

First
Look
Institute

Annual Report
2020

FIRST
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INSTITUTE

For more information, please email
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The
Intercept_

FIELD_
OF_
VISION

PRESS
FREEDOM
DEFENSE
FUND

Contents

Giving democracy a fighting chance.

First Look Institute is a nonprofit organization committed to fearless reporting, bold filmmaking, and defending those who speak truth to power. By empowering journalists to unearth injustices, un beholden to outside influence; by investing in a generation of trailblazing filmmakers; and by protecting risk-taking reporters and whistleblowers from retribution, First Look Institute vigilantly defends our First Amendment rights so democracy can flourish.

First Look Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

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Letter From the CEO

Dear Friends,

Since our organization's founding, First Look Institute has emerged to serve a constituency that is active, engaged, and hungry for truth – which isn't readily accessible in today's media landscape. We expose injustice through our reporting, support diverse and innovative journalists and filmmakers, and defend reporters, whistleblowers, and others who cannot defend themselves.

The year 2020 held a mirror to society, making painfully clear the disparities that persist. The election, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the pursuit of racial justice defined a year in which many lives and livelihoods, particularly those of marginalized communities, were at risk.

In 2020 our teams were mobilized by a spirit of collective action, emboldened in our mission to support at-risk groups and unyielding in our dedication to creating powerful impact.

FLI is home to The Intercept, which produces fearless, adversarial journalism that holds the powerful to account; Field of Vision, a groundbreaking, filmmaker-driven documentary unit committed to elevating historically underrepresented voices; and the Press Freedom Defense Fund, which champions journalists and whistleblowers who face press freedom restrictions, providing financial and legal support when a substantial public interest is at stake.

Thanks to the support of our donors, FLI continued to deliver on its mission and act on some of the most urgent needs of our time. Our teams raced to meet the moment, shining a light on social injustice and political corruption, and protecting the most vulnerable members of the journalistic and documentary communities, all while working remotely due to the pandemic. FLI also demonstrated its dedication to equity and empowerment through the news we report, the films we support, and the communities we serve.

The Intercept's "BlueLeaks" series exposed law enforcement's internal attitudes and operations on issues as wide-ranging as the "Defund the Police" movement and the George Floyd protests to eco-activists. The Intercept's reporting chronicled the ongoing "War on Immigrants" and exposed the abuses of employer power that resulted in workers' deaths and revealed who was profiting from the pandemic.

Field of Vision supported a myriad of filmmakers exploring contemporary global issues, such as the Academy Award-winning "American Factory," which examined the struggles and revitalization of a working-class U.S. community

with investments from a high-tech Chinese company, and "MLK/FBI," a documentary that sourced declassified files on the U.S. government's surveillance and harassment of Martin Luther King Jr.

The Press Freedom Defense Fund (PFD) developed Lawyers for Reporters, a new project in partnership with the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, in which we deepened our commitment to provide pro bono legal services to local and community-based news organizations. The project supports newsroom operations from their inception through development to ultimate sustainability. It provides top-tier legal advice from an array of leading firms to make crucial resources accessible for free to news organizations that need them the most.

PFD also partnered with the National Press Photographers Association to institute the Legal Advocacy Initiative that defended reporters who were arrested or injured while covering protests and other activities related to the killing of Black citizens.

Along with this important work, FLI went even deeper by providing vital relief efforts and funds to a diverse community of journalists, whistleblowers, and filmmakers during this time of extreme economic disruption. Both the Journalist Emergency Relief Program and the Documentary Freelancer Relief Fund provided financial support to help those whose incomes were impacted because of the pandemic. We were honored to distribute more than \$895,000 to bolster individuals in need of legal backing or funds to simply support themselves and their families.

Pierre Omidyar provided the initial funds to launch FLI, and today we are a nonprofit supported by the generosity of individuals and institutions that value freedom of the press and courageous, diverse storytellers. We are profoundly grateful to Pierre for his continued generosity, our 70,000 individual members, and supporters including the Ford Foundation, the James D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Miami Foundation, the Bay and Paul Foundations, the Democracy Fund, and the Redford Center. Despite the challenges of this extraordinary year, 2020 proved to be our greatest year of individual membership growth yet.

