WHO WE ARE

Reliable information that holds the powerful accountable is essential to our democracy. But investigative journalism is at risk: News organizations are cutting staffs as traditional sources of revenue decline. The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism is countering those problems with its replicable, collaborative nonprofit model.

The Center increases the quality and quantity of investigative reporting in Wisconsin while training current and future journalists. A nonpartisan news organization, it focuses on government integrity and quality of life issues including the environment, economy, justice system, education and health.

Our guiding values: Protect the vulnerable. Expose wrongdoing. Explore solutions.

Since July 2009, the Center has produced more than 300 major news reports that have been cited, published or broadcast by more than 600 newspapers, radio and TV stations and news websites in Wisconsin and nationwide. The estimated audience of the Center’s reports exceeds 61 million people.

The Center seeks to collaborate with, rather than compete against, other news organizations to maximize the use of resources. Reports are fact-checked to ensure accuracy and distributed free to news organizations, who are permitted to edit the stories or add their own reporting to meet the needs of their audiences.

Housed in the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication, the Center has a staff of four full-time professional journalists, three to four paid student interns who work as investigative reporters and public engagement and marketing assistants, part-time staff members and skilled volunteers who assist in journalistic and financial operations. The Center also collaborates with journalism classes, its partners at Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television, and news organizations nationwide. A nationally recognized board of directors, including experts in investigative journalism, nonprofit journalism and nonprofit financial management, determines policies, while day-to-day operations are handled by the staff.

ANNOUNCING THE WATCHDOG CLUB

The Watchdog Club is a group of individuals, families and corporations who take a leadership role in sustaining investigative reporting and the training of investigative journalists in Wisconsin. Watchdog Club members share the distinction of being WCIJ’s most generous and loyal contributors, giving $1,000 or more each year. Members are WCIJ’s counselors and ambassadors. They enable WCIJ to excel and innovate, while fostering an informed citizenry and strengthening our democracy.

Visit wisconsinwatch.org/watchdog-club or contact lfuhrmann@wisconsinwatch.org to learn more and become a member.
IMPORTANT JOURNALISM: In recent months, the Center released groundbreaking investigations that reached every corner of the state on topics including Wisconsin dairy farms struggling to keep immigrant workers, weaknesses in protections of whistleblowers who point out waste of taxpayers’ money, contamination in drinking water, solitary confinement in the state’s prisons and wrongful convictions based on flawed microscopic hair and fiber evidence. We produce in-depth investigations of issues that are not yet being covered around the state, prompting discussions on issues that are important to the people of Wisconsin.

INNOVATIVE STORYTELLING: The reporting and storytelling process involved, but was not limited to, in-depth interviews, open-records requests, an intense survey campaign with more than 100 prisoners in solitary confinement, the commissioning of a freelance illustrator, hustling to make great documentary photojournalism, breaking down complicated scientific research into relatable and relevant language, dogging reluctant sources, and being caring and compassionate to people in difficult situations, such as when interviewing parents whose children have been poisoned by lead.

HONORS: In May 2017 the Center took home top national honors in the Sigma Delta Chi Awards for best investigative reporting among small, online independent news organizations, presented by the Society of Professional Journalists. In May 2017 the Center was honored with three gold, three silver and two bronze awards, including the gold for best investigative story or series, in the Milwaukee Press Club’s annual Awards for Excellence in Wisconsin Journalism contest.

A STRONG TEAM: We have enhanced our capacities to produce superb journalism and training while assembling our finest development, public engagement and business team. Andy Hall is the Center’s co-founder and executive director. Managing Editor Dee J. Hall, the other co-founder, runs the day-to-day news operations. Lauren Fuhrmann, associate director, manages daily business operations. Coburn Dukehart, formerly a senior photo editor at National Geographic, is digital and multimedia director, and Alexandra Hall is the second Wisconsin Public Radio Mike Simonson Memorial Investigative Reporting Fellow.

OUR FIRST DOCUMENTARY: The Center and New York filmmaker Jim Cricchi’s Twelve Letter Films co-produced “Los Lecheros” (Dairy Farmers), which explores rising tensions over undocumented dairy workers in Wisconsin since the election of President Trump. The film has so far been accepted to two prestigious film festivals. The Center is experimenting with documentaries to connect with expanded audiences and create new revenue opportunities.

