

# Annual Report



# A note from the founders



(Narayan Mahon for Wisconsin Watch)

As the pandemic stretched into its second year, and threats to our democracy intensified, the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism and its news outlet, Wisconsin Watch, pushed forward with bold plans to reshape the state's journalistic ecosystem.

The biggest headline: The American Journalism Project awarded WCIJ and Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service a transformational three-year, \$1.4 million grant that will dramatically expand each organization, beginning with business and audience development. It also funds a full-time project director for the organizations' joint News414 project, an information system serving Black and Hispanic-majority neighborhoods in Milwaukee.

Other highlights from 2021: We produced 74 stories picked up by more than 360 news outlets, reaching an estimated audience of 60 million in 34 states. These stories garnered nearly two dozen state, regional and national awards. We trained a record 12 interns and fellows – part of our commitment to ensuring that the next generation is equipped with investigative journalism and entrepreneurship skills.

And we raised a record \$1.6 million in revenue, including gifts from 706 individual donors, the largest number ever. Thanks to all of you for supporting journalism that improves and saves lives in Wisconsin and beyond.

**Andy Hall**  
*Executive Director  
& Co-founder*

**Dee J. Hall**  
*Managing Editor  
& Co-founder*



(Coburn Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch)

## Who we are

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism is an independent, nonpartisan and nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization that reports on government accountability and quality of life issues, including criminal and racial justice, education, health, the economy and environment.

Wisconsin Watch embraces anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusiveness in all of our journalism and operations.

We dig into undercovered issues, document inequitable and failing systems, put findings into regional and national contexts and explore potential solutions. We aim to spark impact that improves people's lives and holds power to account. Every investigation is factchecked to ensure that our reporting is accurate and fair.

We train the next generation of journalists and news entrepreneurs through workshops, internships and fellowships, mentoring and collaborations with journalism classes and news organizations. And we share information about journalistic practices, ethics and impact with the public.

We believe in collaborating with, rather than competing against, other news outlets as we strive to build a better and more sustainable news ecosystem. You can find our multimedia reports on [WisconsinWatch.org](https://wisconsinwatch.org) and in hundreds of other news outlets, who receive our stories for free.

We push the traditional boundaries of investigative reporting in search of better ways of connecting with and serving the public.





# Highlights





## AJP growth/expansion

With the 2021 announcement of transformational support from the American Journalism Project, WCIJ is building a revenue and operations team that will support expanding our public service and accountability journalism around Wisconsin. Six full-time roles are being created at WCIJ and Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service to increase the organizations' operational budgets for journalism that represents, informs and engages local communities. It will also strengthen the newsrooms' already close partnership. The positions include a marketing and audience growth director, grants manager, finance and operations manager, development assistant, News414 project director and NNS development director.

## Training

WCIJ trained a record 12 interns and fellows on the news and business sides in 2021. These emerging journalists produced impressive work about the [scourge of dangerous lead pipes](#); a photographic profile of [one of Wisconsin's most polluted waterways](#); [Wisconsin's highest-in-the-nation incarceration rate for Black residents](#); [lack of vaccination among nursing home workers](#); [gaps in a federal program covering COVID-19 funeral expenses](#); and an investigation into a [controversial child abuse pediatrician](#). Wisconsin Watch also led a dozen UW-Madison students in a classroom setting to produce [Color of Money](#), an award-winning examination of the causes and potential solutions to sharp racial disparities in income and wealth in Wisconsin. Business-side interns managed Wisconsin Watch's social media presence, launched our process to measure the diversity of our news sources and tracked the pickups of our stories.

## Accessibility

As we've grown, Wisconsin Watch has worked to improve accessibility to our reporting. We create audio versions of Wisconsin Watch stories, and make them available through all major podcast streaming services. These audio stories have been shared with the Wisconsin Council of the Blind and Visually Impaired, the Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities and the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition. And, through our News414 service journalism initiative, we use targeted text messages and social media posts in English and Spanish on important topics, connecting residents with information they need through the platforms that they use.

## Collaboration

Wisconsin Watch's small staff accomplishes big things through collaborations with other journalists. Our closest collaborator is WPR, which funds an audio reporter embedded in the Wisconsin Watch newsroom. In 2021, WPR also collaborated with Wisconsin Watch to produce a series on a judge's [questionable sentencing practices](#) and on our upcoming podcast and online series, Open and Shut. These two projects were produced as part of the [NEW News Lab](#), a Microsoft-funded collaboration of six news outlets covering crucial issues in Northeast Wisconsin. In addition to our collaboration with Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service on the news and information service [News414](#) for residents of Milwaukee's underserved neighborhoods, we teamed up on investigations with 15 news outlets in Wisconsin and nationwide.





