

STANDING FOR TRUTH



inewssource.org

2024

Annual Impact Report



What will Lupita do for our community?

It's never too late



"THE TIME IS ALWAYS RIGHT TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT."
DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.



You cannot oppress the people

A photograph of a border wall in a desert landscape. The wall is made of concrete and metal, stretching into the distance. The background shows a vast, arid landscape with mountains under a clear blue sky.

This report is for you.

*inewsourc*e is a nonprofit, nonpartisan newsroom dedicated to improving lives in the San Diego region and beyond through impactful, data-based investigative and accountability journalism.

Founded in 2009 as one of the first nonprofit newsrooms in the country, *inewsourc*e is independent of special interests and committed to being a vital public service for San Diego's diverse communities.

Community members also inform and help sustain our newsroom. We are tremendously grateful to our supporters who make our work possible.

You can find our articles referenced in this report at [Cover photo: Community members, mostly from Nestor Language Academy, march from Veterans Park in Imperial Beach toward the South Bay Union School District office to attend a board meeting on June 6, 2024. The district is suffering from massive enrollment declines, forcing officials to consider either consolidating or closing some of its campuses \(*Sandy Huffaker for inewsourc*e\).](https://inewsource.org/tag/annual-report/</p></div><div data-bbox=)

This page: A border road that leads towards an area where a group of migrants have crossed through a gap in the border wall west of Calexico, May 18, 2024 (*Zoë Meyers/inewsourc*e).



Impact is the highest form of success

Since our founding 15 years ago, *inewssource* has considered impact the highest form of success. Changing laws and improving lives is our goal, whether it's a federal government bureaucracy or one life changed for the better.

We kept strongly to that goal in fiscal year 2024, while bringing a new community focus to our work. Listening is often harder than talking, but it results in stronger relationships and direct responses to community needs.

One of our biggest investigations this fiscal year responded to a universal concern about housing and cost of living. We exposed illegal rent increases imposed on the state's poorest residents and forced a change for the good.

Bringing community more solidly and authentically into our work has been an increasingly important part of our mission. We accomplished that with our reporting and by launching a new initiative: the Documenters.

Through the nationally recognized Documenters program, we train and pay people to attend public meetings and take notes. We trained more than 150 Documenters in just the program's first six months, and their notes and stories – in partnership with our reporters – are starting to rebuild our local news ecosystem.

Restoring the quantity and quality of local news across the county is our vision, and we aren't doing it alone. We thank you, our supporters, and extend special gratitude to our dozens of partners, including community organizations, libraries and schools, who are helping to make it happen.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lorie Hearn".

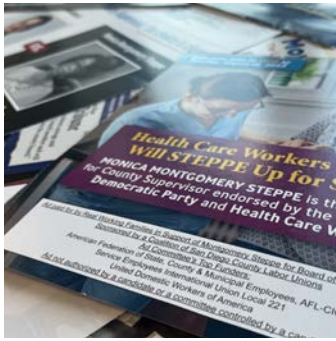
Lorie Hearn
CEO, Editor and Founder

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Sahar Abdalla, Abdelrahman's daughter, greets a fellow farmer at New Roots Community Farm after weeks of being barred from entering the premises, March 14, 2024 (*Philip Salata/InewsSource*).



