



**2019**

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

**SOLUTIONS  
JOURNALISM  
NETWORK**



# Letter of Introduction

**IN OUR 2018 ANNUAL REPORT**, we wrote: “What is increasingly clear is that solutions journalism is not just a useful tool for journalists. It’s critical to the national debate about how to save journalism.”

That debate continued throughout 2019 and is still at the forefront of “the news about news” today — as legacy and emerging outlets alike struggle to earn public trust, survive financially, pursue reporting that has meaningful impact, and address journalism’s own complicity in fostering deficit-based, often dehumanizing, narratives about Black and other historically excluded communities.

What is no longer being debated, however, is this: People are increasingly avoiding the steady drumbeat of news about threats, incompetence, conflict and corruption. Without a balance of coverage that also reveals possibilities for responding to challenges, the news makes them feel depressed, powerless — even sick.

Which is why 2019 was a year of growth for the Solutions Journalism Network.

Solutions journalism offers a solid reason to return to the news: to make sense of reality so that the public is equipped to build a better society. By reporting thoughtfully on how people are responding to problems — looking for lessons from success or failure — solutions journalism sharpens accountability, offers a more comprehensive and accurate view of the world, circulates timely knowledge, and helps strengthen the belief — and, yes, hope — that a better world is possible: something we all need more than ever. Having equipped hundreds of newsrooms and thousands of journalists in the practice of solutions journalism, we sought this past year to extend solutions journalism further: beyond the practice of reporting into the fabric of community life.

In 2019, for example, SJN launched the Local Media Project, a five-year effort to strengthen and reinvigorate local media ecosystems. The project builds on the success of Resolve Philly, an SJN-incubated collective that now includes 23 newsrooms and one university and has produced agenda-shaping coverage of prisoner reentry and economic mobility in Philadelphia. The Local Media Project gathers news and civic organizations in communities across the nation and helps them collaborate on solutions-focused coverage that transforms both journalism and the way people engage with it.



*Panel composed of community organizers from the “Funding the Hustle” event at Quorum in West Philadelphia on July 17, 2019.*



Our Renewing Democracy initiative, launched in 2018 and expanded in 2019, helps local news outlets highlight how community groups, civic institutions and governments are endeavoring to make democracy work better — covering efforts aimed at increasing democratic access and participation, reforming the machinery of democracy, or demonstrating how civic groups can drive change and hold public officials accountable. The emerging stories reflect a powerful real-time curriculum for building a healthy democracy.

And Complicating the Narratives, an initiative built upon Amanda Ripley’s 2018 research, offers journalists interviewing and listening techniques designed to help communities see and move beyond simplistic and polarizing frames, so people can engage in constructive public discourse about divisive issues.

Every crisis is an opportunity. With the emotional weight of news having become so heavy, more journalists now accept that stories are incomplete and unhelpful when they focus only on crisis, incompetence and corruption. There is more agreement that they must also reveal creativity, agency and decency — sources of strength and insight that span racial, demographic and political lines.

Now, as we write this in the summer of 2020, the whole world is focused on overcoming COVID-19. This represents an unprecedented opportunity to get smarter together. But to make that possibility a reality, we must do more than critique our failures; we must scour the world for ideas and innovations, small and large, that show us how to cope, adapt, care and rebuild better — and then share the news.





JOURNALISM  
FOR BUILDING A

# BETTER WORLD

Amanda Ripley, journalist and author, whose research inspired SJN's Complicating the Narratives (CTN) initiative.

**E**VERY DAY, THE NEWS informs us about the world's most serious problems. This is vitally important — but it's not enough. Around the globe, people are also making progress against seemingly intractable issues.

Too often, these stories are missing from the news. This one-sided approach doesn't capture reality and has resulted in disengagement and despair. Imagine a world where, every day, people are informed not only about problems, but also about the ways in which people and communities are effectively responding to them.