Reggie Jackson, a former tour guide and board member of the American Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee is seen in the museum's gallery on June 16, 2021. (Will Cioci / Wisconsin Watch)

## **Color of Money**

University of Wisconsin-Madison student journalists examined Wisconsin's stark racial disparities in wealth and income for our Color of Money series. Wisconsin has one of the biggest gaps between white and Black income and wealth in the country. The series examined the historical roots and modern-day causes of the disparities and examined potential solutions, including reparations for the descendants of enslaved people, raising the minimum wage, "baby bond" programs that provide nest eggs for low-income young adults and other strategies.



Lakeshore homes are seen in the Door County, Wis., village of Ephraim, on July 31, 2021. Many homeowners have placed large rocks along the shoreline to confront erosion amid wild swings in Lake Michigan's water levels in recent years. (Coburn Dukehart and Tad Dukehart / Wisconsin Watch)

## **Imperiled Shores**

Wisconsin's shoreline communities bear a heavy burden as a climate "tug of war" – evaporation from warming temperatures and increasingly intense storms – drives extreme shifts in Lake Michigan's water levels. This Wisconsin Watch and WPR series explored the efforts by Northeast Wisconsin communities to protect their shorelines from volatile water levels while warning of measures that could worsen the impact for downstream property owners.



# Investigations



Judge Biskupic is pictured in 2018 at the Outagamie County courthouse in Appleton, Wis. (Danny Damiani / USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin)

## Justice Deferred

Wisconsin Watch, in partnership with WPR, investigated an Outagamie County Circuit Court judge who was keeping defendants under his control months or even years after their sentences would have ended. Judge Vincent Biskupic has given dozens of defendants open-ended arrangements that, in some cases, lengthen their entanglement with the criminal justice system. Some experts told Wisconsin Watch and WPR it is, at best, a gray area in criminal law.



Knox is seen testifying on Sept. 14, 2017, at a murder trial of a 3-year-old in Huntington, W.Va. (Courtney Hessler / The (Huntington, W.Va.) Herald-Dispatch)

## Flawed Forensics

Wisconsin Watch, in collaboration with the Anchorage Daily News, investigated questionable child abuse diagnoses by a former University of Wisconsin doctor. The probe uncovered at least 12 cases in which Dr. Barbara Knox diagnosed injuries or illnesses as abuse that were rejected by the criminal justice system and other doctors. Knox left Wisconsin under a cloud of controversy in 2019 to become Alaska's top child abuse pediatrician. She left that position April 1, 2022 amid allegations of misdiagnoses and bullying, similar to those she faced in Wisconsin.





(Coburn Dukehart, Isaac Wasserman / Wisconsin Watch)

## News414

In collaboration with Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service, we expanded our efforts to provide on-demand information and accountability reporting to Milwaukee residents. Since launching in spring 2020, News414 has reached more than 2,600 residents via text – alerting them to job opportunities, rent assistance, nearby food pantries, transportation options and more.

When a powerful storm knocked out power for days across Milwaukee last August, reporters quickly [published and repeatedly updated a list of resources](#) and answers to questions on the NNS website and in two News414 Facebook groups – one [serving English speakers](#) (nearly 900 members) and the other [serving Spanish speakers](#) (more than 300 members). Several residents who rely on state food assistance told us that they had not known they could apply for replacement funds for spoiled groceries. “Thank you for your message as I didn’t know it could be replaced,” one person texted. “I really appreciate it.”

Also in 2021: We hired a translator and bilingual community ambassador to engage with Spanish-speaking residents. That allowed us to offer [bilingual versions](#) of relevant stories.

And we [held an online event](#) centered on tenants’ rights as the end of a federal moratorium on evictions loomed.

