jails and prisons tape inmates' calls and those conversations could end up being used in court.

The Facts

Finding and checking gun claims

BY ANGIE DROBNIC HOLAN • POLITIFACT

Ever hear a supporter of gun control say that 40 percent of guns are bought without a background check? It sounds plausible, but it's actually a dubious claim.

Purchases at gun shows and via the Internet typically go without background checks. But it's hard to tell whether it really happens with nearly half of the guns that are sold. That number comes from a telephone survey conducted in 1994 — more than 20 years ago.

That's about the time that federally funded research on guns and gun violence virtually ground to a halt.

Here at PolitiFact, we often have to deal with a scarcity of research and data when it comes to fact-checking guns. You can find our special report examining gun research here: bit.ly/1HIP03m.

As we reported, the lack of gun research, until recently, did not happen by accident. Lobbied by the National Rifle Association, Congress stopped funding for gun research at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and passed amendments discouraging gun research.

Nonprofit groups stepped in to fill the gap, but that means more current research has been funded by groups that support gun control.

That doesn't mean journalists should ignore this private research, but we need to alert readers that it was funded by groups with an interest in the issue. We also need to look closely at the methodology of such studies to see if they are constructed in a way that is rigorous and unbiased.

At any rate, we haven't found private studies that give us a good idea of how many gun purchases are made without background checks. We just don't know the number.

Another big number we don't know: how many civilians are shot by police each year. Police departments track the numbers differently, and there's not one overall federal data set. Some officials in the Obama administration have said they'd like to change that, but we don't expect imminent changes in data collection around police shootings.

That doesn't mean journalists should ignore this private research, but we need to alert readers that it was funded by groups with an interest in the issue. We also need to look closely at the methodology of such studies to see if they are constructed in a way that is rigorous and unbiased.

The closest thing we've found is data from the Centers for Disease Control on fatal injuries under the category of homicides by legal intervention.

The term "legal intervention" covers any situation when a person dies at the hands of anyone authorized to use deadly force in the line of duty. It doesn't separate out gun deaths from other causes of death, however.

Some media organizations have stepped in to try to fill that lack of information. One notable effort is from the Washington Post, which is compiling a database of every fatal shooting in the United States by a police officer in the line of duty in 2015 (wapo.st/1eY1FSK).

Finally, when fact-checking claims about gun violence, journalists need to be sensitive to the issue of suicides.

POLITIFACT

"It has been estimated that nearly 40 percent of all guns sold in America are sold by private, unlicensed sellers either online or through gun shows."

— Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe on Thursday, Oct. 15, 2015 in an executive order

POLITIFACT

"In the states that allow open carry, violent crime was 23 percent lower."

–Florida State Rep. Matt Gaetz on Tuesday, Oct. 6, 2015 in a press conference

POLITIFACT

"States with the most gun laws tend to have the fewest gun deaths."

– Barack Obama on Thursday, Oct. 1, 2015 in remarks following a school shooting in Oregon

Sometimes suicides are included in statistics on gun deaths, and sometimes they are not. Depending on context, the distinction between gun suicides and gun homicides could be important.

The number of suicides is not trivial. More than half of gun deaths are due to suicide.

According to the most recent figures from the CDC, 33,636 U.S. firearm deaths were recorded in 2013. About 63 percent of those deaths, or 21,175, were suicides.

Finally, journalists should be cautious about presenting a direct line between stricter gun laws and fewer gun deaths. At PolitiFact, we see a lot of correlation, but causation isn't as clear.

A 2015 National Journal investigation (bit.ly/1VuGbe7) considered seven types of gun control including handgun registries, open carry permits and gun purchase waiting periods. States that had more restrictive laws within these categories generally had fewer annual gun deaths. An American Medical Association study reached the same conclusion.

But experts we talked to pointed out that the correlation between restrictive laws and fewer deaths essentially disappeared when firearm ownership rates were taken into account. Maybe what's happening is that lawmakers have an easier time passing restrictive gun legislation in states where not that many people own guns.

Experts do, though, see reason to believe that stronger gun laws will reduce homicides even if the research isn't conclusive. One survey of about 150 researchers actively publishing work on guns found that 71 percent believe that strong gun laws reduce the number of homicides, compared with 12 percent who disagree.

According to the most recent figures from the CDC, 33,636 U.S. firearm deaths were recorded in 2013. About 63 percent of those deaths, or 21,175, were suicides.

Jay Corzine, a sociology professor at the University of Central Florida who studies homicide and violent crime, told PolitiFact that while there are always exceptions, "the research on the whole shows that if you make it more difficult for individuals — especially individuals with a criminal background — to obtain firearms, you will prevent some gun-related criminal offenses."

Angie Drobnic Holan is the editor of PolitiFact. She previously was deputy editor, and before that a reporter for PolitiFact, helping launch the site in 2007. She was a member of the PolitiFact team that won the Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the 2008 election.

The Data

Vetting and analyzing mass killing data

BY JODI UPTON • USA TODAY

Parked at the end of a dead-end street in suburban North Carolina, surrounded by small brick ranch houses and big yards, four young men sat in a car. It was September, but the leaves on the trees surrounding the neighborhood had not yet turned their autumn colors.

Why they were there is unclear, but at some point the men were approached by four teenagers and shot to death, just steps from an intersection often used by school buses and residents. It was one of the deadliest scenes in Roanoke Rapids, North Carolina, and one of 29 mass killings in the U.S. last year, according to FBI data.

Except it never happened.

"I've been with the Halifax County Sheriff's Department for 31 years and we've never had a mass killing like [that]. Ever," said Halifax County Sheriff Wes Tripp. Both Halifax County and Roanoke Rapids police said 2014 was fairly quiet, and they had no record of such a crime.

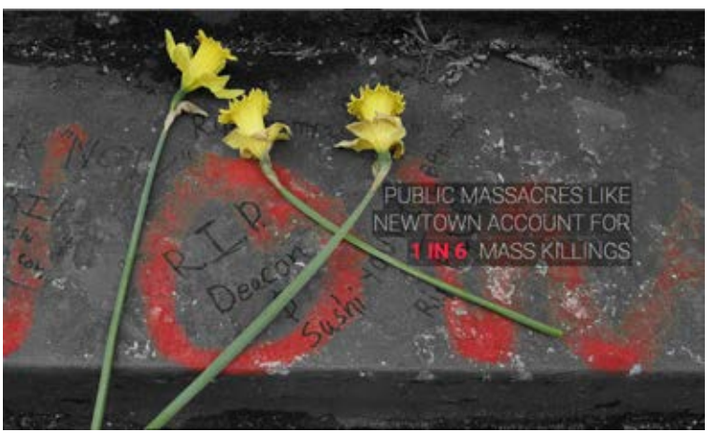
What happened? Most likely, it was a clerical or coding error that turned a similar crime in which one man died into a mass killing. Neither police agency was clear on how the mistake might have occurred.

