2026

inewsource

ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



inewsource.org

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inewsource is a nonprofit, nonpartisan newsroom dedicated to improving lives in the San Diego region through impactful, data-based investigative and accountability journalism. Founded in 2009 as one of the first local nonprofit newsrooms in the country, *inewsource* pursues reporting that is independent of special interests and committed to providing a vital public good for San Diego's many diverse communities.

Community members inform and power our newsroom. We are tremendously grateful for our supporters who make our work possible.

This report is for you.

Dear Friends,

Change and historic growth marked our 16th year serving the San Diego region as we provided high-impact reporting to more San Diegans than ever before.

First, we celebrated our founder and former CEO, Lorie Hearn, who retired in December. A pioneer of nonprofit news, Lorie built *inewsource* into a force for accountability and positive change.

We're carrying that impact forward and are already seeing results. Since January, our new leadership team has achieved historic highs in both audience reach and financial support.

Guided by a strategic commitment to deepening our journalism by making it more responsive to local information needs, we're expanding our coverage community by community — from San Ysidro in the South Bay to Oceanside in North County — ensuring more San Diegans see our work and benefit from its impact.

Our approach is resonating. This past year, we published more stories than ever before without ever compromising our gold standard for quality, accuracy and impact.

We also worked in partnership with community members, called our San Diego Documenters, to surface neighborhood-level stories not reported by other outlets and to hold power accountable to the public.

Our collaborative, community-powered approach is different, and it's getting attention — in the form of national awards and a new national funder, the MacArthur Foundation.

And we're just warming up. Your investments make this public-service reporting possible. Please take a moment to reflect with us on what we've built together and share with others.

Thank you for championing our mission and helping us build a stronger San Diego region.

Warmly,

Jamie Self

Jamie Self, *inewsource* CEO & Editor









Impact of our work

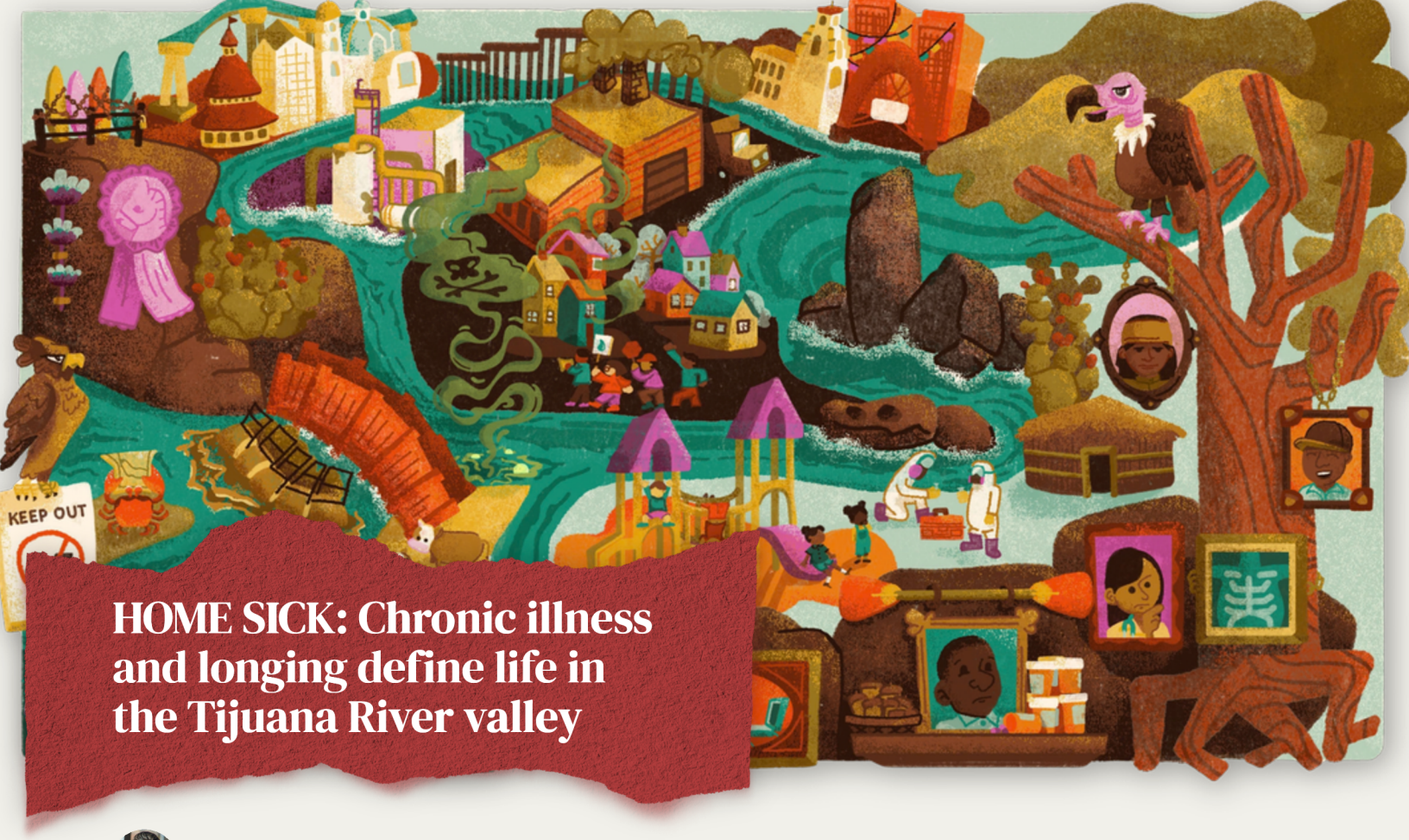
This past year, we exposed a web of politics and money; increased the public's access to vital information about their local governments; amplified community voices facing some of our region's most pressing problems; and so much more.

