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The power of IRE

BY MARK HORVIT

As a reporter who covered multiple beats, from night cops to politics, IRE's tip sheets were a great source of ideas and inspiration. As an editor, whether working the city desk or managing an investigative team, IRE's conference panels on conceiving the project and bulletproofing for accuracy were vital roadmaps.

What I didn't understand was the organization's amazing reach and impact. As with any group or workplace, you can't really understand what goes on unless you get a chance to glimpse behind the scenes.

For almost nine years, I've had the tremendous honor of working for IRE. I was plenty nervous when I took this job, and it turns out those nerves were thoroughly justified. My entire background was in newsrooms, and running a nonprofit brings with it a whole host of requirements that have nothing to do with covering the news. Luckily I've had a ton of help through the years: an always supportive and hard-working board of directors, a dedicated membership base always willing to volunteer, and an amazing staff that, as anyone who's attended a conference or workshop knows, really run this place. I'll miss all of it when I step down as executive director next month.

For all of you who will never have the chance to get the view I've had of this organization, I'd like to leave you with a few thoughts.

The impact that IRE has on individual journalists, newsrooms and the entire industry is much greater than you realize.

If this organization has ever helped you do a story that made a difference, something that stopped wrongdoing, curbed misspending or helped someone in need, then you've seen a glimpse of what IRE can do. But when you see that impact magnified across thousands of members, scores of newsrooms and international boundaries, you realize just how broad this organization's scope really is.

IRE isn't just about journalism.

That seems like an odd thing to say because this organization is all about teaching practical skills to journalists. From finding documents to crunching data to conducting the toughest interviews with grace and purpose, IRE's focus is on hands-on, make-you-better training.

But to me, that's not the biggest impact that we have. By helping you do stories that drive change and hold the powerful accountable, we have a direct role in improving societies and changing lives every single day. Great journalism is one of the most important forces in society for driving change, and IRE has given each of us the power to do just that, in communities large and small, all around the world.

IRE needs you.

I arrived at IRE in 2008, a really tough time for our industry. Jobs were being cut, budgets were being slashed, and our organization, like many others, felt the impact. We weathered that storm, and today we're bigger than we've ever been. But that doesn't mean that we can relax.

Pretty much every day I've worked here, a part of me has worried about tomorrow. Will we have the funding and resources we need to do the crucial work that we do? As each of us knows, the foundation that our industry is built on is dangerously susceptible to seismic shifts in society, from changes in technology to the ever-evolving ways that people consume news.

That means that there will never be a day that IRE doesn't need your support. Your help is an intrinsic part of our organization, whether it's your time as a volunteer or your generous donations. We absolutely can't do this without you.

Now that I get to shift back to being a regular member again, I'll have a new appreciation for IRE,its impact in the world and its importance to society. I've seen IRE change lives. I know it's changed mine.

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

IRE welcomes new training director

Denise Malan has joined the IRE as a training director. Previously, she worked at the Institute for Nonprofit News in a joint position with IRE for three years. She spent the first two years helping nonprofit news organizations around the country collaborate on data projects, then served as interim executive director before becoming director of training and data services, overseeing INN's training program that developed business skills among nonprofit news leaders. She was also a newspaper journalist for more than a decade, covering government, education, politics, the environment and more. She was a data/investigative editor at the Corpus Christi Caller-Times in Texas. She can be reached at denise@ire.org.

IRE awards three fellowships and free training to 10 newsrooms

Ten newsrooms have been chosen for IRE's Total Newsroom Training this year. TNT provides intense, in-house training for small and medium -sized newsrooms dedicated to watchdog journalism. This is the fourth year IRE has offered the free program.

IRE also awarded three TNT Fellowships for IRE's data analysis boot camp in August. TNT alumni are still encouraged to apply for six remaining fellowships for the boot camps in January and March. The fellowships cover most of the cost of attending IRE's week -long data training sessions in Columbia, Missouri.TNT training is customized and includes two days of sessions ranging from public records battles to hands-on data analysis.

"We're excited to welcome a new group of newsrooms to this important program," IRE Executive Director Mark Horvit said. "News organizations throughout the country have increased their level of enterprise journalism thanks to TNT, and that's a huge benefit for the communities that rely on these journalists to keep them informed."

Congratulations to the following newsrooms:

- Alaska Public Media – Anchorage, Alaska
- Daytona Beach News-Journal – Daytona Beach, Florida
- The Commercial Dispatch – Columbus, Mississippi
- News & Record – Greensboro, North Carolina
- The Paducah Sun, Paducah, Kentucky
- WVEC-TV– Norfolk, Virginia
- Indianapolis Monthly – Indianapolis, Indiana
- The McAlester News-Capital – McAlester, Oklahoma
- WPXI-TV– Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- The Marshall Project – New York, New York

Congratulations to the TNT Boot Camp Fellows:

- Brett Baker, 10/11 News KOLN-TV
- Dave Mistich, West Virginia Public Broadcasting
- Rashda Kahn, San Angelo Standard-Times

Department of Veterans Affairs wins Golden Padlock Award

IRE awarded the Department of Veterans Affairs this summer with theorganization's fourth annual Golden Padlock Award, which recognizes the most secretive U.S. agency or individual.

The VA was selected for this honor for withholding records about the qualifications of medical staff who evaluated thousands of veterans for potential brain injuries following service to their country. When TEGNA TV stations across the U.S. formally requested the information, VA hospitals withheld the names, board certifications and medical specialties of doctors performing the exams, saying release of the information "would not contribute to the public's understanding of the Federal Government." Kare11 in Minneapolis first obtained records showing many potential brain injuries were evaluated by staff whose qualifications did not meet the VA's own requirements, potentially missing cases of injuries that can trigger additional benefits for veterans. Following an internal investigation, the VAnow acknowledges 25,000 veterans across the country had their brain injury diagnoses performed by doctors who were not qualified to make those diagnoses. TEGNA is currently in the process of appealing the agency's public disclosure denials.

"The judges believed the VA represents all of the hallmark attributes that we try to honor with the Golden Padlock — secrecy, evasion and a fundamentally curious view of what contributes 'to the public's understanding' of government," said IRE Executive Director Mark Horvit.

IRE invited a representative from the winning agency to attend and receive the honor. No response was received.

Seven elected to IRE Board of Directors

IRE members in June elected seven new directors to the IRE board at the organization's annual conference in New Orleans.
The newly elected members are:

- Sarah Cohen, The New York Times
- Andrew Donohue, Reveal + The Center for Investigative Reporting
- Ellen Gabler, The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
- Jill Riepenhoff, The Columbus Dispatch
- Nicole Vap, KUSA-TV-Denver
- Phil Williams, WTVF-Nashville
- Lee Zurik, WVUE-TV-New Orleans

The board then selected six members of the executive committee: Matt Goldberg (president), Ziva Branstetter (vice president), Ellen Gabler (secretary), Andrew Donohue (treasurer), Phil Williams and past-president Sarah Cohen.

IRE members also elected two members to the IRE Contest Committee: Jim Polk, formerly of CNN, and Saleem Khan, INVSTG8.NET.

Member awarded the Wells Memorial Key

David Cullier, past president of the Society of Professional Journalists and former chair of its Freedom of Information Committee, has been awarded the Wells Memorial Key. Cullier received this award, which is the highest honor for an SPJ member, at the President's Installation Banquet on Sept. 20 during the Excellence in Journalism conference in New Orleans.

Cullier started his journalism career as a city hall reporter in the early '90s, but joined academia in 2001 as the editorial adviser for the campus newspaper and yearbook in the Great Northwest. He went on to become a journalism and media instructor at the Edward R. Murrow School of Communication at Washington State University and the School of Journalism and Mass Media at the University of Idaho from 2003 to 2006. He now serves as the director of the University of Arizona School of Journalism where he started as an associate professor in 2006.

Named after Sigma Delta Chi's second national president, Chester C. Wells, the Wells Memorial key was first awarded 98 years ago. Each year, it is awarded to a member who has performed outstanding service to the Society in the preceding year or through a period of years.

Out on the streets

As a charity moves in to provide housing, some residents are pushed out

Marcelo Rochabrun
ProPublica

Last August, I obtained from a colleague dozens of internal documents from the New York City affiliate of Habitat for Humanity. The story a source had in mind focused on the possibility that the nonprofit had become unwittingly entangled in a massive money-laundering operation. Former employees had already voiced similar suspicions to their superiors, and Habitat had asked a friendly law firm to look into the matter. The lawyers had found nothing of the sort, though, according to a one-page report they prepared.

When ProPublica and the New York Daily News finally published my story eight months later, it didn't focus on the money laundering at all. Instead, the story detailed how the charity's management of an ambitious housing initiative had led to the displacement of low-income families in Brooklyn, families who had been forced out of their homes just days or weeks before Habitat employees moved to buy their former apartment buildings, which the charity described as "long-vacant" structures. Worse, federal money that was meant to fight the foreclosure crisis helped fund the project that displaced these people.

The lesson I learned as I navigated the reporting process is that even if one avenue of reporting doesn't pan out, another might. I looked into the money laundering story and concluded that, for a number of reasons, it didn't check out. But the memos and emails that had made their way to me suggested that Habitat was involved in something troubling in a different way. One employee had complained to Habitat's whistleblower tipline that the New York affiliate was spending "federal money to throw low-income New Yorkers out of buildings."

By coincidence, at the same time as I dug through Habitat's documents, I was also working on an investigation on the failures of New York City's rental protections with ProPublica colleague Cezary Podkul. It was through this reporting on the intricacies of the rental market that I saw the whistleblower's allegations through a different lens.

Former residents of these Madison Street brownstones in New York say they were pushed out before Habitat for Humanity purchased the buildings.

Habitat's project seemed to have a design flaw. In an effort to spend funds efficiently, the charity had prioritized buying vacant multi-family buildings in a poor — but gentrifying — neighborhood of Brooklyn.

However, a project focused on finding vacant multi-family rental buildings is a dangerous endeavor in this city.

Most of these buildings are covered by the state's strongest rental protections — called the rent-stabilization law — which afford tenants the right to renew their leases in perpetuity, no matter how many new owners come in or how many mortgages they default on. Checking the buildings' tax records showed that these protections covered all but one of the buildings acquired by Habitat. And the neighborhood Habitat picked was filled with stabilized buildings. In other words, Habitat had been looking for vacant buildings in an area where buildings rarely, if ever, go vacant. Supporting this, the charity's struggles to find vacant buildings were well documented in the records I had reviewed.

As a result, it seemed that a project that ultimately targeted rent-stabilized multi-family buildings was a recipe for problems. Housing experts told me as much. "You don't find multi-family buildings 100 percent vacant unless somebody has done something really, really, really bad," one expert told me. Another one concurred. "Empty multi-family buildings were tough, if not impossible, to come by anywhere in New York City, even at the depths of the recession," he said.

With all this background information, I really just needed to figure out two questions to prove or disprove the story idea.

1. How do you find out how long the buildings were occupied?
2. How do you find out when Habitat for Humanity first expressed interest in purchasing any particular building?

I first went to Brooklyn housing court. If any of the building owners who sold to Habitat had been trying to get rid of their tenants, then they would most likely have filed eviction cases. The cases I found gave me a list of former tenants to begin tracking down.

It's important to see not just when a case began

Photos courtesy ProPublica

Tashemia Tyson stands in front of the homeless shelter where she lives in the Bronx. She said she has been unable to find a permanent home after being pushed out of her apartment on Madison Street five years ago.

but also how long it dragged out. Throughout the length of a case, it was reasonable to think that a tenant would still be living in the apartment. My first findings from housing court showed that a couple of buildings had had tenants in them just months before Habitat closed on them. This was a good start. However, in any real estate transaction, the closing is only the culmination of a negotiation process whose length is impossible to predict simply from the closing date. Finding when those negotiations had started was trickier.

I then filed public records requests with the city, asking if tenants at any of the buildings Habitat ultimately purchased had ever complained about issues such as lack of heat, water, rats, noise and any other maintenance complaints. More than the issues themselves, I was concerned about the dates, since this would prove somebody was living in the building. The records turned out to be extremely helpful and, while they mentioned no names, they mentioned specific apartments within the buildings. At this point, using Nexis and other public records databases, I could figure out who used to live in each particular unit.

Not exactly knowing what I expected to find, I also filed Freedom of Information Act requests with the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. I was just hopeful that, buried in the paperwork, a Habitat employee or a federal official would have noted the exact dates when negotiations began on specific buildings. I didn't expect, however, that HUD was aware that the buildings had been recently occupied. A senior official at HUD had told me early during my reporting process that he wasn't aware of any irregularities in Habitat's paperwork.

While filing FOIAs is almost a dead end with many federal agencies, HUD actually tries to respond within a few months. I filed two separate requests. One was for the "entire file" involving Habitat for Humanity's New York City project. The other was for any communications between Habitat-NYC and HUD. The logic behind filing this way is that dividing your request into small units can help you avoid "complex tracks" — FOIA-lingo for being stuck in the slow waiting line.