USA TODAY has collected and verified all crimes where at least four people were murdered — the FBI's definition of a mass killing — in the U.S. since 2006 and compared them with the FBI's data. Every year, roughly half of the FBI cases didn't happen — at least not as a mass killing — giving the Bureau an accuracy rate of about 57 percent.

That doesn't include the ones never counted. In 2014, 10 mass killings verified by USA TODAY were not included in the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Report.

But if the FBI is wrong nearly half the time in such high-profile incidents, how can we trust the data for crimes that get less scrutiny? And what other government data may be similarly flawed?

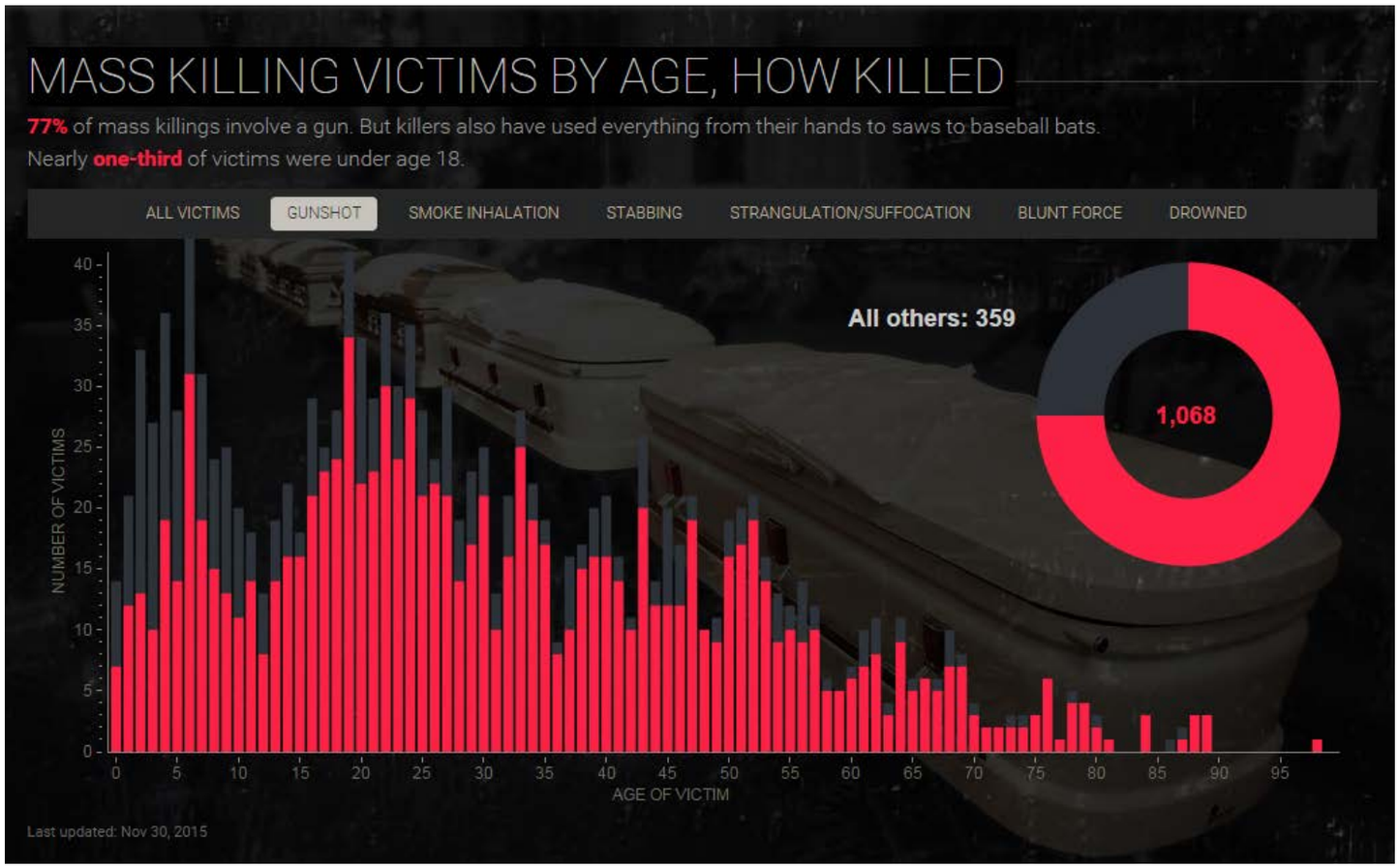
As more journalists use data, we increasingly depend on the government and other agencies to collect it. Yet we rarely analyze its provenance: Who is collecting it, who is using it and is there any accountability if it's wrong?



Major cases go unreported as well, including all of the victims in Newtown except Adam Lanza's mother, whose case was handled by local police.

Recent events have shown how bad government data can be. Many media outlets discovered how incomplete the FBI's Justifiable Homicide Report is when they tried to count something as basic as how often police kill someone.

The FBI says its data is only as good as the local police who report it. And while the FBI performs various internal checks, it's not an audit. The FBI makes clear that the guidelines are "not a regulation. They are not legally enforceable and do not ... impose any legally binding



requirements or obligations."

Missing information in the homicide data isn't unusual. The entire state of Florida, for instance, does not submit data to the FBI. And for many years, Nebraska and Washington, D.C., didn't either — primarily because their reporting systems didn't comply with the FBI's guidelines. But those areas are not included in the 57 percent accuracy rate.

The cases left out are even more baffling.

In 2008, after arguing with his wife, a man threw all three of his children and a stepchild off the 80-foot high Dauphin Island Bridge in Alabama. In 2011, a man shot seven members of his extended family in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Neither case was included in the FBI data.