As we continue to pursue our mission, we thank you for your dedication to our shared values. We invite you to connect with our community as we ask the hard questions, dive deep into issues, and ensure that the public gets the information it needs to live in a just, democratic society in which everyone can flourish.



Michael Bloom
Chief Executive Officer

2020: THE ELECTION + COVID-19 + RACIAL EQUITY

In a time of tremendous need, First Look Institute (FLI) reported on and responded to deep divisions in U.S. society – demonstrated by the 2020 election – the greatest public health crisis of the modern era, and the ongoing quest for racial equity.

In a landscape rife with increasing disparities, FLI’s mission and programs amplified critical underrepresented stories and provided a platform for the storytellers whose lives were upended by the coronavirus pandemic.

During the first year of the pandemic, The Intercept’s investigative journalism exposed the Trump administration’s failed response to the crisis and shed light on the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on incarcerated, Indigenous, immigrant, working-class, and POC communities.

Criminal justice has always been a core focus of The Intercept’s reporting, so the newsroom was poised to cover the protests following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in a way that enhanced public understanding of the dynamics that drive police violence and thwart reform. The Intercept’s team of reporters, researchers, and editors produced original reporting not only on well-publicized cases of police brutality, but also other systemic abuses of power that disproportionately affect the poor, activists, people of color, and other vulnerable groups.

After a summer of racial justice protests and amid a lethal pandemic, The Intercept uncovered dozens of instances of the unethical and improper influence of money in politics. These stories informed readers as they prepared to cast their ballots in one of the most consequential presidential elections of their lifetimes.

“This was a year of unprecedented challenges, as our newsroom took on the most important news stories in a generation while navigating a pandemic that posed new obstacles to our ability to do our work. I’m proud of the way our team rose to these challenges, producing some of the most high-impact journalism we have ever done.”

– BETSY REED, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, THE INTERCEPT

While many for-profit news outlets were forced to cut back on in-depth reporting, The Intercept intensified its coverage of the issues that defined this momentous year, frequently breaking stories that other news outlets followed.

Since its inception, The Intercept has taken a distinctive, fiercely independent approach to coverage of politics, the environment, criminal justice, tech, policing, and movements for social justice, including the Black Lives Matter movement.

As Black and brown Americans and front-line workers disproportionately suffered from the pandemic, The Intercept team relentlessly pursued stories that exposed injustices. Intercept reporters uncovered wrongdoing and abuses at both the national and local levels, leading to change and recognition.

The newsroom produced several widely read collections of articles, including “The Coronavirus Crisis,” “All the President’s Crimes,” “BlueLeaks,” “Protests for Black Lives,” and “The War on Immigrants.”

Our reporting shined a light on how workers were dying from abuses of employer power and revealed who was profiting off of the pandemic.

Also in 2020, The Intercept collaborated with Invisible Institute, Topic Studios, and iHeartRadio, in association with Tenderfoot TV, on the launch of “Somebody,” a seven-part investigative podcast with nearly 1.5 million downloads and a 2021 finalist for a Pulitzer Prize. “Somebody” is an American true-crime podcast hosted by Shapearl Wells that investigates the shooting and death of her son, Courtney Copeland. The podcast explores the racial disparities and turbulent relationship between law enforcement and citizens in one of America’s largest cities.

The need for The Intercept’s work has never been greater, even as the barriers to investigative journalism have never been higher.

The Covid-19 pandemic’s economic fallout led to massive job losses, with devastating consequences for reporters and documentarians. In response, FLI provided support to journalists and filmmakers experiencing economic hardship or legal risks from their reporting on racial justice protests. The Press Freedom Defense Fund launched an emergency financial assistance program. As many journalists struggled with financial hardship, illness, and the needs of dependents and children, PFDF disbursed more than \$200,000 in emergency assistance.

In April 2020, Field of Vision created the Documentary Freelancer Relief Fund in collaboration with Topic Studios. This fund provided \$250,000 in emergency relief payments to freelancers in the documentary field. This fund was one of the first of its kind – and the only U.S. source of relief to freelancer documentarians worldwide.