We call it impact — the gold standard for our work. And we're bringing it to more people and communities than ever before.

***inewsource* published more than 300 stories during the 2026 fiscal year, including reporting that was inspired by collaborations with our San Diego Documenters program. Our work generated the most page views and largest audience growth we've seen in *inewsource's* history.**

Here are some highlights from the year.





HOME SICK: Chronic illness and longing define life in the Tijuana River valley



by Philip Salata

Living with the South Bay sewage

Months in the making, HOME SICK chronicles — and creatively expresses — how decades of infrastructure failures along the U.S.-Mexico border have caused billions of gallons of wastewater and industrial pollution to flow through Tijuana into San Diego's South Bay, sickening many.

While local media outlets, including ours, have long reported on failures to stop the sewage overflows, leading to beach closures and reports of illness, until now no reporting has documented with such narrative depth or clarity the human toll of the pollution crisis. HOME SICK also makes plain that the pollution isn't just in the water — it's airborne — and raises new questions about whether more could be done to help South Bay residents understand what's making them sick.

To tell this story, our team of reporters and visual journalists set out to interview more than 100 people living and working near the pollution. A common thread we heard inspired the title's intentional double meaning: Residents love their home, which many said is making them sick, and longed for the days when their health and quality of life were better.

Awards

National Edward R. Murrow Award
Excellence in Innovation

National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) Foundation
Local Media Award finalist

Best of the West
Online Presentation

SPJ San Diego
Excellence in Journalism Award



How affordable housing in National City became a cash machine for San Diego County labor unions




by Cody Dulaney & Greg Moran

Awards

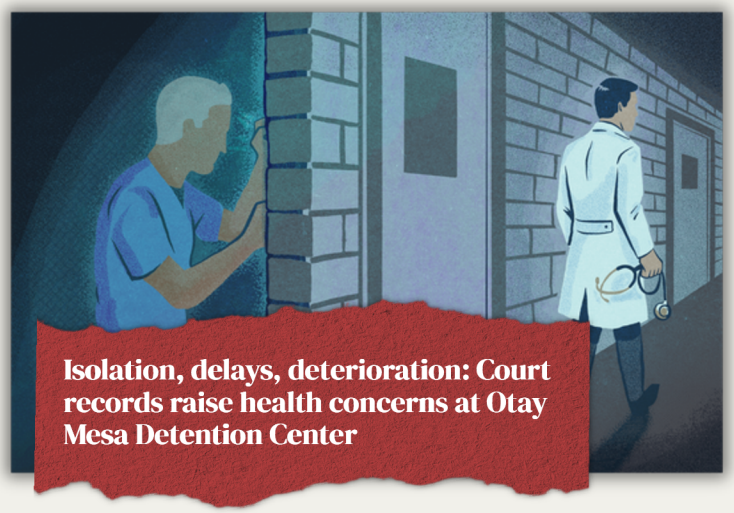
SPJ San Diego
Gloria Penner Award for Political Affairs Reporting

San Diego labor's political ATM

Our investigation exposed the largely hidden role a low-income apartment complex plays in San Diego politics: A powerful coalition of labor unions has for decades owned the property and used it to fund a pro-labor agenda across the region.