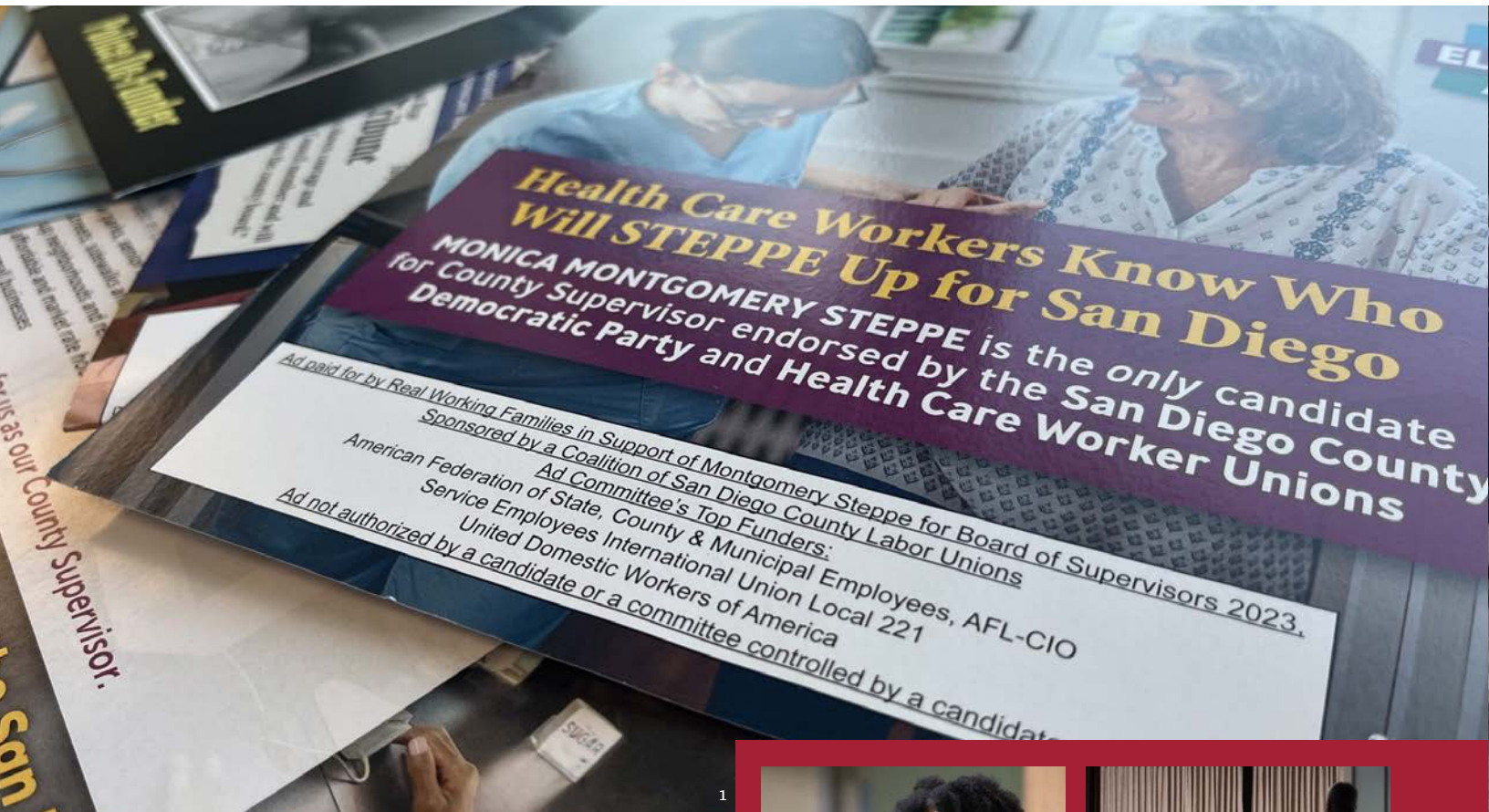
Stories with impact

Impact is the gold standard for *inewssource* reporting. That means our work results in positive change and better lives for communities across the San Diego region.

We published more than 150 stories this past year, many the result of months of reporting and all rigorously fact-checked. They included exposing the influence of money in our elections and holding public officials accountable, from housing authorities to Border Patrol. We also exclusively reported on some of the most important topics impacting families in the South Bay, including school closure talks. Our work spurred change on a number of important issues for San Diegans.

Here are highlights from some of the most impactful reporting, made possible with your support.

Exposing influence of money in our elections



inewssource exposed efforts by special interests representing law enforcement agencies to sway an important local election that decided partisan control of the San Diego Board of Supervisors. Our exclusive reporting revealed that large sums of money were behind mailers that made misleading statements about one of the candidates and her record on police accountability.

Protected by the First Amendment, independent expenditures like this allow organizations and individuals to bypass maximum contribution limits to support or oppose political candidates. Their money can significantly alter a candidate's financial support and help shape races by bankrolling mailers, commercials and other ads.

