



2019

Wisconsin Watch Annual Report

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 staff as traditional sources of revenue decline. The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, and its news outlet, Wisconsin Watch, are countering those corrosive trends with its replicable, collaborative nonprofit model.

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism increases the quality, quantity and understanding of investigative reporting in Wisconsin while training current and future journalists. The Center informs the citizenry and strengthens democracy. Our guiding values: Protect the vulnerable. Expose wrongdoing. Explore solutions.



Jim Malewitz, investigations editor.

Join the Watchdog Club

Watchdog Club members share the distinction of being the Center’s most generous and loyal contributors. Donors of at least \$1,000 become members of our Watchdog Club and receive “behind the story” insights, events and benefits, such as coffee conversations with Washington Post reporter Jonathan O’Connell, NPR media reporter David Folkenflik, New York Times immigration reporter Caitlin Dickerson and an evening with former New York Times Publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr.



Sheila Terman Cohen, Watchdog Club member.

Join the Watchdog Club Leadership Circle

The Watchdog Club Leadership Circle is a network of people and businesses taking a leadership role in sustaining investigative journalism. Their support also helps us train the next generation of investigative reporters and public engagement and marketing professionals. Donors of at least \$5,000 become members of our Leadership Circle and receive all the benefits of the Watchdog Club, plus an office tour and lunch with Executive Director Andy Hall and members of the staff, and invitations to exclusive Leadership Circle events.

A note from the founders

Our biggest accomplishment in 2019, it turns out, was the creation of stronger news and business teams to power our operations during the coronavirus crisis in 2020.

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism expanded its staff and revenue to record levels, giving it the resources in 2019 to produce fact-checked investigations of the Foxconn project, prisons and jails, labor trafficking, clergy sexual abuse, immigration, opioid addiction, rural health care, marijuana legalization and much more – always with a focus on potential solutions.

We hired our first investigations editor and our first membership manager to expand our ability to dig deeply, train young journalists and connect with our growing audience. We forged ahead with News414, an exciting partnership with two other nonprofit newsrooms, Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service and Outlier Media, to create connections to 18 underserved Milwaukee neighborhoods and produce public service journalism that responds to residents’ needs, reaching them directly through a free interactive texting service.

This important work – which aims to protect the vulnerable, expose wrongdoing and explore solutions – was made possible by you. In just the past year, our annual budget nearly doubled, to \$1.2 million. This growth was driven by existing and new donors investing in the power of journalism to tell uncomfortable truths – and to make the world a better place.

Our work has had an impact on the interns we have trained. Former intern Alisa Ivanitskaya, a Fulbright scholar from Russia, wrote in a piece posted by Cultural Vistas that her internship “helped revive [her] hope in journalism.”

Which brings us to 2020. COVID-19 is inflicting frightening damage on our society. We realize that the way forward is less certain. But our mission is more urgent than ever. We are shifting resources to investigate the coronavirus’ effects in Wisconsin, emphasizing solutions to accelerate strengthened public health and economic recovery.

We will fearlessly pursue the truth and training of the next generation, to hold power to account and shore up our battered democracy in this critical election year – and, with your help, for many years to come.

Andy and Dee J. Hall
Co-founders
Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism



Visit wisconsinwatch.org/watchdog-club/ or contact Membership Manager Emily Neinfeldt at eneinfeldt@wisconsinwatch.org to learn more about membership.

Highlights

Our journalistic and business operations are advancing.

Innovative reporting

Thanks to funding from Google News Initiative, Wisconsin Watch began work on News414, an innovative effort in collaboration with Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service and Outlier Media. The project will create connections to 18 underserved Milwaukee neighborhoods and produce public service journalism that responds to residents’ needs and reaches them directly – via SMS text messaging. Many of the recipients of this news you can use will be people from diverse backgrounds whose voices are often ignored by traditional top-down media models.