This is what solutions journalism is all about. Telling the whole story. Uncovering, scrutinizing and spreading ideas that point the way to possibilities. Restoring trust in news, strengthening participatory democracy, and revealing credible avenues for hope.

## IMPACT SNAPSHOT

The Montgomery Advertiser in Alabama set out to learn how systematically integrating solutions journalism across its newsroom could help it build a better news product. Bro Krift, executive editor of the Advertiser, set clear goals with his news team, asking, for example, that reporters begin all stories with the question: Who's doing it better? His goal was to become the best newsroom in the USA Today network regardless of size, and in 2019, the Advertiser grew its page views more than any other Gannett paper. Most importantly, Krift said, solutions journalism helped the Advertiser build a better relationship with the community it covers. And it has diversified. In a majority-Black city, the paper no longer serves primarily a white audience.



# Applying the Solutions Lens to Urgent Issues

**FOUNDED IN 2013** by award-winning journalists David Bornstein, Tina Rosenberg and Courtney Martin, SJN is engaging with hundreds of newsrooms and thousands of journalists throughout the U.S., Europe, Africa and Latin America. Its proven approach includes:

- TRAINING** journalists to report on responses to social problems and working with newsrooms to integrate solutions reporting into their coverage;
- SUPPORTING** solutions-focused coverage of society’s most urgent issues — deepening public understanding while driving engagement, trust, accountability and revenue;
- CONNECTING** journalists and news organizations to share, learn and collaborate;
- SHARING** high-quality solutions stories with people and institutions who use them to make change.

The report that follows is a snapshot of 2019, a year in which our credibility and the widespread growth of our network enabled us to scale our work, launch new initiatives and turn our focus to some of the most pressing issues facing journalists and communities today.

## HOPE WITH TEETH

*You’ll know it’s solutions journalism if the reporting actually includes:*



### A RESPONSE

A focus on a response to a social problem — and on how that response has worked, or why it hasn’t



### INSIGHT

One or more “teachable lessons” that make the response relevant and accessible to others



### EVIDENCE

Data or qualitative results that indicate effectiveness, or lack thereof



### LIMITATIONS

Revealing shortcomings, representing those weaknesses accurately and placing them in context



## Initiative Highlights

### RENEWING DEMOCRACY

For a democracy to flourish, the public must believe the government can be held accountable, the political process is fair, and the people have the power to reshape institutions and change society for the better.

Today, many Americans feel that the government is indifferent to their concerns and that everyday people are powerless to make a difference. The news has contributed to these problems by depicting reality through a narrative of brokenness and conflict. Our Renewing Democracy initiative, launched in 2018, aimed to catalyze 100 projects on voting and elections, and citizen-led change. In 2019, newsrooms across the nation wrote about places where people were strengthening the elections process, boosting voter registration and turnout, and removing barriers to voting and running for office.

These projects provided the public with information about how to protect the health of our democracy, a subject too often neglected. They increased public understanding of interventions aimed at protecting fair voting, including what is effective and what isn’t, and why. They also countered the nation’s narrative of brokenness and the perception by many citizens that they have little power to effect change through democratic processes. Many of these stories were connected to community engagement activities that amplified the impact of the reporting and connected it to constructive civic conversation.

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

With a Renewing Democracy grant, the Indigenous Media Freedom Alliance looked at how Montana built one of **the highest rates** of American Indian representation in a state legislature. It also looked at why North Dakota hasn’t come close to those figures. Ruth Buffalo, the first Native American Democratic woman elected to the North Dakota Legislature, linked to the story in her written testimony to the U.S. Congress.



COMPLICATING THE NARRATIVES

In 2018, SJN commissioned groundbreaking research by journalist Amanda Ripley to explore what journalists can learn from the strategies used by conflict mediators to better reveal the complexity of stories centered around contentious issues. In her report, “Complicating the Narratives,” Ripley explains: “The idea is to revive complexity in a time of false simplicity.” The research uncovered a set of skills journalists can develop to source, report and produce stories about polarizing issues in a manner that can reduce rather than inflame divisions.

