



The Fund for Investigative Journalism
Annual Report 2020

**We're expanding our work –
when and where we're needed most**

The Fund for Investigative Journalism provided grants for 48 new investigative projects in 2020, and we increased the other support we provide for grantees, including editorial mentoring, legal help and training. We provided more support to more journalists than at any time in our history, and the journalists we supported were more diverse and working in more parts of the country than ever before.

And the impact of our work was clear: The investigations that were possible because of our support sparked new state and national conversations on important issues, generated thousands of additional news stories and fueled more than 15 changes to policies and practices at the local, state and federal levels in 2020.

The Fund was founded in 1969 with a mission that's simple, unique and timeless: To provide funding and other support directly to journalists so that they can produce investigative stories that have an impact. For 52 years, we've been driven by the belief that strong journalism is the backbone of a strong democracy – and that if you want to support journalism, you have to support journalists.

We'll do even more in 2021, when the need will be even greater.

2020

We provided grants for 48 new projects in 2020

Support included traditional grantmaking and new emergency programs.

The Fund provides grants for groundbreaking investigations on any topic in print and broadcast stories, books, podcasts and documentaries. In 2020, we administered quarterly grantmaking cycles and, for the first time in our history, launched emergency grant programs for timely investigations related to the COVID-19 pandemic and police practices.

Of the 48 new grants we provided to journalists in 2020:

- 55% were for stories in state or local media, and 45% were for stories in national media.
- The state and local stories were in 18 states spanning every part of the country, including Illinois, Missouri, California, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi and others.
- 21% of grants were for collaborative projects involving multiple media organizations.
- Nearly one-third were for innovative projects involving data collection and/or multi-platform storytelling.
- 69% were for freelance investigative journalists; the remainder were mostly for reporters at nonprofit media organizations.

**WE SUPPORTED
48 STORIES IN
18 STATES IN 2020.**

“My investigation into the D.C. Child Protective Services agency’s COVID-19 response would never have happened without the Fund’s support. The generous grant they gave me — wired within days of accepting my pitch — allowed me to completely dedicate myself to the project for a month, the kind of time that is precious and rare to a freelance reporter typically balancing several assignments. The Fund is by far the most efficient and supportive journalism organization I’ve had the pleasure of working with, an experience I was all the more grateful for amid the uncertainty of the pandemic.”

— **Morgan Baskin,**

a 2020 grantee whose cover story in the Washington City Paper sparked immediate changes in protocols to address the safety issues she uncovered.

We're increasing the additional support we provide grantees

Editorial mentoring, legal help and training boost quality and impact.

In a changing and challenging media landscape, investigative journalists increasingly need more than funding to produce groundbreaking stories. To help boost the quality and impact of investigative coverage, particularly at the state and local levels, the Fund expanded the support we provide to grantees in 2020.

- **Editorial mentoring:** A group of more than 20 seasoned investigative reporters works with the Fund to be matched with grantees who need expertise on particular issues or types of reporting. In 2020, we increased the number of grantees with mentors by 25% over the previous year.
- **Legal assistance:** Through our partnership with the Reporters' Committee for Freedom of the Press, grantees have access to pro bono legal help on issues including open-records requests and libel review. In 2020, we nearly doubled the number of grantees receiving legal assistance.
- **Training:** Based on feedback from grantees, we launched a new series of skills-building trainings for grantees at the end of 2020. The series will last through 2021 and will be co-presented with partner groups with expertise on particular issues.
- **Further expansion in 2021:** Grantees have asked for more professional networking opportunities with each other and with leaders in the field, and we'll launch a new initiative for this in 2021 while further deepening the other support we provide.

**25% MORE GRANTEEES
WERE MATCHED
WITH MENTORS
IN 2020**

“As a freelance journalist, I don’t always have institutional support or an immediate network of colleagues to brainstorm and discuss ideas, especially working from the Midwest. It was so helpful to be connected with such an experienced peer to help me strategize and figure out an approach on a complicated and difficult story about one of the most powerful companies in the U.S.”

— **Mya Frazier**, a 2020 grantee who was paired with award-winning investigative reporter John Shiffman of Reuters through the Fund's mentoring program.

We're significantly expanding our support for journalists of color

We deepened engagement through outreach, grants and fellowships.

Because the Fund supports independent journalists who often work outside of traditional media structures, reporters who are under-represented in the field have long turned to us for help covering stories that would otherwise be ignored. Over the last several years, increasing engagement and support of journalists of color across our work has been a major priority, and we made substantial progress in 2020.

- 45% of our grantees in 2020 were journalists of color, and half of our grantees were women.
- Three of our Diversity Fellows published major investigations in 2020, one of which helped spark a new federal law to address corruption in the nation's immigration system.
- We increased grant applications from journalists of color by 60% from 2019 to 2020.
- We engaged more than 60 local, state and national journalists of color organizations in our work in 2020, co-sponsoring webinars, attending group meetings to hear feedback, authoring newsletter articles and more.
- We launched a partnership with the Ida B. Wells Society to provide coaching and pitch sessions for their members' proposals and designate grants for their members.

**45% OF OUR
GRANTEES IN 2020
WERE JOURNALISTS
OF COLOR**

*"I had fallen into that mid-career slump where I wasn't experienced enough for senior roles and the door was being constantly shut in my face because I was 'overqualified' for existing openings. **The diversity fellowship allowed me to pursue quality work** while anchoring in one of the best investigative teams in the country right here in Miami. By the time I completed my fellowship, USA TODAY had offered me a prestigious position on their enterprise team. I went from completing my fellowship to starting the position of my dreams."*

— **Romina Ruiz-Goiriena**, who published a four-part series in the Miami Herald and el Nuevo Herald – which helped spark federal legislation – through a Diversity Fellowship from the Fund in partnership with the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.