A growing team

We have enhanced our capacities to produce superb journalism and training while assembling our finest business team. Executive Director and Co-founder Andy Hall is responsible for the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism’s news and business operations. 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 is the digital and multimedia director. In 2019, Wisconsin Watch added an investigations editor, Jim Malewitz, and membership manager, Emily Neinfeldt. Bram Sable-Smith is the fourth Wisconsin Public Radio Mike Simonson Memorial Investigative Reporting Fellow, producing investigative news stories. Other new faces: The Cap Times public affairs reporting fellow Parker Schorr, Phoebe Petrovic, our Report for America Corps member producing Wisconsin Watch’s first podcast, and Engagement Manager Matt Whitney, who aids in promoting these investigations to the public.

Our first podcast

With funding from Report for America, Wisconsin Watch hired Criminal Justice Reporting Project Manager Phoebe Petrovic to lead production of our first podcast – an investigation of police and prosecutorial misconduct in Wisconsin. It is scheduled to launch in late 2020 or early 2021.

Strengthening the news ecosystem

Wisconsin Watch’s reporting fills a void. At a time when newspaper circulation is at the lowest it has been since 1940, Wisconsin Watch brings stories to the public and to newsrooms across Wisconsin and the country, directly, and through a partnership with the Associated Press. Some newsrooms have been cut in half – or more – in the past decade as the news business experiences a catastrophic loss of revenue. As media outlets across the state shrink, the capacity of Wisconsin journalists to delve deeply into complex problems has diminished. Wisconsin Watch provides crucial stories on undercovered issues – on its own in some cases and through collaborations with other news outlets. In 2019, our reporters teamed up with colleagues in nearly 20 other newsrooms.

Membership

As part of the Facebook Local News Membership Accelerator, the Center has dramatically improved its membership program. In 2019, the total number of donors increased 18% and the number of recurring donors increased 157%. Recurring donors now make up nearly a quarter of all supporters. Through the accelerator, we conducted our first comprehensive, professional market research of our existing audience. Based on insights from the audience research, we refreshed our branding to reflect our dedication to bold investigative reporting and better appeal to our existing and potential audience. The Center built a strong digital infrastructure during this project that will allow us to continue to increase visits to our site, newsletter subscribers and donors.

National leadership

The Center is at the forefront of national efforts to reinvigorate local and state investigative journalism. We are a leader in state-focused nonprofit investigative reporting, ethics, financial transparency, content distribution, digital asset management, metrics and impact tracking. Our leadership in these activities is largely responsible for national funders’ continuing support as we share our knowledge with other organizations. On the state level, the Center’s staff members serve in leadership roles on the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, which promotes public access to the workings of government, and the Madison Pro Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Our interns

Wisconsin Watch interns aren’t out getting coffee and running errands. Our reporting interns conduct interviews, dig up public records, analyze data and fact-check their reports in intensive hours-long sessions with editors. They collaborate with Wisconsin Watch staff and partners at PBS Wisconsin, Wisconsin Public Radio and other news organizations to produce high-impact investigative pieces on government integrity and quality-of-life issues.



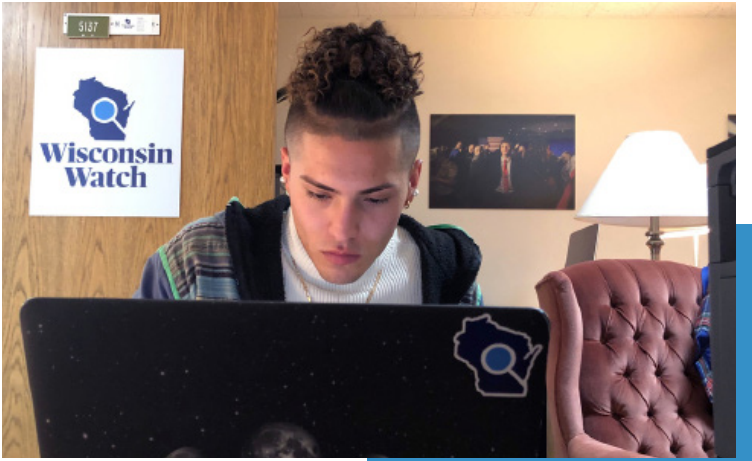
Our business internships offer students the chance to gain hands-on experience in social media marketing, business development, stewardship of donors and metrics tracking – skills essential to our operations.