Building a database that spanned a decade, we found that the coalition set up the complex as a nonprofit business and generates on average $5.2 million every year in untaxed rent and laundry payments. Since 2016, about 11 cents of every dollar collected from tenants has been used to influence elections for city councils and school boards across the region, finance ballot initiatives that advance labor interests — and pay union leaders six-figure salaries. In the past five years alone, the apartment complex has spent nearly $1 million on campaigns to lift prohibitions on project labor agreements for city construction projects.

The revenue has also gone toward one of the coalition's own employees, a South Bay councilmember. That councilmember later updated years' worth of campaign filings to fix inaccuracies our reporting uncovered.



Isolation, delays, deterioration: Court records raise health concerns at Otay Mesa Detention Center

by Sofía Mejías-Pascoe & Jake Kincaid



Immigration prosecutions in San Diego on pace to double as cases for drugs, guns drop

by Sofía Mejías-Pascoe



inewsource talked to El Centro's Border Patrol chief now being sued over Bakersfield arrests. Here's what he said

by Sofía Mejías-Pascoe

Data dives

As federal immigration enforcement intensified, *inewsource* helped San Diegans understand not only what was changing, but what those changes meant for immigrants and the broader San Diego region.

Sofía Mejías-Pascoe and Jake Kincaid examined hundreds of federal habeas corpus petitions to investigate conditions inside the Otay Mesa Detention Center. They identified dozens of immigrants who described deteriorating health while facing inadequate medical care. Their reporting also revealed a resistance to oversight as the detained population rapidly grew. The investigation thrust into public view the otherwise difficult-to-access experiences of immigrants inside the facility.

Sofía also used federal prosecution data to show how immigration cases were reshaping the justice system in San Diego and Imperial counties. Immigration prosecutions were on pace to more than double, while prosecutions involving drugs, firearms and white-collar crime were declining. Our reporting underscored the tradeoffs created when federal resources shift toward immigration enforcement.

And Sofía's early reporting on Border Patrol Chief Gregory Bovino captured, in his own words, the strategy behind a controversial enforcement operation in California's Central Valley he later took across the U.S., thrusting him into the national spotlight. Cited in an amicus brief connected to a lawsuit, the *inewsource* story shows how original local reporting can become part of the public record and inform efforts to hold powerful institutions accountable.

Community-powered reporting

Informing communities for and with neighbors

This year, *inewsource* continued to expand our regional reporting, digging into communities' biggest problems with urgency and amplifying residents' voices along the way. Our Documenters network of engaged community members helped us tell those stories.

In the South Bay, Community Reporter Crystal Niebla brought our online audience along for on-the-ground reporting, sharing local accountability stories through creative and compelling social media posts. Education Reporter Andrea Figueroa Briseño followed Central Elementary through its final year as it prepared to close its doors for the last time. Her intimate reporting highlighted the community members whose work shaped the decades-old school.

In North County, we've hosted listening sessions to drive our hyperlocal, accountability journalism. Community Reporter Katie Futterman dug into the 108-year-old Lake Hodges dam, the beloved landmark that locals warn is also a disaster waiting to happen — by flood or fire. She also tracked discussions to bring late-night flights to Palomar Airport and followed Encinitas city officials' decisions.

And in Imperial County, we brought comprehensive coverage to a developer's plans to build what would be California's largest AI data center — next door to a residential neighborhood. Investigative reporter Philip Salata spent months building relationships with community members who told us their story of uniting with neighbors to fight the project, while Greg Moran dove into court records to offer a profile of the developer drawing the community's ire.

- Andrea Figueroa Briseño — Education reporter
  Crystal Niebla - South Bay reporter



- Katie Futterman — North County reporter



- Philip Salata —
  Environment and energy reporter



Documenting the community

Our Documenters program has brought more community into our reporting and set the foundations for more diverse coverage that meets community needs, interests and skillsets.

Our coverage of local government meetings throughout San Diego County remains robust, but we've added more opportunities for Documenters to get involved in informing their own communities. In the past year, Documenters contributed to larger reporting projects, election coverage and community events reporting. We coached nearly two dozen of them to conduct interviews, generate social media content, contribute directly to our newsletter, Documenters Dispatch, conduct guided online research and more.