Our reporter scoured records in the County Registrar of Voters' campaign finance search tool and went through a lengthy process of cleaning, compiling and analyzing the numbers to track down the outside spending.



1) Flyers supporting and opposing candidates in the special election for the County Board of Supervisors are shown on Jul. 27, 2023. 2) Monica Montgomery Steppe speaks at a candidate forum for the San Diego County Board of Supervisors election in San Diego's Rolando Park neighborhood, Sept. 19, 2023 (*Zoë Meyers/inewssource*). 3) Amy Reichert speaks at a candidate forum for the San Diego County Board of Supervisors election in San Diego's Rolando Park neighborhood, Sept. 19, 2023 (*Zoë Meyers/inewssource*).

The reporting showed more than \$1 million spent - much more than the candidates spent themselves. In addition to publishing the findings, we created a searchable, online database for voters to explore the spending themselves in the run up to the election, bringing a new level of transparency to the public by giving them access to public information that is otherwise very difficult to navigate.

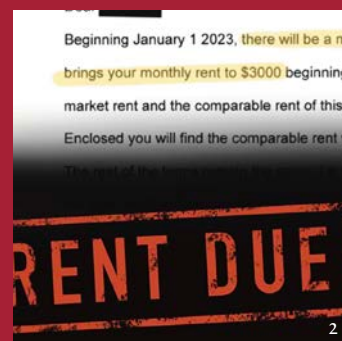
Ending illegal rent increases



An *inewssource* investigation revealed the San Diego Housing Commission, which manages the federal Section 8 housing voucher program, has been approving rent hikes for low-income tenants without checking whether they exceeded the cap set by state law. Multiple agencies locally and across the state changed their policies in the weeks following publication.

After our reporting, nearly 30,000 low-income residents in San Diego County now have the same protections from excessive rent increases as other tenants in the state.

The change protects some of our county's most vulnerable and saves untold millions of dollars in taxpayer money annually. *inewssource* also created informational resources to help tenants know when a rent increase is illegal, and we're expanding the investigation to illegal rent increases generally.



1) Darius Moore works on a painting in downtown San Diego in 2023. He has been living on the street for about 6 months since he and a roommate were unable to afford their rent increase in Vista (Zoë Meyers/*inewssource*). 2) Illustration by Steve Breen/*inewssource*. 3) The San Diego Housing Commission building is shown on Nov. 6, 2023 (Zoë Meyers/*inewssource*).

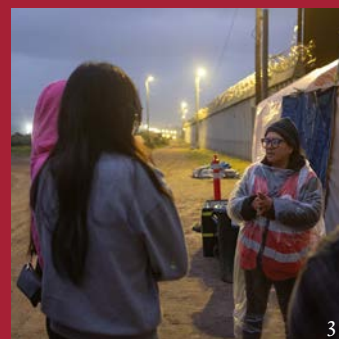
Experts and attorneys say illegal rent increases are affecting tenants across San Diego County of all income levels, with or without Section 8 vouchers.

Investigating the border wall's human toll



Our reporting on border and immigration became more important than ever as migrant crossings along the U.S.-Mexico border reached record highs. We published investigations on Border Patrol's vehicle pursuit policies, allegations of agent misconduct, and medical emergencies and deaths along the border wall.

Our work also raised questions about the effectiveness of how Border Patrol and local agencies respond to medical emergencies, especially after the border wall was raised to 30 feet under former president Donald Trump. Deaths of migrants who climb the border fence to get into the U.S. have soared since the fence was raised. That grim trend is colliding with the reality that migrants wait hours – sometimes days – in outdoor holding areas with many barriers to aid and where immigration advocates say Border Patrol is impeding or slowing down access to medical care.