Despite the chaos of the news business, our four dozen former interns are finding good jobs, in journalism and related fields.

From the Wisconsin Capitol and communities throughout America’s Dairyland, to the front lines of the coronavirus crisis, to Wall Street, to schools



in San Diego and farms in Washington State, to strife-torn Ukraine, to a family pushed out of its home in Kenya by a World Bank-backed project, to allegations that Exxon Mobil lied to the public about the effects of climate change, former Wisconsin Watch interns are unearthing important stories around the globe. They have worked at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Wisconsin State Journal, Cap Times, St. Cloud (Minn.) Times, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, Guardian US, BBC, The Telegraph’s Moscow Bureau, Wisconsin Health News, a fruit growers magazine in Washington,



the newly launched Sahan Journal to cover immigrants in Minnesota, the Appleton Post-Crescent and many other outlets.

Our former public engagement and marketing interns have filled key business and engagement positions at the Institute for Nonprofit News, PRX and The Markup.

These interns, the stories they tell and the business innovations they produce are the Center’s most lasting legacy.

Major investigations and impact

Our reports generate thought-provoking and productive discussions, win national and state awards (including 88 Milwaukee Press Club awards) and influence the public agenda.

In 2019, our groundbreaking coverage identified significant barriers facing Gov. Tony Evers’ plan to halve prison populations. We revealed the use of pay-to-stay fees that can bury inmates in a mountain of debt. We showed how the rich can buy their way out of jail while the poor stay locked up. We documented the extent of clergy sexual abuse in Wisconsin. We exposed labor trafficking on a Wisconsin cabbage farm, the quiet rise in meth addiction and the threat to reproductive care at Catholic hospitals. Wisconsin Watch explored the struggles of rural hospitals to stay afloat, the rising tensions as wolves rebound from near extinction, deceptive tactics used against homeowners in the path of the taxpayer-subsidized Foxconn plant and the problem of managing pain and opioid dependence in rural areas. These stories added valuable information and context to the public debate over important issues.

We continued covering water quality problems in Wisconsin during 2019. After Gov. Tony Evers declared 2019 the “Year of Clean Drinking Water,” citing findings from our coverage, Republican lawmakers began to get behind measures to improve water quality.



Catholic Hospitals

Catholic hospitals in Wisconsin are common, and usually the only option for people of color in certain neighborhoods. Wisconsin Watch, in collaboration with Fuller Project, found that one-third of hospitals in the state are governed by Catholic principles, more than twice the national average. That means that many forms of contraception, including tubal ligations, are not available to patients. The investigation also found that many patients are unaware of the restrictions and may lack an alternative hospital. One long-time doctor who practiced in a Catholic hospital said the restrictions sometimes prevented her from giving the best care to patients. “When you have a moral conflict like that,” she said, “it eats away at you.”



The Cannabis Question

As part of an investigative reporting class taught by Dee J. Hall, students in the UW-Madison School of Journalism and Mass Communication took an in-depth look at what would happen if marijuana were legalized in Wisconsin. Students reported on scientific evidence underlying cannabis’ medicinal uses, the ways marijuana arrests and convictions impact Wisconsinites and other facets of legalization. Sen. Fred A. Risser introduced legislation that would decriminalize 25 grams or less of marijuana in Wisconsin. His press release cited our report that found that black people are arrested at four times the rate of white people in Wisconsin for marijuana possession. The 15 stories in the project were picked up more than 430 times and reached 5.4 million readers across the nation.