We're launching new efforts to support the broader field

New programs leverage expertise of grantees, leaders and partners.

Our grantees, leaders and partners have unique expertise that can help other reporters produce investigative journalism that has an impact. Many of our grantees' stories also provide resources that other journalists can use, including data that can be localized.

We launched a new program in 2020 to share these resources, expertise and lessons for the broader field. We began a series of online forums with our grantees, Board members and Advisory Board members. Every forum is co-sponsored with partner organizations.

In the last six months of 2020, these forums reached approximately 750 journalists, journalism students and partners nationwide.

The first four sessions focused on:

- Race and policing, co-sponsored with the National Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.
- COVID-19, co-sponsored with the Association of Health Care Journalists.
- Immigration, co-sponsored with palabra., a new media platform created by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists.
- Education, co-sponsored with Chalkbeat and in partnership with the Education Writers Association.

This program will continue and expand in 2021.

750 JOURNALISTS AND STUDENTS PARTICIPATED IN OUR EDUCATIONAL FORUMS IN 2020

“So much of being a journalist, and a freelancer especially, is about figuring out your own little ways to solve reporting and writing problems. But if we’re lucky, every so often we’re reminded that others have developed their own little tricks of the trade. That’s what the webinar was for me, a pleasant reminder that I have a community out there whose experience I can lean on.”

— **Mosi Secret**, a grantee who was a panelist on the Fund’s webinar about covering race and policing with other recent grantees and Board members who have received Pulitzer Prizes for their coverage of police misconduct.

The investigative journalism we support is sparking change

Grantee stories shape the national discussion and help spark reform.

The Fund supports unbiased, nonpartisan journalism that has an impact. Our grantees' stories uncover wrongdoing, expose injustice, deepen public understanding of complex issues and help spark reform. In 2020, investigative stories that were published with our support helped spark at least 15 changes to policies and practices, including:

- Several thousand low-income, primarily Black homeowners in Michigan kept their homes because of a state law that was enacted after a series of stories about over-taxation and foreclosure published with our support.
- Crews in Georgia removed soil with dangerous levels of lead from the yards of hundreds of families with young children after stories published with our support led to increased funding and action.
- The Washington State Legislature allocated funds for hiring and training and launched a year-long study after a report published with our support showed that Native American drivers in the state are far more likely to be stopped and searched than white drivers.
- Child-abuse caseworkers in California began making in-person visits during investigations and identifying children to remove from dangerous homes because reporting that we supported showed that COVID-19 protocols were hampering investigations and led the governor to reverse an earlier policy.
- Charter schools in the District of Columbia began holding open meetings after a story published with our support helped spark a new local law requiring transparency.

**STORIES WE SUPPORTED
HELPED SPARK 15
CHANGES TO POLICIES
AND PRACTICES IN 2020**

— **Kathleen McGrory**, Deputy Editor for Investigations at the Tampa Bay Times, which received a grant from the Fund for a series exposing a controversial policing program; the series sparked state legislation and advocacy from several national organizations.

“The grant we received from the Fund for Investigative Journalism was hugely important to our reporting.

It helped us access costly public records, including body-camera footage that showed deputies interacting with the people who were targeted. We used the footage both to better understand how the program worked and to create an interactive graphic that let readers experience what it was like to be targeted.”

Stories produced with our support in 2020

Below are highlights of stories our grantees completed in 2020.

For a full index, go to www.fij.org.

[Which Louisville Judge Let Police Search Your House? Most Signatures Are Unreadable](#) by Jacob Ryan for the Kentucky Center for Investigative Reporting and Travis Ragsdale for WDRB

[New U.S. Citizens Were One Of The Fastest-Growing Voting Blocs. But Not This Year](#) by Eileen Guo in FiveThirtyEight

[Connecticut's Halfhearted Battle: Response To Lead Poisoning Epidemic Lacks Urgency](#) by Jenifer Frank in The Connecticut Health I-Team

[Burkina Faso's Invisible War](#) by Clair MacDougall in Columbia Journalism Review

[Mississippi 'throws away' juveniles, robbing them of chance for redemption, advocates say](#) by the Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting in the Jackson Clarion-Ledger

[Behind Georgia's Covid-19 dashboard disaster](#) by Keren Landman in Atlanta Magazine

[Members of Congress Profited From COVID Bailout While Small Businesses Were Shut Out](#) by Justin Glawe and Jeremy Borden in Sludge

['Buy it or else': Inside Monsanto and BASF's moves to force dicamba on farmers](#) by Johnathan Hettinger for the Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting and St. Louis Post-Dispatch

[Public colleges hide donors who seek to influence students. Will COVID-19 make it worse?](#) by Miranda Spivack in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and USA Today

[Air COVID-19](#) by Jenny Manrique Cortes in palabra.

[Deadly heat is killing Americans: A decade of inaction on climate puts lives at risk](#) by Bridget Hickey with Ali Raj, Dean Russell, Elisabeth Gawthrop and Veronica Penney in The Guardian

[Belly of the Beast](#) by Erika Cohn in Human Rights Watch Film Festival and PBS

[Don't count on the census](#) by Natasha Haverty in Reveal

Funding partners

We're grateful to partners who make our work possible.



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1110 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 500 Washington, DC. 20005