Indeed, HUD emailed me a couple of months later saying they had identified close to 1,000 pages of relevant records to fulfill both of my requests. However, there was a surprise: HUD had decided to show Habitat the records it intended to disclose to give the charity a chance to challenge their disclosure. The move was frustrating — although it was a judgment call on the part of the agency that was ultimately grounded in FOIA law. But HUD's decision helped drag out my request for an additional four months. To my surprise, I got all the records in the end, either because Habitat did not oppose the release of the records or because HUD overrode those concerns.

Records-wise, I based most of my reporting on court, city and HUD reports, which I then compared with Habitat's internal documents. From here it was straightforward enough to create a timeline. HUD's records proved to have what I most needed: signed documents attesting to the date Habitat had "first visited" the properties it sought to acquire. In one case, HUD records showed Habitat first visited a property 15 days after the last recorded tenant filed a complaint about the building with the city. In another case, Habitat was already negotiating a purchase 20 days after the seller had sued the last remaining tenant, trying to evict her.

As I tracked down tenants using Nexis or through their relatives, I had really just one question for them: When did you move out? Talking to them almost five years after their move, I was concerned they would not remember or provide me with contradictory information. I made sure during the interviews not to offer the dates I had independently found for fear of influencing their answers. In the end, all their answers matched the documents I had obtained.

In response to the story, Habitat said that while it was "unequivocally unaware of any coercive tactics" used to push out the tenants, it stood ready to help any of the "seven displaced families" find affordable housing.

Marcelo Rochabrun is a senior reporting fellow with ProPublica. He is a 2016 Livingston Award finalist and also won an IRE award last year for his reporting on Princeton's exclusive eating clubs while a reporter for The Daily Princetonian. @mrochabrun

Photos courtesy ProPublica

Shortcut to the American Dream

A look at the flaws of a U.S. visa program

By Josh Salman
Sarasota Herald-Tribune

When the presidential campaign brought immigration policy to the forefront, it ignited a story we had put on the back burner in 2010.

We had first learned of the U.S. government's EB-5 visa program six years ago, when rumors circulated that a shady investor may be helping foreign investors obtain green cards through this little-known program. The rumor proved to be false, but our recent investigation found evidence that EB-5 was being exploited by other businessmen with tarnished reputations.

We also learned that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the agency charged with running the program, does little to check the backgrounds of wealthy foreigners who pay for the right to jump in front of the immigration line by pumping capital into real estate projects from Miami to Seattle.

Under the rules of the program, wealthy foreigners can obtain visas through investments of $500,000 to $1 million. Those investments must create or preserve 10 jobs in the U.S. The program was originally intended to help rural areas plagued by poverty, but it now helps to develop real estate in some of America's most affluent neighborhoods.

Most of the money is funneled through regional centers, which are private businesses that are approved by government regulators to spend EB-5 money.

Failed FOIAs

The Herald-Tribune filed 12 Freedom of Information Act requests with USCIS for records pertaining to EB-5. Those included requests for every person who has been approved for an EB-5 visa since 2008, where the application lists either an expected address in Florida or an investment with a business in the Sunshine State.

But USCIS rejected substantial portions of those FOIAs, claiming that revealing the information would be an invasion of privacy. The organization cited an exemption in the law that allows the government to withhold all information about individuals in "personnel and medical files and similar files." We did not appeal, but still may further challenge this opinion. Others FOIAs that were approved were expected to take almost a year to process.

The only really useful information the USCIS gave us right away were the numbers of visas issued to wealthy foreigners every year and a list of approved investment centers in each state. The numbers showed that pending EB-5 applications from immigrants had risen nationwide from 853 in 2008 to 17,367 as of September 2015 —a 1,936 percent spike in seven years. We knew we were onto something.

There was a similar rise in the number of the regional centers administering the money. They grew from 16 in 2007 to more than 930 by September 2015. Only California had more than Florida's 73, making our area prime territory for an investigation of this nature.

Backgrounding the regional centers

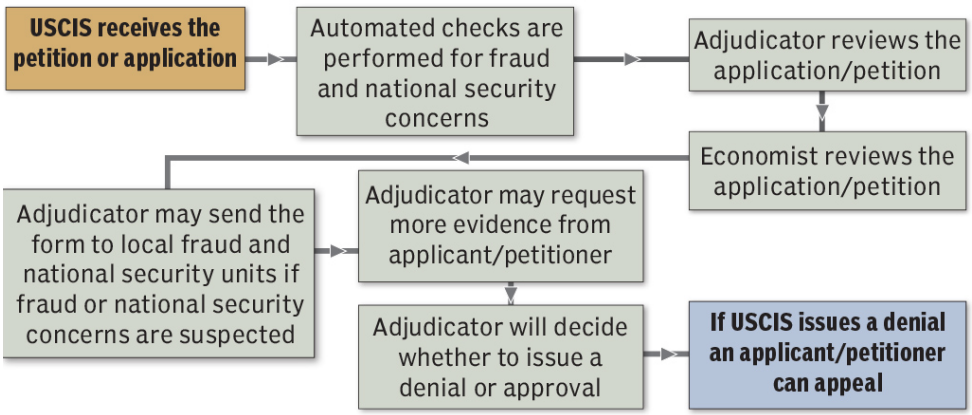
Because of limited time and resources, we focused our efforts primarily on those regional centers approved for operation in the Sunshine State. We ran the companies through the Florida Department of State's database, which gave us the centers' addresses and the top managers.

We then checked to see to what other companies these people were linked to. We ran their names through PACER, an electronic government database of court records, to see whether they had been sued, indicted or filed for bankruptcy. We checked county courthouses for arrests, lawsuits and foreclosure filings, and we searched federal and state election commission databases for any evidence they had contributed to political campaigns.

The Herald-Tribune called every single person named as a manager of a regional center and interviewed more than 50 individuals tied to the program, including EB-5 regional center operators, immigrants who used EB-5 to gain green cards, government regulators and third-party analysts. The newspaper toured EB-5 projects around the state, using that information to build a database of the

EB-5 Adjudications Process

This table shows the steps of obtaining a visa through the EB-5 immigration process.



Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

GATEHOUSE MEDIA

The federal government struggles to verify whether the funds used by foreigners to gain EB-5 visas were obtained legally, with no access to many offshore bank accounts or employment information, a Herald-Tribune investigation has found.

Photo courtesy Sarasota Herald-Tribune

73 EB-5 regional centers in Florida. My editors and I felt it was important to call every center simply because we agreed it was the right thing to do. We wrote vignettes on each, and some were operating better than others. We also thought it would be fair, given the nature of the investigation.

Our reporting showed that USCIS never fully vetted the principal investors approved to open EB-5 regional centers in Florida. The operations are run by businessmen who were barred from selling securities; developers with a history of failed projects; a multimillion-dollar firearms dealer; and an attorney who has represented dozens of criminals coming into the country.

Some of these EB-5 principals have been entangled in lawsuits over allegations of fraud. They have been linked to financial crimes, battled bankruptcy and lost homes to foreclosure. Those types of financial issues would typically preclude a loan from a traditional bank, so these players have turned to EB-5 instead. We later learned that's because the program's current regulations do not give the immigration department the authority to deny or terminate an EB-5 regional center based on past fraud or national security concerns.

We also found the men behind these EB-5 regional centers had their hands deep into the political pot. In Florida alone, the principals of EB-5 regional centers have donated more than $800,000 to federal campaign coffers since 1999, funding bids from both major political parties and members of Congress who have publicly supported EB-5. Elected politicians have gone on to work for EB-5 regional centers following their retirement or lost elections. So has the past director of the USCIS.

Questioning the regulators

Without the names of the visa applicants, there was little we could do to investigate their backgrounds. But we did discover that the government struggles to verify whether the funds used by foreigners to gain EB-5 visas were obtained legally, with no access to many offshore bank accounts or employment information. In fact, the federal government has no centralized database to track these investors once they enter the country. Instead, the government relies solely on paper records that lack basic information, like a name or date of birth.

The government also admits it cannot fully verify each job it says was created through EB-5. The program's top administrative agency is unable to demonstrate the precise benefits of EB-5 investment, which is now commonly used as a bridge loan to jump-start real estate developments. For that reason, many of the projects now using EB-5 funding would have proceeded without the foreign investment, which has boosted developer margins through capital that is dramatically cheaper and less risky than traditional bank financing.

The Springs at South Biscayne, a 138-bed senior living community, is at 6235 Hoffman St. in North Port on land formerly owned by the South Biscayne Church. The facility was built by Omega Florida Regional Center and financed, in part, by EB-5 funds.

Impact

The response to the series was swift. Just one day after the Herald-Tribune published its first installment in December, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission scheduled a national conference call with members of the media, announcing plans to bolster its EB-5 related enforcement efforts.

The federal agency, which regulates financial securities and fraud, also sanctioned seven individuals —six of them lawyers — for selling EB-5 investments without properly registering as financial brokers. Those enforcement actions included claims against a Florida attorney featured in the Herald-Tribune investigation, who ultimately agreed to disgorge $132,500 and pay $8,243 in prejudgment interest. It was the first time the SEC sanctioned attorneys for their role as EB-5 brokers.

Congress also is eyeing change. Federal lawmakers are vetting a bill that would increase the minimum required investment from EB-5 immigrants from $500,000 to $800,000. The bipartisan bill also would bolster the Department of Homeland Security's authority to investigate EB-5 fraud, require background checks on regional center principals and establish an "EB-5 Integrity Fund." Regional centers would fund this effort through an annual fee used by Homeland Security to conduct more audits and regular site visits.

Leaders backing the effort have used the vulnerabilities highlighted in the Herald-Tribune investigation as vehicle to round up support. The proposal likely will not come for a final vote until late 2016. And some government officials also are pressuring the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to develop a searchable electronic database for EB-5 records, which would allow the agency to more closely monitor fraud and potential threats to national security.

But there is still plenty of room for more EB-5 investigations. We still have some data requests pending, which we hope to receive this year for potential follow-ups.

News organizations in every state also can take similar steps to gauge the EB-5 activity in their coverage area, and see who is behind these projects. EB-5 activity is robust throughout California, the Northeast and Texas — areas with burgeoning real estate markets.

The results — and names you find — tied to EB-5 in your area may be surprising, and it could be a way to advance coverage of an ongoing story. It is also a great way to engage readership and pull them into the national debate centered on immigration right now. But be sure to file FOIAs as early as possible, and investigate every angle possible during the wait. This also makes for a great exercise on backgrounding people and sources.

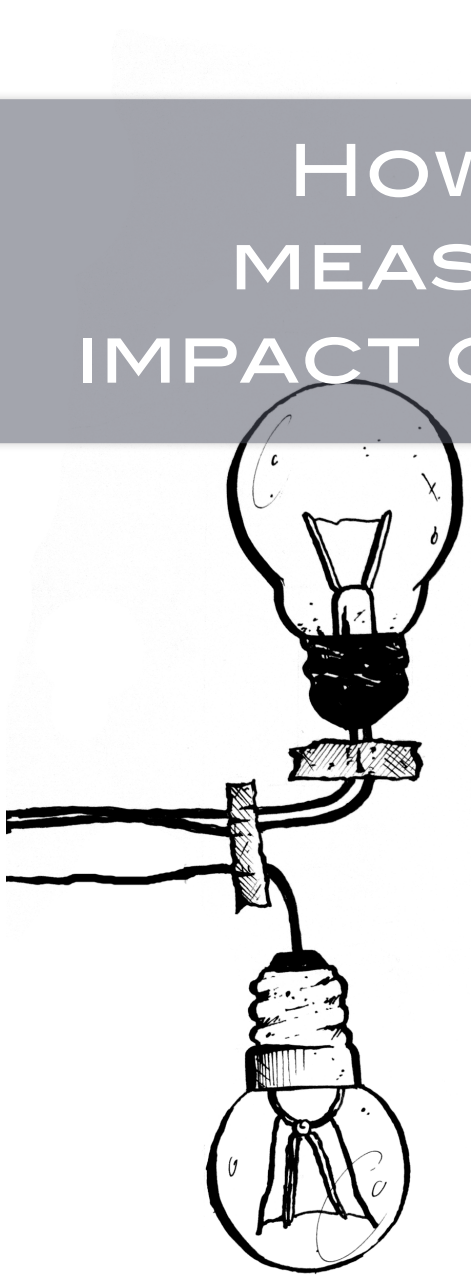
Josh Salman is an investigative reporter for the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, where he focuses primarily on watchdog business projects. His work has earned awards from organizations including the Society of Professional Journalists; the Society of American Business Editors and Writers; Editor and Publisher; and the Florida Society of News Editors, which awarded him first place for investigative reporting and a gold medal for public service in 2015.

Photos courtesy Thomas Bender/Sarasota Herald-Tribune

How do we measure the impact of a story?