Seeking a Cure

Wisconsin’s rural communities struggle to keep local hospitals and to recruit medical professionals, creating a health crisis in many rural areas. Seeking a Cure, a collaborative project with several Midwestern newsrooms, found that hospitals were closing or cutting services and merging with other hospital companies to stay afloat. In some rural areas of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Watch found, residents drive more than 40 minutes to get emergency care.



Foxconn

As the massive Foxconn manufacturing plant began to take shape in the village of Mount Pleasant, Wisconsin Watch, in collaboration with Wisconsin Public Radio, found a sense of betrayal among some residents whose homes were bulldozed to make way for the project. The owners sold their homes to the village for road widenings related to Foxconn that were later scrapped – or never planned, the investigation found. The story added to the growing questions around the future of the project, which is in line for a record \$4 billion in state and local subsidies.



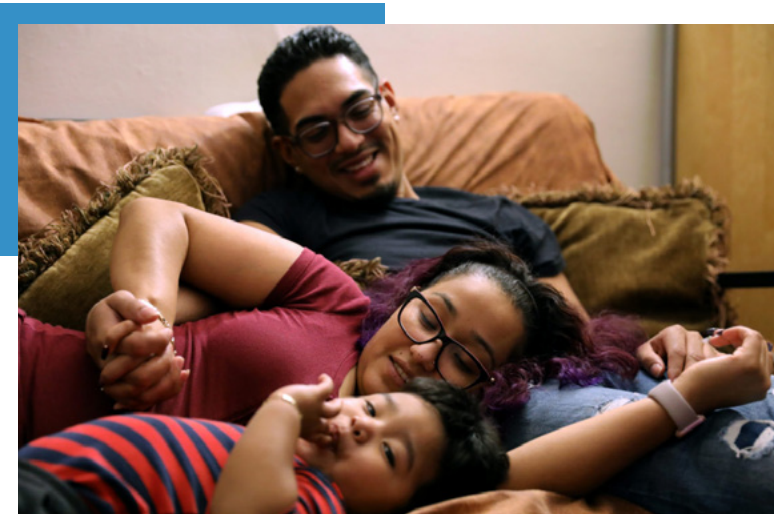
Cruel and Unusual?

A continuation of Wisconsin Watch’s series from 2017, former reporting intern Izabela Zaluska looked at how pay-to-stay fees can put inmates thousands of dollars in debt, how high supervision rates can cause longer incarceration and how Gov. Tony Evers’ plan to decrease prison populations remains stalled over a variety of systemic and political hurdles.



Catholic Clergy Abuse

In 2019, Catholic dioceses in Wisconsin began releasing names of credibly accused clergy members. Wisconsin Watch told the stories of victims’ long-term trauma and how the church can better uncover the abuse and help victims heal. Reporting intern Erica Jones spent hours interviewing victims and poring over records. Wisconsin Public Radio investigative reporting fellow Bram Sable-Smith and Fulbright Scholar fellow Alisa Ivanitskaya created powerful multimedia elements to help tell the story.



Coburn Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch

Marigeli Roman lies down with her son Adriel, 2, and husband, Erick Gamboa, while watching a movie in their Milwaukee home on February 8. Erick Gamboa spent six months in immigration detention which was a major hardship on the family.



Alisa Ivanitskaya / Wisconsin Watch

Ted Lausche, a survivor of physical and sexual abuse at a Catholic orphanage in Louisiana, is seen on the porch of his house in Marshall, Wis., on July 3. Lausche says he still suffers from the trauma of childhood abuse.



Emily Hamer / Wisconsin Watch

Tony Evers shares a kiss with his wife Kathy after being sworn in as Wisconsin's governor during the inauguration ceremony at the Wisconsin State Capitol on Jan. 7.