1) A camp installed by Mexico along the border wall near Jacumba Hot Springs is shown on Feb. 2, 2024. 2) Migrants wait to be processed by immigration authorities near Boulevard, Jan 2, 2024. 3) Adriana Jasso, Program Coordinator for the US-Mexico Border Program at the American Friends Service Committee, speaks with a group of volunteers along the US and Mexico border wall in San Diego, March 12, 2024. (All photos: Zoë Meyers/inewssource)

Because of our reporting, families gained answers to critical questions about how their loved ones actually died, leading to one pending lawsuit. Our reporting on deaths along the border and the response to emergencies there continues this year.

Creating a better-informed South Bay



From school closure talks to meeting access issues, our education reporting in southern San Diego County can't be found anywhere else.

This year, we broke the news that the South Bay Union School District was considering shutting down campuses in the face of stark enrollment declines and, for several months, reported exclusively on how the proposal could affect families. The district serves nearly 6,000 students in Imperial Beach, San Ysidro and southern San Diego, many of whom are considered low-income and identify as Hispanic or Latino. School consolidation options would impact hundreds of the district's students.

inewssource revealed that the San Ysidro School District was the only one in the South Bay that did not livestream its board meetings, despite pleas from parents for months to boost transparency and family involvement. The district resumed livestreaming following our reporting.



- 1) Community members question South Bay Union School District Superintendent Jose Espinoza during a town hall meeting at Mendoza Elementary School in Imperial Beach, April 3, 2024 (*Zoë Meyers/inewssource*).
- 2) Parent Loni Geno speaks to board members during a South Bay Union School district meeting, June 6, 2024. Her son, Bear Wilson, right, attends Nestor Language Academy, which officials are considering splitting into two campuses as the district faces enrollment declines (*Sandy Huffaker/inewssource*).
- 3) Community members attend a South Bay Union School District town hall meeting at Mendoza Elementary School in Imperial Beach, April 3, 2024 (*Zoë Meyers/inewssource*).

Because of our reporting, other media outlets are now covering the district more closely. We've had several readers reach out to Andrea Figueroa Briseño, our RFA education reporter, and other staff at *inewssource* to thank us for covering their community.

Engaging communities in local democracy



inewssource brought the nationally recognized Documenters program to San Diego, launching an ambitious plan to promote transparency in local government and transform the local media landscape.

Our Documenters program, the only one in southern California, trains and pays community members to take notes at public meetings. We fact-check those notes, and then we share the information with the public free of charge. It's a creative and vital way to engage and empower communities in local democracy at a time when local news coverage has dramatically decreased, trust in the news is at historic lows and individuals have changed the way they consume the news.

So far in this first year, the program has trained more than 150 Documenters, documented 50 meetings and established partnerships with nearly 30 local organizations, libraries and universities. Documenters identified two violations of the state open meeting law, the Brown Act. In another example, a Documenter noticed the city was considering banning virtual public comment and tipped off an *inewssource* reporter, who wrote a story about the plan. After publication, hundreds of people submitted public comments opposing the proposal and other media outlets jumped on the story. The city then abandoned the proposal.

San Diego Documenters is supported by the Conrad Prebys Foundation, James Silberrad Brown Foundation, Lawrence A. Appley Foundation, Gerald T. & Inez Grant Parker Foundation, Carol and Richard Hertzberg, The Adams Endowment through The Campanile Foundation, and other community partners.

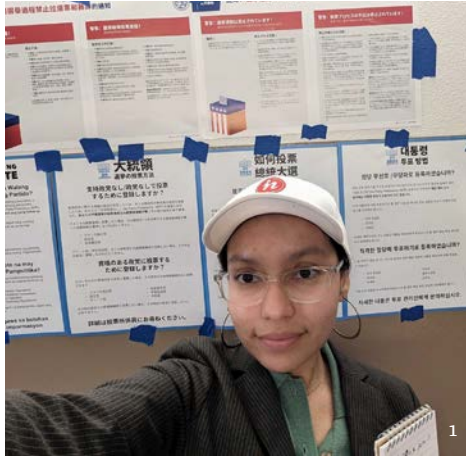
1) Group shot of Documenters after successfully completing their training on April 17, 2024. 2) Documenter training class being held at Casa Familiar, one of our community partners, on April 9, 2024 (All photos: provided).