Five tips for taking measurements

By Taeler De Haes
WFAA-Dallas/Fort Worth



For over a decade, media makers have debated the issues surrounding impact measurement — the definition of impact, methodologies to measure it and whether it's measurable at all.

Journalists want to know if their reporting made a difference. Here are five guidelines to follow when tracking impact.

One: Identify your mission and define impact

Figure out what your organization's mission is, and then identify what impact means to your organization.

Lindsay Green-Barber is the director of strategic research at the Center for Investigative Reporting. She started working for CIR in 2013 as the media impact analyst, and her first assignment was to define what "impact" meant to the organization.

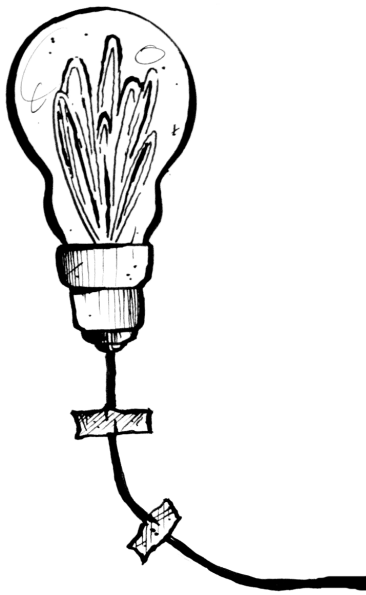
"While there is no clear definition of impact, it is understood that impact is real world change," she said.

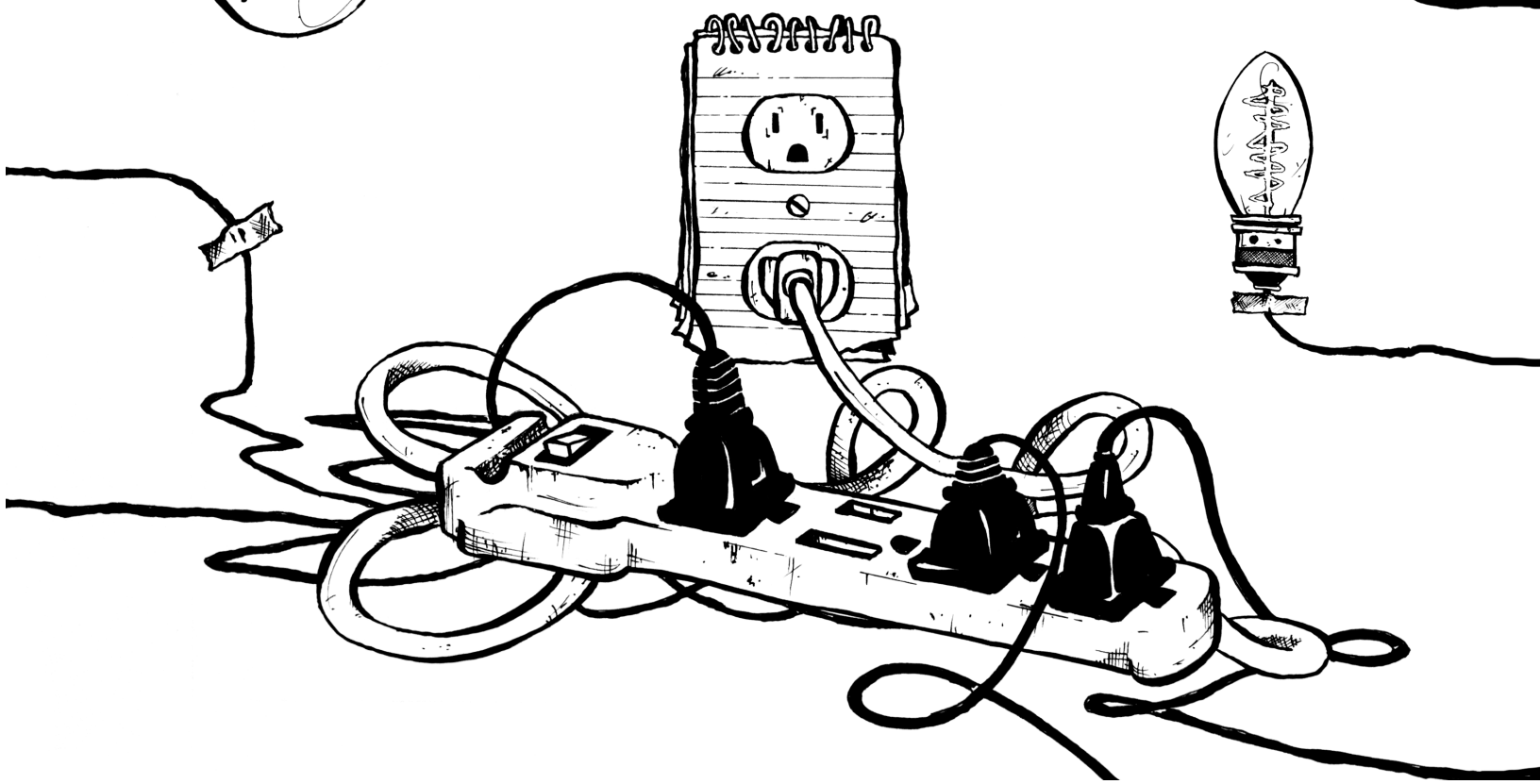
Reach versus Engagement

Real world change can take many forms, but here's one way to break it down: nonprofit measurements versus commercial measurements.

President of ProPublica Dick Tofel wrote a paper focused on the experience of ProPublica and how the impact of journalism measures its success.

"If you're running a for-profit news organization, your mission is to make money," Tofel said. "You may care more about reach rather than engagement."





A nonprofit is more likely to invest time and resources into engagement measurement because its success is based on change. A commercial newsroom makes money through advertising, and advertisers care about ratings or reach. The bigger the reach is, the more revenue is generated.

Standard metrics are vital for revenue, according to Jim Glass, the Creative Services Director at WFAA-TV in Dallas.

"Every morning I probably get eight pieces of media analytics from Nielsen to Rentrak — those are both TV measurements — and ComScore for digital products," Glass said.

For social analytics, Glass also subscribes to ShareRocket, a monthly subscription detailing engagement per post for Twitter and Facebook.

In commercial newsrooms, legacy newsrooms, in particular, reporters and marketers are disconnected when it comes to interpreting these metrics. But there's a reason for that, according to Carolyn Mungo, WFAA-TV news director.

Reporters at WFAA-TV don't have the same access to the same detailed reports as the marketing staff and digital team. Although they can look at certain metrics if they choose to be included on an email listserv.

Mungo said the variance in the overnight reports could be stressful andoverwhelming for reporters and lead them to false conclusions about ratings. Instead, focusing on monthly trends — the bigger picture — is a more accurate indicator of how the station is doing overall regarding reach.

Regardless of what your mission is and your method of measurement, impact tracking is vital for long-term growth and success in both nonprofit and commercial newsrooms.

Jessica Clark, director of the Center for Social Media Research, started developing impact-tracking methods in 2004. She says the importance of measuring impact is simple. Just ask yourself why you became a journalist.

"If you became a journalist because you think you should comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, then impact is square in the middle of your mission," Clark said.

At the very least, journalists need to know who is reading, watching or listening to their work to understand their audience.

But, as any good journalist knows, balance is important. Reporters should be wary of making editorial decisions on mere numbers alone.

"The bottom line is defined by reach, but the soul of the station is impact," said Jason Trahan, WFAA-TV investigative producer.

Two: Track your story

If you want to track your story, it's best to start before the reporting even begins. Outline a plan, identify possible outcomes and figure

out what methodologies you want to use.

Green-Barber came up with an impact tracker through CIR that holds all offline qualitative impact for the organization. Reporters fill out a web form using their organization's custom URL, and anyone in the organization can log in to access the database to check what stories are creating the most impact.

The offline impact tracker web form is broken up into three categories of impact. Macro outcomes occur at an institutional level, resulting in a concrete change like the passing of a law. Meso changes influence the public, which could mean increased coverage of a certain topic from other news organizations.

"If someone asks me, 'What has our impact been on our criminal justice beat?' I can go in and filter just by 'criminal justice,'" Green-Barber said.

Green-Barber will have the impact tracker available for other organizations to use this year.

Another way to track your story is through geocoding. Some nonprofit organizations, such as the Wisconsin Center for InvestigativeReporting, release investigative reports around the state and country. When Associate Director Lauren Fuhrmann began at the Center, one of her first tasks was to figure out where its stories were being published.

She uses GIS mapping to mark where the center's work is shared.

The center uses Meltwater, a paid clipping service, to gather data. It pulls metrics to show where the center's work is shown, including mentions of the work using key terms.

"We're able to export a spreadsheet that has all the mentions of our work and that includes the URL, the headline and the news organization," she said.

Aside from pickups, Meltwater creates two other spreadsheets. One gives information about the news outlet that shared the story, including circulation size and how many visitors they have on a monthly basis. The other details information about how the story ran, when it was published, the headline and URL.

Three: Use necessary data, no more and no less

Metrics should never be the starting point for impact tracking. Create a measurement model that corresponds with your mission.

"Don't count things just because you can," Dana Chinn, director of the Norman Lear Center Media Impact Project at the University of Southern California, said.

Chinn doesn't measure traffic — a metric many news organizations consider vital.

Why?

"Because it's not going to affect any decisions I make about what goes on my site," Chinn said.

Standard metrics only tell part of the story. These metrics include page views,unique visitors and time on site, to name a few. While it is important to know how many people click on a story or like a post on Facebook, the numbers tell you little to nothing about the engagement or impact. Are people actually reading what they clicked on? Are they sharing or commenting? Was that click an accident?

Many news outlets rely heavily on these standard metrics, because they are tangible — flawed, but tangible. However, that does not mean they are not usable. Chinn said anything involving standard metrics could be summed up in two phrases: "so what" and "it depends."

The phrase "it depends" stems from a lack of standards. For example, in television news, a Nielsen rating is a standard metric. It has a relative value that's set by people using those metrics, she said.

"A Nielsen rating is simply a methodology that advertisers decided is correct. It's a currency," Chinn said.

But Nielsen is incredibly flawed, Glass said. In Dallas, there are 800 Nielsen homes, which represent the demographics of the 6.3 million people in the market.

When the system gets installed into a home, buttons on your remote are assigned to different members of the household.

"Every fifteen minutes, I'm required to press who's in the room watching television,"Glass said. "If you walk out of the room, I have to punch you out. After 45 minutes of non-reporting, you're supposed to be tossed out of the sample. It is so labor intensive."

For a Nielsen family to get tossed out of the sample, it can take months or even years. By that time, the previous ratings already came out with the faulty metrics.

Another unreliable metric is time spent on page.

"The total is counted based on the pages that are sent from the server, so it doesn't count the time if someone only [visits] one page, and it

doesn't count the time spent on the last page," Chinn said. "You have to customize your tracking code."

With the understanding that time spent on page is not based on the server but, instead, is based on user behavior, Chinn customized a tracking code to look at scroll rate.

"We can tell if they're reading something about the principal of the story at the top, or if they're actually scrolling all the way to the bottom. That is useful and more accurate," she said.

Despite the faulty metrics and an overwhelming amount of them, Chinn proposes three numbers to keep in mind when tracking impact: one, two and 15.

One represents the power of the individual. Find the person behind each click. Think about the key people your story may have affected. It doesn't matter how many page views you get; it matters who the person is, she said. Two is the second response after seeing a story. It is the measure of "bounce rate,"or the second or third click after the initial click.

"Don't focus on the first click-type metric. Focus on the second," Chinn said. "Did your content actually lead to a second click or a third click? It's that action that indicates engagement."

Lastly, Chinn recommends spending 15 minutes per day learning about metrics. Using these three numbers as a guideline can refine the metrics important to your organization.

Four: Expect to spend a little extra time (and money)

While the numbers are important, audience engagement is often more telling.

Fuhrmann manually keeps track of web and Facebook comments in an Excel spreadsheet, which takes a few hours per story.

"Truthfully, I think some of the anecdotal stuff is much more important than just looking at the number of Facebook shares," she said. "I think what's even more important is who are the people that are sharing it."

Aside from time, tracking can cost a pretty penny, depending on how extensively you are tracking.

"It's very time consuming. We are paying for Meltwater, but there are a lot of smaller non-profits that can't," Fuhrmann said. "When I was manually compiling, it took me a couple of days a month to manually type in the information in how the stories were being used. By the time I had compiled all the information, there was no time to analyze it."

The time and resources get even more extensive depending on publishing frequency. Fuhrmann suggests paying for a clipping service if your organization puts out regular content.

Five: One size does not fit all

There is no master metric or algorithm for measuring impact. Using a mix of both qualitative and quantitative measures are necessary.

"Straightforwardness and simplicity are good qualities when looking at impact," Charles Lewis, executive editor of the Investigative Reporting Workshop at the American University School of Communications, said.

There must be some logic and purity to whatever metric and formula an organization uses. Otherwise, questions may arise surrounding the complexity.

