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## News, February 2021

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Several of our grantees published groundbreaking stories this month, and several others saw new impact from previously published investigations. Highlights are below.

Earlier this month, the Fund launched new [grant opportunities](#) to help journalists increase the impact of their reporting: expedited grants for urgent stories and follow-up grants for timely stories after initial investigations. Today and every Friday at noon Eastern, join us for Open Office Hours on [Zoom](#) to learn more about how to apply for grants.

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### Collaborative journalism: 50 Iowa reporters gather body-camera policies from local police agencies

Iowa has a widely divergent, unregulated system of rules and policies governing public access to police video footage, a tool that many saw at the outset as a way of monitoring the conduct of police. Those disparities, [found in a review of the policies](#) of more than 200 agencies, can hinder the ability of everyday Iowans to answer questions about a family member's death at the hands of police or prove the victim's innocence. Through the Iowa Newspaper Association, with a grant from the Fund, more than 50 reporters obtained and reviewed local policies on body cameras and in-car dash cameras, as well as associated video. Reporters received more than 200 policies, which they put into an interactive map and analyzed to find common threads.

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### Report uncovers lack of state data-sharing on race and ethnicity in COVID-19 vaccinations

As part of a [collaborative report](#) by grantees at the Documenting COVID-19 project at Columbia University's Brown Institute for Media Innovation and The COVID Tracking Project at The Atlantic, reporters gathered states' data-sharing contracts with the federal government, including the data fields they withhold. The report shows that several states — including California and Texas — aren't sharing race and ethnicity data on vaccinations with the CDC. In Connecticut, in an effort to process billing forms more quickly, some hospitals don't fill out vaccine intake documents, causing gaps and underreporting of race and ethnicity

information. As a result, only about half of records provided to the federal government include race and ethnicity information, making it difficult to understand the root of health inequities.

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## 'Land Grab Universities' report wins Polk Award

This week, Tristan Ahtone and Robert Lee were awarded a 2021 [George Polk Award](#) for Education Reporting for their two-year investigation into the powerful and painful strains of myth and money behind the land-grant university system in the U.S. The story and database, published by High Country News, tracks nearly 11 million acres of land seized from Native American tribes to fund 52 colleges and universities. Earlier this month, Ahtone and Lee shared their reporting and data during our webinar on how to localize the story. You can watch the full webinar [here](#).

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## Grantee investigation sparks legislative action in Florida

A [new bill](#) introduced in the Florida Legislature aims to create safeguards for how law enforcement agencies can use data to identify and target people who have not committed crimes. The bill stems from a [Tampa Bay Times](#) investigation that uncovered a local sheriff's program to monitor and harass people who are deemed likely to break the law. Florida Sen. Audrey Gibson said she acted after reading the story. Her bill would require agencies to inform people deemed likely to break the law of their status — and give them the opportunity to appeal.

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## L.A. church postpones major conference amid COVID-19 reports

A large religious conference next month was canceled because of concerns that it could lead to COVID-19 infection among participants – concerns that stemmed in part from reporting by grantee Ruslan Gurzhiy for the Russian-language media outlet, "Slavic Sacramento." Gurzhiy's report on the same conference last year [uncovered the death](#) of two Washington state men who attended the event, one of whom was a 90-year-old pastor, due to complications related to COVID-19. The Los Angeles Times [cited](#) Gurzhiy's reporting in its coverage of the decision to cancel this year's conference.

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## Report shows environmental and human toll of U.S. agribusiness's water use in Brazil

The spread of giant soybean plantations in the Brazilian state of Bahia – many of them owned by U.S. farming companies – are at the heart of a massive water crisis threatening tributaries, floodplains and sources of essential rivers for local communities, according to Caio Freitas' [new](#)

[report for Mongabay](#). Water licenses for nearly 2 billion liters a day to be used for agriculture across west Bahia have been issued over the last year, with many of the licenses going to U.S.-based corporations operating in Brazil. Freitas' report uncovers the environmental and human impact of this ongoing battle for water between communities and corporations.

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