Coburn Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch

Kim Mahoney's house on Prairie View Drive in Mount Pleasant, Wis., is the only house still standing in her subdivision, out of an original 13 properties. All other property owners sold to the village of Mount Pleasant and their homes have been demolished to make way for the Foxconn plant. A building on the Foxconn site and the Foxconn construction area are seen in the background. Photo taken on July 1.

Top 10 photos of 2019



Coburn Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch



Coburn Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch

Family physician Dr. Bert Hodous works at Mayo Clinic Health Systems clinic in Arcadia, Wis. He used to work at the Arcadia hospital, and says when it closed "it was the saddest day of my life." He helped design the new clinic, which serves a wide variety of patients in the rural area, including the area's Hispanic population. "I am so proud of this facility," he says. "It's clear to the patients that they are top notch." Photo taken Sept. 19.



Coburn Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch

A mother from an Amish community in Brodhead, Wis., watches as her 12-year-old daughter receives an exam at the Fowler Memorial Free Dental Clinic in Monroe, Wis., on Sept. 24. The mother had brought five of her children to the clinic, which provides free care to qualified children up to age 15 in Green and Lafayette counties.



Emily Hamer / Wisconsin Watch

Linda Bender, attended a Jefferson Township board meeting Feb. 28, to discuss a wind project that could come to the Wisconsin town. Around 10 people spoke in opposition to the project, while two were in support. Bender, a resident of Juda, says there is "no evidence" that wind turbines cause health detriments.



Emily Hamer / Wisconsin Watch

Abbie Testaberg and her husband Jody Testaberg are seen on their hemp farm, Kinni Hemp Co., in River Falls, Wis., April 18. Here, their sons Ari, 6, left, and Aki, 8, show frozen hemp that was harvested last season and is now being stored in a freezer.