Our Sunshine Week project included 10 Documenters who worked with our newsroom to evaluate local government preparedness to updates in California's government transparency law: the Brown Act. Our work provided a comprehensive look at the public access to information for local governments and led some agencies to make changes to their websites.

Through it all, our program trained 188 people and covered more than 300 meetings. Their work contributed to nearly 50 news stories reported by *inewsource* and our news partners.

Additionally, with the Documenters program, *inewsource* added three news partners: The San Diego Sun, The Coronado News and the North Coast Current. Their inclusion in our growing news network will help our organization better serve hyperlocal communities in downtown San Diego, Coronado and North County.



What is the Documenters program?

In 2024, *inewsource* launched the nationally recognized Documenters program in San Diego to increase government transparency and reshape local media.

The program trains and pays community members to take notes at public meetings. Their work is fact-checked and shared as accessible, community-driven news — an innovative response to shrinking local journalism and declining public trust.

Innovations

Award-winning project presentations

This year, we continued to advance our visual reporting by creating one-of-a-kind visual projects — one of which, HOME SICK, received a National Murrow Award for Excellence in Innovation among other acknowledgements. We tackled the Tijuana River sewage crisis, the battle over data centers in the desert, poor medical treatment at a local ICE detention center and questionable housing practices from a labor union, each with a unique, engaging presentation involving custom code and design.

Our reporting itself was innovative. For HOME SICK, a team of reporters and visual journalists at *inewsource* set out to interview more than 100 people in what became our largest project to date. Those accounts were shared in a series of posts on Instagram and formed the backbone of Environment and Energy Reporter Philip Salata's storytelling.

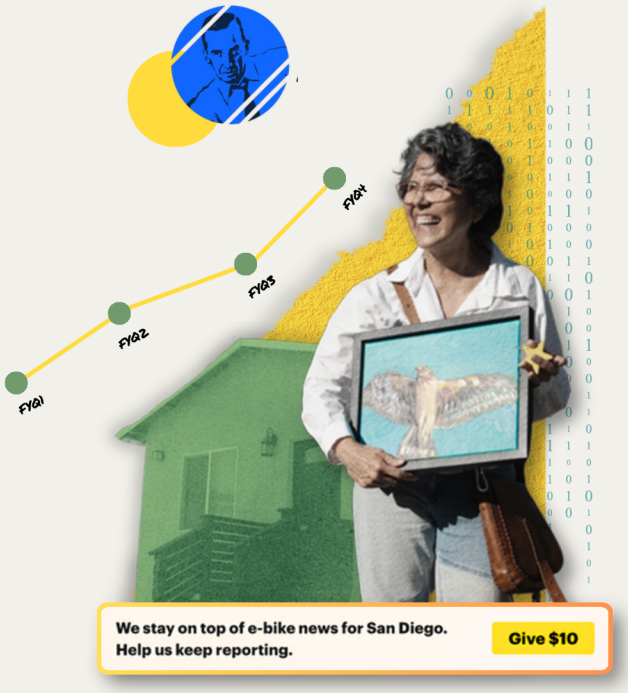
AI leadership

inewsource concluded its second year in the American Journalism Project's Product & AI Studio. Following our successful product development around donation tools, AJP granted us $50,000 and other collaborators a third term in the studio to develop EngageLine, our story call-to-action generator, for other local newsrooms.

We continue to use and experiment with AI-assisted coding, allowing us to build and refine tools on our website despite not having an engineering team. Some of those innovations include Contextualizer, a tool in stories that highlights complex terms and makes them easier to understand; Sidebar, a pull tab that shares more about the reporters who wrote them; and scrapers that alert us to news happening across the region.

Nextdoor verified reporter program

We became the first news outlet in San Diego — and one of the first in the entire country — to have verified reporters on the neighborhood social platform. Our community reporters Katie Futterman and Crystal Niebla combined received nearly 400,000 impressions of their posts in various neighborhoods including videos, polls and story shares over the course of the year.



Building the next generation of journalists

inewsource continues to equip talented reporters entering the field with the tools they'll need to be effective accountability journalists and to grow in their careers.

This year, we welcomed Federal Impact Reporter Jake Kincaid, who joined us as a Report for America corps member, and North County Reporter Katie Futterman, who joined us as a fellow in the California Local News Fellowship. These programs, which support early career journalists, help us expand our staff into needed coverage areas and build a case for support among local donors.