Our engagement helped us frame and report [dozens of stories in 2021](#). Those included a [deep examination](#) of a community college’s attempts to better serve local Black and Latino students. We also showed how [Wisconsinites struggled to navigate confusing bureaucracy](#) as they tried to claim federal funeral assistance after their loved ones died of COVID-19. That included a Milwaukee woman who received compensation for her father’s funeral shortly after we published details about her long wait. News414 recently [launched a website](#) to showcase our work to residents and prospective community partners. [Visit news414.org.](#)



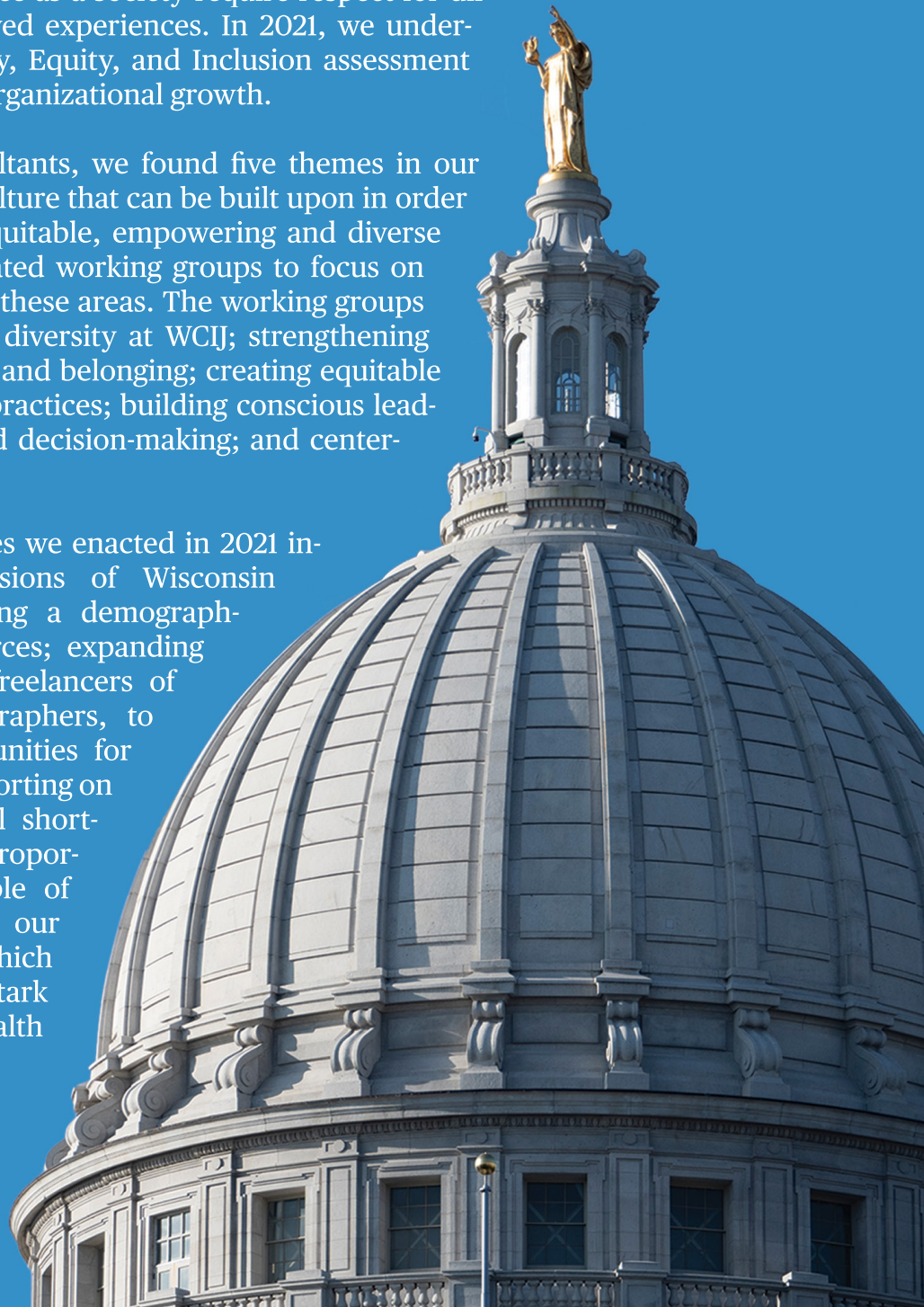
# DEI

Inclusiveness is at the heart of thinking and acting as journalists and the complex issues we face as a society require respect for different viewpoints and lived experiences. In 2021, we undertook an internal Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion assessment and identified areas for organizational growth.

Working with DEI consultants, we found five themes in our current organizational culture that can be built upon in order to create a more just, equitable, empowering and diverse workplace. We have created working groups to focus on and propose solutions in these areas. The working groups are exploring increasing diversity at WCIJ; strengthening our culture of inclusivity and belonging; creating equitable structures, policies and practices; building conscious leadership, management, and decision-making; and centering DEI in journalism.