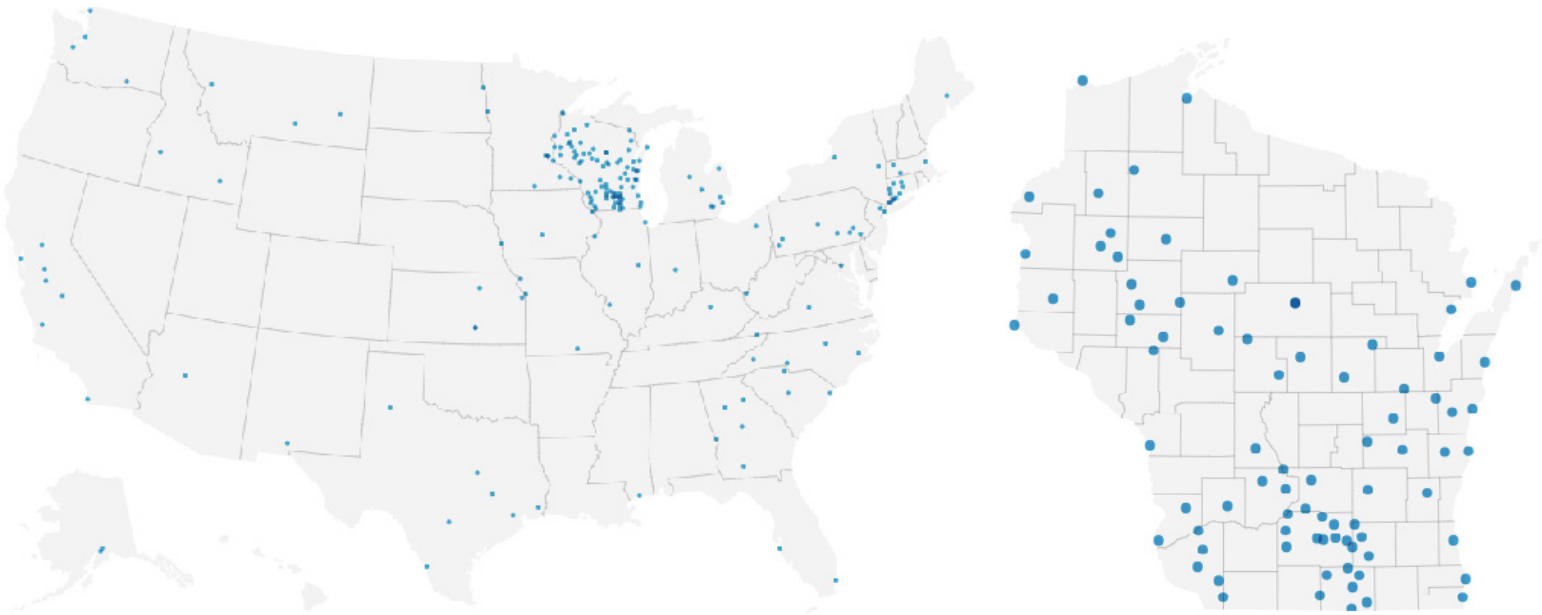


Emily Hamer / Wisconsin Watch

Lena Stojiljkovic, a University of Wisconsin-Madison student, is seen in her friend's apartment in Madison, Wis., April 10. In the fall of 2016, she was hospitalized for a psychotic break and diagnosed with bipolar I disorder. She says she was delusional, psychotic and had no grasp on reality. Stojiljkovic said she believes smoking marijuana helped trigger the psychosis.

Where our stories are used

We are proud of the broad reach of our news coverage, a record that few comparable news organizations can match. Here is how our stories flow through Wisconsin and across the nation.



These maps show the locations of news organizations in Wisconsin and across the United States that published or cited Wisconsin Watch’s work from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2019.

Audience metrics
Jan. 1 to Dec. 31,
2019

17 million
total estimated audience
8.1 million in print • 8.8 million online

1,457
pickups, mentions, follow-up
reports, columns/editorials
and localized reports

32
major reports

256
news organizations published
or cited our work

32
states, and Washington D.C.
and five other nations

Financial information

2020 budget

\$1.2 million

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization (WCIJ Inc.) by award-winning investigative journalists Andy and Dee J. Hall in 2008 and was launched in their basement in 2009. Our initial budget was about \$150,000. Under a contract with UW, the Center’s office in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication is shared by staff and students who are hired as investigative reporters and public engagement and marketing interns. In 2019, estimated revenue was \$1,056,720 and expenditures were \$796,367. Today, the budget is \$1.2 million, allowing us to more fully accomplish our journalistic and training missions while building a more sustainable and resilient financial base.

The independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization 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 Wisconsin Watch’s news 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

Since 2009, more than 850 individuals, corporations and foundations across the nation have supported us. Major recent supporters include:

Laura and John Arnold
Ira and Ineva Reilly Baldwin Wisconsin Idea Endowment
Lau and Bea Christensen Charitable Foundation
Susan Troller Cosgrove and Howard Cosgrove Evjue Foundation
Wendy Fearnside and Bruce Meier
Larry Hands and Karen Kendrick-Hands
Phil and Tricia Hands
Sally Mead Hands Foundation
Reid Hoffman
Barbara Johnson
Wm. Collins Kohler Foundation
David and Marion Meissner
Peters Family Foundation
Mary and Ken Rouse
The Reva and David Logan Foundation
Vital Projects Fund
Google News Initiative

Joyce Foundation
Mary Burke
Wisconsin Newspaper Association
NewsMatch
REI
Facebook



Visit [WisconsinWatch.org](https://www.wisconsinwatch.org) to read our stories and make a gift!

Emily Shullaw for Wisconsin Watch

This illustration was published on Sept. 8, 2019, with an investigative report that included interviews with “Roberto,” one of 14 men from Mexico who were allegedly victimized by a labor-trafficking scheme that transported legal temporary farm

workers from Georgia to work illegally at a Racine-area farm. “Sometimes the manager was angry and didn’t give us water. (We) told him that there was no water – it seemed intentional,” “Roberto” said.