We also hosted seven interns in the summer, fall and spring. They held reporting assignments as community reporters and also worked on the audience engagement team.

inewsource interns are always the standouts in a highly competitive pool of applicants. Recent alumni have gone on to opportunities at POLITICO, Wyoming Public Radio and California Post.

Our internship program is generously supported by the Conrad Prebys Foundation, the Scripps Howard Fund through the Institute for Nonprofit News, the City University of New York and the late Jendy Dennis.













"I am walking away with so much knowledge and an incredible amount of growth. I'll remember how I walked in hesitant and unsure about what I was doing — but left feeling fully supported by a team of amazing journalists..."

— Jenna Ramiscal,
Audience Engagement Intern

Journalism awards

Awards announced or presented from July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026, plus the 2026 National Edward R. Murrow Award

2026 National Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Innovation | Small Digital Organization

Awarded by Radio Television Digital News Association

"HOME SICK: Chronic illness and longing define life in the Tijuana River valley"

On Tijuana River pollution, public health and an innovative multimedia presentation of residents' experiences.

Authors/contributors: Reported by Philip Salata; edited by Jamie Self; designed by Giovanni Moujaes; with reporting, editing, visual and multimedia contributions from Jennifer Bowman, Teal Davis, Crystal Niebla, Zoë Meyers, Hannah Psalma Ramirez, Stacey Uy

National Institute of Health Care Management

Award: Local Reporting Award — Finalist

"HOME SICK"

Authors/contributors: Philip Salata, *inewsource* team

Best of the West

Award: Online Presentation — First Place

"HOME SICK"

Authors/contributors: Philip Salata, *inewsource* team

Institute for Nonprofit News

Award: 2025 Insight Award for Visual Journalism - Medium Division

"Fentanyl: A Decade of Death"

On San Diego's fentanyl crisis, overdose deaths and affected families.

Authors/contributors: Steve Breen, *inewsource* team

Society of Professional Journalists, San Diego

Nine inewsource honors were presented at the 2026 San Diego SPJ awards ceremony.

Top Award | SPJ Excellence in Journalism Award

"HOME SICK: Chronic illness and longing define life in the Tijuana River valley"

On Tijuana River pollution, public health and the lived experiences of affected communities.

Authors/contributors: *inewsource* staff

Special Award | Gloria Penner Award for Political Affairs Reporting

"Investigating organized labor in San Diego County"

On the intersection of organized labor, politics, development and affordable housing.

Authors/contributors: Cody Dulaney and Greg Moran

Third Place | Daily Reporting and Writing — Feature Story, General

"I attended the EUSD board meeting so you didn't have to": How parents get you to care about schools in Encinitas

On Encinitas school-board governance, community engagement and cultural conflict.

Authors/contributors: Katie Futterman

First Place | Daily Reporting and Writing — Government Story

"The San Diego job that councilmembers never approved"

On San Diego city government and an unapproved municipal position.

Authors/contributors: Greg Moran and San Diego Documenters

First Place | Daily Reporting and Writing — Housing/Development Story

"Using ADUs as San Diego vacation rentals"

On the use of accessory dwelling units as short-term rentals and its effect on housing policy.

Authors/contributors: Cody Dulaney and Charis Johnston

First Place | Daily Reporting and Writing — Investigative/Enterprise Series

"Investigating San Diego's sexually violent predator program"

On oversight, spending and alleged problems within San Diego's sexually violent predator housing program.

Authors/contributors: Greg Moran

First Place | Digital — Multimedia Presentation

"HOME SICK: Chronic illness and longing define life in the Tijuana River valley"

On Tijuana River pollution, chronic illness and the experiences of South Bay residents.

Authors/contributors: *inewsource* staff

First Place | Digital - Social Media Storytelling

"San Diego's complex issues, explained"

On social-media explainers about important and complicated San Diego issues.

Authors/contributors: Iran Martinez Jr. and Crystal Niebla

Second Place | Video - News Feature, Serious News Reporting

"HOME SICK: Rancher shares how pollution in Tijuana River changed his life"

On the personal effects of Tijuana River pollution on a South Bay rancher.

Authors/contributors: Philip Salata and Iran Martinez Jr.

By the numbers

inewsource ended FY26 in a strong financial position, giving us a solid foundation to deepen our journalism and reach more communities across San Diego. Revenue totaled approximately $2.75 million, exceeding our $2.6 million forecasted budget, thanks to the generosity of individuals, foundations and institutional partners who believe in the importance of independent local journalism.