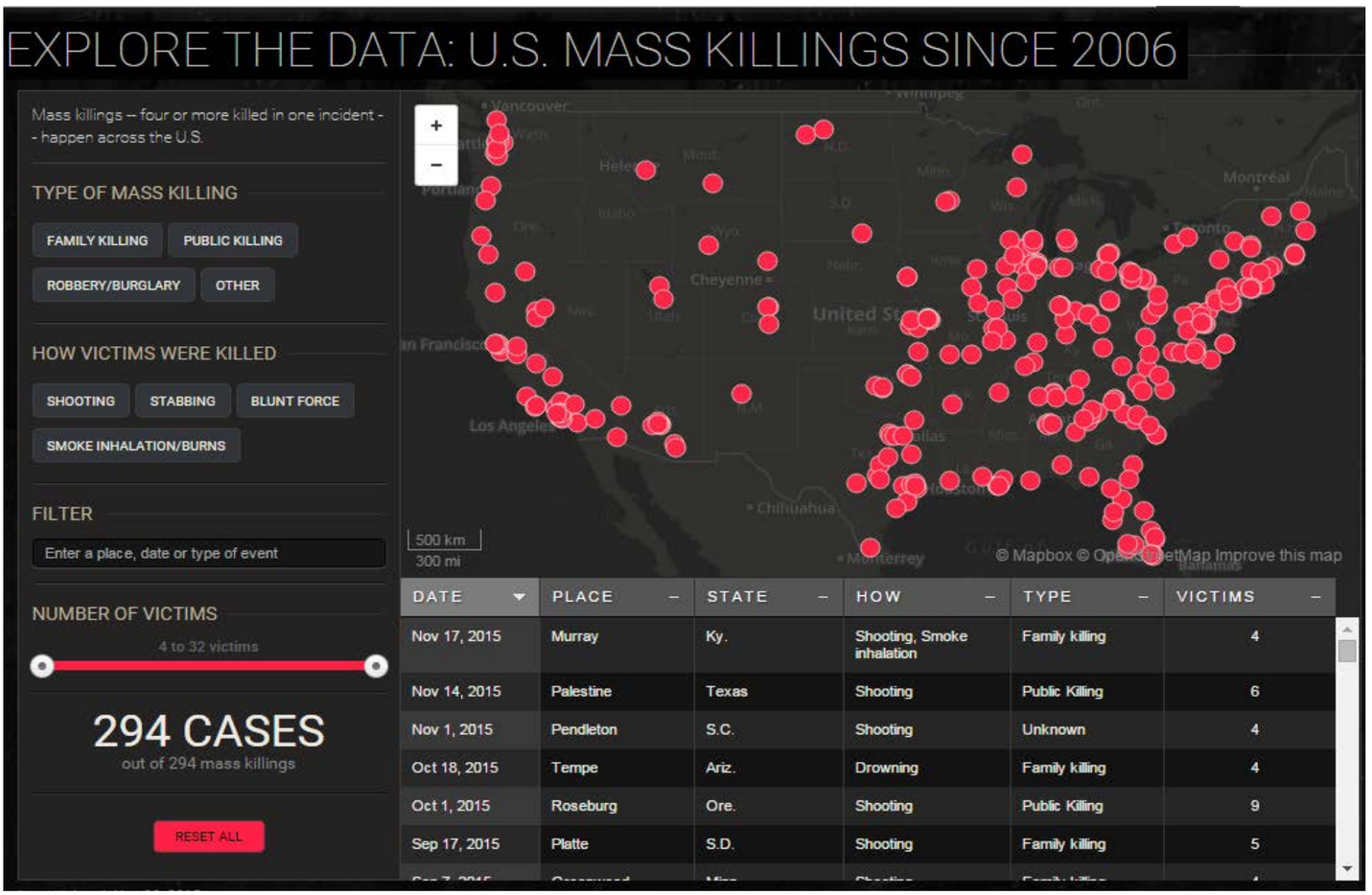
Major cases go unreported as well, including all of the victims in Newtown except Adam Lanza's mother, whose case was handled by local police. (Connecticut State Police — which handled the other 26 deaths — say the information was submitted to the FBI but was retracted due to an error; they were unclear why the cases were not in the 2012 data.)

Deciding what you are measuring is also critical to understanding the shootings. If you look at statistics on mass killings, they are not increasing. The number has stayed pretty stable for years. And if you look at public mass shootings — a subtype, roughly one in six mass killings based on our research — there is also no strong evidence of an increase (though these are all rare events). What may be increasing, however, is the number of instances where people go into a public place and start shooting (known to the FBI as an 'active shooter' regardless of the number of deaths, if any). But even Stanford research (stanford. io/1HSVWel) points out that this may be due to increased reporting in recent years.

Different entities have different definitions of mass shootings. For example, Stanford researchers define a mass shooting as three or more people shot, but not necessarily fatally. The killer(s) are not counted. That's different than the FBI and other researchers.

The FBI's is not the only government data with lurking errors, and some of the worst problems come from data that is not used as part of the government's work flow. In other words, if the data is collected because Congress has asked for it but the agency doesn't use it to do its work, be suspicious.

The Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education



— which reports on gender equity in athletics — is known to be riddled with errors; the office fully acknowledges the data are not scrubbed. The same office provides information on sexual assaults on campus, which is also known to be underreported.

The problem extends to state and local levels as well.

About 70 percent of officials said data problems were "frequently or often an impediment to doing business effectively," according to a Governing magazine survey of 75 officials in 46 states published in June.

It can also lead to bad decisions.