In 2019, SJN launched our Complicating the Narratives (CTN) initiative, translating the foundational research into a set of resources and trainings for journalists that provide a more sensitized, humanized and nuanced understanding of people today. The curriculum focuses on four key pillars that journalists can implement to strengthen (and depolarize) their coverage:



Participants at the North Carolina Humanities Council’s “Can We Talk?” forum practice complicating the narratives.

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

In Laconia, New Hampshire, The Laconia Daily Sun used CTN as the framework for a virtual training for its most ardent Letters to the Editor contributors. As a result of the CTN training, the paper’s leadership developed new protocols for its editorials and opinion pages that emphasize constructive dialogue and encourage its letter writers to work together across divides to submit jointly signed letters that present differing opinions in more respectful ways.





## LINKING SOLUTIONS TO REVENUE

Local news organizations, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, are rethinking their business models — demonstrating anew the value of local news and forging more powerful relationships with their audiences in ways that can help them stay alive through very tough economic times. SJN has seen that solutions journalism can help drive this change, by strengthening both the news product itself and the quality of engagement it inspires.

In 2019, we launched the Solutions Journalism Revenue Project as a laboratory to help local news organizations connect the dots between the solutions approach and new revenue. We’ve assembled a cohort of 12 news organizations, representing diverse media types and geographies, that are committed to experimenting intensively with solutions reporting and strategies to increase revenue from memberships, subscriptions, corporate sponsorship, grants, underwriting of special beats or verticals, community events and more. In addition to training and coaching from SJN staff and issue experts, newsrooms have received modest grants to support solutions journalism projects, business experiments and fundraising appeals. The work of this group will play out through 2020, and insights gained from their efforts and successes will inform our ongoing work.

*In October 2019, SJN hosted a revenue summit in Mansfield, Ohio, where the Richland Source has used solutions journalism as a way to serve its community and generate revenue. Sharon Chan, vice president of philanthropy at The New York Times, discusses how news outlets can make money with solutions journalism. SJN distilled more lessons from the summit [here](#).*

## EXPANDING INTERNATIONALLY

SJN continued to build its presence outside the U.S. in 2019, laying the foundation for expansion over the next three years. Our early efforts in Europe, East Africa and Latin America have leveraged judicious local partnerships to meet the steadily growing demand for our work.

We have raised the stature of solutions journalism in Europe, where our region manager has established credibility and visibility in a critical market — as well as highly productive relationships with both A-list newsrooms and high-potential new media startups. We hosted a “train-the-trainer” workshop in Prague at the end of the year, featuring journalists and educators from 21 different countries committed to spreading solutions journalism locally.

The Nation Media Group in East and Central Africa, Nigeria Health Watch and the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism in South Africa have become leading practitioners of the solutions approach. SJN’s partnership with Nairobi-based Science Africa to train journalists at eight news organizations has yielded more than 100 stories, mostly focused on health and agriculture issues and the majority of them solutions-oriented. And we’ve been gratified to see nearly 250 journalists from Africa sign up as members of SJN’s Hub, indicating an energetic community of practice.

Our partnership with Fundación Gabo in Cartagena, Colombia has ignited widespread interest in, and enthusiasm for, solutions journalism across Latin America and revealed a promising foundation for growth. A five-day intensive “train-the-trainer” workshop for 16 journalists was the first event in a comprehensive training program across the region that reached an audience of 181 journalists. In addition, hundreds of journalists have availed themselves of the online resources, such as story collections, put together by Fundación Gabo and SJN. We received 103 applications for eight grants of \$1,000 each to support the production of individual solutions journalism pieces.

In the meantime, SJN’s core solutions reporting curriculum is now available in 13 languages, and we are routinely translating other resources into Spanish, French and German to meet the growing professional appetite in news organizations around the world.

