

Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism

WisconsinWatch.org

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Who We Are

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan news organization that seeks to increase the quality and quantity of investigative reporting in Wisconsin, fostering an informed citizenry and strengthening democracy, while training the next generation of investigative journalists. The Center collaborates with Wisconsin Public Radio, Wisconsin Public Television, the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism & Mass Communication, and mainstream and ethnic media across the nation, including members of the Investigative News Network and Investigative Journalism Education Consortium.

Our mission: Protect the vulnerable. Expose wrongdoing. Seek solutions to problems.

The Center is housed in the UW-Madison journalism school. The Center's award-winning [staff](#)¹ includes Andy Hall, founder and executive director; Kate Golden, reporter and multimedia director; Bill Lueders, Money and Politics Project director; and Lauren Fuhrmann, public engagement director. In addition, the Center operates a year-round paid internship program for UW-Madison journalism students, and it collaborates with journalism classes on award-winning investigative news projects. A nationally acclaimed board of directors,² including experts in investigative journalism, nonprofit journalism and nonprofit financial management, guides and oversees the Center and determines policies, while day-to-day operations, including news coverage decisions, are handled by the staff.

What We Do

The Center examines (1) government integrity, with a special focus on the influence of money in politics and policymaking, and (2) quality of life issues such as the environment, health, education, justice system, the economy and immigration. Emphasizing collaboration over competition, the Center's staff works closely with journalists at other news organizations, journalism classes at UW-Madison, paid interns, experienced volunteer reporters and photographers and freelance journalists. Stories are vetted in a fact-checking system, adapted from the nonprofit Center for Public Integrity, and are subjected to

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Five Milwaukee Press Club Awards, and Dane County NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) citation, 2011; four Milwaukee Press Club Awards, IRE Awards finalist, and Associated Press Media Editors' Innovator of the Year for College Students award for collaborative efforts with UW-Madison journalism school, 2012; eight Milwaukee Press Club Awards, IRE Awards finalist, 2013.

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The board includes Knight Investigative Reporting Chair Brant Houston, Center for Public Integrity founder Charles Lewis, Journalism professor and former public radio executive Jack Mitchell, CPA and nonprofits management expert Scott Keith Baumgartner, Wisconsin public broadcasting executive Malcolm Brett, Newspaper executive and newsroom diversity leader Karen Lincoln Michel, Sponsorship and advertising expert Herman Baumann

pre-publication legal review as appropriate. Reports are distributed free to media via a password-protected embargo system to provide all media with simultaneous publication and broadcast windows. News organizations are encouraged to add reporting and to tailor the reports to the needs of their audiences. Five to 20 news outlets pick up most major reports. The Center's reports gain further reach through radio and TV public affairs programs, social media, editorials, columns, blogs, letters to the editor and online comments. All stories are published and archived on the Center's website, www.wisconsinwatch.org.

Reach and Impact

Since July 2009, the Center has produced more than more than 105 major news reports plus nearly 100 Money & Politics columns that have been cited, published or broadcast by more than 230 newspapers, radio and TV stations and news websites in Wisconsin and nationwide. The estimated audience of the Center's reports exceeds 25 million people.³ Collaborations with other news organizations expand the impact of our stories. Stories and their distribution are tracked in a chart and interactive maps at <http://www.wisconsinwatch.org/in-the-news/> and include:

A collaborative investigation⁴ revealing allegations of a physical altercation between two Wisconsin Supreme Court justices in a nationally significant collective bargaining case;

Examining the effects of the state's new tort reform law, which diminished families' abilities to hold nursing homes accountable for negligence, and barred prosecutors from using state inspections as evidence. Some nursing homes, we discovered, were failing to reports deaths and injuries as required by law;

An investigation revealing reliability problems in the state's GPS tracking of offenders, who have been jailed although they were complying with terms of their release;

A six-part series on the growing reliance on immigrant dairy workers in the Dairy State⁵;

The only complete analysis of requests for post-conviction DNA testing by Wisconsin prisoners⁶;

The underreporting of sexual assaults on University of Wisconsin campuses⁷;