In addition, DEI initiatives we enacted in 2021 include creating audio versions of Wisconsin Watch stories; developing a demographics survey of news sources; expanding our relationships with freelancers of color, including photographers, to better cover the communities for which we report; and reporting on wrongdoing and societal shortcomings that have a disproportionate impact on people of color statewide, such as our Color of Money series, which examined Wisconsin's stark racial disparities in wealth and income.

(Isaac Wasserman /  
Wisconsin Watch)



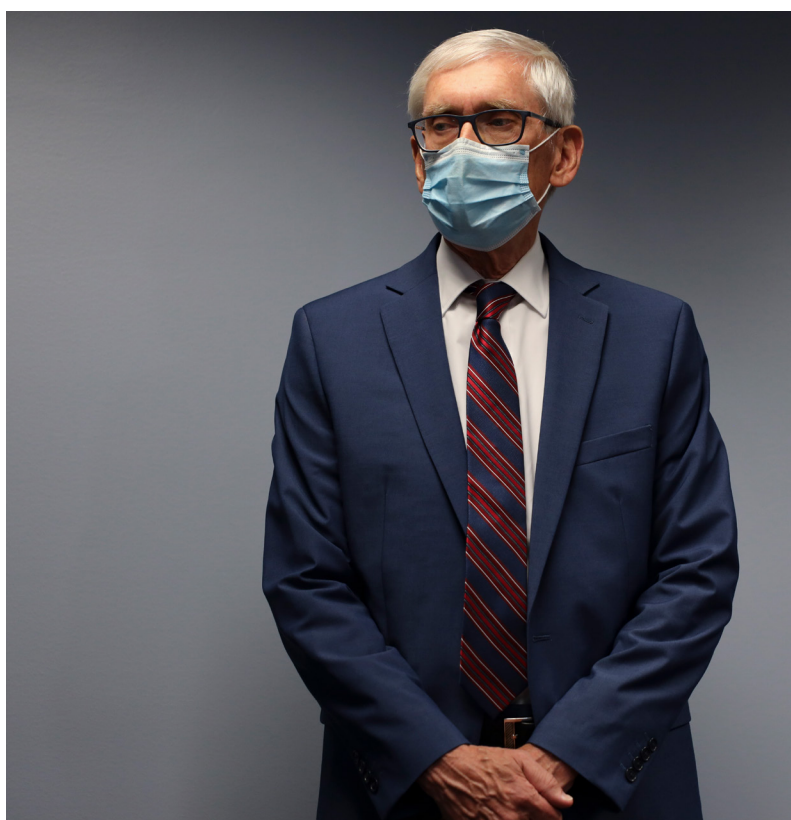








Top photos of 2021



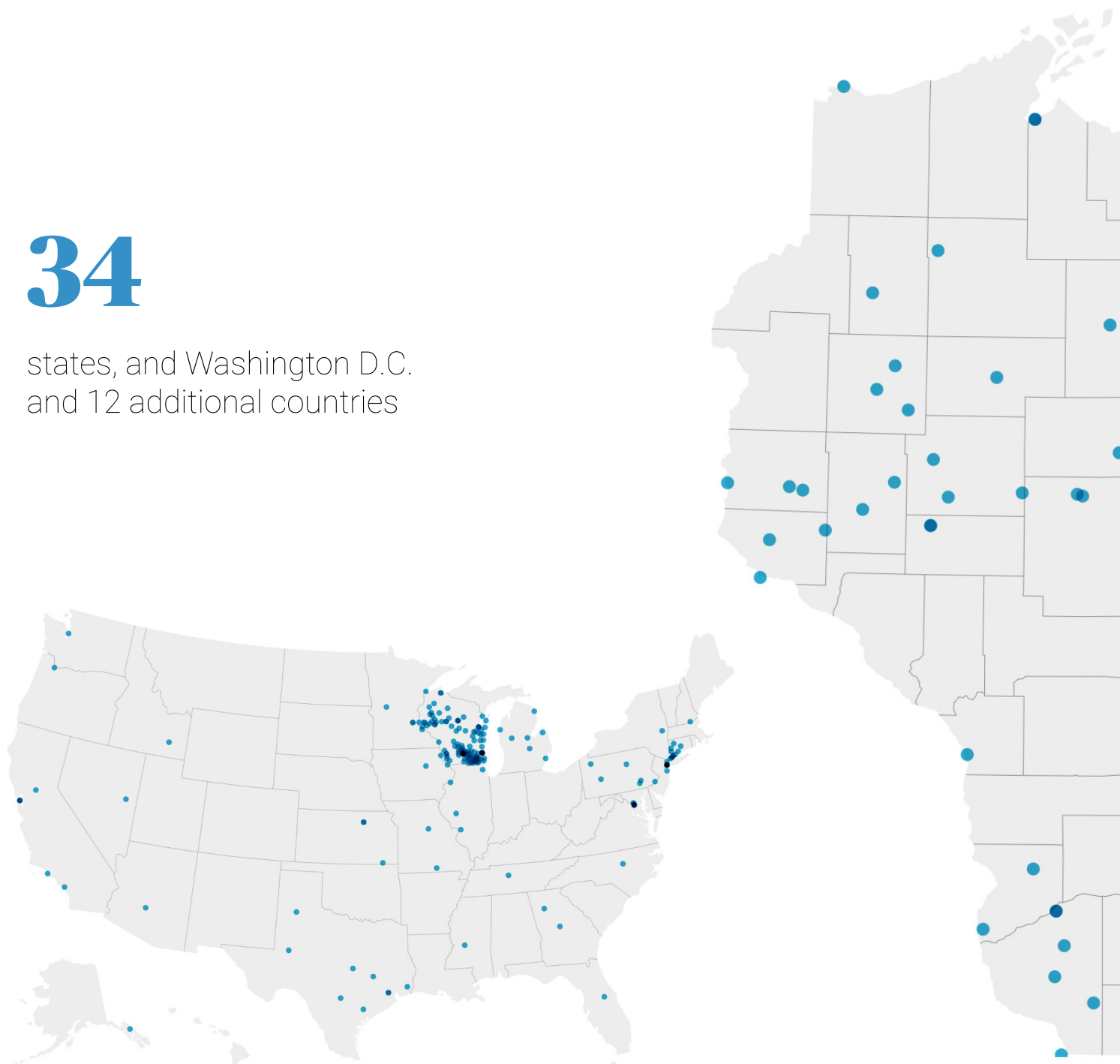


# Audience

These maps show the locations of news organizations in Wisconsin and across the United States that published, broadcast or cited Wisconsin Watch's work from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2021. Darker colors indicate a higher density of news organizations in that area.

## 34

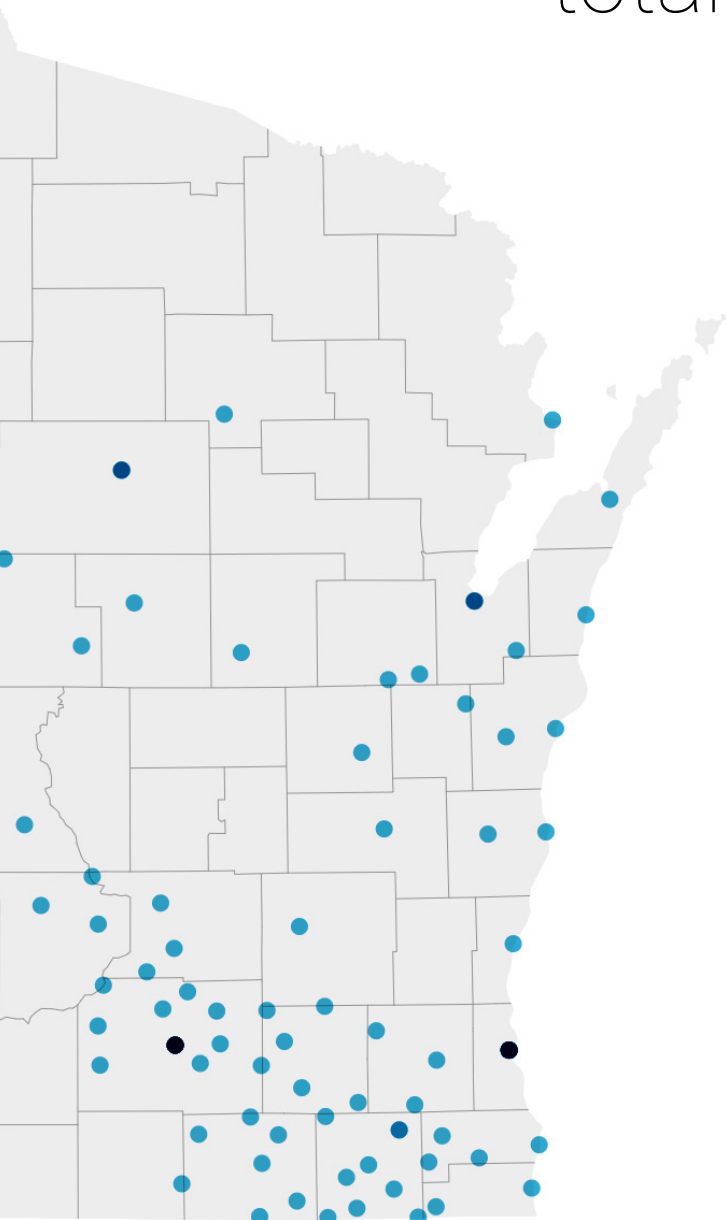
states, and Washington D.C.  
and 12 additional countries