The Documentary Freelancer Relief Fund provided nearly 580 freelancers across 71 countries with funding. Of the freelancers who received funds, 65% self-identified as BIPOC; nearly 30% self-identified as LGBTQIA; 44% were from outside of the U.S.; 7% identified as having a disability; 6% identified as being a refugee, forced migrant, or otherwise displaced person; 3% identified as being undocumented; and 1% identified as being a veteran.

PFDF also joined forces with the National Press Photographers Association to provide legal assistance to journalists facing arrest or injury while covering social justice protests such as those following the death of George Floyd. This support totaled \$100,000.

These emergency responses are a natural extension of FLI's mission to support documentary filmmaking and serious journalism that bring to light information in the public interest necessary for a functioning democracy.

“The economic fallout from Covid-19 has triggered an unprecedented crisis in the news business that requires everyone who cares about journalism in America to pitch in. Right now. We need journalists to report on both the pandemic and on the national protests over police brutality. Helping journalists weather this economic crisis is an investment in the future of American journalism.”

– JAMES RISEN, DIRECTOR, PRESS FREEDOM DEFENSE FUND

To ensure sustainable support, Lawyers for Reporters (L4R), established in 2019 as a joint project of PFDF and the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice, deepened its commitment to providing pro bono legal support to local news organizations. The collaboration provides these services to nonprofit news organizations to support their operations from their inception through development to ultimate sustainability. The rapid disappearance of local and community-based news organizations is sparking a robust rise of hyperlocal replacements. L4R leverages its resources by channeling top-tier legal advice from an array of leading firms to make these crucial resources accessible for free to organizations who need them the most.

L4R served 23 clients in 2020, 61% of which are led by people identifying as women, BIPOC, or LGBTQ+. Nineteen law firms deployed 52 attorneys to serve these clients, donating more than \$1 million in in-kind service.

“Five years ago, First Look Institute launched Field of Vision. The mission was clear: to support work that uses innovative and artistic ways to explore contemporary global issues through a cinematic lens. Field of Vision is here to push the boundaries of nonfiction storytelling, to expand those who tell stories, how they're told and to advocate for the field. The reflection that comes in tandem with a five-year anniversary is even more poignant when it is coupled with a global pandemic. It caused Field of Vision to look back in gratitude while scanning the horizon for opportunities to create new initiatives, resources, and support for both filmmakers and filmmaking.”

– CHARLOTTE COOK, CO-CREATOR AND EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, FIELD OF VISION

In 2020, Field of Vision built on its foundational commitment to short-form filmmaking and to creating greater equity, inclusion, sustainability, and support within the industry. Field of Vision acquired IF/Then shorts from the Tribeca Film Institute, after the Institute suspended its activities.

IF/Then aims to break down barriers in the film industry — barriers which are a direct product of systemic and structural racism — by working with creators who experience inequity based on their personal background. IF/Then's programming focuses on supporting regional creative communities and fostering compelling, character-led, community-inspired stories that embody the breadth and diversity of the people and places they represent.

As productions shut down, festivals shuttered, film sales halted, and job losses grew, uncertainty spread across the industry. Field of Vision first launched an “office hours” service for the documentary community in early March, which facilitated 200 meetings across 21 countries in the first three months alone. The team provided a range of virtual mentorship and consultation services and responded to the array of issues created by the pandemic, spanning project development, pitch training, feedback on proposals and grant applications, and more.

Field of Vision created the Covid-19 Risk Assessment for Documentary Filmmakers in partnership with the Sundance Institute and Doc Society. As independent filmmakers considered resuming their work, one question loomed: Should I be filming at all? The assessment served as a guide for professionals across the industry and around the world.

The Intercept

The Intercept is an award-winning news organization dedicated to holding the powerful accountable through fearless, adversarial journalism. Its in-depth investigations and unflinching analysis focus on politics, war, surveillance, corruption, the environment, technology, criminal justice, the media, and more. The Intercept gives its journalists the editorial freedom and legal support they need to expose corruption and injustice wherever they find it.

The Intercept was launched in 2014 to provide the kind of independent journalism missing from many mainstream media outlets and is singularly focused on bringing to light hidden truths that the public has a right to know.

In 2020, The Intercept defended democracy with a relentless pursuit of the truth, navigating a pandemic and meeting the moment of racial reckoning with the same ideals upheld since its inception.