3 According to preliminary estimate compiled by our partners at MapLight, based upon Audit Bureau of Circulation, Cision, Arbitron and Quantcast data

4 With WPR

5 A collaboration with *The Country Today*, WPR, WPT, WisPolitics.com and Capitol News Connection

6 With the *Wisconsin State Journal*

7 With INN members -- Center for Public Integrity, National Public Radio and state investigative centers in Colorado, Texas, Washington and Massachusetts

The tragic consequences of Wisconsin's high suicide rate⁸ particularly among Native Americans;
Life in Rock County, Wis., hard hit by the closing of a General Motors plant⁹;
Chronic polluters awarded federal stimulus funding while avoiding environmental oversight¹⁰;
Controversial tactics used on vulnerable students by for-profit colleges;

Exposing misleading nutritional claims by the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board's \$30 million a year pro-dairy campaign;

A multi-part series that examined Wisconsin's mixed record and waning spending on homeland security in the 10 years after the 9/11 attacks;¹¹

A computer-aided analysis of a sample of 50,000 e-mails sent to Gov. Scott Walker¹² found Walker accurately said most were supportive – but a third of supporters were from other states. We discovered one came from an Indiana GOP activist and prosecutor who urged a “false flag” operation to fake a physical attack on the governor and discredit pro-union protesters.

The Center's work has had a real impact.

Even before it was published, the Center's story on campus sexual assaults prompted the University of Wisconsin-Madison dean of students to vow to improve the treatment of students who report abuse. University officials also created a Web page to improve public access to sexual assault data that previously were available only through public records requests.

The state milk board removed misleading dairy weight loss claims from its website.

The story about questionable tactics used by a for-profit college caused Wisconsin regulators to order Westwood College to halt enrollment until problems were corrected.

Nationwide attention was focused upon Native American suicides and a former Menominee Reservation resident donated \$5,000 to a local Boys & Girls Club.

8 With WPR, WPT, New America Media, Indian Country TV, *Native America Calling* and others

9 With *The Janesville Gazette*, WPR and WPT

10 With the Center for Public Integrity and published in *The Washington Post*

11 In collaboration with 10 Gannett Wisconsin newspapers

12 At the request of *Isthmus* newspaper, which obtained the materials in a lawsuit

The analysis of Walker emails was circulated worldwide. And the follow-up led to the immediate resignation of the Indiana prosecutor who had suggested faking a violent attack on the governor.

As a result of the Center's investigation of nursing homes, the state reformed its procedures to ensure that reports of abuse and neglect are promptly examined.

Legislators cited the Center's investigation into the reliability of GPS tracking of offenders in rejecting the governor's plans to expand monitoring and requesting an in-depth nonpartisan study of reliability.

Separate legal and ethics investigations were launched to examine the Supreme Court incident, calls are growing to replace judicial elections with merit selection, and a justice now faces three ethics charges.

Education and Professional Training

The Center has become an important [training ground](#) for current and future generations of investigative journalists. Sixteen students have served internships or done full-time freelance work with the Center, learning valuable skills that they have used to secure work in journalism and related fields in Haiti, Russia and across the United States. The Center's staff collaborates with reporting classes and presents at investigative reporting and ethics conferences – including IRE, NICAR, SPJ, INN, SABEW and Wisconsin Newspaper Association – and the Center co-sponsored an APME NewsTrain and IRE Better Watchdog workshop for state journalists. Four key Center figures serve on the board of directors of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, promoting public access to the workings of government.

National Model for Ethics, Transparency, Collaboration

The Center has created a replicable model that is helping to invigorate local investigative journalism and democracy. Nonprofit newsrooms across the country are emulating its journalistic and financial practices, which focus on transparency. Board members Brant Houston and Charles Lewis, Hall and legal counsel Christa Westerberg co-authored a UW-Madison Center for Journalism Ethics [report](#) on recommended ethical practices, and Houston and Hall wrote a [J-Lab.org tutorial](#) on forming a nonprofit news site. Houston, Lewis and Hall are among the founders of [INN](#), which offers administrative and technical services to, and facilitates collaboration among, nonprofit news organizations. Hall serves on the Membership and Standards Committee of INN, and Board of Directors of the Iowa Center for Public Affairs Journalism, which is modeled upon the Wisconsin organization. The Center served as fiscal sponsor for Centro de Periodismo Investigativo in Puerto Rico and the Iowa Center.