### IMPACT SNAPSHOT

While Fabrice Le Lous from La Nación, the Costa Rican daily newspaper, had been making forays into solutions journalism before a May 2019 workshop SJN organized in Cartagena, Colombia, he seized on the workshop opportunity to hone his craft. In August 2019, he published a multimedia solutions feature on single-use plastics, a hot-button topic in environmentally conscious Costa Rica, that included a visual story tracking every piece of single-use plastic that journalists in the newsroom consumed in a week. SJN named the series one of the 20 best solutions journalism stories of 2019.



*Journalists participating in the Media Challenge Fellowship Group meet in small breakout sessions for a solutions journalism training in Uganda.*





Amy Walker worked with student journalists from Quinnipiac University to facilitate community listening stations and publish solutions stories on programs reducing food insecurity for the **Hamden Hunger Project** in Connecticut.

Caleb Okereke launched **Minority Africa**, a Uganda-based digital solutions journalism outlet created by and for African minority individuals and communities, in December 2019.

Julia Migné expanded INKLINE's global solutions reporting platform, training **dozens of journalists** in climate solutions reporting.

### LEDE: SUPPORTING JOURNALISM ENTREPRENEURS

In 2019, SJN launched the **LEDE Fellowship**, a new initiative to support journalism entrepreneurs in creating and leading projects that spread solutions journalism in their communities. This fellowship is an opportunity for entrepreneurs leading solutions journalism projects to connect and learn from one another and accelerate the spread of solutions journalism, both creating local impact and seeding national conversations.

The 21 fellows across 12 time zones are working on projects that **L**everage their networks, **E**ngage the community the journalism informs, **D**isseminate solutions stories, and **E**levate untold stories and unheard voices.

### STRENGTHENING LOCAL MEDIA ECOSYSTEMS

The intersection of collaboratives and solutions journalism is an exciting model for informing and engaging all segments of a community in the local media landscape, with coverage and outreach that is more inclusive and reflective of the overall demographics of the population than any individual member might otherwise achieve.

In 2019, SJN launched the Local Media Project, a five-year initiative to strengthen and reinvigorate local media ecosystems. As part of this effort, SJN is catalyzing at least 15 collaboratives that will report on a pressing challenge in a community with a solutions journalism perspective in order to change the prevailing negative narrative around the issue and stimulate audience engagement.

The project kicked off with collaboratives in Philadelphia; Charlotte, North Carolina; and New Hampshire. Each year, we add new collaboratives, which receive active support from SJN for two years. At the end of this period they remain in the network, but are expected to be financially self-sufficient. The most recent cohort includes Wichita, Kansas; Cleveland/Akron; and, in partnership with the Local Media Association, Chicago and Oklahoma City/Tulsa.

In addition, SJN has launched a collaborative in western New York state and is convening a sister collaborative in Southeast Michigan. In a groundbreaking effort, these two collaboratives will work jointly on the same area of coverage with a solutions perspective.

**IMPACT SNAPSHOT**

Members of the Charlotte Journalism Collaborative exposed a major problem with federal housing vouchers: One out of three expires before it is used. They went beyond reporting on the problem, uncovering effective responses from other places. U.S. Rep. Alma Adams took notice, **calling for the expansion of the federal Housing Choice Vouchers Program**, and the Charlotte Housing Authority adopted one of the responses that emerged from the reporting.



Members of the Charlotte, North Carolina, Journalism Collaborative take questions during one of their virtual town halls.



“TELL ME SOMETHING GOOD”

In 2019, SJN took a big step forward in its partnership with Google Creative Lab producing “Tell Me Something Good,” a daily audio spot of solutions journalism for users of Google Assistant. Each day, SJN staff members summarize one story, chosen from the **Solutions Story Tracker**.

Initially, Google’s robot-voice did the talking. In July 2019, that robot gave way to “Tell Me Something Good” co-hosts Jay Woodward and Julia Hotz, SJN’s Communities Manager. Five times a week, they discuss a solutions story in less than a minute, and provide a link to the original reporting so that people can read and learn more.