“This is my home and I know the history of this city. To prevent injustices from continuing, we need more people to be informed on the decisions being taken at every level of local government. That is why I became a Documenter.”

- Engelberto Macias, San Diego Documenter

Building the next generation of journalists



inewssource expanded our work to build the next generation of journalists as a vital part of our mission. We mentored and trained paid interns, as well as two Report for America (RFA) corps members, both first generation college students, in a national service program that supports emerging journalists to report on undercovered issues and communities. Crystal Niebla, our RFA infrastructure reporter, has helped *inewssource* produce more innovative storytelling on social media, producing informative and engaging reels explaining issues that matter to communities. Andrea Figueroa Briseño, our RFA education reporter, has built an extensive network of sources in the South Bay with her much needed, unmatched education coverage, celebrated by parents.

We also brought on Philip Salata, an early career journalist dedicated to reporting on environment and energy as one of the first fellows in the California Local News Fellowship, a new state program to support local news. *inewssource* is the only San Diego newsroom participating

in these programs. As the push for transitioning to green energy in California continues, eyes across the nation are focused on Imperial Valley’s “white gold” – the vast reserves of lithium under the Salton Sea. Salata reported on the deep-pocketed special interests invested in lithium mining and the potential impact upon everyday people. He also reported on a toxic algae bloom in Mission Bay and a land dispute at a community garden that is an integral part of the refugee community in City Heights.

Our early career reporters are supported by generous contributions from the Patricia and Christopher Weil Family Foundation, Fieldcrest Aspiration Foundation, Paula and Brian Powers, USC Annenberg, the Education Writers Association, the California Local News Fellowship, Report for America and dozens of local community members.

1) Crystal Niebla is seen at the Southcrest Recreation Center, where voters are casting ballots in the statewide primary, March 5, 2024 (*Crystal Niebla/inewssource*). 2) Report for America corps member Andrea Figueroa Briseño. 3) Raul Flores holds up a piece of lithium chloride at Imperial Valley Community College while explaining to his classmates how it is extracted and refined on Oct. 5, 2023, in relation to Philip’s “white gold” reporting (*Philip Salata/inewssource*). 4) Report for America corps member Crystal Niebla. 5) Andrea Figueroa Briseño visits Perkins K-8 School in Barrio Logan in 2023 (*Kristian Carreon/ inewssource*). 6) California Local News Fellow Philip Salata.

Innovating our storytelling



Impact goes beyond the award-winning investigative stories we create. *inewssource* is committed to finding new ways to reach readers through innovative storytelling and improved user experience. This past year, for example, we updated our website to make it easier to navigate. After the new site launched, we saw an increase in reader engagement: Our returning visitorship grew by 79%, and the time our readers engaged on our site grew by 188%. The website wasn't the only major factor driving these results.

We also added Pulitzer-prize winning editorial cartoonist Steve Breen, who had left the Union-Tribune, to our staff. His hand-drawn illustrations and cartoons have allowed us to connect with new audiences and help explain complex stories in a simpler way. But Breen is also part of a multimedia team that has produced several stories weaving together text and illustrations, video clips, sound bytes and graphic special effects to push our storytelling to new heights on the web and across our social platforms. An example of this effort was during our reporting on the recent flooding in Encanto in February 2024, referenced in picture #3.

On the technical front, *inewssource* is part of an American Journalism Project grant cohort exploring the ways AI can improve news products and serve as tools for editors and reporters while ensuring the integrity of our journalism. Other innovations we implemented last year included an app, embedding audio into our stories, activating our audience engagement team to elevate our social media storytelling, and the list goes on. *inewssource* has even more planned for FY25 to prioritize a satisfied user experience.

1) Border patrol 100 mile reach illustration in September 2023 (Illustration by Steve Breen/*inewssource*). 2) Steve Breen draws his first illustration for us in his home office on October 30, 2023 (Courtesy of Steve Breen). 3) Gregory Montoya receives call after call in his flooded home on Beta Street on Feb. 1, 2024 (Philip Salata/*inewssource*).