A TIMELINE OF IMPACT

In Iowa, How Bernie Sanders Won a Trilingual Satellite Caucus

The video on Bernie Sanders's ground game in Iowa followed a young Latina volunteer as she attended a satellite caucus with mostly Latino and Sudanese immigrants. The piece saw high traffic across platforms and on social media; the video was shared and amplified by prominent figures including Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders himself.

Date: February 6, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/02/06/iowa-satellite-caucus-immigrants-bernie-sanders/>

Zoom Meetings Aren't End-to-End Encrypted, Despite Misleading Marketing



Illustration: The Intercept

Who's on the line? Despite Zoom's claims that their meetings used end-to-end encryption, The Intercept's security team discovered that these claims were false. The scoop was picked up all over the world and led to an overhaul of Zoom's privacy commitments and policies. In August 2021, Zoom reached an \$85 million settlement in a class-action lawsuit for lying about end-to-end encryption and sending data to Facebook and Google.

Date: March 31, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/31/zoom-meeting-encryption/>

As Coronavirus Spread, Financial Services Contractor Told Warehouse Workers They Aren't Allowed to Get Sick

Two exclusive investigations by The Intercept showed how a mailing and printing contractor discouraged its workers from wearing personal protective gear and taking time off when sick. Six of the company's workers eventually died from Covid-19. A spokesperson from the New York State attorney general's office is now investigating the allegations.

Dates: April 7 and April 30, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/04/07/coronavirus-new-york-warehouse-workers-sick-leave-tmg-broadridge/>

Coronavirus Capitalism – and How to Beat It



Screenshot: The Intercept

“Coronavirus Capitalism – and How to Beat It” was a very early and prescient take on Covid-19 by Naomi Klein. In the video, Klein coins the term “coronavirus capitalism,” which then became a term used by journalists at dozens of outlets, including the New York Times, CNN, and the Wall Street Journal.

Date: March 16, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/16/coronavirus-capitalism/>

TikTok Told Moderators to Suppress Posts by “Ugly” People and the Poor to Attract New Users

The Intercept obtained internal documents that revealed TikTok moderators were instructed to suppress posts created by users deemed too ugly, poor, or disabled for the platform. Coverage was picked up by dozens of outlets and continues to serve as a key reference for those reporting on TikTok's algorithm and censorship.

Date: March 16, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/16/tiktok-app-moderators-users-discrimination/>

“He Just Empties You All Out”: Whistleblower Reports High Number of Hysterectomies at ICE Detention Facility

The Intercept team was the first to report on a whistleblower complaint about poor medical care in ICE detention. Subsequently, the newsroom was the first to speak to the doctor at the center of allegations about high rates of hysterectomies at the privately run immigration jail in Georgia. In startling accounts, some women have charged that the surgeries were undertaken without their informed consent. This in-depth reporting led to an investigation of the Irwin County Detention Center.

In May 2021, the Department of Homeland Security announced they would be shutting the controversial detention center down.

Since The Intercept reporting was published, the deportation of whistleblower Alma Bowman was stayed.

Dates: September 15 and October 27, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/09/15/hysterectomies-ice-irwin-whistleblower/>

Police Surveilled George Floyd Protests With Help From Twitter-Affiliated Startup Dataminr



Illustration: The Intercept

The Intercept uncovered how the artificial intelligence startup Dataminr leveraged its Twitter privileges to help law enforcement digitally monitor protests related to the killing of George Floyd in the summer of 2020. The Intercept scoop prompted the ACLU and activist groups to pen an impassioned letter to Twitter, demanding the company cease facilitating Dataminr's surveillance of those engaged in the demonstrations.

Date: July 9, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/07/09/twitter-dataminr-police-spy-surveillance-black-lives-matter-protests/>

Minneapolis Police Union President: “I’ve Been Involved in Three Shootings Myself, and Not a One of Them Has Bothered Me”

The Intercept was the first to highlight concerning comments made by the head of Minneapolis’s police union, Lt. Bob Kroll, demonstrating how the Minneapolis Police Department has normalized police violence within its standard practices.

This post received over 1 million views in its first week and mobilized calls for police reform in the city.