In 2019, Google asked SJN to develop two-way interviews with journalists featured in our Solutions Story Tracker for the debut of its Google Assistant news service. And Creative Lab staff members started work on their own versions of “Tell Me Something Good” in Germany, Australia, Brazil and Mexico.



SJN’s Communities Manager Julia Hotz records a segment for “Tell Me Something Good.”



Participants in the 2019 Solutions Journalism Educators Academy at the University of Oregon.

EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION OF JOURNALISTS: J-SCHOOLS

As interest in solutions journalism continued to grow, SJN enlisted a small group of professors to help design and launch an initiative introducing the practice at journalism schools across the country.

After the successful launch of the Solutions Journalism Educator Academy at the University of Oregon in 2018, the program continued in 2019.

SJN hired a full-time director of journalism school partnerships, who now annually trains and supports scores of professors teaching solutions journalism at more than 100 colleges and universities nationwide. An initiative seeded in 2019 led to a two-day Educator Academy for 14 journalism professors at historically Black colleges and universities in 2020. By incorporating solutions journalism into the curricula of journalism programs at colleges and universities nationwide, SJN aims to provide faculty the support they need to prepare students emerging from school ready to immediately apply the approach in their professional careers.

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

Kenny Jacoby, an investigative data reporter with the USA Today Network, published a series on athletes transferring to NCAA schools after being disciplined for sex offenses at other colleges. After the series ran, Congress issued a bipartisan call for an independent study of NCAA policies, and the NCAA launched an internal review. Two of the colleges that had previously perpetuated this so-called predator pipeline began pre-vetting athletes who transferred from other schools, following a model Jacoby featured in **the solutions story in the series**, which has been shown to effectively halt the practice. Jacoby, who learned about solutions journalism as a student in the very first course of its kind offered at the University of Oregon, told SJN his series would not have had the same impact if it had not shown readers an effective path forward.



## BRINGING SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM TO TV

While solutions journalism remains a relatively new concept in local television news, SJN is working to spread the practice in outlets across the country and seeing promising results. Traditionally, many stations have resisted budging from a formula of sensational coverage that is often captured by the adage “If it bleeds, it leads.” But in 2019, after a successful pilot at the ABC affiliate in Cleveland, SJN recruited and trained 15 television stations interested in solutions journalism.

SJN also developed a **solutions journalism playbook** highlighting key lessons in scaling the practice across local TV newsrooms. For example, since turnover is a fact of life in TV newsrooms, we advise newsrooms to designate a solutions journalism “champion” or trainer to bring newly hired staff up to speed and to provide story guidance. SJN also suggests that newsrooms remind reporters to ask key questions regularly when covering stories, including: “Who’s doing it better?” “How are you measuring success?” and “What are the limitations of this approach?” We’ve also learned that an enthusiastic marketing, promotions or creative services staff can be a major asset in a solutions project when it is involved from the start.



WALA-TV reporters in Mobile, Alabama

### IMPACT SNAPSHOT

In 2019, KXAN, the NBC affiliate in Austin, Texas, launched a project called **Save Our Students** to explore what was working to prevent youth suicide, bullying and school shootings. Drawing on advice from an SJN training to “flip the frame” when a problem has been covered extensively, the newsroom sent teams to California and Ohio to investigate potential solutions for improving mental health in schools. Almost half the KXAN team contributed to Save Our Students, producing 40 stories, including multiple digital features, and engaging the community through several live events, including two town hall meetings.

“It seems like the audience wanted this type of content,” said Josh Hinkle, director of investigations and innovation. “They wanted to know that there was a possibility that this problem could be fixed. It garnered an interest that we hadn’t seen before.”



## SHARING INSIGHTS AND INFORMING ACTION

As more journalists and newsrooms adopt the solutions approach, they are building a body of stories that provide insights into responses to society's most urgent problems.

SJN's Knowledge Dissemination team is charged with circulating this work in order to realize the enormous potential of this distinctive knowledge asset.