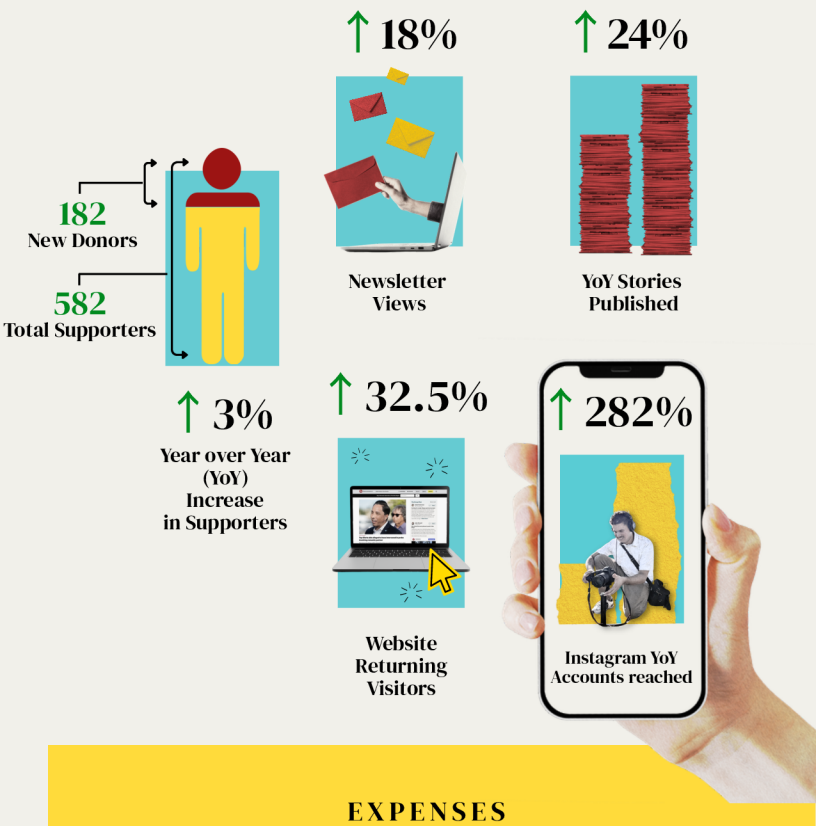
This support allowed us to strengthen our financial footing while investing in the journalism our region needs. We ended the year with approximately three months of reserves and continued securing multi-year commitments that provide greater stability as we plan for the future.

With this foundation in place, *inewsource* is positioned to enter its next chapter from a place of strength as we expand our reach, serving more communities and producing more journalism that informs people, holds power accountable and creates meaningful change.

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

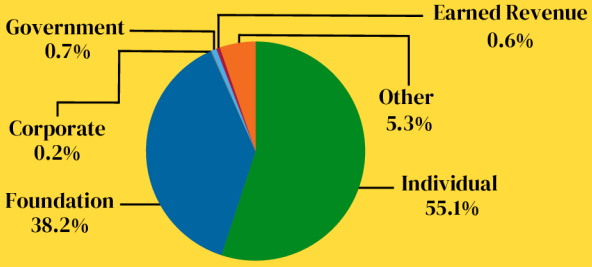
4.86M
Total Journalism Reach + Impressions

*This number includes our **Total Journalism Reach** which represents the number of times people engaged with our journalism across our website, newsletters, Apple News and Instagram. The figure above also includes impressions from other social media platforms where our content appeared.*



REVENUE

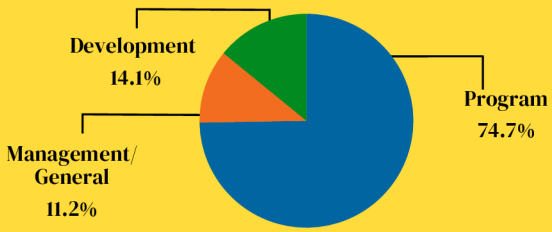
$2,753,263



Individual	$1,515,750
Foundation	$1,052,855
Corporate	$4,180
Government	$20,000
Earned Revenue	$15,262
Other	$145,216

EXPENSES

$2,491,258



Program	$1,861,665
Management/General	$278,063
Development	$351,530

Our supporters

Editor's Circle — $50,000+

Judy Clarke and Speedy Rice
Lorie Hearn
Karen and John Liu
Allison and Robert Price
Jordanna Polis Schutz
Sandra Timmons and Richard Sandstrom
Nita and Henk van der Werff
Karin Winner