# 60M

total estimated audience



## 2,000

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

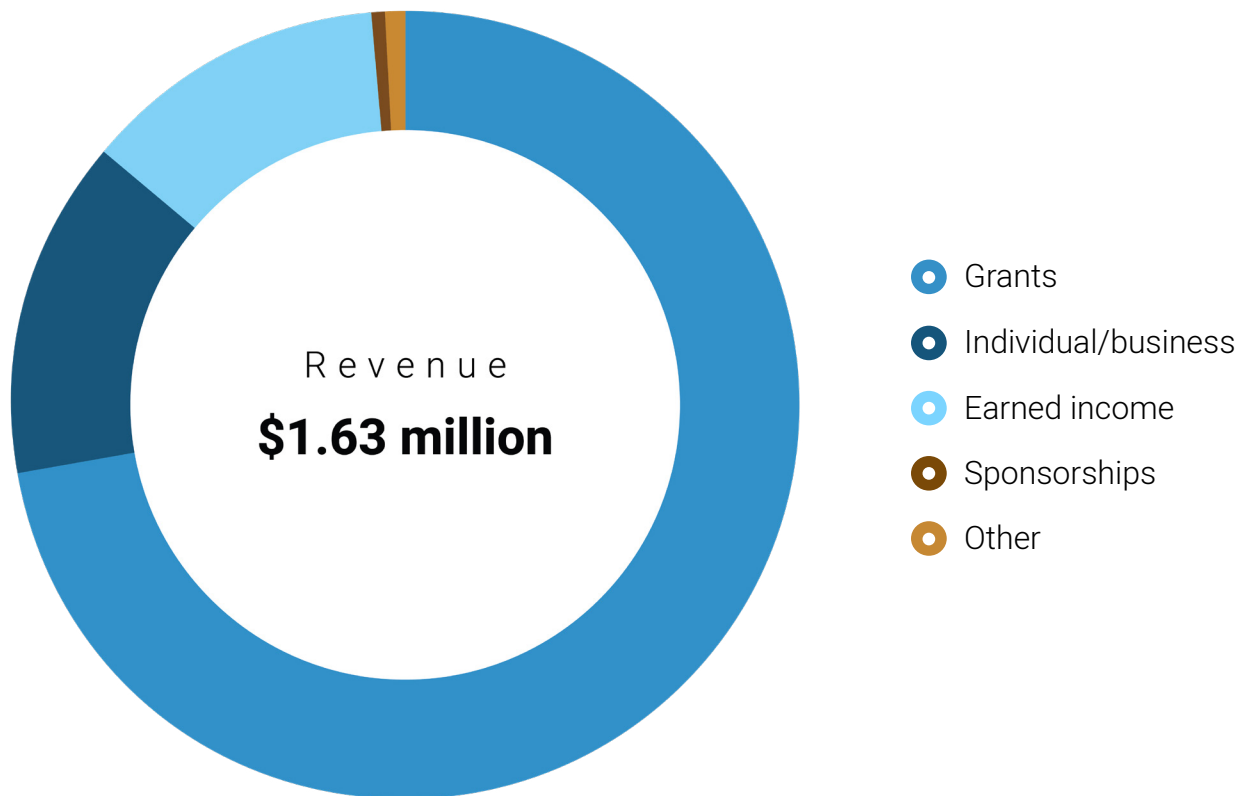
## 360

news organizations published,  
broadcast or cited our work

## 74

investigative reports

# Financials



2020

**\$1.3M**

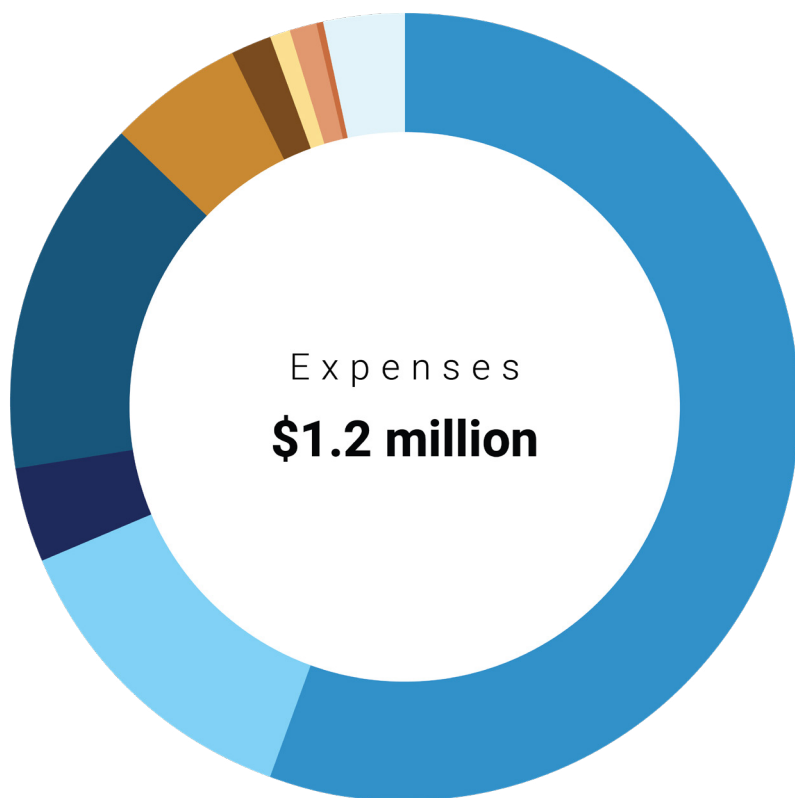
revenue

2021

**\$1.6M**

revenue





- Program staff
- Fundraising staff
- Admin staff
- Contract services
- Marketing & development
- Professional fees
- Travel & meetings
- Web development
- Databases and records
- Other

2022

**\$2.2M**

revenue goal

## Major funders

American Journalism Project • Arnold Ventures  
• Joyce Foundation • Reva and David Logan Foundation • Microsoft • Greater Green Bay Community Foundation • Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region • Inasmuch Foundation • Philip Merrill College at the University of Maryland • Knight Foundation • NewsMatch • Fund for Investigative Journalism • Evjue Foundation • Walton Family Foundation • Institute for Nonprofit News • Herb Kohl Philanthropies • Report for America • UW-Eau Claire Foundation • University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism • Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism • Wisconsin Newspaper Association

## In-kind support

Barbara Johnson  
Marquette University  
Pines Bach  
Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Wisconsin Newspaper Association  
Wisconsin Public Radio  
WisPolitics.com

## 2021 Collaborators





# Awards

## **Third Coast / Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Competition**

*Finalist, Impact category*

Wisconsin Watch and WPR for 'I cried for days': Wisconsin blocks pandemic payments for federal disability aid recipients, reported by Bram Sable-Smith.

## **Eppy Awards**

*Finalists, Best collaborative investigative/enterprise reporting (fewer than 1 million unique visitors)*