As individuals from nonprofits and commercial newsrooms have stated, impact tracking — regardless of the mission and method — is imperative in fostering growth and preserving the mission of journalism itself. Knowing how an audience reacts and engages with a story helps to better understand how to adequately and effectively serve the community.

By tracking impact in a more formal and cohesive method using both qualitative and quantitative methods, it will be much simpler to keep track of proof of performance for both the reporter and the newsroom at large.

Turning your investigation into a podcast

Gina Barton
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

The immensely popular Serial podcast reminded journalists everywhere of the power of the serial narrative, a storytelling form that's been around since at least the 19th century. Serial also inspired many investigative reporters who have not been trained in radio to try their hand at podcasting, a format embraced by audiences and advertisers alike.

So what makes a successful podcast? First and foremost, all the things that make a compelling story in any other form. But you'll need to add a few elements to make the audio presentation great. The most effective way to be sure your story resonates with podcast listeners is to keep them in mind throughout the process, from reporting through promotion.

Reporting

Upgrade your recorder. Journalists often record their interviews to ensure accuracy. But when working on a podcast, ditch the voice notes function on your iPhone for equipment that yields high-quality sound, such as a digital Zoom audio recorder. For interviews with out-of-town sources, Skype audio is much cleaner than a recorded phone call.

Transcribe as you go. Once you've nailed each interview, transcribe it as soon as possible to save yourself a lot of aggravation when it comes time to write the script. The last thing you'll want to do at the end of a months-long reporting process is type up hundreds of hours of interviews.

Seek out archival audio. Television or radio clips can help keep your podcast varied and interesting. In addition to broadcast stations, university and library archives may house audio or video collections. If you need help figuring out where to find recordings, check with local filmmakers, who must routinely track down historical video and audio recordings.

File public records requests for police audio. In many states, police are required to record interrogations. Even in states where it's not required, they often do. These audio recordings are public records in some states. Once you have them in hand, you can and incorporate

them into your podcast. Often court proceedings are recorded as well.

Don't forget to record some natural sound ('nat sound' in radio parlance). Are you interviewing a police detective? Grab some audio of the squad room. A teacher? Record a few minutes of the action during class.

Writing

Plan the narrative arc of each episode and the entire show. As in print serial narratives, good ledes (or 'hooks') entice listeners to invest time in your story and cliffhangers help bring them back for more. Try to keep your episodes similar in length. Listeners will appreciate the consistency.

Work backward. Consider building your script around the audio you have gathered for your print reporting rather than writing a script that requires you to obtain specific bits of sound.

Just talk. When recording your voiceover, talk off-the-cuff about the topic or answer a question in conversation with a colleague rather than reading or reciting lines from a script. This helps convey your enthusiasm, and it helps you sound natural rather than scripted. It can also save you from doing multiple takes.

Add value. If you are producing a podcast in addition to a printed or online project, there may be people who want to experience the story in both formats. To keep listeners engaged, you have to give them something more than the content of the written story. You could add details, feature different sources or include insights about your reporting process.

Plan ahead. If your podcast takes off, listeners will immediately start asking when they can expect a second season. Be sure to have an answer for them.

Production

Recruit people in your newsroom as voice over 'actors.' If you have corresponded with someone in prison, for example, but aren't allowed to bring a recorder inside, you can ask a colleague to read the letters or excerpts from them — aloud — for use on the podcast. Of course, let listeners know that's what you're doing.

Edit, but not too much. You want to remove background noise or throat clearing, but an overly polished podcast may alienate listeners, who want to feel as if they are part of a conversation.

Consider investing $129 in the iZotope Rx plugin package to clean up audio files quickly, removing clicks, background noise, loud breathing, etc.

Promotion

Identify your audience by finding similar podcasts and figuring out who is talking about them online. Market your podcast directly to those people through the use of Twitter hashtags, Reddit boards and other social media.

Produce an online landing page to showcase your podcast.

Get in touch with your local NPR affiliate or independent radio station to see if they will consider airing your podcast or promoting it to their listeners via audio teasers or on their website.

Use house ads to promote your work to old-school readers and online audiences.

Gina Barton is the criminal justice investigative reporter at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and author of "Fatal Identity: A story of friendship, deception and murder." She is host of the Edward R. Murrow award-winning "Unsolved" podcast, co-created with producer Katie O'Connell. @writerbarton

Food safety

The bureaucracy of what we eat

Mike McGraw | Hale Center for Journalism

After eating a medium rare steak at Applebee's in 2009, an 87-year-old Iowa woman got violently ill, underwent surgery and now must wear a colostomy bag.

The steak had been mechanically tenderized — a process meant to make tough meat tender and more valuable. But the process also forces deadly pathogens deep inside the meat, where they often aren't heated enough to kill them.

"You trust people, trust that nothing is going to happen," the woman told The Kansas City Star in 2012, " but they (beef companies) are mass-producing this and shoveling it into us."

Despite six outbreaks of foodborne illness related to the process and years of pleas from food safety groups to require warning labels and safe cooking instructions, it took the U.S. Department of Agriculture another six years to do so, finally implementing that mandate in May.

Food industry lobbying, bureaucratic malaise, government budget cuts, congressional meddling, inadequate testing and the complexities of mass processing systems have hampered food safety efforts for decades.

And it doesn't make things any easier that no fewer than 15 federal agencies are involved in food safety efforts.

Now, we can add yet another potentially harmful ingredient to that toxic brew: pressure from international trade agreements to lower food safety standards to accommodate an increasingly global market in food.

American food safety sovereignty took a back seat, for example, when multi-national food companies took exception to " country of origin" labels on meat products. They used fair trade agreements to force a repeal of the requirement.

While many consumers seem to miss the labels, their disappearance portends more dire consequences. The labels would have helped health officials track contaminated products to their source, an important factor in an industry that co-mingles meat from many different animals from as many as 13 different countries.

Food safety advocates are already ringing alarm bells over our newest trade deal with 11 Pacific Rim nations, predicting the pact could undermine import surveillance and food safety standards.

The new pact comes as food safety regulators in the U.S. are shutting down border inspection stations and cutting the budgets of entire divisions dedicated to monitoring the safety of foreign plants that import food to the U.S.

In fact, the GAO published a report (bit.ly/2cqlEuk) in May on enhancements needed for imported food safety.

Overall, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, some 48 million Americans (one in six) are sickened by foodborne illness every year; another 128,000 are hospitalized and 3,000 die.

As the population gets older, more aging Americans become even more susceptible to such illnesses.

Needless to say, the world's constantly evolving food supply chain is fertile ground for more investigative reporting. And it's not just about meat.

The HealthGrove data visualization website crunched the CDC's data from 1984 to 2014 and posted results in April showing the 25 foods most commonly involved in foodborne illness outbreaks.

They include refried beans, coleslaw, lettuce, ham, shrimp, soup, tuna, eggs, cake, salad, oysters and pork.

Beef is the number two culprit, with 827 outbreaks over the 30-year span of available data, each causing an average of 20 illnesses; chicken was number one.

Even ice is a problem, causing 102 outbreaks over those years, or an average of six outbreaks a year, causing an average of 33 illnesses. You can find the rest at bit.ly/2aaKnkYv.

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

Preview

PREVIEW
The art scene warms up in the summer. Check out the Nelson-Atkins Museum fruit sculptures on the Nelson-Atkins Museum lawn. Discover what's in store in our second weekly Summer Fun edition.

SPORTS DAILY
KU's Sydney Conley is a favorite to win an NCAA long-jump title, but it's her personality that often gets the attention. | B1

TODAY'S WEATHER: LOW 59, HIGH 72. THUNDERSTORMS. | B8

$1.00

Schools chief Green set to leave

Family connections in Atlanta area beckon the Kansas City district superintendent since 2011.

By JOE ROBERTSON

The reasons Steve Green is set to leave the Kansas City Public Schools can be counted on one hand.

Two of his children and three of his grandchildren live in the Atlanta area, he told The Star Wednesday.

That's why he plans to leave after four years of leading Kansas City through a turbulent tide from unaccreditation and the brink of state takeover to provisional status and a shot at full accreditation.

Green is the sole finalist for the superintendent post at the Atlanta-area DeKalb County School District.

"It has everything to do with family and nothing to do with the school board," Green said before his public announcement at the school district's offices Wednesday night.

He was contacted by a search firm earlier this year to gauge his interest, he said.

SEE GREEN | A6

Tenderized beef to get label under USDA rule

An investigation by KC Star found the mechanical process used on beef has health risks for consumers.

By LINDSAY WISE

WASHINGTON | Mechanically tenderized meat must be labeled and include safe cooking instructions, according to a rule announced Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The long-awaited rule, which will go into effect next year, comes after a Kansas City Star investigation in 2012 exposed health risks associated with beef that has been run through a mechanical tenderizer.

Mechanical tenderizers hammer meat with dozens of needles or small blades to increase tenderness, a sought-after trait by consumers. But the process can drive dangerous pathogens such as E. coli and salmonella deep inside steaks, roasts and other beef products, where they can survive cooking to rare or medium-rare. Ground potatoes, even when the meat appears

SEE TENDERIZED | A14

"I apologize for the poor judgment I displayed."

MISSOURI HOUSE SPEAKER JOHN DIEHL

MISSOURI HOUSE SPEAKER ADMITS TO RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEGE INTERN

Revelation of their text messages sparks political firestorm.

Republican House Speaker John Diehl, 40, has a reputation as a hard-charging, deal-making politician. His text exchanges with a college intern include photos, with one apparently showing Diehl on a trade mission to Europe.

By JASON HANCOCK

JEFFERSON CITY | Text messages obtained by The Star reveal a sexually charged relationship between House Speaker John Diehl and a college freshman in a Missouri Capitol internship program that shut down abruptly last month.

The messages, which span almost a thirty-page text exchange, also reveal an intimacy between arguably the state's most influential lawmaker and a young woman taking some pleasure in a secret association.

The term show occasional efforts by Diehl and the intern to meet in person. They range from mundane chatter, about boring meetings and dreading speeches, to the more sexually suggestive.

Diehl initially declined to comment. But about six hours after the story was posted online Wednesday morning, he issued a statement admitting the relationship.

"I take full responsibility for my actions and I am truly sorry to those I let down," Diehl's statement said. "I apologize for the poor judgment I displayed that put me and those closest to me in this situation. I also regret that the woman in question has dragged my name into this. She has been back stops here. I ask for fu-

SEE TEXTS | A6

Lawmakers in Jefferson City stunned by scandal

Statehouse Democrats call for the Republican speaker to resign.

By ELIZA HELLING

Missouri House Speaker John Diehl's apology for his relationship with a college intern isn't likely to eliminate the furor surrounding the powerful politician, officials on both sides say.

Diehl, 40, issued the apology Wednesday afternoon about six hours after The Star published a series of suggestive texts between the House speaker and a former intern at the Capitol.

Diehl's admission followed tense private meetings with Republican leaders in his office at the Capitol. In those closed-door sessions, Diehl and his allies needed to find sufficient political support to survive the crisis ignited by the texts and The Star's story about them.

Some Republicans were willing to offer that support.

"I've known Speaker and I believe what he said," Rep. Noel Shull of Kansas City said. "I don't think it's going to change.

SEE REACTION | A6

Train was traveling too fast

Officials say an Amtrak train was traveling at least 100 mph — twice the speed allowed — when it derailed Tuesday night in Philadelphia, killing seven people and injuring more than 200. The accident could affect Northeast travel for weeks. | A2

'Miss Ruby' dies at 95

Ruby W. McIntyre, the woman known to generations of Kansas City police officers and other customers at Ruby's Soul Food Cafe as "Miss Ruby" or even "Mama," has died at age 95. | A4

Theater chains examined

The government is checking allegations that big movie theater chains, including Leawood-based AMC, are using their market clout to block smaller rivals from receiving first-run movies. | A8

Photos courtesy The Kansas City Star

These kinds of stories are important for all newsrooms, large and small. But Big Agriculture is doing its best to keep them from us.

A new USDA funding bill passed by Congress, for example, would prevent anyone from filing FOIA requests for internal documents from the 22 federally-mandated food promotion programs.

Some farmers have long objected to mandatory payments to the programs, which promote everything from watermelon to beef. And consumer groups have questioned the veracity of their promotional campaigns including, for example, the health benefits of eating beef. The new FOIA exemption would bar them, along with journalists and others, from seeing internal documents about how that money is spent.

In the aftermath of viral videos from animal cruelty groups, some states have passed laws criminalizing those activities and many states still have " veggie libel" laws on their books meant to protect producers of perishable food from the effects of allegedly false statements.

But there are still plenty of good sources on the subject.

Do a survey of large suppliers and food processing companies in your area. Develop sources inside unions that represent workers there, or check unemployment claims for former workers.

I once left my business cards under windshield wipers of cars in the parking lot of a turkey processing plant, inviting workers for an after-work beer. It worked pretty well, and I learned a lot.

Reach out to the union that represents USDA meat inspectors at njcfil.com.