Date: June 2, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/02/minneapolis-police-union-bob-kroll-shootings/>

Eric Branstad, China’s Man in Washington



Illustration: The Intercept

The Intercept published an investigation of Eric Branstad, son of the former U.S. Ambassador to China Terry Branstad, exposing his use of family connections – both in Iowa and nationally – to lobby for several Chinese companies and interest groups. Following our investigation, Campaign Legal Center filed for an ethics investigation into Eric Branstad’s work.

Date: October 15, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/10/15/eric-branstad-trump-china-ambassador/>

Inside Biden’s Meeting With Civil Rights Leaders

The Intercept obtained a recording of a meeting between then-President-elect Joe Biden and key civil rights leaders, which aired on the Deconstructed podcast. In the recording, Biden was unenthusiastic about executive action and warned against police reform before Georgia’s Senate runoffs.

The scoop was picked up by dozens of media outlets, including CNN, the New York Times, NBC News, and HuffPost.

Date: December 10, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/12/10/biden-audio-meeting-civil-rights-leaders/>

NYPD Officer Caught Planting Marijuana in a Car – Again

The most-watched Intercept video of the year showed new footage of an NYPD officer apparently planting marijuana in Jason Serrano’s car to justify a stop and search. The piece received over 15 million views across platforms and sparked an internal NYPD review. Following the publication of the video, the Legal Aid Society filed a motion to vacate Serrano’s conviction.

Date: March 18, 2020

Link: <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/18/nypd-misconduct-body-cameras-marijuana/>

The Trump Administration Embarked on an Unprecedented Execution Spree



Dustin Higgs at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute, Ind. Photo: Courtesy of Dustin Higgs’s defense team

In the midst of the pandemic, the Trump administration embarked on an unprecedented execution spree, killing 13 people over the course of six months in the federal death chamber in Terre Haute, Indiana.

Liliana Segura’s series of investigations was cited, shared, and discussed by lawyers, activists, and lawmakers. The ongoing movement against the federal death penalty includes voices first heard via Segura’s reporting. Her work received an Izzy Award, where the awards committee deemed it a “crucial public record of a killing surge that was largely unnoticed but nevertheless led to a new push to abolish the federal death penalty.”

Date: December 29, 2019 - January 14, 2021

Link: <https://theintercept.com/collections/out-for-blood/>

SOMEBODY

In March 2020, The Intercept launched the “Somebody” podcast. The seven-part investigative documentary series, a co-production of Topic Studios, The Intercept, and iHeartRadio, in association with Tenderfoot TV, has amassed over 1.5 million downloads, drawing acclaim and driving action. The Pulitzer Prize Board named “Somebody” a 2021 finalist for Audio Reporting, citing the podcast as “a dogged and searing investigation of the murder of a young Black man in Chicago and the institutional indifference surrounding it.”



Illustration: First Look Media

As a result of The Intercept’s reporting, Chicago’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) — which monitors city agencies and probes misconduct — opened an official investigation. For more than a year, Chicago’s OIG has been “working diligently” to analyze several issues illuminated by the podcast. Investigators are exercising close scrutiny of police officers’ decision to handcuff Courtney Copeland as he was dying; examining the presence of superficial detective work; and evaluating the way in which police berated Copeland’s mother, Shapearl Wells, the host of “Somebody.”

The city remains under a consent decree to reform the department, particularly around officers’ use of force. According to a scathing report by the inspector general, Chicago police are cited as having grossly mishandled the protests following the murder of George Floyd.

Beyond its impact on the public discourse around policing in Chicago, “Somebody” disrupted the genre of investigative reporting. It joins a growing movement of journalists who seek to do their work in less extractive ways. Upending the convention of investigative podcasts — in which journalists take the mic to tell someone else’s story — the Invisible Institute and The Intercept designed “Somebody” around the emotional weight and authenticity of Shapearl’s voice. As the team tackled systemic inequities within modern policing, it also challenged the asymmetrical power dynamic reporters often have with their subjects. The Intercept journalists sought to be storytellers, and not story-takers, to accompany Shapearl on her narrative journey, putting our craft at the service of her experience and

voice. One podcast reviewer described our ethos in the form of a question: “Could ‘Somebody’ be the beginning of what narrative reparations sound like?”