Wisconsin Watch and TMJ4 News for "Thousands await jobless aid as Wisconsin leaders blame each other" and Best collaborative college/university & professional website – Wisconsin Watch and University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Journalism & Mass Communication for Color of Money series.

## **Association of Health Care Journalists**

*First place*

First place in the Health Policy (small) division, Lives on Hold; Bram Sable-Smith, Wisconsin Watch and Wisconsin Public Radio.

## **Society of Professional Journalists' Region 6 Mark of Excellence awards**

*Finalist*

UW-Madison student reporter Kayla Huynh was a finalist in the SPJ Region 6 contest for her story on barriers erected to college voters.

## **Regional Edward R. Murrow Award**

*Best Investigative Reporting in the large market radio category in Region Four*

Wisconsin Watch and WPR reporter Bram Sable-Smith was honored for Costly Care, an audio series that exposed the practice of hospitals suing patients for past-due bills during the pandemic.

## **LION Awards**

*Finalists, Community Engagement and Service Award*

Wisconsin Watch and Milwaukee Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service for News414; and Best Coverage of Protests and Movements – For coverage of the protests in Wisconsin sparked by the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

## **INN Awards**

*Honorable mention, journalism partnership of the year*

Wisconsin Watch and Milwaukee NNS for News414.

## **Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism**

*Winner*

TMJ4 News, in collaboration with Wisconsin Watch, was honored for the months-long investigation, Unemployment System Collapse.

## **Webby Awards nomination in Documentary**

*Short form category*

Metcalf Park: Black Vote Rising, a documentary produced by 371 Productions in partnership with Wisconsin Watch exploring efforts to boost the Black vote in Milwaukee.

