

FIJ – SUPPORTING INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING PROJECTS AROUND THE WORLD

People and Publications in this Issue

- Robin Amer – USAToday
- Chandra Thomas Whitfield – NBC News
- Trevor Aaronson – Mother Jones

News from FIJ

- The [Tides Foundation](#) of San Francisco, on the recommendation of another (anonymous) donor, has made a \$10,000 donation to support FIJ.
- Following a \$10,000 grant from a Colorado-based donor, FIJ is now within \$5,000 of reaching a \$25,000 matching challenge grant from the [Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation](#) (EEJF), one of our longtime funders. This is in addition to \$50,000 received from EEJF earlier this year. FIJ has until January 31, 2019, to secure the final \$5,000 in donations to receive the matching grant, so there is plenty of time for you to consider how to invest any upcoming holiday windfall. Or, you can donate now at the [FIJ donations page](#).

Investigation Spotlights



*John C. Young protests in front of the Mobile Government Plaza.
Photo by Tim Jones*

- In [a story](#) for **NBC News**—and her latest piece on domestic violence in the black community—FIJ and Schuster Institute Fellow **Chandra Thomas Whitfield** tells of police sergeant John C. Young, who, speaking in April as a private citizen, asked the Mobile City Council to address the issue of black women being killed by intimate partner violence.

Young received a tepid response.

As Young told the council, five black women were killed in Mobile, Alabama, in 2016, six in 2017 and five by April this year. That is 16 women dead, mostly at the hands of black men, over three years in this small Southern city.

A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study notes that black women are 35 percent more likely to be victims of domestic violence than white women. In the story, L.A. author Sa'iyda Shabazz says silence about the issue for many in the black community stems from worries of contributing to the racist stereotype that black men are more violent than men of other races.

Meanwhile, Young says he will continue his one-man crusade despite the city council's lack of response.

- FIJ thanks The Ford Foundation for providing the funding for this project.

Investigation Spotlights *cont'd.*



A City of Chicago car drives past the illegal dump site at the center of the investigation. Photo by Brian Jackson

- [The City](#), a new investigative podcast from **USA TODAY**, tells the story of an undercover FBI investigation that failed to win justice for a black Chicago neighborhood that had been the victim of illegal dumping perpetrated by the mob.

The City was created by investigative reporter **Robin Amer**, who received bridge funding for the show from FIJ.

The story begins in Chicago in 1990. Highways are rebuilt, old buildings demolished, new parks and skyscrapers erected. But all that rubble has to go somewhere: a pair of vacant lots in a black, working-class neighborhood called North Lawndale.

At the helm of this operation is a guy sporting a Cosby sweater, manicured nails, and underworld connections: John Christopher. For more than a decade, what Christopher does on this lot is a tour through the underbelly of Chicago: aldermen get indicted; an FBI investigation goes awry; a neighborhood gets polluted with impunity. And a community's resilience is tested—all under the specter of racism in America.

- FIJ thanks The Park Foundation for providing the funding for this project.

Mother Jones

- In 2011, FIJ helped fund investigative reporter **Trevor Aaronson's** research into the FBI's program of recruiting informants to break terrorist plots within the U.S. That reporting became the [award-winning Mother Jones](#) magazine story "[The Informants](#)," which Aaronson wrote while a fellow at the [Investigative Reporting Program](#) at the University of California, Berkeley. Part of that Mother Jones story followed the FBI's involvement with counterterrorism informant Shahed Hussain – the owner of the company whose limousine crashed in upstate New York on October 6, killing 20. Ironically, Hussain's relationship with the FBI began when he was caught running a scam at [the New York DMV](#).

Aaronson, now the Executive Director of the [Florida Center for Investigative Reporting](#) and a contributor to [The Intercept](#), says, "I think there's a valid question here about whether this horrible accident would have happened had the FBI not protected this guy from deportation and prosecution for [more than a decade](#)."