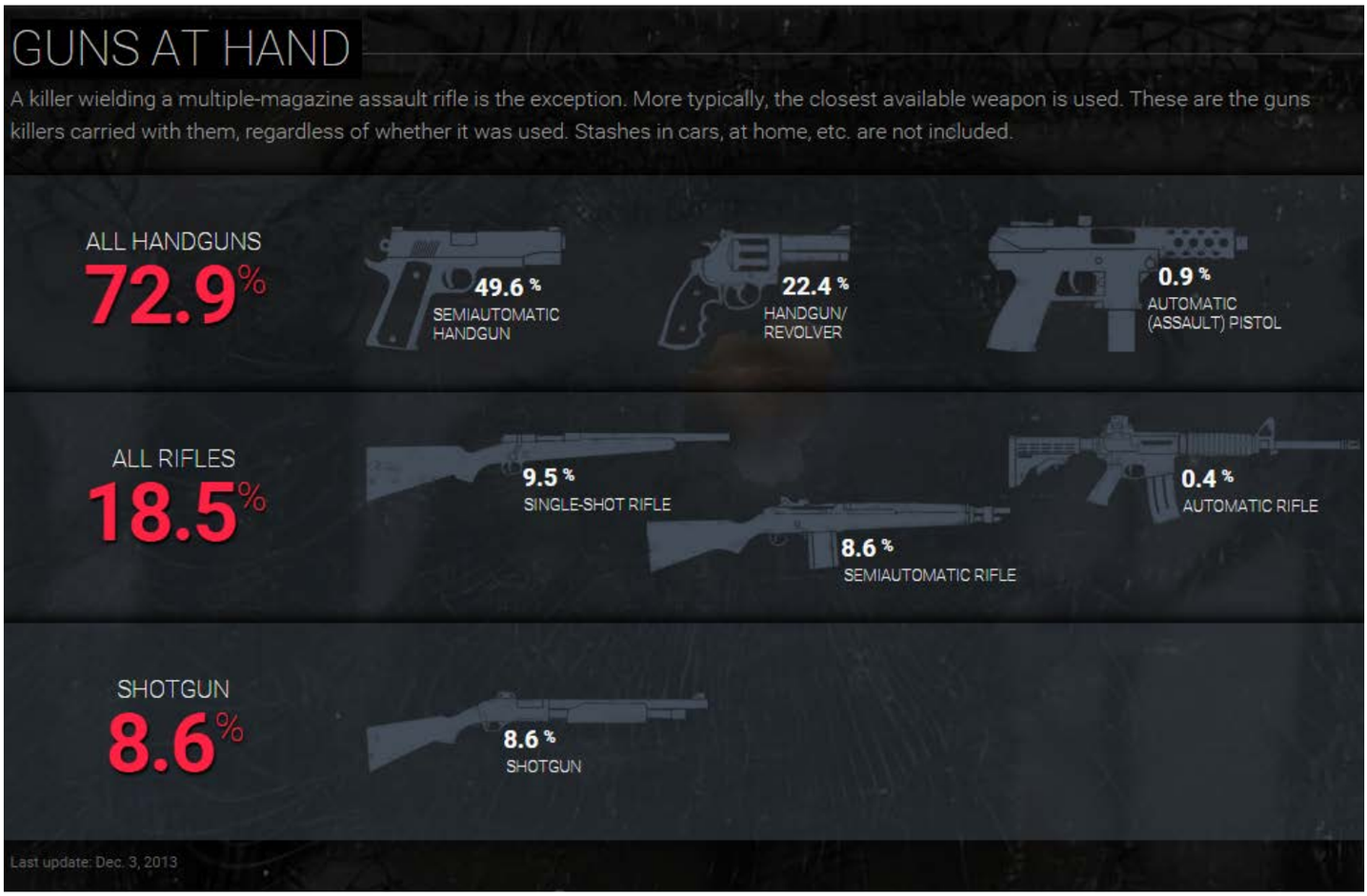
Under pressure from the Associated Press and other news outlets, Pennsylvania officials revealed 243 cases of well contamination — including some caused by fracking — between 2008 and 2014. The state, which earlier supported industry claims that fracking was not harmful, said it found those cases last year when reviewing documents in regional offices that had not been forwarded to the central office.

> Be persistent in your definition. If you're creating your own database, make sure you rigorously apply your definition — whatever you decide it is.

It's hard to tell if such cases are negligence, or something more malignant. It's been suggested that under-reporting gives local police better case-clearing rates. But the poor data — at least on mass killings — hurts the clearance rates as often as it helps. After all, it's hard to solve a murder that never occurred.

We've long been trained to assume data is dirty; we should also assume both missing and errant records. When working with any government data, here are a few tips to see if there are cases missing:

- Make sure you understand how the data is collected and how it's used. Why does the agency collect the data? How do they use it? Are there any consequences if it's incomplete? If they don't use it to get their job done, assume it's incomplete at best.
- Check it against another source. Even if it's only for spot checks, try to find another source for some of the data. The Center for Public Integrity found huge gaps in reporting by comparing the Clery Act data to sexual assault prevention and victim counseling programs. Likewise, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel found the city was methodically recoding aggravated assaults as a minor crime,



If you are creating your own data set, make sure you get as many cases as possible; any data set that only includes easy-to-find or well-known incidents will yield flawed results.

dropping the number of violent crimes reported to the FBI.

•Small sample sizes compound the error. Overall, the FBI data may be more accurate for its roughly 12,000 homicides a year. But mass shootings that end in at least four deaths are rare — only about 26 a year. Getting a dozen wrong creates a huge error.

•Check NICAR-L and IRE tipsheets. Someone has probably used the data recently. What problems did they find?

•Be persistent in your definition. If you're creating your own database, make sure you rigorously apply your definition — whatever you decide it is. While working the mass killings data, the USA TODAY team had a lot of discussions about what fit the criteria, including whether terrorist incidents should be included (no, unless they occur within the United States) and whether deadly car chases should be counted (yes, if the suspect had a clear target and is charged with first-degree murder). If you are creating your own data set, make sure you get as many cases as possible; any data set that only includes easy-to-find or well-known incidents will yield flawed results. If you're using a sample, make sure it's statistically relevant.

•Be suspicious of any data that seems too simple. That's also true of methodologies that use data to create "Top 10" lists that

don't pass the laugh test. Stories such as "Worst Careers for Women" make huge assumptions about how data is distributed. The results are equally suspect.

Mark Hannan contributed to this report. Paul Overberg and Meghan Hoyer were also on the original team that created the mass killings database. An exploration of the data can be found at masskillings.usatoday.com.

Jodi Upton is the Senior Database Editor at USA TODAY, where she leads data-driven stories on everything from college coaches' salaries to Medicare to Census data. The mass killings project, which is still ongoing, won multiple national and international awards.

The Legislation

Investigating gun regulation in Finland

BY VILLE JUUTILAINEN • FINNISH BROADCASTING COMPANY

Finland is a Nordic country of 5.5 million people with 1.5 million registered guns. Gun legislation has been a heated topic during the last decade, rising into the spotlight after major shooting incidents. These violent incidents have routinely prompted questions about tighter gun control. The discussion offered ample opportunities for journalists to dig deeper into the new laws and hopefully provide a guide for those facing new legislation in their countries.

Firearms and crime

To analyze Finland crime data, we can use the statistical service of the police working under The Police University College. In my experience, the PolStat team has been a good source for making statistical inquiries on a deadline and getting crime data to be joined with geographic data for projects such as interactive crime maps.

When I worked at MTV, a news broadcasting company in Finland, we analyzed homicide data and studied which regions in Finland had the most homicides and under what circumstances the violence occurred. From 2003 to 2013 a firearm was used in 17 percent of homicides.

New law

New gun legislation will go into effect this month. The new law defines safe ways for storing and transporting firearms for gun users. At the same time, new legislation will focus on shooting ranges, as the current regulation dates all the way back to 1915, when Finland was still under Russian rule.

Under the new legislation, physicians will have more defined responsibility to inform the police of certain patients. The duty will apply to patients who are evaluated in involuntary treatment, treated against their own will for suicidal tendencies, or who have gone through mental health assessment and been found capable of violent behavior.