## **Milwaukee Press Club**

*12 awards*

Three gold, six silver and three bronze – Wisconsin Watch's coverage of racial justice, unemployment, pandemic and other issues.

## **Local that Works contest**

*Finalist*

For News414, a collaboration between Milwaukee NNS, Wisconsin Watch and Outlier Media.



# Join

## **The Watchdog Club**

The Watchdog Club is made up of the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism's most committed and loyal members who support our important mission. Members are Wisconsin Watch's ambassadors. They help Wisconsin Watch excel and innovate while fostering an informed citizenry and strengthening democracy.

Donors of at least \$1,000 become members of our Watchdog Club and receive “behind the story” insights, private events such as coffee conversations with world-renowned journalists, exclusive offers including invitations to our partners’ events and regular updates on Wisconsin Watch and the state of investigative journalism in Wisconsin from Executive Director Andy Hall.

## **The Leadership Circle**

The Watchdog Club Leadership Circle is a network of supporters taking a leadership role in sustaining investigative reporting and the training of investigative journalists.

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.



## Watchdog Club membership

Lynn and Tom Ansfield • Adam Balin and Karin Mahony • Daniel and Karen Barr • Brynn Bemis and Finn Ryan • Judith Bentley • Paul Bickford • Walt Bogdanich and Stephanie Saul • Betsy Brenner and Steve Ostrofsky • Eliot Brown • Stephen Caldwell • Marcus and Sheila Cohen • James Danky and Christine Schelshorn • Brian Davis and Deb Umstead • Andy and Tad Dukehart • Jean Espenshade • Beth Flaherty • Renie Schapiro • Caroline Fribance • Lewis Friedland and Stacey Olikier • Pam Gilbert and Charles Lewis • Stephen Glass • Chris and Erin Glueck • Elke and Rob Hagge • Janet and Philip Hasler • Vince Jenkins and Stefanie Moritz • Margaret Jones and David Linton • Douglas and Martha Lee • Troy Lethem and Mary Matthias • Donna and Scott Lewein • Karen Lincoln Michel and Roberto Michel • Peter Livingston and Sharon Stark • Richard Luxton • Bonnie and Jack Mitchell • Greg and Michaela Moy • Elizabeth Neary • David Nelson and Brook Soltvedt • Carol O'Leary • Kristine O'Leary • Dick and Noel Pearson • Dick Record • Tom Terry • Carol and John Toussaint • Michael Vinson • Tom and Mim Warren • Roger and Kristi Williams • Norm Fost

## Leadership Circle membership

Herman Baumann and Kay Schwichtenberg • Mary Burke • Lau and Bea Christensen Charitable Foundation • Howard Cosgrove and Susan Troller Cosgrove • Betty and Corkey Custer • Mark and Sara Eversden • Wendy Fearnside and Bruce Meier • Andy and Dee J. Hall • Larry Hands and Karen Kendrick-Hands • Phil and Tricia Hands • Sally Mead Hands Foundation • Barbara Johnson • Julilly Kohler • Adel Korkor • Cynthia LaConte • David and Madeleine Lubar • David and Marion Meissner • Catherine Orr • Loud Hound Foundation • Peters Family Foundation • Wm. Collins Kohler Foundation

## The Legacy Society

The Legacy Society is a group of supporters helping to build a legacy that will inform Wisconsin residents and strengthen our democracy for decades to come by transforming the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism into a larger, more financially resilient institution. They are visionary philanthropists who want to ensure financial stability and a strong future for the Center.

Legacy Society members have included the Center in their estate plans, including wills, trusts, retirement plan distributions and life insurance. Your planned gift makes you a lifetime member of the Legacy Society. Learn more about ways to join the Legacy Society at [wisconsinwatch.org/legacy-society](http://wisconsinwatch.org/legacy-society)

## Legacy Society founding members

*Barbara Johnson*

*Renie Schapiro*

*Carol T. Toussaint*

*Peter Livingston and Sharon Stark*

If you have already included the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism in your estate plan, thank you, and we want to hear from you so we can acknowledge your generosity!

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Visit [wisconsinwatch.org/watchdog-club](http://wisconsinwatch.org/watchdog-club) or contact Wisconsin Watch development director Jay Burseth at [jburseth@wisconsinwatch.org](mailto:jburseth@wisconsinwatch.org) to learn more about joining the Watchdog Club or Legacy Society, or to give a donation of any amount.



[wisconsinwatch.org](http://wisconsinwatch.org)