Awards

inewssource won 31 awards for investigations, in-depth stories and photos, including top honors for community impact and responsible journalism. A full list of our awards is available on our website.

“Our communities live in the wake of decisions by those who hold power. I want to tell those stories and show what’s at stake.”

- Philip Salata, *inewssource*'s environment and energy reporter

Society of Professional Journalists San Diego Pro Chapter

2024 Distinguished Coverage Award

Sofía Mejías-Pascoe

Investigating barriers: Border and immigration

Neil Morgan Community Impact Award

Cody Dulaney

Illegal Rent Increases

Sol Price Award for Responsible Journalism

Jill Castellano

Investigating extremism in San Diego

Audio — Investigative/Enterprise Story

First Place

Jill Castellano

Racism alleged in San Diego Police Department

Daily Reporting and Writing — Business Story

Third Place, Philip Salata

Lithium Valley

Daily Reporting and Writing — Criminal Justice Story

Third Place

Jill Castellano

San Diego police officer stages suicide, shoots gun in home, solicits sex workers but was never disciplined

Daily Reporting and Writing — Education Story

Second Place

Andrea Figueroa Briseño

San Diego Unified agreed to pay for his private education. Now his mom says she’s owed thousands of dollars.

Daily Reporting and Writing — Environment Story

First Place

Philip Salata

It has no predator and spreads quickly. Meet the organism causing alarm in San Diego Bay

Daily Reporting and Writing — Government Story

Second Place

Cody Dulaney and Zoë Meyers

A death sentence: Falling through the safety net, one San Diegan faces homelessness again

Daily Reporting and Writing — Health Story

Second Place

Andrea Figueroa Briseño and Crystal Niebla

Child care centers in San Diego, Imperial counties among thousands yet to comply with lead testing

Daily Reporting and Writing — Multicultural Story

Second Place

Philip Salata

This refugee has championed a San Diego urban farm for years. Now, a nonprofit is threatening to evict her

Design Elements — Feature Photo

First Place

Zoë Meyers

Jacumba migrant encampment reportedly cleared, but Border Patrol blocking access

Awards

Third Place

Zoë Meyers

Pauma Valley's teen soccer star died in a chase with Border Patrol. His impact lives on

Digital — Multimedia Presentation

First Place

inewssource staff

Border Patrol Chase

Best of the West



News Photography

First Place

Zoë Meyers

Jacumba migrant encampment reportedly cleared, but Border Patrol blocking access

San Diego Press Club

At Large, Wildcard: Housing Insecurity

First Place

Cody Dulaney

Investigating San Diego's approach to homelessness

Online and Daily newspapers, Breaking News

First Place

Jill Castellano

A San Diego resident flees the US to escape hate crimes prosecution

Online and Daily newspapers, Criminal Justice

First Place

Jill Castellano

Longtime officer says 'culture of anti-Black racism' plagues San Diego Police force

Second Place

Jill Castellano

San Diego Police officer stages suicide, shoots gun in home, solicits sex workers – but was never disciplined

Online and Daily newspapers, Education

Second Place

Andrea Figueroa Briseño

Hundreds of San Diego Unified students could need special education. Many wait months for access

Online and Daily newspapers, Election Coverage

First Place

Sofía Mejías-Pascoe

San Diego struggles to hire bilingual poll workers – but voters need them

Online and Daily newspapers, Investigative Reporting

First Place

Sofía Mejías-Pascoe

Blind Mule Smuggling

Third Place

Cody Dulaney

San Diego County spent more money on security than food for people sick with COVID-19

Photo: A group of migrants from Colombia wait by make-shift shelters in the Jacumba wilderness, May 13, 2023. Hundreds have been waiting in the area for days to be processed by immigration authorities with little food or water. This photo won the Best of the West photography award (*Zoë Meyers/inewssource*).