The Center's Board of Directors retains full control over revenue generation, adopting a policy¹³ in 2010 to protect the integrity of the Center's operations by requiring editorial independence, and public disclosure of all donors. The policy developed by the Center heavily influenced the national membership standards developed by INN.

Financial Overview

In February 2009, Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation awarded the Center its first grant -- \$100,000 to support general operations. EEJF, based in Oklahoma, contributed additional general operating grants of \$100,000 in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Since the original EEJF grant, the Center's funding has expanded to include five dozen individuals, foundations and other organizations. A two-year \$75,000 matching grant from the Challenge Fund for Journalism¹⁴ was awarded to the Center in 2010 to foster capacity building; it has been successfully completed. The Foundation to Promote Open Society, which works in cooperation with the Open Society Institute in New York City, awarded the Center \$50,000 in general operating support in 2009, \$100,000 in 2010 (spread over two years), \$35,000 in 2011 and \$350,000 in 2012 (over two years).

In 2013, The Joyce Foundation became a major supporter of the Center. The Chicago-based foundation awarded a \$100,000 grant to be split by the Center and MinnPost, a nonprofit news organization, to support in-depth coverage of key issues in Wisconsin and Minnesota. The grant will fund coverage of political reform, environmental protection and gun violence issues in Wisconsin, as well as political reform in Minnesota.

Other donors include the Peters Family Foundation in Utah in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012; Evjue Foundation in Madison in 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012; and Wisconsin State Journal in 2009, 2012 and 2013.¹⁵ All members of the Center's Board of Directors are financial supporters of the Center.

In addition, the Center has received substantial in-kind and volunteer support valued at \$75,000 to \$100,000 per year.¹⁶ The terms for pro bono legal services are described in a written agreement with a law firm and a verbal agreement with a second firm. A facilities use agreement with the University of Wisconsin describes terms of the Center's relationship with the university, including use of office space in exchange for providing educational services and employing student interns. Wisconsin Public Radio donates additional office space in Vilas Communication Hall, while the *Appleton Post-Crescent* and *The Capital Times* donate space in the Dick Wheeler Capitol Press Room.

The Center's 2013 budget of \$435,000 reflects its journalistic and educational missions and is composed of revenue from foundation grants (80%), earned income (7%), individual and corporate donors (6%), sponsorships (6%) and events (1%). We expect the budget to grow to \$500,000 by 2014, primarily through increased reliance upon earned income, major donors and foundations with a focus upon the Wisconsin region. As we seek to diversify revenue sources, the Center plans to implement a program to attract support from a larger number of small donors. We also are seeking increased contributions from news organizations and current and former journalists, and we are creating sponsorship opportunities

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A joint program of the [Ford Foundation](#) in New York, the [McCormick Foundation](#) in Illinois and EEJF

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All donors are listed at: <http://www.wisconsinwatch.org/about/funding/>

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Reporting, photography, editing, legal services, office space, technology and library services, discounted payroll services

connected to the Center's activities (such as its internship program) and events (such as its annual Wisconsin Watchdog Awards reception and dinner).

The Center is striving to increase its earned revenue. Earned income accounted for less than 5 percent of revenue in 2009, and represents 7 percent of revenue in 2013. The Center has received revenue for producing investigative reports through arrangements with the Center for Public Integrity and Chicago's WBEZ Public Media, and for producing the online tutorial on forming a nonprofit newsroom for J-Lab. In 2011, the Center announced a partnership with nonpartisan MapLight to investigate the influence of money in Wisconsin state politics and policymaking. The project was supported by the Open Society Institute. It resulted in about \$25,000 in earned income to the Center in 2011 and a similar amount in early 2012. The MapLight partnership agreement provides for the Center's total editorial independence.

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