TRAINING YOUNG JOURNALISTS: The Center is an important training ground for current and future generations of investigative journalists. More than 30 students have served investigative reporting internships or done full-time freelance work with the Center, and since 2015, the Center has offered public engagement and marketing internships to assist with business operations. We continue our collaboration with the UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication to hire students for internships and offer our expertise through guest lectures and teaching investigative reporting courses.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION: WCIJ is involved in exciting, emerging relationships with news organizations, documentary filmmakers and universities to strengthen our journalism, reach a larger audience and explore new sources of revenue. Recent partners include ProPublica, Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting, HuffPost, the Medill Justice Project at Northwestern University, the Journalism School at Columbia University and the Center for Public Integrity.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP: The Center is at the forefront of national efforts to reinvigorate local and state investigative journalism. WCIJ is a leader of state-focused nonprofit investigative reporting, ethics, financial transparency, content distribution, metrics and impact tracking. The Center’s leadership in these activities is largely responsible for national funders’ continuing support as we share our knowledge with other organizations. On the state level, three key Center figures serve on the board of directors of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, promoting public access to the workings of government, and Fuhrmann serves as vice president of the Madison Pro Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS, NOVEMBER 2017
DOCUMENTING HATE

In partnership with ProPublica and newsrooms across the country, the Center is investigating hate groups and hate crimes in Wisconsin to add to a national database.

BROKEN WHISTLE

Broken Whistle explores the dwindling protections and incentives for whistleblowers in Wisconsin, despite Gov. Scott Walker’s campaign to root out waste, fraud and abuse.

CRUEL AND UNUSUAL?

The Center distributed surveys to inmates in long-term solitary confinement, in which they described lack of services, mental health problems and suicide attempts.

FLAWED FORENSICS

The Center’s reporting showed that the FBI’s use of flawed hair and fiber evidence led to convictions of innocent people in Wisconsin.

IMMIGRATION TENSIONS

Wisconsin dairies struggle to keep farms running, as workers cite President Trump’s rhetoric and deportation fears. Some leave Wisconsin to return to Mexico.

FAILURE AT THE FAUCET

In the Center’s ongoing coverage of Wisconsin drinking water, reporters found that children were exposed to unsafe levels of lead in drinking water at schools and daycares.
REPORT TO STAKEHOLDERS, NOVEMBER 2017

IMPACT

Our reports generate thought-provoking and productive discussions throughout the community, win state and national awards and influence the public agenda.

- Booker Shipp, a man in prison for life, was notified by the Center of the FBI’s assessment that its testimony in his case was flawed. Our investigation is seeking to uncover all cases of flawed forensic testing and testimony by the FBI in Wisconsin.

- In response to our April 2017 report on long-term solitary confinement in Wisconsin, which isolates some inmates for years at a time, one reader wrote to the Wisconsin State Journal in a letter to the editor: “This substantial piece of journalism made for sobering reading on Easter Sunday, but it’s essential for all of us to confront the facts about the kinds of torture that our state routinely inflicts on mentally ill prisoners in our names and with our tax money.”

- While the Center was working on a project looking at administrative confinement, the state Department of Corrections quietly changed rules that allow more out-of-cell time and more treatment and evaluation for inmates with mental illness who are in solitary confinement.

- On a Facebook post promoting our June 2017 story on immigrant dairy workers leaving Wisconsin, we saw significant engagement from the community — including reaching more than 6,000 individuals and generating more than 300 likes, comments and shares on that post alone. The post also led to a lively discussion in the comments section where individuals of different viewpoints were able to share their perspectives on the complex and highly charged issues at play in our investigation. As part of our promotional strategy for the story, we held a Facebook Live discussion with the reporter, Alexandra Hall, where we included comments from viewers and social media followers to encourage an ongoing community discussion.

- In May 2017, we took top gold honors in three investigative reporting categories from Wisconsin’s premiere all-media journalism competition — the Milwaukee Press Club Excellence in Journalism contest, as well as an additional five silver or bronze awards. The Center now has received a total of 48 awards since 2011 from the Milwaukee Press Club.

FAILURE AT THE FAUCET

- As evidence of the quality of our reporting, we are proud to report that on May 1, the Society of Professional Journalists named the Center’s Failure at the Faucet series a first-place winner in its national contest for 2016. The series took top honors in the Sigma Delta Chi Awards for investigative reporting among small, online independent news organizations.

- Gov. Scott Walker has commented on the Center’s drinking water reports, saying that his administration takes them seriously. Walker included in his 2017-19 state budget proposals explored in Failure at the Faucet, including a boost in funding for the Childhood Lead Prevention Program and lowering the level that triggers an investigation when a child is lead poisoned.

- We found that lead in drinking water, which ignited a public health crisis in Flint, Michigan, is largely ignored as a potential contributor to elevated blood lead levels in thousands of Wisconsin children, although drinking water flows through an estimated 176,000 lead service lines to homes in Milwaukee, Watertown and Racine, plus Buffalo, Sheboygan, Rock, Green Lake and Pepin counties. Two Democratic lawmakers from Madison and Milwaukee proposed a bill that would require the state to conduct tap water testing when a child is lead poisoned. Madison Rep. Chris Taylor said the proposal came in response to the Center’s ongoing series.