Awards

Online and Daily newspapers, Multicultural

Third Place

Jill Castellano

They went to a gun range for a birthday celebration. Then came the threats from right-wing extremists

Online and Daily newspapers, Political/Government

First Place

Crystal Niebla

Developers paid \$1.8B to San Diego communities, but few reap benefits

Online and Daily newspapers, Political/Government, SANDAG

Second Place

Jennifer Bowman

Online and Daily newspapers, Public Service/Consumer Advocacy

Second Place

Crystal Niebla

San Diego voters could end free trash pickup. Why fees could exceed estimates

Online and Daily newspapers, Public Service/Consumer Advocacy, Conservatorships

First Place

Jennifer Bowman

Online and Daily newspapers, Series – Serious Subject

First Place

Jill Castellano

Police misconduct, discipline and transparency

Photography – Still, Photo Essay

Third Place

Zoë Meyers

12 paths to housing: What happened after San Diego’s hotel shelters closed

Radio/Podcast, Enterprise/Investigative Reporting

First Place

Cody Dulaney

‘A disaster waiting to happen’: Veterans Village tenant allegedly killed by neighbor



Trash truck illustration used in a recent story about San Diego’s plans to charge for trash pickup. Crystal Niebla won a first-place award for her in-depth coverage of the ballot measure that led to the proposal (Illustration by Steve Breen/*inewssource*).

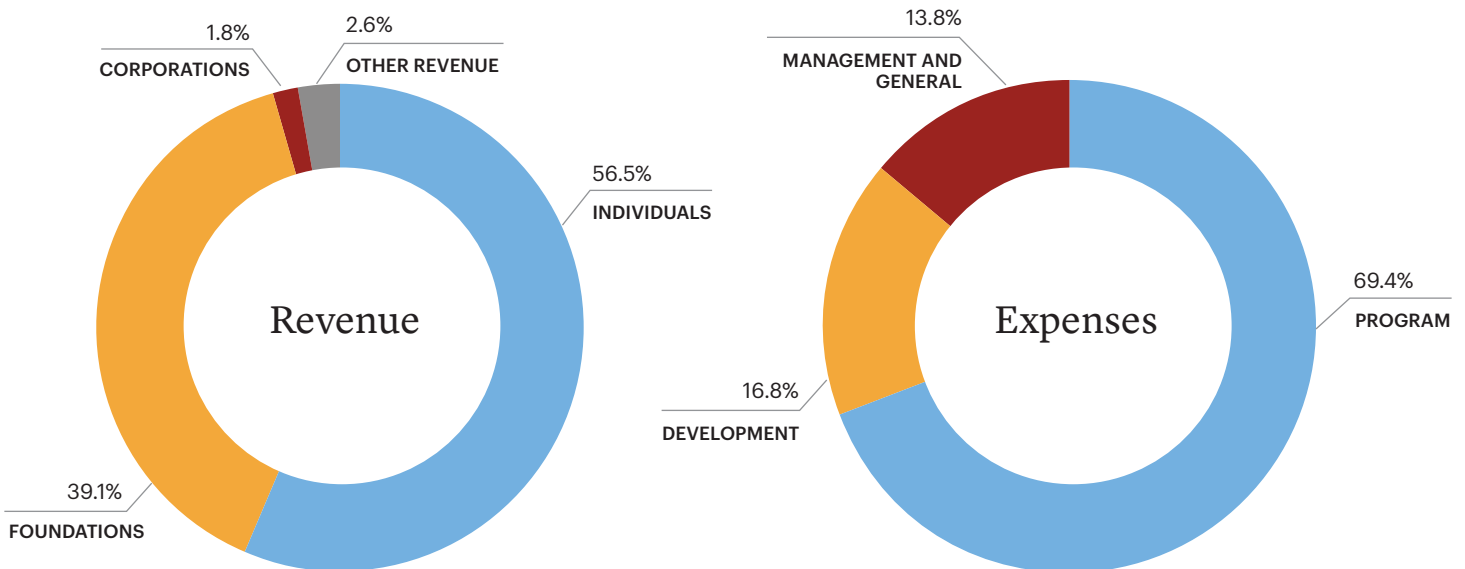
By the Numbers

*inewsourc*e is able to continue serving our community, thanks to contributions from individuals, private foundations and other institutions. This past fiscal year 2024, our total revenue grew to \$2M, including a 27% increase in contributions from our growing community of individual supporters. Additionally, we expanded the number of institutions that support our work and continue building relationships with partners across the region.