The Police of Finland

A total of 47 firearms and ammunition were found in a series of police raids in 2013 in southern Finland. Eight of the guns had been reported missing or stolen.

How do physicians' rights and responsibilities to disclose affect the number of reports and what are the cases? We could investigate this further by gathering general experience from the field or through the Finnish Medical Association. Naturally we are also interested in the previously untracked information: How often is this kind information used to cancel gun permits or considered in the new applications?

The background

The atmosphere around gun legislation changed dramatically in Finland after the first major school shooting in 2007, when a 18-year-old high school student took the lives of eight people before killing himself. Another incident followed a year later, when a 22-year-old student killed 10 people at a university before committing suicide.

In both of these tragedies, the young shooters had legally acquired semi-automatic pistols. The first shooter had a history of using antidepressants for anxiety, while the second had been transferred away from civic military service for undisclosed reasons

The Finnish Defence Forces

Finnish conscripts training in northern Finland. Participating in the service is one of the few reasons a resident can legally own a gun.

and questioned by the police the day before the incident. What is notable in these signals is how these kinds of factors would later be handled in the legislation.

The nation was shaken by these unprecedented tragedies. By fall 2008, there were clear political intentions to prohibit handguns in Finland. In addition, the head of police suggested banning small caliber semi-automatic pistols, and the suggestion was even welcomed by the Finnish Shooting Sport Federation, which stated that this type of gun isn't suitable for sports.

The political will for a ban gradually diminished. It wasn't until 2011 that new legislation brought into effect tighter handgun regulation and increased evaluation for all gun permit applicants. A month later, the terrorist attack in Norway brought gun policies back in the political agenda.

The changing landscape of gun laws prompted our organization to build a detailed timeline starting in 1998 featuring the introduction of new legislation. (bit.ly/1XQ66Dp)

While these events draw the most attention, first we need to take a look beyond the tragedies and try to form a picture of a common gun owner. What kinds of statistics are available on guns and their holders in Finland?

Registered guns and their owners by numbers

There are 650,000 gun permit holders in Finland — about 12 percent of the population. The National Police Board's Firearms Administration maintains the permit registry and releases summaries of the data regularly. There are over 1.5 million registered guns in Finland, or about 28 guns per 100 people. The total number of guns has decreased by over 2 percent since 2010.

The registry cannot be accessed directly by journalists as the information about individual gun permits and weapons is undisclosed, but the administration may confirm a permit holder if you provide a valid reason. They also do make aggregate data available.

The most common registered firearm is the shotgun at over half a million items in the registry, followed by two types of rifles. Finland has a strong hunting culture. According to the Natural Resources Institute Finland, there are over 300,000 registered hunters annually in Finland.

There are also over 200,000 different types of registered handguns in the registry. The most common use for these guns is in sports. According to the Finnish Shooting Sport Federation, there are half a million shooting hobbyists in Finland.

We should look at all of these numbers critically. The gun registry is known to have inaccuracies dating back to the era when information was stored on cardboard and the permit procedures were more loose than today. This means there are guns in the registry with incorrect information or guns that might not have been in the possession of their legal owners for years. The decline in the total number of guns might as well tell us that the registry has been cleaned up from duplicate entries. The gun registry was upgraded in 2012 and is currently preparing for another major upgrade.

Police estimate that there are tens of thousands of illegal guns in Finland, and some of those illegal guns come from other countries. Finnish Customs confiscated 309 guns in 2014.

The illegal gun market and the state of once-deactivated guns in Finland would be good topics for deeper investigation. It would also be possible to request anonymized regional data to compare different types of guns and the number of permit holders on a municipality level. This approach could be supported, for example, by using statistics indicating actual hunting activity, or locating nearby shooting ranges and studying their usage levels.

This brings us to one basic question about gun use: Is it a problem for a civilian to have a gun at home if it's not actively used in hunting or in a hobby? By now we should cover how one actually acquires a legal gun in Finland. We will learn that protecting yourself is not a valid reason.

Finnish Reservists' Association

Finnish Reservists' Association's biathlon competition held in southwest Finland. Sports and reservists activities are two of the few reasons residents can legally own guns.

Gun permit evaluation

The application process for a gun permit has become more detailed since the new legislation was instated in 2011.

Local police departments are the licensing authorities for gun permits. The applicant must be over the age of 18 and is required to have a justifiable purpose of use, which must be proven with a hunting license or a shooting club card. The hunting license can be acquired after passing a 60-question test administered by the Finnish Wildlife Agency. The shooting clubs have various criteria for memberships.

In order to acquire a handgun, you must be at least 20 years old with a minimum of two years proven shooting experience.

The other justifiable purposes for applying for a gun permit include having a job that requires a firearm or keeping a firearm as a memento.

A person's first gun permit is typically temporary. The applicant must present the firearm to the police within a month of the acquisition.

During the gun permit process, the applicant's health and behavior are evaluated. The applicant may be refused a permit for having a criminal record or substance abuse issues. According to the guidance given by the Police Department under the Ministry of the Interior, the evaluation is based on a registry check, an interview, an aptitude test and statements in addition to the documentation provided by the applicant. Last year, police rejected 3 percent of applicants.

The evaluation has become more thorough since the law changed in 2011, when medical professionals were also given new responsibilities. Physicians have a duty — and other healthcare professionals a right — to notify the police if the patient is unfit to possess firearms. Notification can be based, for instance, on a patient's mental health issues, or if the patient acted violently while using medical services.

There were 1,231 reports made during a 16-month tracking period from 2012 to 2013. However, it has not been tracked how many of these notifications have led to permit rejections or cancellations.

A permit can be canceled, for example, if the holder is convicted of a violent crime or a crime involving firearms, or if the holder does not adhere to gun permitting regulations. There were fewer than 1,000 gun permit cancellations last year. In 2010, this number was over three times higher, which was because of a special police investigation conducted after the two school shootings.

Looking at the gun permit process, we face a lot of criteria with various interpretations. The question now: How uniformly does the gun permit evaluation work in different local police departments?

The aptitude test was based on an old test used in the military for conscripts. I've done one version of it myself back in the day, and I know personally how regularly it's ridiculed among the people who have done it.

The future of gun legislation

Recently, in the aftermath of the Paris terrorist attacks, the political debate has started on the new European Union Firearms Directive. It proposes changes such as banning certain semi-automatic firearms, better regulation of the online acquisition of firearms, improving traceability of weapons and controlling deactivated firearms more strictly. No doubt this is something that European journalists will be tracking.