- A Republican-sponsored bill is paving the way for Wisconsin to accelerate replacement of lead service lines owned by both water utilities and private homeowners, which has been a major impediment.

Evanny Dorsey’s daughter has tested positive for elevated levels of lead three times in the past year. She suspects the lead is leaching into the water from her home’s lead service lines. Coburn Dukehart/WCIJ
AUDIENCE METRICS

We are proud of the broad reach of our news coverage, a record that few comparable news organizations can match. With online research from services such as Meltwater and the Wisconsin Newspaper Association’s News Tracker (the latter provided in-kind by WNA), we have compiled in-depth metrics on how our stories flow through Wisconsin and across the nation.

2017
January 1, 2017 to October 31, 2017

24 major reports

521 pickups, mentions, follow-up reports, columns/editorials and localized reports
  427 pickups
  34 mentions
  6 follow-up reports
  38 columns/editorials
  17 localized reports

4.7 million total estimated audience
  2.8 million in print
  1.7 million online
  200,000 broadcast

105 news organizations published or cited our work

WHERE THE CENTER’S STORIES ARE USED

These maps show the locations of news organizations in Wisconsin and across the United States that published or cited the Center’s work from January 1 to October 31, 2017. Darker colors indicate a higher density of news organizations in that area.

WCIJ recounted the final days in the United States for Luisa Tepole and Miguel Hernandez, bottom. In early June, the couple and their two young children left the western Wisconsin dairy farm where they have lived and worked for 16 years, returning to their hometown in Veracruz, Mexico. Coburn Dukehart/WCIJ
OUR INTERNS

Our reporting interns work on the front lines of journalism. They write and produce high-impact investigative pieces on government integrity and quality-of-life issues. Our new business internships offer students the chance to gain hands-on experience in social media, marketing, business development and metrics tracking.

Center interns are in the field, conducting interviews and requesting records. They receive intensive training and work closely with Center staff and partners at Wisconsin Public Television, Wisconsin Public Radio and other news organizations.

We often crow about the great work by our interns, and they’re also doing amazing things after their internships. They’re getting jobs, no slight accomplishment in this market — and good ones. Our more than 30 former interns are active in print, online and broadcast journalism around Wisconsin, the U.S. and the world. From Green Bay and Appleton, Wisconsin, to California, Montana, Washington, New York, Russia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Kenya, our former interns take the skills they learned at the Center and apply them while working around the globe.

For many of them, working at the Center served as a gateway to future opportunities. Recent graduates of our internship programs have landed impressive jobs: Cara Lombardo was hired as a reporter for The Wall Street Journal, Louisa Lincoln was an intern for the NPR marketing team and then was hired as a development associate by Public Radio International and Mia Sato is engagement editor for Illinois’s Better Government Association, a nonprofit investigative watchdog.

“Young reporters rarely get the luxury of working on long-term investigations early in their careers, let alone as students, which is why WCIJ is such an important place. WCIJ instilled in me an investigative mindset, which prepared me for internships at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the AP and, as a result, changed the trajectory of my career.”

— Cara Lombardo (2016-17), reporter for The Wall Street Journal

HERE’S WHERE SOME OF OUR FORMER INTERNS HAVE WORKED

[Image of various logos and text mentions]
FINANCIAL INFORMATION

2017 budget: $500,000
Goal: $1 million

The Center was co-founded by award-winning investigative journalists Andy and Dee J. Hall in January 2009. Its initial budget was about $150,000. Today the Center’s budget is about $500,000. We aim to grow to about $1 million to more fully accomplish the journalistic and training mission while building a more sustainable and resilient financial base.

The Center is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that is funded through grants, donations and sponsorships from foundations, corporations and individuals, as well as earned income it receives for producing stories and training journalists. As a matter of policy, funders exercise no control over the Center’s editorial decisions, and all funders are publicly identified, to protect the integrity of our journalism. We publish a list of our supporters, tax documents and audited financial statements on our website.

SUPPORTERS

Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation
The Joyce Foundation
Evjue Foundation
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
Democracy Fund
Reva and David Logan Foundation
Peters Family Foundation
Wisconsin Newspaper Association Foundation
Marcus and Sheila Cohen
Larry Hands and Karen Kendrick-Hands
Phil and Tricia Hands
Dick Record
Renie Schapiro and Norman Fost

Betty and Corkey Custer
Elaine Burke
Barbara Johnson
Wendy Fearnside
Herman Baumann and Kay Schwichtenberg
Walt Bogdanich
Mark and Sara Eversden
Robert S. Hagge
Carol O’Leary
Finn Ryan and Brynn Bemis
Martha and Douglas Lee
Janet and Philip Hasler
Michael and Susan Michaelis

...and more than 300 additional individuals, corporations and foundations across the nation.

Visit WisconsinWatch.org to read our stories and make a gift to the Center.