In April 2019, SJN partnered with **Drawdown Ecochallenge**, a program focused on reducing carbon in the atmosphere. We connected more than 4,000 participants to hundreds of stories from our Solutions Story Tracker. These stories highlighted responses to climate change in areas including transportation, land use and electricity.

Elizabeth Zabodsky, executive director, Ecochallenge.org, said in an email to SJN, "From a low-tech community composting program in Anchorage, to an innovative carpooling program in Philadelphia and microgrids in Bangladesh, the solutions journalism stories provided both knowledge and inspiration to Ecochallenge participants."

IMPACT SNAPSHOT

SJN's Solutions Story Tracker is a curated database of stories that have been reviewed, evaluated and tagged by a team of Solutions Specialists. Searchable by issue, location, author, newsroom and strategic insights, this database grew in 2019 to include 7,862 stories by 4,092 journalists about responses to problems in 164 countries. From this unique body of work, SJN has curated more than 300 story collections that university professors, policymakers and others can use to highlight what is working and replicate best practices.



Susan Smith Richardson trains reporters at WBBM-TV in Chicago.



AS OF 12.31.19

# 18,655

journalists exposed to our resources and training

# 13

languages in which our core curriculum in solutions journalism is offered

# 7,862

stories in our Solutions Story Tracker by

# 4,092

journalists from

# 985

news outlets about problem-solving in

# 164

countries

4 collaboratives with  
51 participating newsrooms,  
7 educational institutions,  
2 public libraries and  
9 community and professional organizations

# 107

colleges and universities teaching solutions journalism as part of their journalism curricula

From winter 2016 to fall 2019,  
**82 NON-JOURNALISM EDUCATORS**  
at **70 INSTITUTIONS** integrating  
resources from our Solutions  
Story Tracker into **221 COURSES**  
impacting **8,693 STUDENTS**



# Leadership



**DAVID BORNSTEIN**  
**CO-FOUNDER AND CEO**  
David Bornstein is a journalist and author who focuses on social innovation. He co-authors the “Fixes” column in The New York Times Opinionator section. His books include “How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas,” “The Price of a Dream: The Story of the Grameen Bank” and “Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know.”



**KEITH HAMMONDS**  
**PRESIDENT**  
Keith Hammonds came to SJN from Ashoka, where he started and led the News & Knowledge Initiative, advancing the work of hundreds of social entrepreneurs in media around the world. He also has been Executive Editor at Fast Company magazine, a bureau chief and editor for BusinessWeek in Boston and New York, and a writer for The New York Times in London and Johannesburg. He is the owner and publisher of The Boulder Monitor in Montana.



**TINA ROSENBERG**  
**CO-FOUNDER AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR INNOVATION**  
Tina Rosenberg is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author. She co-authors the “Fixes” column in The New York Times Opinionator section. Her books include “Children of Cain: Violence and the Violent in Latin America” and “The Haunted Land: Facing Europe’s Ghosts After Communism,” which won the Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award.



**MAURISSE JOHNSON**  
**CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**  
Maurisse Johnson has held a number of finance and financial systems roles, most recently at the New York City Housing Authority, where he managed the capital planning and environmental review process. Over the years he has worked with a few companies in different capacities, including Burson-Marsteller, where he was the Director of Financial Planning and Reporting, Parsons Brinckerhoff, where he was the Manager of Reporting and Systems, and J.Crew, where he was the Director of Financial Systems.

# Board

David Boardman, *Chair*  
Susan Davis, *Vice Chair*  
David Bornstein  
Marsha Cooke  
T. Morgan Dixon

Dean Furbush, *Treasurer*  
Barnaby Marsh  
Courtney Martin  
Tina Rosenberg, *Secretary*  
Trabian Shorters

For board member bios, click [here](#).

# Staff



For bios of our team members, click [here](#).

# Our Supporters

As a nonprofit, Solutions Journalism Network is grateful to the individuals and organizations that provide philanthropic support for our work. A list of our foundation supporters can be found [here](#).