Ville Juutilainen is a journalist with Finnish Broadcasting Company specializing in data-driven stories, visualization and new forms of storytelling. Juutilainen has worked with the main Finnish newspapers and broadcasting companies and has consulted various organizations in using data and digital tools.

The Computer-Assisted Reporting Conference offers over 150 hands-on classes and 100 panels and demos geared toward data journalists at every level. Join us to learn new skills, share story ideas, and chat with some of the best and brightest data journalists in the business.

Learn from experienced journalists how to use spreadsheets, databases, mapping tools, programming languages, web scrapers, news apps and more. Get fresh story ideas and guides for how to execute them. You'll leave with a computer full of free tools and the know-how to put them to use.

To find out more about the conference, including registration and arrangements at the conference hotel, visit ire.org/conferences/nicar2016.

IRE Resources

The IRE Resource Center is a major research library containing more than 26,000 investigative stories – both print and broadcast – and more than 4,200 tipsheets available at ire.org/resource-center or by contacting the Resource Center directly, 573-882-3364 or rescntr@ire.org.

STORIES

No. 26911: "Fear at FSU" — Tampa Bay Times.
These stories exposed the failure of a state's mental health system to aid a sick man who was in crisis begging for help before he opened fire on students in the library at Florida State University. They raised questions about the handling of the shooter's case in New Mexico, stoked a national conversation about the availability of quality mental health care for people in need and spurred a proposal to reform New Mexico state law. (2014)

No. 26716: "Gun Wars: A News21 Investigation of Rights and Regulations in America" — News21.
This piece examined the contentious political and cultural divide between those who say the right to own and carry guns is guaranteed by the Second Amendment and those who believe firearms should be more regulated. The project used or created nine databases to assess gun laws in every state in the nation and to document violence involving firearms across the United States. (2014)

No. 26513: "ATF Gun Tracing" — CBS News.
CBS News obtained access to the National Tracing Center operated by the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and took the public behind the scenes of this massive facility in the heart of rural West Virginia to show how guns are traced — guns used in crimes such as the Newtown Connecticut mass shootings, the Aurora, Colorado theater shooting, and the shooting of Congresswoman Gabby Giffords in Arizona. (2013)

No. 26497: "How Kids Get Caught in Chicago's Deadly Gun Trap" — DNAinfo.com.
Told through the perspective of a killer out on parole, this is the story of how gang members influence kids, teaching them to sell drugs and shoot guns to get money, power and respect. The story also reveals that if juveniles do get caught with guns in Chicago, they still rarely get punished. Even fewer get sent to juvenile detention. Gangbangers use that to their advantage to lure kids into violent lives of crime. (2013)

No. 26186: "Unmasking the NRA's Inner Circle" — Mother Jones.
The piece revealed the shadowy, inner workings of the NRA leadership through a previously unpublished internal "Report of the Nominating Committee" to the NRA board. The CEO of the firm that made the Bushmaster rifle used inside Sandy Hook Elementary School had quietly served on the NRA board's Nominating Committee to help control the NRA's latest elections, and the chairman of the Nominating Committee was a longtime NRA board member who lived and owned a home in Newtown less than three miles from the Sandy Hook school. The story revealed the depth of the NRA's ties to the gun industry including the Freedom Group whose profits have led the industry through sales of Bushmaster AR-15 rifles. (2013)

TIPSHEETS

No. 4225: "Assault Weapons and High-Capacity Magazines"
Mark Follman, (of Mother Jones) provides links to data and stories on gun violence. Produced by Follman. (2014)

No. 3580: "The Hidden Life of Guns"
In this tipsheet, James Grimaldi shares how The Washington Post reported the story, "The Hidden Life of Guns," which won the 2010 IRE FOI Award. He provides a day-by-day account of the series of events that unfolded as the reporting took place. He also includes a source list of important interest groups. (2011)

EXTRA! EXTRA!

"Distraught people, deadly results" — The Washington Post.
This running investigation continues to keep a tally of the number of people shot by police in 2015. It provides an interactive calendar where readers can get more details. (2015)

Read the full investigation here: wapo.st/1C52eEP

"KC 'gun squad' works to cut down firearm thefts, illegal sales" — The Kansas City Star.
In Kansas City over the last three years, police have taken 1,107 stolen gun reports — an average of one a day. And while the number has been declining — from 436 in 2012 to 350 the next year and 321 in 2014 — it doesn't include all thefts. Exactly how many firearms are lost or stolen each year in the United States is impossible to know, as the vast majority of personal firearms are not registered and losses and thefts often go unreported. (2015)

Read the full investigation here: bit.ly/1RyFXUK

"Handguns often weapon of choice in school shootings" — The Center for Investigative Reporting.
The shooting inside a Florida State University library in 2014 was marked the 42nd school shooting in this country since 2000, and like a majority of those before it, was carried out with a handgun. Of the 160 "active shooter incidents" between 2000 and 2013 included in a recent FBI study, nearly a quarter happened at schools or in other educational environments, such as school board meetings. (2014)

Read the full investigation here: bit.ly/1R4bJJW

IRE AUDIO

"How to track and report on gun violence" — IRE Conference.
A panel of three experts — Patricia Carbajales from Stanford University, Mark Follman from Mother Jones and Trymaine Lee from MSNBC — discuss techniques for compiling shooting data and how to write stories about shootings. (2014)

Listen to the full audio here: bit.ly/13kAyLu

Visualizing traffic data for TV

Mc Nelly Torres
NBC 6 Miami

Driving in Florida is a risky business. Every year, over half a million drivers are involved in vehicle crashes in the Sunshine State.

As members of Miami's NBC 6 Investigative Unit brainstormed projects before the November book, we knew that traffic was among the most important issues our viewers care about.

When I moved to TV news after 19 years working in print and online, I learned to approach data-driven investigations with viewers' needs in mind. You want the viewers to tune in and promotion folks help you do just that.

Data stories are different for TV because we don't have the airtime to use a lot of numbers. We don't want to bore viewers with too many numbers, so we need to use the most remarkable data that makes a point. And while in print and online we try to do the same, we have more space to use graphics and interactive visualizations as we write the stories.

With traffic being a talked-about issue, Dan Krauth, one of our investigative reporters, had filed records requests to obtain data on parking tickets and red-light camera citations.

Investigative reporter Tony Pipitone added a great story idea to the mix: finding the most dangerous exits on I-95. Pipitone already knew that the Florida crash report data, issued by the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles annually, would help him do just that.

The analysis focused on the 24,000 crashes that were documented on both north and southbound roads during rush hour from 2011 to 2014.