Talk to your state's health department and check the CDC's website for information about recent foodborne illness outbreaks.

Check the FDA for non-meat food recalls and the USDA's meat recall system for recent recalls involving companies in your area at fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/ and bit.ly/JlAYri.

Yelp restaurant reviews can even be a good source.

While investigating an outbreak of foodborne illness, the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene found that patrons had reported illnesses on the business review website that had not been reported to authorities.

Check nearby food processing plants for violations of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Many large, modern plants are highly mechanized and can be relatively dangerous places to work.

What you learn could help you develop union sources. And besides, if the company has a poor worker safety record, how do they do on food safety?

Also check court records, both state and federal.

In looking into the company that produced what came to be called " pink slime," several years ago, I tripped over a federal lawsuit that gave me a little more insight into the potential dangers of large, industrialized food production systems.

The company treated its product — officially called a lean beef additive — with ammonia to kill pathogens. The company sued its industrial ammonia supplier after it found that 190,000 pounds of beef additive were ruined because its ammonia tank was contaminated with cresylic acid, a toxic compound used in disinfectants and wood preservatives.

If you are into meat, read Chris Leonard's excellent book " The Meat Racket."

If you are interested in how the mob got a foothold in the food industry years ago and how the industry can work at its worst, read my favorite investigative reporting book of all time, " Vicious Circles," by the late, great Wall Street Journal reporter Jonathan Kwitney.

Read Upton Sinclair's " The Jungle," of course.

If you are in or near Minnesota, check out the excellent website and helpful folks at the Minnesota Department of Health, quite likely the best state health department in the nation.

Mike McGraw is the special projects reporter at KCPT's Hale Center for Journalism, and also works with NPR and KCUR's Harvest Public Media Component. He comes to KCPT after a 30-year career on The Kansas City Star's investigations team, where he and a colleague won a Pulitzer Prize for a series about the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

A few favorite resources

- **Seattle attorney Bill Marler's "Food Safety News"** bit.ly/29XmGysFDA
- **Food contamination letters** bit.ly/29XmGP3Food
- **Water Watch** foodandwaterwatch.org
- **The Center for Foodborne Illness** foodborneillness.org/cfi-leadership.html
- **North American Meat Institute** bit.ly/2a7JDx9
- **R-Calf** (U.S. cattlemen defending Country of Origin labeling and other trade issues) r-calfusa.com
- **National Cattlemens' Beef Association** beefusa.org

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TENDERIZE

FROM A1

pears fully cooked.

Mechanically tenderized beef needs to be cooked to a higher internal temperature and also needs to rest for a specific amount of time before it is safe for consumption.

"Labeling mechanically tenderized beef products and including cooking instructions on the package are important steps in helping consumers to safely prepare these products," USDA Deputy Undersecretary Al Almanza said in a prepared statement. "This commonsense change will lead to safer meals and fewer foodborne illnesses."

There have been at least six outbreaks of foodborne illness attributable to mechanically tenderized beef prepared in restaurants and homes since 2000, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The Star's investigation, "Big Beef: Beef's Raw Edges," featured the story of one 87-year-old woman who had to wear a colostomy bag for the rest of her life after falling ill from a pathogen inside a mechanically tenderized steak she had eaten at an Applebee's restaurant.

The illness destroyed Margaret Lamkin's large colon and almost killed her.

Mechanically tenderized beef looks no different than intact cuts. Without any labels to distinguish meat that has been blade- or needle-tenderized, consumers or restaurants have no idea that they've bought something that needs to be cooked more thoroughly.

The USDA expects the new labeling requirement will prevent hundreds of illnesses every year, the agency said Wednesday.

The meat industry defends the safety of products that are mechanically tenderized, arguing that they don't need special labeling.

"Data show that our proactive, food safety efforts have improved these products' safety profile over the last several years," Barry Carpenter, president and CEO of the North American Meat Institute, said in a statement Wednesday.

But Carpenter said his group recognizes that the USDA's new rule is less burdensome than an earlier version and represents a compromise.

"We will work with the Food Safety and Inspection Service to implement the new labeling requirement in the most effective manner for both industry and consumers," he said.

The public health importance of labeling mechanically tenderized beef is reflected in the USDA's decision to move up the deadline for implementation of the rule to May 2016 from 2018, said David Plunkett, senior staff attorney in the food safety program at the Center for Science in the Public Interest in Washington.

"The best thing about it is they recognized that there's no reason to wait another two years to implement the rule under their practice of giving companies extra time to implement labeling rules," Plunkett said.

"The companies know it's coming, they are probably already prepared for it," he said. "Let's go ahead and get this in place so consumers know what's what with the food they're eating."

Plunkett and other food safety advocates, who have pushed the USDA for years to require labeling of mechanically tenderized meat, welcomed the new rule Wednesday.

The rule is "a huge step forward," said Pat Buck, executive director of the Center for Foodborne Illness, Research and Prevention, a nonprofit public health organization based in Chapel Hill, N.C.

"This is really an urgent public health issue that can be mitigated to some degree with this label," Buck said. "The consumers have no idea that the product actually even exists, and so by putting a label on it consumers will be better protected."

The USDA estimates that mechanical tenderizing is used for about 11 percent of beef products annually, or 2.6 billion pounds. But Buck said people who work in beef processing plants estimate that the percentage is actually much higher — about 90 percent.

Buck also would like the labeling rule to apply to poultry and pork products that have undergone mechanical tenderizing.

"That would be the common-sense thing to do," she said. "But given that most people will thoroughly cook their pork and poultry, where it was most urgently needed was with the beef."

Hollow needles are sometimes used to inject flavorings or marinades. That can add to contamination risks.

Surveys of beef producers by the USDA found that most use mechanical tenderization to improve quality. A large percentage of mechanically tenderized meat winds up in family-style restaurants, hotels, hospitals and group homes.

Mechanically tenderized meat has been the subject of several USDA recalls since at least 2000. A Canadian recall in 2012 included mechanically tenderized steaks imported into the United States, but it's not clear how many people were sickened.

In a 2010 letter to the USDA that The Star reported two years later, the American Meat Institute noted eight recalls between 2000 to 2009 that identified mechanically tenderized and marinated steaks as the cause. Those recalls sickened at least 100 people.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest, an advocacy group, has estimated that mechanically tenderized beef could have been the source of as many as 100 outbreaks of E. coli and other illnesses in the United States in recent years. Those cases affected more than 3,100 people who ate contaminated meat at wedding receptions, churches, banquet facilities, restaurants and schools, the center said.

How a mechanical tenderizer works

Dozens of needles or blades pierce the beef and sometimes inject it with marinade.

Plates press down on the cut while the blades penetrate.

The tenderizing process can force E. coli contamination on the surface of the meat deep into the interior of the meat. Cooking those cuts to a rare or medium-rare temperature can allow the pathogens to survive.

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture, food safety advocates and industry sources

Photos courtesy The Kansas City Star

Seafood from slaves

How The Associated Press found a slave island, tracked the workers' catch to Wal-Mart and other U.S. stores, and prompted the rescue of more than 2,000 trapped men

Margie Mason, Robin McDowell and Martha Mendoza | The Associated Press

For hundreds of slaves, Benjina was the end of the world.

Stormy seas cut the remote Indonesian island village off for several months a year. There were no roads, no telephone service and just a few hours of electricity a day.

The Burmese fishermen who docked there had spent months at sea, pulling up monstrous nets and sorting seafood around the clock. But the relief they felt when they finally touched land was quickly replaced by desperation. They were still trapped by ruthless captains. Some men were locked in a cage for simply asking to go home. Those who managed to run away were stuck living off the land in the surrounding jungle. And just off a beach, a jungle-covered graveyard was crammed with the corpses of friends and strangers buried under false names.

When we first arrived in Benjina in late November and informed the men we were journalists there to tell their stories, they couldn't believe it. A few wiped away tears as they spoke. Some chased after us on dusty paths, shoving pieces of paper into our hands with the names and addresses of their parents back home.

"Please," they begged. "Just tell them we're alive."

And so we told their stories of captivity, abuse and being bought and sold to provide the U.S. with inexpensive seafood. To date, the journalism has prompted the repatriation of more than 2,000 men, more than a dozen arrests, new legislation and international censures. We're still investigating.

This story of seafood from slaves began with a simple question that we just couldn't shake: Where was the outrage?

The horrific abuses experienced by migrant workers on Thai fishing trawlers had been well-documented in previous reports — by governments, nonprofits and news organizations, including our own AP coverage. Almost all of the stories came from previous slaves, men recalling how they managed to escape their floating prisons. Most said they were tricked or kidnapped onto boats. They worked 22- to 24-hour shifts, seven days a week, sometimes touching ground just once every two years. Many of the men bore scars from being beaten by their captains. Some, they said, were killed, and the bodies tossed overboard. The U.S. government had regularly slammed Thailand for failing to tackle trafficking and forced labor in its seafood export industry, but the public didn't seem to notice, much less care.

We had to find a way to change that. Our best bet, we decided, would be to get very specific, linking slave-caught fish to American dinner tables — and name names.

Thailand is the world's third-largest seafood exporter, earning $7 billion annually. With a major shortage of workers willing to take the dangerous jobs, the business is staffed largely by poor people from within the country, along with illegal migrants from neighboring Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos who are issued fake travel documents.

Our big break came when we were told by a source that stories of abuse were starting to filter in from a little-known island in the eastern part of Indonesia, a place no outsiders had visited.

A local boatman named Eddy agreed to take Myanmar correspondent Robin McDowell to coastal villages dotting the island so she could talk to fisherman who had escaped abusive conditions on ships or were abandoned by their captains. Most were Burmese and they desperately wanted to go home. But with no form of identification, they were stuck.

"It feels like the end of the world," said Hla Phyo, who had been away from Myanmar for more than six years.

Then McDowell saw the graveyard.

The blue, white and green burial markers were visible even from the water. There were more than 60 in total, some broken or overrun by jungle weeds and trees. Each was inscribed with a Thai name, birth date, address and the ship on which they worked. But it was all a lie, Eddy said. Many of the men buried here were Burmese slaves, forced to take the fake identities on their seafarer books even in death.

McDowell was enraged. She climbed a hill behind the fishing company, the only place where the signal was strong enough to send a phone text message to Asia regional writer Margie Mason: "You aren't going to believe this!"

We knew we needed more, and asked Burmese reporter Esther Htusan from Yangon to come help find more men. When she arrived, the language barrier was lifted and the doors swung wide open.

Using a handheld video camera, we interviewed as many men as we could, more than 40 in total. Htusan also gave the camera to a dockworker, a slave himself, so he could get a quick interview with one of the men in the cage. He looked straight into the lens — just out of sight of a security guard — and said he and the others were locked up because they were considered flight risks. Their only crime was asking to

go home.

That same evening, we filmed men on a slave ship as it came into dock. Two men were standing at the rail, smoking cigarettes, backlit by the fluorescent light on the deck.

"Are you Burmese?" Htusan yelled to them from a small boat, camera rolling. At first, they didn't know what to make of her and joked around. But she shouted for them to take her seriously: She was a journalist with an American news agency there to tell their stories. Soon there were four men, then six, eight and finally 12. Showing tremendous courage, with their captain just on the other side of the ship, the men jostled to be heard.

We already had astounding footage, but we knew the true impact would not come unless we proved where the fish ultimately ended up.

We had video and photographs of the slaves' seafood being loaded onto the Thai-owned Silver Sea Line cargo ship. We used a marine satellite tracking service to follow the vessel for two weeks with live transmissions of its current location and speed. When it finally arrived at the Thai port of Samut Sakhon, about an hour south of Bangkok, Mason and McDowell were there to watch it unload.

For the next four nights, we surreptitiously followed trucks delivering slave-caught seafood to processors, freezer warehouses and distributors, noting the names of the companies. We crammed ourselves into the back cab of a small pickup truck along with a photographer and a videographer, and were forced to stay inside behind tinted windows for hours at a time to avoid being seen.

On the opposite side of the world, national writer Martha Mendoza began searching U.S. Customs records to trace the seafood directly to companies familiar to most Americans.

Plugging away at databases that track U.S. imports, we checked if the companies we saw receiving the tainted fish in Thailand were shipping to a U.S. distributor, and whether those shipments were packaged and branded. The brands were straightforward — cans of cat food labeled Fancy Feast, Meow Mix and IAMs came out of Thai processors that bought fish off the boat from Benjina. The U.S. distributors were more complicated because they are not required to disclose where they sell fish. We went to dozens of supermarkets in different states to check out frozen and canned seafood. Was it from Thailand? Was it a species we had seen? What brand was it? Who was the distributor? Then it was back to the databases for a potential match.

"The brands were straightforward — cans of cat food labeled Fancy Feast, Meow Mix and IAMs came out of Thai processors that bought fish off the boat from Benjina."