# Financials

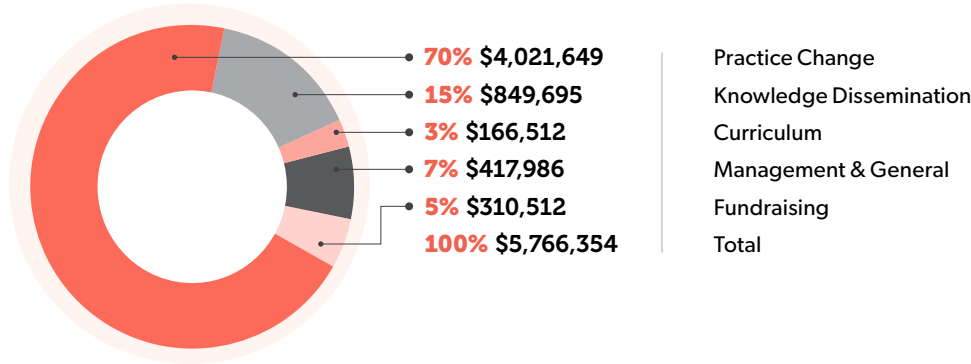
**THE YEAR 2019** was one of growth for the Solutions Journalism Network. Program expenses accounted for 87% of total expenses; our overhead, including fundraising, was 13%.

Total income for 2019 was \$9,437,090 — an increase of 86% from \$5,069,806 in 2018. The increase was primarily due to SJN’s being awarded a \$5 million, five-year restricted grant from the Knight Foundation to strengthen local news ecosystems; SJN is regranting more than half — \$2.7 million — to our newsroom partners participating in this initiative. SJN awarded an additional 61 newsroom subgrants in 2019 totaling \$856,362.

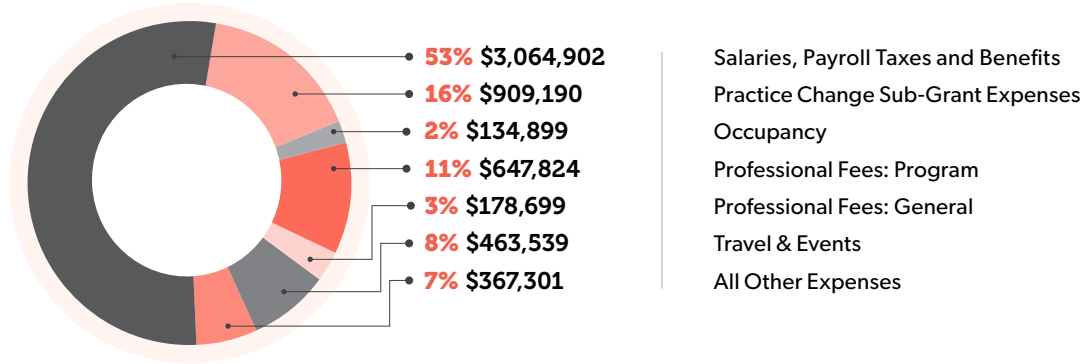
Total expenses of \$5,766,354 in 2019 remained relatively flat compared with 2018 total expenses of \$5,543,659. SJN awarded 61 newsroom subgrants in 2019 totaling \$856,362, an increase of six from 55 in 2018, which totaled \$1,244,750.

Click to access the SJN 2019 **Form 990** and **2019 Audited Financial Statements**.

## 2019 EXPENSES BY PROGRAM AREA



## 2019 EXPENSES BY CATEGORY



CEO and Editor of the GroundTruth Project Charlie Sennott, VP/Journalism of the Knight Foundation Jennifer Preston, and SJN’s VP of Practice Change Liza Gross.





**SOLUTIONS**  
**JOURNALISM**  
NETWORK

**CONTACT US**

New York, NY, USA

[www.solutionsjournalism.org](http://www.solutionsjournalism.org)

[info@solutionsjournalism.org](mailto:info@solutionsjournalism.org)