The crash data is a gold mine of information with eight tables, including a driver's table with detailed information about a driver's date of birth, gender, address, insurance and even license number. Other tables include information about what caused the accident, any traffic violations, vehicle information, witnesses and more. The database also has the coordinates where the crash took place.

Without realizing it, we were collecting a vast arsenal of data-driven stories. Leaving ample time to prepare for sweeps helps prevent more headaches down the road. In our weekly meetings we brainstormed titles for the stories as we provided updates of our progress. And these meetings were not limited to the investigative unit. We also had the editors and promotion folks. This helped a great deal because once promotions knows what the story is about, they can start working on promos to lure viewers. Rushing is never good, and having all these minds in one room helps during brainstorming, problem solving and updating on progress.

For parking tickets, we focused on the top six places where people were more likely to receive parking tickets and how much revenue the cities were getting from these infractions. We analyzed 2014 and 2015 dates from the cities of Miami Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami.

After I ranked the data and got the locations, I created an interactive map using SnapMap, which takes the 20 most recent geo-tagged photos from Instagram and creates a StoryMap to show viewers the locations where tickets were being issued.

For the red-light cameras story, we requested the location performance summary report to find the cameras giving out the most citations at intersections in Hollywood, Miami and Fort Lauderdale.

But for this particular story, Dawn Clapperton, our executive producer, thought a timeline was proper. Red-light cameras have been a contentious issue in Florida since state legislators approved a measure in 2010 that opened the doors for companies and municipalities to profit from red-light camera tickets.

Using TimelineJS from the Knight Lab, I built an interactive timeline showing all the drama in Florida, including the new law; the lawsuits filed to challenge red-light

tickets (which went to the Florida Supreme Court); research showing that rear-end and angle crashes increased; and failed measures filed at the state level to ban the devices.

The interactive timeline was used in shows to promote the story, and it became popular online. But we had issues publishing a user-friendly timeline on our website. Lesson learned: When playing with a new tool, make a dummy page and publish the interactive to fix any glitches before it goes live. If you can't do it, don't be afraid to ask for help.

We have found these are the types of stories that viewers like, but you can also delve into other data-driven stories like hit-and-runs, DUIs and pedestrian and bicycle fatalities.

Map the data and analyze it, but also use that for stand ups and publish it online. I consider that a public service.

Mc Nelly Torres is an award-winning investigative producer for NBC 6 in Miami. She co-founded the Florida Center for Investigative Reporting and has worked in numerous daily newspapers. Torres, a long-time IRE member, served on IRE's board of directors from 2008-2013. An Emmy winner and three-time nominee, Torres has won numerous state, regional and national awards for her investigative work.

Shooting backlash: Fend off calls for secrecy

David Cuillier
University of Arizona School of Journalism

Few things close down public records faster than guns and death.

Citizens and politicians are quick to react after a shooting, shuttering 911 tapes, police reports and gun permit records, usually with the intent to protect victims and their families from perceived privacy intrusion by the press.

We can learn from previous tragedies to avoid information backlash.

Oregon cone of silence

Getting information during or immediately following a massacre can be frustrating, as reporters discovered after the Oct. 1 shooting by an English student at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon.

The day Chris Harper Mercer killed 10 people and wounded seven, Douglas County Sheriff John Hanlin refused to say Mercer's name, even though he had died.

"I will not name the shooter. I will not give him the credit he probably sought prior to this horrific and cowardly act," Hanlin said at a press conference.

To this day he has yet to name the shooter — reporters got the information through other means.

Police also were quick to withhold 911 tapes, dispatch logs and police reports, applying the over-used investigatory exemption in the state public records law.

"The state records exemption that allows them to withhold this material even though the suspect is dead and there will be no trial is broadly interpreted by government here," Les Zaitz, investigations editor for The Oregonian told me via email. "The latest justification is that they STILL might charge someone in the case."

This is one of the most abused exemptions in the country, and reporters should challenge it. In many states, case law narrows the exemption to specific information that would materially harm an investigation.

Police should be forced to make a case that specific bits of information would harm an investigation, and then redact those facts and release the rest of the records.

The Oregonian and KGW-TV both petitioned the attorney general for an opinion on the matter, seeking access to police reports and interviews of the two officers who killed the shooter. The AG, unfortunately, sided with police.

Sometimes pushing back works, though. The community college initially withheld information about the shooter, citing the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act, but eventually relented after the Oregonian demonstrated that FERPA doesn't apply to records of a deceased adult student.

Sandy Hook backlash

Few mass shootings have left a bigger wake of secrecy than the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre Dec. 14, 2012, in Newtown, Connecticut, where Adam Lanza fatally shot 20 children and six adults.

The Connecticut Legislature immediately, without public input, amended the state's FOI Act to restrict disclosure of murder victim photos, 911 calls and the identification of minor witnesses. They also established a victim's privacy study group, packed with advocates for victim privacy.

Connecticut journalists and the local Society of Professional Journalists chapter tried to integrate common sense into the discussion, but it's not easy given the emotions and empathy for victims and their families. I spoke at a hearing, noting that proposed changes would make the state more secretive than most, but ultimately the group proposed even worse provisions.

For example, the task force suggested a "look but don't touch" approach to crime scene records, where reporters could look at documents but couldn't get a copy. That would be ludicrous, and I don't know of any law like that in the country. Fortunately, the

Legislature did not implement that idea, but the original closures immediately after the shooting remain today.

Ultimately, the public is more in the dark now in Connecticut because of legislative overreaction to the shooting.

Focus on FOI benefits

Research shows a strong correlation between people's fear of privacy invasion and reduced support for open records. People want to hear that 911 call of the frantic teacher hiding in the classroom closet, but they will demand making that same record secret when reminded of the victims. Arguing the "public's right to know" is not persuasive.

Countering the push for secrecy following shootings is possible, but takes some careful, strategic communication.

- **Cathartic healing.** It's important for a community — and victims — to heal from such a tragedy, and confronting the horror head-on can be cathartic, even beneficial if done tastefully and ethically.
- **Validation**. Seeing photographs, hearing the 911 tapes, and reading about the victims' struggles validates the significance of what victims endured. Remember that iconic 1972 Pulitzer-Prize-winning photograph of a 9-year-old Vietnamese girl running naked down a street, screaming "too hot, too hot" as she burned from napalm? She now lives in Canada and sees the photograph as validating the pain and struggle she endured: "I can work with that picture for peace."
- **Prevent future victims.** It's imperative we protect our community from future victimization by better understanding what happened and how to prevent it. That means knowing whether police acted appropriately and whether witnesses and victims were treated well. We will only know that if the public can see the information.
- **Government accountability.** Focus on the need to hold government accountable, particularly in the use of force by police and expenditure of funds in paying off settlements. It's not about selling papers or increasing ratings — it's about making sure our public servants do their jobs right.
- **Delay, delay, delay.** In the face of records closure, urge lawmakers to delay action. The heat of the moment can overcome policy makers, so do all you can to have any proposed amendments to the public record law put off until cooler heads can prevail. If need be, suggest a task force be commissioned to study the issue for six months to a year. Freedom of information is a logical, principled democratic ideal that often loses when pitted against emotion.

