FUND FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Tipsheet from Inside the Investigation: Brian Howey & Nate Rosenfield

1. Submit records requests for Taser logs from the police departments you cover. If you can obtain them, they're an amazing and underutilized public record.

2. Recreating incidents requires a wealth of sourcing. While Taser logs will tell you the date, time and duration of Taser triggers and other datapoints, you'll need information from additional sources to report on Taser deployments. Police incident reports, body camera and dash camera footage, interviews with witnesses and the person/people who were Tased, county jail logs that tell you when the arrestee was booked into the jail and what charges the dept recommended, booking sheets with booking photos that may show injuries and—sometimes—injury disclosures, can all provide essential context.

3. Invest in public records that will help you for future stories. We requested the department's entire Taser logs and all its jail booking logs from 2005-2023. These records have provided critical information across multiple investigations.

4. Public records are great, but a sympathetic source is often better. Take the time to establish relationships with sources, who will sometimes lead you to other sources and records you would never obtain via a request.

5. You never know who will talk to you. Don't be afraid to ask, even people who seem hostile at first.

6. Remember, a person is never just a source. They have fears, concerns, desires and interests that are much bigger than their decision to speak with you. To build trust, establish a real relationship that develops over time. Always lead by listening and keep your judgement to yourself.

7. People who are chronically impacted by the criminal justice system are often a community unto themselves. Build contacts in this network and let them guide you to people who've been abused, rather than just relying on records requests, experts, organizers, lawyers, and other official sources of information.

8. <u>Remember</u>: memory is a strange and fickle thing. Be wary of single, or even double-sourced testimonies. To avoid factual errors, layer your sourcing as much as possible when recreating incidents of alleged abuses. Always report skeptically AND keep in mind that just because two people remember an incident differently doesn't necessarily mean one of them is lying.

9. Stay organized. When reporting and fact-checking a long-term investigation, there is nothing more important than knowing where your documents are. Organizational spreadsheets and a strict folder system are key. When working with a team, agree on these structures and define organizational terminology and file naming conventions as early as possible. Discuss organizational changes as a group and revisit the system periodically—your organizational methods may need to change as you go. This is time consuming, but essential. You <u>will</u> regret it if you don't do this. We maintain spreadsheets that track our sources (names, contact info, interview status, assigned reporter, important context, etc); records requests (link to original request; date filed, due date, point of contact, responsible reporter, etc); and important cases (name of victim, date of incident, incident aspects we're tracking for patterns, supporting evidence, etc.). All reporters on your team should be able to determine who has spoken to a particular source and when, locate an interview recording, or find any document on file within a minute or two.