Frequently Asked Questions about FIJ Applications

There are many questions that come up in each round of applications, and several that probably should. Below is a list of these queries, which we plan to post to the website in the near future. Please feel free to share them with any potential applicants.

1 – What makes a good proposal?

A good story pitch written for an editor would be very similar to a good proposal written for an FIJ grant. Get to the point. What is the main question your investigation seeks to answer? What is your road map for tracking down information? Is the

information obtainable through public records, interviews, or your own observations?
What has your preliminary research found?

2 – What is your definition of “investigative”?

Uncovering wrongdoing by powerful people and/or institutions.

3 – What is your definition of “groundbreaking”?

Something important that was previously unknown or hidden.

4 – May I go deeper into a topic that has been in the news recently?

Perhaps. Explain how your investigation would significantly advance the story, or the understanding of the issue.

5 – Is there a successful proposal you can provide as a sample?

Sorry, no. Application materials are confidential.

6 – What expenses will FIJ cover?

Generally, FIJ covers hard costs such as travel and data collection, and often grants small stipends. See [the sample budget](#) for guidance.

7 – What expenses won’t FIJ cover?

FIJ cannot help you rent office space, purchase office supplies, or buy equipment. However, FIJ will cover the cost of equipment rental. FIJ also will not cover budgets that are submitted without itemized details.

8 – What is the word limit for a proposal?

The summary shouldn’t exceed 100 words; the proposal shouldn’t exceed 1,000 words.

9 – Why do you require a letter of commitment?

FIJ does not have the staffing nor the capacity to find news outlets for completed work and will not make grants for projects that might never find an audience.

10 – I’m having trouble getting a letter of commitment. The editor wants to see a copy of the story before committing. I’m sure if I get funding, I will get published (or aired). May I apply?

No. But do show your editor the sample language that we suggest (on the [Apply For a Grant](#) page) for the letter of commitment.

It is a pledge **“that the news outlet will publish or air the specific story you propose – as long as it meets the publication’s expectations and standards.”** It is a commitment, not an ironclad contract. FIJ cannot compel a news organization to publish something that does not meet its standards.

11 – I have more than two work samples I’d like to send.

That’s great! But select and send the best two.

12 – Does FIJ take phone calls to discuss project ideas or grant requirements?

Yes. But first look over the [FIJ website](#), especially the [Apply For a Grant](#) page.



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- 13 – Who reviews applications and chooses recipients?
The FIJ board of directors reviews all applications.
- 14 – Can you give me written feedback on a proposal before I apply?
We can't provide written reviews, but if you call, we can answer specific questions.
- 15 – May I ask board members for feedback and information?
We ask that you don't. If you question a board member about a proposal, they are required to recuse themselves from the review process.
- 16 – Is there a deadline for finishing a funded project?
The project deadline is one year from grant notification.
- 17 – If I am working on a grant project now, may I apply again for a new project?
No. Finish the first project before applying for a new grant.
- 18 – If I received a grant in the past, may I apply for a new project?
Yes. However, if a grantee has received several grants over the years, the board may take a pass on future applications.
- 19 – Does FIJ fund book projects?
Yes. In this case, authors must submit a copy of a signed contract in place of the letter of commitment.
- 20 – Does FIJ fund international reporting?
Some, if the story has a strong American angle and is published in the US.
- 21 – May I apply with a partner?
Yes, though one person must take responsibility for the grant.
- 22 – Does FIJ fund photo or other visual reporting projects?
Yes. Though photos would probably need text to explain the investigative findings. Video projects definitely qualify, and we also encourage other storytelling platforms, including audio.
- 23 – May I apply to more than one organization that funds investigative work?
Yes, as long as you disclose this in the application and budget. FIJ does not require exclusivity.
- 24 – How would FIJ prefer to be recognized?
FIJ would appreciate a credit in the primary medium that distributes the project. For example: "This report was supported by a grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism."

The FIJ Newsletter was compiled by Jerry Redfern.

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FIJ GRANT DEADLINE: MONDAY, FEB. 4, 2019, 11:59 EST