Eventually, the puzzle came together. We found seafood tracking back through supply chains to the ships from Benjina landing in supermarkets, distribution centers and restaurants in every state, thousands of outlets. And then, with a videographer and photographer, Mendoza headed to Boston for the North American Seafood Expo to talk to companies with tainted supply chains, industry groups and Thai and Indonesian representatives.

The National Fisheries Institute, in a pre-emptive strike, sent a warning to the companies at the show: "Prepare for major AP story on labor abuse in seafood: Association advises members Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist reporting from Boston show floor."

The AP team was followed by men apparently working for seafood firms as we worked the floor. Salespeople turned their backs. Eventually, however, we gave all the subjects of the story an opportunity to respond and obtained comment on camera from Thai and Indonesian authorities. The story was ready to publish.

But there was still one major obstacle left. The men on Benjina identified by name, in photos or in video were vulnerable. And we could not run the story until we guaranteed their safety. And so we sought help from the International Organization for Migration.

About two weeks before the story was published, Indonesia's marine police, with information from the IOM, rescued eight slaves from the island — including the man AP had videotaped behind bars in the locked cage. The men we were most concerned about were out of harm's way.

The story moved March 24, 2015. Its impact was tremendous, and immediate. Thai Union, one of the world's largest seafood processors and a major exporter to the U.S., announced the next day that it had fired a supplier. Seafood businesses were inundated with calls. Three U.S. groups representing retail and seafood businesses, including Wal-Mart and Whole Foods, wrote a letter to the Thai and Indonesian ambassadors in Washington to demand action.

In the U.S., Mendoza attended a Congressional hearing and wrote about a loophole that had allowed slave produced goods to enter the U.S. for decades despite a ban.

But the biggest impact came in Indonesia itself.

We went back to Benjina about a week later when Indonesian authorities evacuated hundreds of other slaves. We documented their mad scramble for freedom and watched as hundreds of trapped men emerged from captivity, dashing toward vessels that would carry them to freedom. As hundreds of rescues grew to the thousands over months, Mason followed one man, enslaved for two decades, as he traveled home to collapse into the arms of his wailing mother.

And we didn't stop. When we learned some fishing boats had fled to Papua New Guinea waters with slaves aboard, we obtained high resolution satellite photos to find them. The boats were eventually seized.

When the Thai government said abuses all occurred on foreign territory, we located factories just outside Bangkok and found children and poor migrants locked inside and forced to peel shrimp. Then, we linked the sheds to the supply chains reaching European and Asian markets, as well as dozens of popular U.S. brands, supermarkets andrestaurant chains, from Wal-Mart and Target to Whole Foods and Red Lobster. As a result, the largest seafood company in Thailand pledged millions of dollars to bring all shrimp peeling and processing in-house by the end of 2015.

And we didn't stop there. More reporting is underway.

Farm fable

Investigating restaurants "local food" claims

Laura Reiley | Tampa Bay Times

What doesn't get discussed at food-writing conferences? In 2016 — this era of Yelp and Instagram food brags and flagging newspaper subscriptions — what good are we, the food critics? What does the food critic bring to the table that diners can't get elsewhere? In the event that my paper's CFO starts asking that question, I have my answer tidied up.

In eating out 200 times a year, year in and year out, I'm in a unique position to assess value. Is this particular restaurant — when compared to dozens at its price point, cuisine and ambition level — worth readers' money?

The job got harder a few years ago. Words like "sustainable," "naturally raised," "organic," "non-GMO," "fair trade," "responsibly grown," "heirloom" and "local" started replacing menu frippery like "fresh," "hand selected" and "oven-roasted." I could ignore hand-selected (seriously, what else might aid in selection, laser beams?), but I was flummoxed by sustainable and local. What did they mean precisely, and how much more was it worth?

A pasture-raised, heritage-breed pork chop may cost three times as much as commodity pork. Is it worth it? I had been grappling with questions like this for a while and watched farm names crowd onto Tampa Bay menus. At the same time, I embarked on a series called " On the Farm" with a photographer at the paper, a not-so-sneaky ploy to get out of the office and cavort with Florida's goats and rabbits. We heard it again and again from small farmers: Life was hard, it was a labor of love, the deck was stacked in favor of Big Ag and restaurants were kicking them in the shins by misrepresenting their products.

With the tagline "Local, simple and honest," Boca was among the first farm-to-table restaurants in Tampa Bay, one of the first menus where the assertion "we use local products whenever possible" meant much. But many of the sources listed on their chalkboards claim they do not or never did sell to Boca.

Photo courtesy Laura Reiley / The Tampa Bay Times

Wait, what?

This was the drill. Red Hot Restaurant X buys Farmer Brown's naturally raised grass-fed beef for three months, then a cash flow problem requires a switch to a commodity product and Brown's name stays on the menu and chalkboard, whether by accident or on purpose. Brown gnashes his teeth quietly because he doesn't want to alienate Red Hot's executive chef and he wants the marketing boost of being on the menu.

I've been a food critic since 1991 and have always known I was lied to about some of the food I've been served (this is not prime beef, and that is not a house-made dessert). But farm-to-table fibbing seemed especially galling, so I pitched an investigation to editors. I didn't think much about whether doing so would make me a pariah or a hero in the restaurant community because I wasn't sure how much I would find.

I took time off from reviewing and spent two months investigating and a couple weeks working with my editor Stephanie Hayes on the writing. The " Farm to Fable" series went online April 13.

The series called out several establishments. One restaurant served frozen Chinese treated with sodium tripolyphosphate instead of the wild Alaskan Pollock it listed on the menu. Another restaurant served " Florida blue crab" that, in actuality, is a different species called blue swimming crab. One establishment, which boasted about its local-sourced food,

A vendor at The Mid Week Madeira Beach Open Air Market claims to have grown these strawberries on two acres of tower hydroponics. However, reporting raised questions about these claims.

received fish and meat from states as far away as Idaho and Colorado.

And that's what I found just about everywhere. Many farm-to-table restaurants are dishonest about their food's origin.

It's been cool. It's been fun. But I also think food writers everywhere owe it to their readers to examine if and how this is playing out in their own markets. Watchdog journalism in this case means stepping into a deep void not covered in any way by regulators. The CDC tracks E. coli outbreaks and local health inspectors check to make sure commercial kitchens have soap at their hand-washing sinks, but no one oversees farm-to-table menu claims.

Biggest problem

Restaurant communities are incestuous rumor mills. There are reasons for that. Distributors flit from this restaurant to the next, pollinating each one with the kitchen scuttlebutt from the last as they drop off orders. Then, after restaurant customers have gone home and the kitchen has been cleaned, chefs like to drink together and talk smack.

I had to be stealthy if I didn't want everyone to immediately know what I was doing. I called my counterparts at other papers around the country: Had anyone ever done a farm-to-table exposé and named names? No one had. Too expensive, too hard to get proof with hermetically sealed and supremely unhelpful national distributors like Sysco and U.S. Foods. And let's face it, food writers are often not trained as investigative journalists, and most investigative journalists have bigger fish to fry than fried fish. There was no road map for this.

Step 1: I started my research in as low-key a way as possible. I sat on the office floor and sorted through file drawers of menus, stacking them into categories of "makes no claims," "makes claims but I'm fairly confident that they're accurate" and "makes claims that I'll start looking at." Because menus change, I swung by all these restaurants and picked up current versions or downloaded them from websites and took camera phone pics of claims on chalkboards.

For restaurants making specific seafood claims that seemed sketchy (a problem we had already documented in a grouper expose some years back), I got permission from the paper to spend a little money doing DNA testing — fish samples whisked from Ziplock bags in my purse to marine biologists at the University of South Florida.

For my companion story on fraudulent claims by vendors at outdoor markets, I visited every Tampa Bay outdoor market and

Photos courtesy Lara Cerri / The Tampa Bay Times

The Plant City Farm and Flea Market in Tampa. Their site says "approximately 90% of the produce is sold to restaurants, grocery stores, and hundreds of fruit & vegetable dealers that sell along the road sides." Resellers will often purchase their produce from these stands and pass it off as their own.

catalogued vendors. I made a crude list in Word of all of them, noting who claimed to be a " farmer" and how many markets they attended (if a " farmer" sold at four or five markets there was a good shot he was really a reseller — there aren't enough hours in the day to tend to crops and drive a zillion miles to stand around selling squash).

Step 2: Call the chefs and restaurateurs. "Hi, it's Laura from the Times. I'm doing a story on sourcing and I want to talk to you about where you're getting product from." These are people I knew, with whom I'd had longstanding phone relationships (I still try to maintain my physical anonymity as much as possible). If an unknown reporter or investigative journalist had made those calls, folks might have been more circumspect. But they were happy to talk to me.

Step 3: Call the farmers, food producers or middlemen/distributors the chefs had named. These were sometimes people with whom I'd had relationships, but not always: "Hi, I'm doing a story on sourcing, and I want to find out who you are selling your pork to right now, and who you've sold to in the past six months."

> There was a lot of off-the-record talk about sketchy vendors. It seems everyone knew who the charlatans were, but no one wanted to be a whistleblower.

Any farmer or food producer who has achieved a reasonable scale will likely use a distributor. This adds complications, but they are not insurmountable. A few of the larger distributors were leery of sharing their customer list, but I explained that I was a restaurant critic doing a story about sourcing.

For the outdoor market story, I began checking out "farmer" websites and Facebook pages (image searches revealing the use of stock photos of celery and kale were a bad sign — a farmer should be able to go outside and snap a photo), and then I met with market vendors and organizers who I knew to be legit. There was a lot of off-the-record talk about sketchy vendors. It seems everyone knew who the charlatans were, but no one wanted to be a whistleblower. In some cases I had to drive out to the " farms," some of them nonexistent or derelict.

Step 4: Confrontations. I kept careful files of discrepancies and what I thought might be restaurant misrepresentations, but didn't start calling until I was nearly done with information gathering. I didn't want people to have time to amend fraudulent behavior or cover their butts. Each confrontation phone call I weighted from easiest question to hardest, so that chefs and restaurateurs didn't get defensive until fairly far in. Often, it was simply, " You told me you were using Happy Hollow squash and he says he hasn't sold to you in six months. What gives?"

The most surprising thing was how nonchalant many of them were when confronted. " Yeah, we substituted

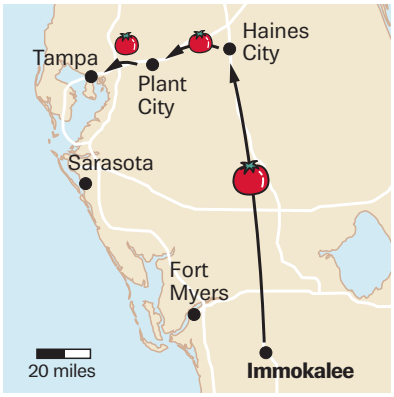
Photo courtesy Lara Cerril / The Tampa Bay Times

Have tomato will travel

The tomato you bought at the farmers market may have been grown in Sinaloa, Mexico . . .

. . . and then made its way to the big produce markets in Atlanta or Immokolee . . .

. . . and then trucked to Plant City or Haines City. From there it makes its way to a farmers market or restaurant.



Source: Times research

The Tampa Roll at Jackson's Bistro in Tampa advertises "Tempura fresh grouper," but DNA tests showed that the fish is actually tilapia.

something else. We try to source local when we can. But, well, concessions must be made." This applied to vendors at the outdoor markets who claimed to be farmers as well: Many didn't see the harm in claiming to have grown something themselves that in fact was grown by someone else 1,000 miles away. The food was from a farm somewhere, right?

> People who are doing it right, who are being honest about the provenance of what they sell, are penalized by those who are taking short cuts.

Fallout: My relationships with the restaurants and fake farmers I named in these stories are not likely to be repaired any time soon. But hundreds of local restaurateurs, chefs, farmers and diners — and hundreds more nationally — have thanked me for starting a dialogue about an unsavory truth about which they've all known. People who are doing it right, who are being honest about the provenance of what they sell, are penalized by those who are taking short cuts.

If the series has eroded trust between diners and restaurants, is that such a bad thing? It's a part of commerce where consumer complacency is the norm. The stories about provenance are almost as delicious as the food itself. But even if it tastes absolutely fabulous, that commodity pork chop being sold at pasture-raised, heritage-breed prices is defrauding the public.

I've spoken to dozens of food writers in the U.S. and Canada who aim to replicate investigations like this in their markets. And it's been heartening in Florida to see politicians like the Commissioner of Agriculture get exercised about this kind of consumer fraud. My hope is that, at the very least, we can work toward clear definitions of terms like " local" and " sustainable."

And just as the fundamentals of this investigation were fairly low tech, there are solutions for greater menu transparency that are simple: Before you Instagram that pork chop, Google the name of the farm. Does it exist? Are they near you? What do they say is being grown or produced right now, and do they have a customer list on their website? Without a combination of consumer engagement and watchdog reporting, I'm pretty sure of what kind of load we will continue to be fed.