Nobody wants to have to cover a mass shooting or investigate the aftermath, but when such an event is foisted on a community, journalists have an obligation to not only report the truth ethically, but to ensure emotional reaction doesn't lead to increased government secrecy.

David Cuillier is director of the University of Arizona School of Journalism in Tucson, Arizona, and a member of the Freedom of Information Committee for the Society of Professional Journalists. He is co-author, with Charles Davis, of "The Art of Access: Strategies for Acquiring Public Records."

Snapshots from our blogs

2016 CAR Conference T-shirt contest to begin in January

It's almost time for the annual CAR Conference T-shirt contest!

If you don't have a design ready to go, don't worry. You still have plenty of time to come up with your best data journalism one-liners, SQL puns and NICAR logo designs.

The winner gets bragging rights, a free shirt and $50 in the IRE Store. Runners-up will be sold as laptop stickers.

Here's how it works:

Jan. 22-31: Submit your designs by emailing them to shirts@ire.org. We'll take just about any high-resolution format.

Feb. 1-7: Vote for your favorite designs. We'll have links on the home page and CAR Conference page.

Feb. 10: Winning designs announced on the IRE website.

Log on to view the guidelines: bit.ly/1OcQwHK

IRE Radio Podcast | The Toughest Interview of My Life

BY AARON PELLISH | IRE

There are some phone calls that will always be hard to make as a reporter. Reaching out to grieving relatives in the wake of a death is one of them.

On this episode, Minneapolis Star Tribune reporter Jeff Meitrodt discusses what it was like to do that over and over again as he pieced together a powerful four-part investigation on deaths on family farms. Read more here: bit.ly/1IOAOk7

As always, you can find us on Soundcloud, iTunes and Stitcher. If you have a story you think we should feature on the show, drop us a note at web@ire.org. We'd love to hear from you.

Scrutinizing what you scrape: How The New York Times investigated arbitration

ADAM ATON | IRE

Court records have long been a vital tool for journalists looking to hold powerful corporations accountable. But what happens when disputes between companies and consumers move out of open court and into private meeting rooms? What happens when class action lawsuits – and the wealth of human sources and records that go with them – start to disappear?

Journalists at The New York Times found themselves wrestling with some of these questions as they reported out a three-part series on the rise of arbitration clauses. (nyti.ms/1XLBwaE)

Arbitration clauses are tucked into everything from terms of service to employment agreements. They're used by giants like AT&T, Starbucks and Netflix, as well as smaller companies like Ashley Madison, the adultery dating website. The clauses funnel consumers' grievances into private hearings where, instead of a judge and jury, people make their case to a corporate lawyer or professional arbitrator. The proceedings play out behind closed doors; there are no appeals, few rules and little oversight.

By interviewing scores of lawyers, judges and plaintiffs, Times reporters Jessica Silver-Greenberg and Michael Corkery were able to piece together a picture of what people can expect if they've signed an arbitration clause: Companies can compel arbitration according to religious texts — whether it's the Bible or the tenets of Scientology. Evidence can be suppressed. Witnesses can be influenced. Class action lawsuits can be explicitly forbidden.

Read more here: bit.ly/1QiRJTH

Behind the Story: How KING 5 TV overcame language barriers to investigate birth tourism

BY ADAM ATON | IRE

There were elusive aspects to this story that dogged Chris Ingalls from the beginning — the inscrutable website, the murky legal environment, the incognito maternity mansion. But none was more important, or more delicate, than scoring the face-to-face interviews that unravelled everything.

It began two years ago. A Chinese viewer had written to Seattle's KING 5 TV, where Ingalls works on the investigations team, asking if the station was aware of a business that flew pregnant women into the country to give birth.

The anonymous tipster included a link to the business' website, written entirely in Mandarin.

For parents who want their children born on American soil — which automatically grants the baby U.S. citizenship — the website offered to help arrange a travel visa for the mother.

Once in Seattle, she would spend about three months in an expansive house near a golf course until she gave birth.

Why, Ingalls wondered, was this shady-sounding business in such an upscale area? Was this somehow legal? And who

A screenshot from KING 5 TV's broadcast showing the website for Seattle Fu Hua Enterprises LLC.

else knew about it?

For a year and a half, the story went nowhere. Nobody at the station spoke Mandarin, so Ingalls showed the site to someone who did; the two of them still couldn't find anything worth reporting. The golf course on the website looked familiar, but Ingalls couldn't track down the house.

He was ready to give up when a third tip came in. It wasn't much different than the others — Have you guys seen this website? Isn't this illegal? — but Ingalls pulled up the website again anyway. He clicked "translate" on Google Chrome and found something new: The website had been updated. There were more pictures, and a company name, Seattle Fu Hua Enterprises LLC, now appeared at the bottom of the page. Ingalls pulled the company's corporate registration with Washington state. He found the names of the owner and some employees, along with phone numbers and email addresses. He tried them all.

Read the rest of the story here: bit.ly/1IOCxWI

IRE Radio Podcast | The NFL's concussion cover-up

BY SHAWN SHINNEMAN | IRE

Meet Steve Fainaru and Mark Fainaru-Wada. You might have guessed from their names that they're brothers. They're also both investigative journalists working for ESPN. On this episode, we're sharing pieces of our conversations with the brothers during their recent trip to the University of Missouri. We talk about everything from their reporting on the NFL's concussion crisis to the much-discussed relationship between ESPN and the NFL and how they decide when to team up on a reporting project.

Read more here: bit.ly/1NcPpHY

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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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, Megan Luther, megan@ire.org, 605-996-3967 or Alex Richards, alex@ire.org, 702-606-4519

DOCUMENTCLOUD — A platform to organize, research, annotate and publish the documents you gather while reporting. Collaborate on documents across your newsroom, extract entities from text, and use powerful visualization and search tools. Visit www.documentcloud.org.

Contact: Lauren Grandestaff, support@documentcloud.org, 202-505-1010

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, dherzog@ire.org, 573-882-2127

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