In FY24, we also secured pledges for multi-year, conditional gifts, totaling \$610k over the next two years which will be recorded as conditions are met. Additionally, we released nearly \$432k of restricted revenue recorded in FY23*. This will support our ambitious work, grow our reserves and build a sustainable roadmap to expand our mission.

Our complete, audited financial statements are available at inewsourc.org/finances

Our Financial Activity July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024



TOTAL REVENUE:	\$2,003,950*
● Individuals:	\$1,132,501
● Foundations:	\$783,471
● Corporations:	\$35,692
● Other Revenue:	\$52,286

TOTAL EXPENSES:	\$2,207,387
● Program:	\$1,531,667
● Development:	\$371,733
● Management and General:	\$303,987

*Revenue does not include \$432k of previously recorded revenue, but released in FY24, nor \$610k of conditional revenue for future expenses.

Spotlight Club

(July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024)

Thank you to our Spotlight Club members, a growing community of our most generous donors giving \$1,200 or more to protect credible and in-depth journalism as essential to a thriving democracy.

Editor's Circle

\$50,000+

California Wellness Foundation
The Conrad Prebys Foundation
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James Silberrad Brown Foundation
KPBS/San Diego State University Research Foundation
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Karin Winner

Impact Ambassador

\$25,000+

American Journalism Project
Pam and Hal Fuson
Manpower San Diego
Northwestern University | Medill
Jack McGrory
Report for America
Patti Roscoe and Jim Tiffany^{*}

Fourth Estate

\$10,000+

The Adams Endowment at The Campanile Foundation
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Louarn and Alan Sorkin
Patricia and Christopher Weil

Illuminator

\$5,000+

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Fund for Nonprofit News (NewsMatch) at The Miami Foundation
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USC Annenberg
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*"We believe in *inewssource* and in our community."*

- Ida Houby and Bill Miller, Spotlight Club members

Headliner

\$2,500+

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Sarah Bakhiet
John Caple
Margaret Carlson Citron and Paul Citron
Amy Corton and Carl Eibl
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Education Writers Association
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John Venekamp and Cliff Schireson
Abby Silverman Weiss and Ray Weiss
Rachel and Peter Zahn

^{*}Indicates monthly donor

[†]Deceased

Spotlight Club

(July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024)

Inside Source

\$1,200+

Eileen Ackerman*
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Georgia and Blair Sadler
Sue and Duff Sanderson
Lynn Schenk
Susan Shirk and Sam Popkin
Jean and Pemberton Smith

"I believe in *inewssource's* ability to deliver quality news coverage."

- Gail Bardin, Spotlight Club member

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Kat Chapman Steuer and Ted Steuer
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Susana and Pedro Villegas
Audrey Viterbi and Dan Smargon
Mary Walshok
Susan and Allan Wegner*
Katherine White
Cindy Wingard
Laura Wingard and Michael Schuerman
Julie Wright*
Ann Zahner*

(Note: The Inside Source membership level increased from \$1,000 to \$1,200 or more annually in September 2023.)

A full list of *inewssource* supporters is available at inewssource.org/our-supporters

"I support quality local journalism and keeping government accountable."

- Julie Meier Wright, Spotlight Club member

Ways to Give

Your gift can create meaningful change for communities and our democracy.

Give to the *inewssource* Investigative News Fund and power our newsroom for you and your community. The fund directly supports our reporting team, from editors and investigative reporters to emerging journalists.

Visit: donate.inewssource.org/investigative-news-fund

Email: members@inewssource.org

Call: (619) 500-3370

Mail: *inewssource*
Investigative News Fund
PO Box 34546
San Diego, CA 92163

Other Ways to Give

Visit: inewssource.org/ways-to-give

Back cover photo: In protest, farmers and community members walk into New Roots Community Farm holding signs while chanting, "show us the lease!" on Jan. 21, 2024 (*Philip Salata/inewssource*).

Standing for Truth



inewssource.org