Laura Reiley has been the Tampa Bay Times' food critic since 2007. She has received numerous state and national awards. She is a former critic for the San Francisco Chronicle and the Baltimore Sun and the author of four guidebooks in the Moon Handbook series. She has cooked professionally and is a graduate of the California Culinary Academy.

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GMO files

Following the results of a failed trial in Europe

Nils Mulvad | Investigative Reporting Denmark

Sometimes investigative reporting is just luck.

For me, it happened with a story on Monsanto and a trial in Denmark on genetically modified organisms. GMOs are an especially controversial topic in Europe, as several people fear that the modified genes of crops might have long-term health effects. Because of this, Monsanto and other companies have found it difficult to sell crops that have been genetically altered. The trial would, reportedly, test the safety of these crops.

The trial led to two stories:

1. Monsanto stopped using GMOs in the European market.

2. Authorities and Monsanto kept the test results of the trial secret.

It all started in 2013 when I was part of a group building the Danish Center for Investigative Reporting. We were quite confident at the time that we would get funding. Then the plan was to prepare a couple of environmental stories, which could be published quickly.

I did background research on several environmental topics, one of them being GMOs.

I hadn't covered it before, so it was all very new to me. One of the top hits in my search was a four-year- old picture of the Danish Minister of Agriculture Eva Kjer Hansen walking in sunny cornfields with the press, claiming trials would open Denmark for GMOs three years later.

She visited Monsanto three months earlier, published a so-called report on the truth of GMOs, and then presented these new trials for growing genetically modified corn in Denmark.

The stories in the press were covered with these sunny pictures.

Three years passed, and I planned to do a story on the trial outcomes, where farmers in Denmark actually grew the genetically modified corn and how they were adjusting to the new crops.

I couldn't find much on the web. Some hits came up, but they only reported that the trials expanded. There was nothing about the results.

So, I called the test center and asked for the results directly.

Soon after, the Danish State Authority for Farming — a branch under The Danish Ministry for Agriculture and Food, run by Eva Kjer Hansen — called me and asked for a meeting.

I got three takeaways from the meeting.

1. I received a lot of files and documents on the trials, stating how the test failed.

2. I was denied access to the actual test results.

3. The authority stopped all work on GMOs.

There was no plan at all to introduce them in Denmark, and no interest for it any longer, they said. No employee in the authority worked with GMOs any longer.

From here I thought it would be easy. I would just battle the case on getting the test results, and then I'd ask Monsanto to comment on it all.

It wasn't as simple as I had hoped. A Monsanto spokesperson was based in Brussels, so when I was going to a conference in Brussels in beginning of May 2013, I made an appointment to meet with him.

He told me Monsanto decided not to push any further for GMOs in Europe. They would only sell it where there wasn't resistance, which meant they could only sell it in three countries in Europe.

I also asked him for access to the trial results. He refused, but told me that Monsanto would publish the results later (they have not).

After all that, I had another hiccup with the interview. I planned to record it on my iPhone, but I had forgotten to check one thing: the storage. I quickly ran out of space (keep in mind I was an associate professor teaching students how to use smartphones for interviews).

The spokesman very kindly allowed me to use his iPhone for the interview. After the interview, I deleted my iPhone's entire music library. I would not face the same situation again.

The battle for the trial records was even more difficult than the interviews. When the Authority for Farming denied my request, the Ministry for Food and Agriculture backed them up. I even petitioned the help of the Danish ombudsman, but he supported the Authority's decision too.

I never received the results from the trial.

Regardless, we went with what we had and published the GMO story. It instantly went around the world. Our reporting on agriculture was picked up by Reuters, the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting and the Columbia Journalism Review.

A lot was left unsolved, and the potential for follow-ups is abundant. We want to know the outcome of all trials on GMOs, not just the ones that are published, which are normally pro-GMO.

We also want to know the strategy for selling GMOs.

In April 2016, I was at the investigative conference in Norway and together with the editor-in- chiefat Jysk-Fynske, Bruno Ingemann, we taught a training session in daily digging. This case with GMOs and Monsanto in Denmark is a rather good practical example of how this can be done.

1. Do background research on important topics and see which stories have not been followed-up. It's really checking how much is never checked.

2. Plan your own follow-ups. Keep a calendar where you make note of when you will check a story that you've previously reported.

3. Have some FOI cases running. Sometimes you can easily get a result. Sometimes a denial is a better story than actually gaining access.

Bruno Ingemann and I did a handout with 25 tips on everyday digging. It can be found here: bit.ly/1T0EDra

Nils Mulvad is partner and CEO at Kaas & Mulvad. He specializes in getting and analyzing data by extracting, negotiating, using FOI-requests and scraping. Nils cofounded DICAR, Global Investigative Journalism Network, Farmsubsidy.org and Scoop. @nmulvad

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STORIES

No. 27574: " Cock Fight: One Man's Battle Against The Chicken Industry." —Fusion.
Chicken is by far the most popular meat in the United States. Every year, 9 billion are slaughtered for food. But very little is actually known about how they are grown, raised and killed. Indications are that the U.S. chicken industry, which is controlled by four major companies, would prefer to keep it that way. It's not easy to get a camera into the sheds where industrial poultry is raised, known as a " broiler farm." But Craig Watts, a third generation farmer from North Carolina, was willing to give the Fusion Investigates team unprecedented access to his operation, where he churns out roughly 120,000 birds every two months. (2015)

No. 27470: " The Trouble with Chicken." — Frontline.
FRONTLINE investigates the spread of dangerous pathogens in our meat —particularly poultry — and why the food-safety system isn't stopping the threat. Focusing on an outbreak of Salmonella Heidelberg at one of the nation's largest poultry processors, the documentary reveals how contaminants are evadingregulators and causing more severe illnesses at a time when Americans are consuming more chicken than ever. (2015)

No. 27452: " What's in Your Food?" — WebMD.
This special report featured 12 pieces of content including two investigative reports, an infographic, two videos, two expert Q&As, four supporting stories and a quiz. It has been WebMDs most successful (in terms of viewership) independent special report to date. (2015)

No. 27341: " Devastating Virus." — Harvest Public Media.
Most people think food comes from the grocery store. So when a devastatingvirus hit the hog industry in Spring 2013, few people probably noticed except when it came to paying a lot more for bacon that summer. Harvest Public Media investigated the Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus, a fast-spreading virus never before seen in the U.S., finding an intriguing international story and a significant failure by the U.S. agency that oversees agriculture. (2015)

No. 27201 " A Game of Chicken." — The Oregonian/ OregonLive. Over the course of a decade, the U.S. Department of Agriculture had not one, not two, not three, but four opportunities to warn the public about salmonella outbreaks involving Foster Farms chicken. Each time, they hemmed and hawed, worrying more about the threat of legal action from a corporate giant than about protecting consumers. Health reporter Lynne Terry was the first journalist inAmerica to identify and write about this alarming trend. With reporters from Frontline, The Center for Investigative Reporting and the New York Times circling around the story, she beat them all with a stunning and illuminating examination of the failures of the USDA. (2015)

No. 27180 " Nuclear Radiation and Food Safety." — KBS (Korean Broadcasting System).
Although the agricultural products from regions near Fukushima, Japan are still tainted by radiation, the South Korean government is looking to resume imports, adding to the fear of radiation exposure among Korean citizens, Rumors are rife on the internet, amplifying the atmosphere of terror. KBS carried out a full investigation of the actual situation in Japan to help address the widespread fear. The real radiation levels of agricultural products from the 8 prefectures near Fukushima were tested and revealed. The message of the program was that the import decisions of the Korean government have to give top priority public food security. (2015)

TIPSHEETS

No. 4812 " Supply Chain Reporting/Produce from Mexico."
LA Times reporter Rich Marosi gives links to get food and food safety reports as well as tips on where to go in the U.S. and Mexico when reporting on the produce supply chain. (2016)

No. 4754 " Resources for covering agribusiness."
Journalists Pam Dempsey, Peggy Lowe and Nils Mulvad provide tips on where to start an agribusiness investigation. (2016)

"Investigation finds hundreds of workers confined to American fishing boats." — Associated Press
An investigation by the Associated Press found that around 700 undocumented men from Southeast Asian and Pacific Island nations are working dangerous fishing jobs on American boats where they are confined for years. They found instances of human trafficking, tuberculosis, insufficient food supplies and 20-hour work days on many of the boats. Some of the workers are paid as little as 70 cents per hour. The fish they catch ends up at restaurants and grocery stores around the country, including Whole Foods and Costco. The crux of the problem is a federal legal loophole: Because the workers are on American ships, they can't be designated " foreign-based workers," which would make them eligible for visas. Because they are only in the U.S. temporarily when they dock, they also aren't eligible for immigrant visas. Instead, the workers are caught under a federal law that requires boat owners to detain the workers on the ship whenever they port. (2016)
Read the full story here: http://apne.ws/2c0FQ6s

IRE AUDIO

"Pam Dempsey, Peggy Lowe, Nils Mulvad." — IRE Conference
Pam Dempsey, Peggy Lowe, Nils Mulvad discuss agribusiness: GMO labeling, Monsanto and factory farming. Learn how to fight for data in international courts, turn investigative stories into compelling audio pieces and use data to produce valuable quick-hits to help you better navigate the field of agribusiness and tell deeper and more accurate stories. (2016)
Listen here: bit.ly/2crKlqc

I am alive and determined to tell stories

Azaz Syed
Geo News / The News International

ISLAMABAD: "If you continued working like this, next time we will fire bullets in your body." The threat was from an unknown caller soon after the bullets struck my home, located in the suburbs of Pakistan's capital, Islamabad, six years ago.

In the wee hours of that very day, unknown attackers had fired bullets at the front gate of my house. Seven bullet holes are still a permanent feature of the front gate.

The attack was a reaction by my country's powerful sitting intelligence chief of that time, who had earlier sent a message to me to avoid digging deep into a story regarding a military trial that led to an execution of a soldier while bypassing the due process of law. The intelligence chief was the judge of that military court, which ordered the execution.

The executed soldier was allegedly involved in a terror attack on the former military dictator General Pervez Musharraf, who was a front-line partner of United States' war on terror while often violating the human rights of people of this part of the world. The same unknown men attacked my house with bricks weeks before.

I was not the only journalist who was threatened. There were many more like me, as that year Pakistan was indexed as one of the least free countries for media — ranked 151 out of almost 180 countries by Reporters Without Borders. Pakistan still hovers near the bottom of the list; the World Press Freedom Index now ranks it as 147.

Although Pakistan was going through a transition to democracy from a military rule of (retired) General Musharraf, who had resigned in August 2008, the military and its intelligence services were still powerful. Pakistan has a checkered record of democracy as almost half of its history is filled with the governance of four military dictators. Parliament, elected government, police, and courts all become helpless if military or its intelligence services violate the constitution or the law.

The situation is not much different even today.

In this scenario, my news organization not only aired and published the investigative piece I was working on, but it also stood by me and offered an immediate transfer to London station.

This was a tricky situation for any investigative journalist who wants to uncover things in a country that, at that time, were part of the war theater along Afghanistan in the ongoing war on terror.

Almost every other day terrorists attacked, and the government tried curbing them. The whole incident was a defining moment for me. I learned if people throw hurdles against you reaching your goal, you continue your struggle and achieve your goal by adopting a new strategy.

The situation was grim, but I followed the law and went straight to the police and filed a report naming the accused. Initially, my colleagues took it as nonsense. But later when it became public that I had named those who had threatened me, apparently it had become hard for the suspects to harm my family members or me further.

However, the threat kept lurking, and I kept working. Meanwhile, I adopted some safety measures, but I declined to go to London. I told my office colleagues that I would rather pay attention to the stories on the war on terror.

I started working, and I did some more stories while being cautious of my security as well. I would be covering almost all the mega events of terrorism in the country with the trust and blessings of my bosses of that time. Besides doing some stories, I partnered with my long-time friend Umar Cheema, a famous investigative journalist, to found the Center for Investigative Reporting in Pakistan (CIRP). The purpose of establishing this center was to promote the culture of investigative journalism in this part of the world, where journalists work in a fragile environment without proper training. The center is currently in the process of taking off.

On May 2, 2011, when U.S. forces in Abbottabad killed Osama Bin Laden, I was assigned to cover it. Following the trail, in the months to come, I became the first journalist to bring the investigation report of Osama's wives to the world and later played a key role in bringing forward some more key documents of the saga. In 2015, my book — The Secrets of Pakistan's War On Al Qaeda — also arrived on the Pakistani book market and remained a best seller.

The attack on myself did not weaken me. Rather, it gave me strength to find new avenues. Today I am not only practicing journalism in my country but also striving for a better environment and improved training sessions for the journalists of this part of the world.

Recently, I have produced investigative stories on the Pathankot attack in India and the controversy relating to the U.S drone strike that killed Taliban chief Mullah Akhtar Mansoor. I am actively uncovering the stories in the aftermath of Panama Papers. I am also working on some long-form stories relating to the current status of militancy in Pakistan. The memories of the attack at my house are still alive, but the journey of journalism continues.