Impact Ambassador — $25,000+

Pam and Hal Fuson
Irwin Jacobs
Bryce and Sierra Kroha
Patricia and Christopher Weil

Fourth Estate — $10,000+

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Stephanie Bergsma and Dwight Hare
Sophie Bernabe
Michele and Kenneth Chin-Purcell
Mark Dillon
Elisabeth Eisner and Bill Whelan
Kim Godwin and Tom Wilcox
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Connie Matsui and Bill Beckman
Rosemary and Michael Perlmeter
Judy Price and Marshall Lewis
Louarn and Alan Sorkin

Illuminator — $5,000+

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Eileen Haag and Ira Lechner
Guy and Laura Halgren
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Carol Lazier and Jay Merritt
Paula and Brian Powers
Rachel and Peter Zahn

Headliner — $2,500+

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Catherine Darragh
Emily and Dan Einhorn
Alicia and Charles Foster
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Abby Silverman Weiss and Ray Weiss
John Venekamp and Cliff Schireson
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Angie Vorhies
Ellen Waddell
Kitty Wolcott

Inside Source — $1,200+

Eileen Ackerman
Sayed Ali
William Angus
Feroza Ardeshir and Suresh Subramani
Debra Baker
Heather Bergman and Matthew Steiner
Mary Ann Beyster
Janet Bourgeois
Karen and Jim Brailean
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Paula Cordeiro
Guylyn and Scott Cummins
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Mary G. Dawe
Alice Diamond
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Patricia Finn and Walter Burkhard
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Julie Meier Wright
Maggie and Paul Meyer
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Linda Nyquist
David Oates
Cindy and George Olmstead
Bonnie Opotowsky
Michael Price
Susan L. Quinn
Niru Ramachandran
Georgia and Blair Sadler
Sue and Duff Sanderson
Lynn Schenk
Jamie Self
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Stephanie Tarkington
Jim Tiffany and Patti Roscoe
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Mary Walshok
Kathy and Jim Waring
Katherine White
Laura Wingard and Michael Schuerman

Thank you to our 436 Champion and Member donors who also help to support us.

For the full listing, please visit inewsource.org/our-supporters/

Thank you to our generous institutional partners.

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Fund for Nonprofit News
The Hervey Family Fund
James Silberrad Brown Foundation
The Jendy Dennis Endowment Fund
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Report for America
The San Diego Foundation
Sandra B. Phelps Legacy Fund
Santa Maria Valley Chamber
Scripps Howard Foundation

Note: All donors listed were contributors from July 1st, 2025, to June 30th, 2026











Honoring a founder. Celebrating a legacy.

When Lorie Hearn founded *inewsource* in 2009, she had a bold idea: San Diego deserved fearless, independent investigative journalism dedicated to serving the public. Under Lorie's leadership, that vision grew into the newsroom we are today — one that uncovers wrongdoing, holds powerful officials and institutions accountable and produces journalism that makes a meaningful difference in the lives of San Diegans.

In March, we celebrated Lorie's retirement and extraordinary legacy with a special Spotlight Club gathering. Friends and supporters came together to honor what Lorie accomplished and what she made possible: a strong, independent *inewsource* ready for its next chapter under the leadership of new CEO Jamie Self.

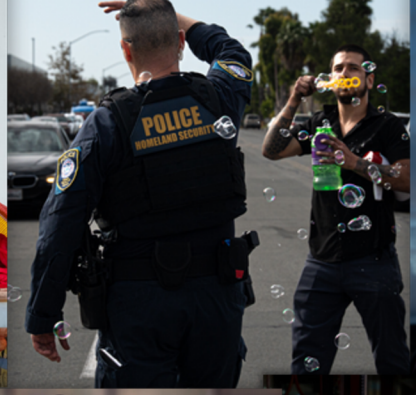
The Lorie Hearn Founders Club

To mark this important moment, a group of generous supporters made special gifts in Lorie's honor. Their generosity celebrates her legacy while investing in the future of the organization she founded. We gratefully recognize the founding members of the Lorie Hearn Founders Club:

- James S. Brown Foundation
- Karen Liu
- Karin Winner
- Lorie Hearn
- Nita and Henk van der Werff
- Sandra Timmons and Richard Sandstrom

Lorie, thank you for having the vision to begin this work, the determination to build it and the leadership to make it last. Your legacy lives on in every story we tell and every community we serve.