“Somebody” has influenced educators and students alike; following its release, the podcast’s producers developed a podcast teaching guide that serves as a tool for talking about race and the police.

As shared by People magazine, Shapearl was quoted for her intimate perspective on an issue of national importance: “When I see George Floyd, it takes me back to day one, because he was essentially begging like my son was begging for someone to help him.”

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Field of Vision

First Look Institute launched Field of Vision five years ago with the goal of bringing new and unique perspectives from filmmakers, journalists, and artists into the news cycle — to both challenge and elevate different narratives, and deepen understanding of the critical stories of our time. Field of Vision is here to push the boundaries of nonfiction storytelling, to expand those who tell stories and how they're told, and to advocate for the field.

In the vast landscape of independent documentary film, Field of Vision's unwavering focus on artistic approach, craft, and a commitment to the filmmakers and their development sets this initiative apart.

Embracing the intersection of visual journalism and cinematic filmmaking, Field of Vision has established itself as a leading producer, funder, mentor, and champion of new, diverse, and expansive perspectives. Supporting nonfiction filmmaking that uses innovative and artistic ways to explore critical global issues, Field of Vision helps push boundaries and advocate for better practices, a more equitable industry, and a better future.

The artists supported represent a range of backgrounds and artistic mediums from filmmaking, journalism, and art. Field of Vision has supported more than 161 films to date, including 89 shorts, five series, and 67 feature-length documentaries, with 60 films currently in various stages of production.

From the beginning, the team worked with intentionality, consciously supporting films and filmmakers that are traditionally underrepresented, and films that are made by members of their communities: 55% of the filmmakers we have supported are female, 44% are people of color, and 37% are filmmakers from outside of the United States.

In 2020, as much of the world shut down, Field of Vision films continued to expand our ideas of what is possible. The team earned recognition from prestigious festivals like Sundance and Tribeca, and from the Academy Awards (one win, one nomination), Emmys (one win, five nominations), World Press Photo Awards (three wins), Peabody Awards (one win, one nomination), and Critics' Choice Awards (one win, four nominations). Recognition at this scale increases visibility of the stories being told while celebrating and elevating the career paths of the filmmakers.

CONTINUED COMMITMENTS

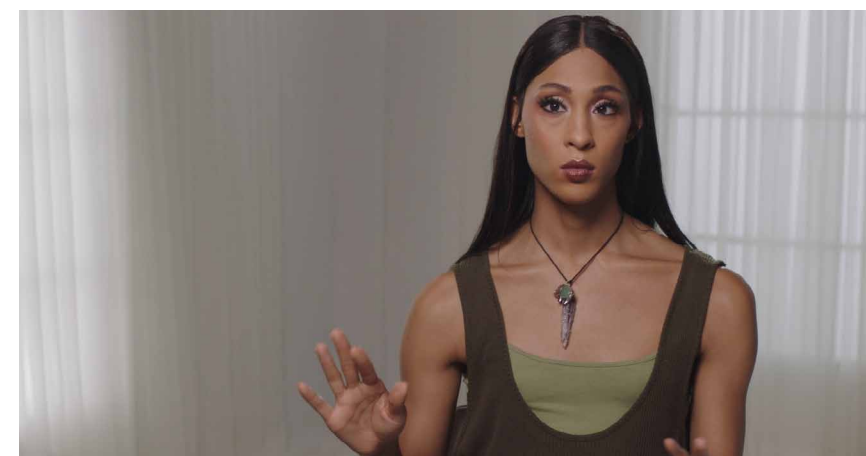
As part of its mission to advocate for and within to improve the industry, Field of Vision proudly maintained programmatic funding support for emergent nonprofit film organizations. Field of Vision continued support for Firelight Media, a vital organization that supports nonfiction film by and about communities of color, and No Evil Eye Cinema, an underground microcinema that aims to redefine the creative and social parameters of film for underrepresented communities. Field of Vision's support expanded to include an emerging network, FWD-Doc: Documentary Filmmakers With Disabilities, that works to increase opportunities, networks, and employment for D/deaf and disabled filmmakers.