Azaz Syed is an Islamabad-based investigative journalist of Pakistan. He worked for Geo News and writes for The News International. He can be reached @AzazSyed and azazsyed786@gmail.com.

America, Land of the Fee: How to Reduce or Eliminate Copy Fees

David Cuillier
University of Arizona School of Journalism

Government agencies have learned a great trick for denying records and data: Charge a heckuva lot for it.

Fees for searching, redacting, compiling and copying public records have gotten out of control:

- The city of Ferguson, Missouri, charged The Associated Press $135 per hour to pay a clerk earning $13.90 per hour to retrieve emails regarding the shooting of Michael Brown.
- A volunteer editor of a Somerville, Massachusetts, news blog was told it would cost him $200,000 for city officials to provide parking ticket data.
- This year when college students at Central Michigan University conducted a FOIA audit of the state's 15 public universities, the fees totaled more than $20,000

Some journalists are told it will cost millions of dollars for data, charging a per-record fee. Those horror stories are classic. But for the most part, it's the smaller gouges that get in the way of day-to-day reporting — a charge of $300 or $1,500 that a news organization would be unwilling to pay.

And it's getting worse.

Fee-dom of Information

Most states charge for actual costs of photocopies, without additional fees for search or redaction time, but that is changing.

The laws regarding copy fees are all over the map, according to one analysis published this year by a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill doctoral student. Taeho Lee concluded that the definitions of fees are varied and loose throughout the country, providing clerks discretion to inhibit access through invoice.

One solution, Lee told me, is to standardize the laws and clearly spell out the expenses. That would certainly help. I propose we go further: Eliminate search and copy fees altogether.

From a philosophical perspective, democracy demands accessible government information. We already paid for the records through our taxes, so anyone should be able to see them. It's simply a cost of doing government business, and Congress through the centuries has acknowledged the need for government to disseminate its business free to the public, such as through the federal depository library system.

From a practical perspective, fees recoup very little of the cost, yet they are used as a barrier for citizens, particularly the poor. When you think about it, they are a type of poll tax —they price the disadvantaged out of their government.

A.Jay Wagner, an assistant professor at Bradley University in Illinois, analyzed FOIA performance data to find that the federal government collected a total of $353 million in FOIA fees from 1975 through 2014. Sounds like a lot, but that is only 6 percent of the $5.8 billion cost to implement FOIA during that same period. Fees cover just a fraction of the cost of FOIA implementation, yet are used to stymie requesters.

Freedom of Information ain't free

If agencies insist they really need the money, then they should charge commercial users the market rate for their requests. Margaret Kwoka, a law professor from the University of Denver, found that 70-95 percent of FOIA requests are submitted by commercial users out to make a buck, not to help people understand what their government is up to, the original intent of FOIA.

So make those companies pay more to cover the actual cost of records management and ease the backlog on journalists, researchers and citizens who serve the public interest.

Or, take it to the next level: Put everything online proactively so nobody has to request a copy, which will eliminate the need for not only fees, but requests! We need to work toward a future where having to ask for a government record is seen as failure in the system. It should just be there online for anyone to look at and download.

Of course, that is a little unrealistic. Agencies will always try to hide information that would embarrass them or expose corruption and mismanagement. It is precisely those types of records that journalists seek.

Until we can convince legislators to eliminate public record fees, which should be our ultimate goal, journalists need to ramp up the battle and push back. Don't accept them. Don't encourage them. Don't pay them.

David Cuillier is director of the University of Arizona School of Journalism and past president and FOI chair of the Society of Professional Journalists. He is co-author, with Charles Davis, of "The Art of Access: Strategies for Acquiring Public Records." He was recently awarded the Wells Memorial Key, the highest honor from SPJ.

10 Tips for Reducing Fees

1. Print out your state law (www.rcfp.org/ogg) and make the agency justify the actual costs of copying through a line-item list. If they balk, request to see the contract with their copy services company for how much they pay per copy (my school pays 1 cent per page for our contracted photocopy service, not including paper).
2. Insist on paying only the actual cost of a copy, which is the law in most states. For paper copies that is about 1.3 cents per page. Tell them you'll pay 2 cents per page to give them a hefty percentage profit. If they resist, insisting on 25 cents per page, or even $1 per page, lay it out for them:
   - **Paper:** Box of 10 reams (500 sheets each ream), at $28.93 at Wal-Mart = .6 cents per page.
   - **Machine:** Xerox Phaser 7800/GX costs $5,899 and produces 225,000 copies a month. Assuming two-year life, that's .1 cents per page.
   - **Toner:** $181.00 for 24,000 pages, or .6 cents per page.
   - **Electricity:** Negligible.
   - Total cost per copy: 1.3 cents.
3. If you live in a state that charges search and retrieval fees, make them justify the time and expense, particularly the pay level of the workers making the copies.
4. Ask for an electronic copy, which should be free. In some states (Arizona, Washington and most recently Massachusetts), if you request a record in electronic format and it is available electronically, then an agency must provide it that way, not as a printout or converted PDF.
5. Ask to just look at the record. Then capture the images with your phone, a portable scanner or a small copy machine.
6. Narrow your request by picking and choosing only the documents that are necessary to copy.
7. Survey all the agencies in your area and write a story about the inconsistency in fees and outrageous ways the government rips off the public. Interview average people who pay the fees, and ask elected officials why they think it's necessary to overcharge citizens to access records they've already paid for through their taxes. Focus on the fact the fee serves as a poll tax, pricing the poor out of their government (" I don't understand it, mayor, is the city really out to alienate poor minorities?").
8. Coordinate with other media in an effort to expose the problem statewide, timed with Sunshine Week in March. Witness the power of a watchdogpile.
9. Contact your state public records ombudsman, attorney general's office or press association to see if anyone can talk some sense into the agency.
10. Lobby for legislation lowering or eliminating fees. The Massachusetts Legislature saw the light by reducing per-page fees from 50 cents to 5 cents. That's a start.

Snapshots from our blogs

Tips for turning your investigation into a longform, multiplatform narrative

BY KASIA KOVACS

A serial killer. An Afghan teenager in London. A porn star with animmense knowledge of shell corporations.

"Gee," you might say, "is that the cast of the latest Wes Anderson film?"Actually, these characters are all real people, featured in stories by the speakers at the "Longform Investigative Journalism: Stories on Different Platforms" panel at the IRE Conference in New Orleans. Another thing they all have in common? They're characters with the clout to keep audiences reading, listening or watching a story.

When it comes to longform stories or reporting through a narrative, classic storytelling elements are still key: a beginning, middle and end; compelling characters; access to scene and dialogue; a central conflict that drives the story. But narrative reporting today isn't exactly the same as it was fifty years ago. These days, journalists don't just write. They film. They produce. They animate. They design, code, and record.

Greg Borowski, editor of the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel investigative unit, Alice Brennan, investigative producer at Fusion, and Susanne Reber, executive editor at Reveal, discussed how they work with different platforms to produce narrative stories.

Read more here: bit.ly/2cFmkxm

10 free tools to help you clean, analyze and visualize data

BY SOO RIN KIM

Freelance journalist Samantha Sunne and Helena Bengtsson, data projects editor for The Guardian, spent an hour at the 2016 CAR Conference going over free, open-source tools that can replace expensive data cleaning, analysis and visualization programs.

Here are some of my favorite tools the speakers mentioned:

Google Sheets: Google Sheets is a widely known spreadsheet tool that is easy to use and accessible from any computer, making collaboration easy. But Google Sheets functions are not as extensive as those in Excel.

csvkit: This is a very powerful tool that allows journalists to perform very specific manipulations on CSV files. While this tool is powerful, it may not be the most user-friendly. Because it runs in the command line, it's not the most intuitive tool and can be difficult for non-programmers to use.

Sublime Text: SublimeText is one of the most widely used text editors among coders, including me. It recognizes file types and highlights elements in different colors. The free version keeps asking you to purchase the paid version, but hey, we're all used to advertisements now, aren't we?

iFOIA: iFOIA.org, run by The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, not only generates record request letters, but it also provides journalists with a detailed analysis of state records laws. I can't help but be biased about iFOIA because I used to update contact information for state agencies on the website when I interned for RCFP. It's a great resource for reporters.

Evernote: Evernote is a high-quality tool for taking notes, editing audio, clipping images, scanning documents and much more. The scanner is especially useful. All you need is a smartphone to take pictures with, and you can search for words in the uploaded images.

Read more here: bit.ly/2cntXKE

Fake classes and suspicious subsidies: Tips for investigating your college campus

BY KAITLIN WASHBURN

Craig Flournoy, a journalism professor at the University of Cincinnati, recognizes the courage it takes for a student to do investigative reporting on the college he or she is attending.

"It is a risk...to criticize the hand that signs your paycheck or that hands you your diploma," Flournoy said.

Marcelo Rochabrun did just that when he went after the most elite eating clubs at Princeton as editor of the Princetonian. The eating clubs, Princeton's equivalent to sororities and fraternities, are incredibly influential within the university's community.

Rochabrun started by studying the 990 forms of the university and the organizations affiliated with it. He came across the Princeton Project Foundation, whose mission statement is to provide money for "educational purposes" and to "better" the Princeton campus.

What Rochabrun discovered is that this foundation only existed to hand out various grants to Princeton's eating clubs. He found that about $20 million had been given to many of the eating clubs for extensive refurbishments made to their meeting places.

During his talk, Flournoy detailed how his students looked into academic spending and athletic subsidies at the University of Cincinnati. They ultimately found that students' tuition money was being funneled to athletes via a university subsidy without disclosure on tuition bills.

Read the entire post here: bit.ly/2cOaE8N

Azerbaijan: Journalist Khadija Ismayilova Set Free After Final Appeal Hearing

BY STELLA ROQUE | OCCRP

Journalist Khadija Ismayilova was set free after her final appeal hearing at the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan two days before her 40th birthday.

Ismayilova, an award-winning reporter who exposed the corruption of the ruling Aliyev family, has been in prison in Baku since her arrest on Dec. 5, 2014.

Many say that her arrest was politically motivated as a consequence of herreporting.

The court ordered Ismayilova's release and suspended her sentence, acquitting her of the charges of misappropriation and abuse of power, but upholding the charges of illegal entrepreneurship and tax evasion, for which she still faces 3 years and 6 months. That sentence was commuted to probation. Surrounded by TV cameras, reporters and admirers

as she left prison, she remained defiant.

"There was no crime," Ismayilova told the press upon her release. "President Aliyev and his clique decided to get rid of any criticism against them. It was part of the oppressive action against human rights activists, journalists and NGO leaders.

"I will go further to the European Court and I will fight until I am proven [innocent] on all charges and I will hold the Azerbaijani government responsible for keeping me a year and a half in prison, keeping me away from my work, my family and my students. The government will be held responsible for doing all this."

She was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison last September by the Baku Court of Grave Crimes on charges relating to large-scale misappropriation and embezzlement, illegal entrepreneurship, tax evasion and abuse of power. She has denied the charges against her.

Read the entire post here: http://bit.ly/2crQXou

Report on the student debt crisis with our new simplified database

BRETT MURPHY

Student debt is quickly becoming a national crisis. But reporting on student loans and college finances has always been thorny, especially when dealing with complicated bureaucracies and patchwork data.

Earlier this year, for the first time ever, the Obama Administration released a comprehensive intersection of student population, college performance and "outcome" data, measuring with precise detail who gets into what school and what they do after graduation. But the Department of Education's raw "College Scorecard" is a labyrinth of information covering some 7,800 campuses all over the country, broken down by almost 2,000 different variables – everything from enrollment demographics and SAT scores to repayment rates and post-graduate earnings.

Today, NICAR is offering a simplified, Excel-ready version of the database– College Scorecard Simplified – along with a data dictionary and step-by-step guide on how you can analyze data specific to your beat and start reporting. We've cleaned and pared down the original database to include the most usable fields, a step that will save busy reporters a great deal of time. We're also providing a robust list of caveats, in addition to the DOE's documentation and other important resources, most notably ProPublica's Debt by Degrees project.

NICAR's free College Scorecard Simplified database is accessible for reporters of any experience level to quickly download and analyze. Using the data, newsrooms can track and compare schools' accessibility across different income levels alongside performance metrics and ultimate outcomes.

Many schools across the country are under budget constraints, so understanding how appropriations have impacted students can paint a vivid picture in your city or state. The Scorecard also provides insight into the world of private for-profit colleges, which have sprung up in cities – and online – across the country. Most importantly, the data covers all federal grant and loan recipients, so reporters can now measure the effectiveness of government aid across different types of students and schools.

You can read more and access the data here: bit.ly/2cf4qAm

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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, as is help in deciphering records you obtain yourself.

Contact: Denise Malan, denise@ire.org. To order data, call 573-884-7711.

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Contact: Jaimi Dowdell, jaimi@ire.org, 314-402-3281

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Contact: Sarah Hutchins, learn@ire.org, 573-882-8969

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MAILING ADDRESS:

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

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