POLICE
HOMELAND SECURITY










FIGHT FOR SCHOOLS!
FIGHT FOR SCHOOLS!


COMMUNITY
LAND












WARM
HEARTS
MELT ICE




PEED
IMIT










HOT
HOT
HOT
HOT
HOT


PORT OF SAN DIEGO
UNIFIED PORT DISTRICT



Thank you for taking the time to see what you helped make possible this year.

Every story, every investigation and every impact highlighted in this report is made possible by a community of people who believe San Diego deserves strong, independent local journalism. Whether you read and share our reporting, attend an event, introduce someone new to *inewsource* or support our work financially, you are part of that community.

And what you make possible matters. Your support helps our journalists uncover facts, hold powerful institutions accountable and bring important information to people across our region — always free and accessible to everyone.

As we look ahead, we have an even bigger vision for what local journalism can do for San Diego. We want to reach more people, report from — and with — more communities, and ensure that everyone in our region has access to the trusted information they need to understand and shape the place they call home.

We can't do that without you.

I hope you'll consider deepening your support in the year ahead through a financial contribution, by introducing others to our work, or even by opening your home or another gathering space to help us bring more people into this community.

Thank you for believing in this work and in what we can build together. I'm always grateful to hear from you.

In gratitude,

Adam Klekowski, Director of Philanthropy

Ways to give

Donate online at inewsource.org/donate

This is the easiest, fastest way to give and to set up recurring donations.

Donate by mail

Checks made out to "*inewsource*" and mail it to:
inewsource
Attn: Philanthropy Department
P.O. Box 34546
San Diego, CA 92163

Donor Advised Fund

Combine the most favorable tax benefits while supporting *inewsource* with a gift through your donor-advised fund. Request a grant distribution through your DAF sponsor. Be sure to include *inewsource*'s EIN # 27-0732786.

Gifts of stocks or securities

Put stock in *inewsource*'s future with a donation of stock or mutual funds. Notify your broker or bank that you intend to electronically transfer the securities to *inewsource* and use the following information:

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For the Benefit of: Investigative Newsource
d.b.a. *inewsource*
Account #: 0BP769795
inewsource Tax ID #27-0732786
P.O. Box 34546, San Diego, CA 92163

Planned giving

Help protect the journalism you love by creating your legacy. Giving options include a gift in your will, naming *inewsource* as a beneficiary, gifts of assets and investing in our endowment.

Match your gift at work

Many companies will match your donation to *inewsource* as a charitable organization. Please check with your company to see if it offers a matching gift program.

What's next?

Democracy is stronger when people have the information they need to navigate and shape their communities and when the powerful are held accountable. That's the future *inewsource* is building for all San Diego County residents.

We'll continue producing deep, consequential investigative reporting for the San Diego region while expanding our coverage of distinct issues impacting hyperlocal communities across the county. We already have news desks in the South Bay and North County with dedicated reporters and community Documenters on the ground as well as teams of editors and investigative reporters bringing the deeper, authoritative coverage we're known for.

This is only the beginning. These investments are part of a broader plan to bring more accountability reporting, stronger community connections and trusted local information to every region of the county. We look forward to sharing much more about that vision in the year ahead.



Save the date

Spotlight Club Event
Sunday, Feb. 28, 2027
Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego
Join us as we share exciting news about our future!

Find your next story

We hope you enjoyed our report. Now take a moment to unwind. Hidden in the puzzle below are 15 words connected to *inewsource*. Words may appear across, down, diagonally, forward or backward.

B J L Z K B L G N V H V D L Y R N T
X E H F C Z Z F E N A F X K Z N Z S
V X Z H I I F Z I W D M J B P H G U
O L J Z S H Y H G A V G O M K I C N
Y I L U E N T Q H M V R U K A D I S
F S B I M E I B B W O R R U M D T H
N L A X O X N D O Z K N N T Q D M I
S I L G H T U O R I B W A N A Q O N
Z M B R V D M C H X X X L V G L G E
N P O C V O M U O K T K I V D X E J
Q A A J V O O M O N K M S W J R I E
G C N V M R C E D V X F M T S J D M
R T A J J G N N W A T C H D O G N Z
S T U K N O O T O V G Q P Z Z X A F
V C J Q V E U E T K C Y H V J H S Z
G E A B H P W R T Y C O N U S G W W
M P M H E U W S A Y C I L B U P Y D
Y N H F Z W I N V E S T I G A T E Q

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