FILM HIGHLIGHTS

American Factory

From Academy Award-nominated directors Steven Bognar and Julia Reichert, "American Factory" documents the revitalization of one long-shuttered factory in Ohio by a Chinese billionaire, in which high-tech China clashes with working-class America. "American Factory" premiered at Sundance in 2019 and walked away with the U.S. Documentary Best Director Award. The film sold to Netflix and in 2020 won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature; was nominated for a BAFTA, a Peabody Award, and a Producers Guild of America Award; and won a Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Director and was nominated for two others in Editing and Cinematography.

Disclosure



Still: Disclosure/Field of Vision

"Disclosure" (by director Sam Feder and executive producer Laverne Cox) is an unprecedented, eye-opening look at transgender depictions in film and television. "Disclosure" was eventually bought by Netflix and released in June; with a distribution of 200+ million subscribers in 37 languages and 190

countries, this was an ultimate win in getting stories of trans lives and trans people told at a broad scale, growing representation and understanding. During production, it was vital to the director that the crew be composed exclusively of trans people; in concert with this initiative, the “Disclosure” team offered a fellowship to trans people interested in pursuing a filmmaking career. The opportunity provided networking opportunities with industry professionals, hands-on training, and mentorship.

MLK/FBI



Still: “MLK/FBI”/Field of Vision

“MLK/FBI” — by renowned director, producer, editor, screenwriter, and dedicated chronicler of the Black experience in America, Sam Pollard — is the first film to uncover the extent of the FBI’s surveillance and harassment of Martin Luther King Jr.

Sam’s films have garnered numerous awards, from a Peabody Career Achievement Award to Emmys and an Academy Award nomination. “MLK/FBI” is distributed by IFC Films and received a Critics’ Choice Documentary Award for Best Archival Documentary and two IDA Documentary Awards for Best Feature and Best Director, among others.

ACQUISITION OF IF/THEN

When Tribeca Film Institute announced its intention to pause all programs by fall of 2020, IF/Then Shorts was in need of a new organizational home. The fund and mentorship program supports storytellers by breaking barriers to access, exposure, and sustainability in the media landscape.

With its acquisition of IF/Then, Field of Vision is eager to make a unique contribution in the field that further serves the needs of regional documentary filmmakers and sustainability in their careers.

LAUNCH OF FIELD NOTES

As part of its ongoing commitment to supporting creative explorations of nonfiction filmmaking, Field of Vision launched Field Notes in September. The online journal serves as a space for original writing about nonfiction cinema in all of its forms — inclusive of original essays, interviews, correspondences, and reported features. Field Notes is an initiative created in response to feedback from filmmakers yearning for more thoughtful and nuanced writing about the art form. Led by Contributing Editor Devika Girish, and featuring a regular column by Ashley Clark, Field Notes also publishes previously circulated work in translation from other languages to connect the international documentary community.

LOOKING AHEAD

Field of Vision recognizes the power held within strategic partnerships. Alongside Lawyers for Reporters — a joint venture of PFDf and the Cyrus R. Vance Center for International Justice — Field of Vision plans to launch a free legal clinic in 2021. The service will provide services for freelancers working in the documentary space within the U.S., offering legal information and referrals to pro bono legal assistance to filmmakers and journalists looking to learn more about specific topics.

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Maria Ressa, editor and CEO of Rappler, arrives for her promulgation on charges of cyber libel, at a regional trial court on June 15, 2020, in Manila, Philippines. Photo: Ezra Acayan/Getty Images

Press Freedom Defense Fund

The Press Freedom Defense Fund (PFD) provides crucial resources to independent reporters, news organizations, and sources facing crippling legal threats from government forces or powerful corporate interests that seek to intimidate, persecute, and prosecute in the U.S. and abroad.

Since its launch in 2017, PFD has become a globally recognized defender of First Amendment rights by providing legal resources, financial support, and technical assistance to those who risk everything to expose corruption. While other organizations work to ensure information transparency or engage in strategic litigation, PFD is unique. No other organization consistently remedies the devastating personal harm suffered by the under-resourced reporter, isolated whistleblower, or struggling news outlet.

At PFD, success is measured by security: Reporters should be able to do their jobs without having to face persecution or unwarranted litigation. This guiding principle is especially vital today, when the systematic silencing of the press is widespread and getting worse.

“If the world does not act quickly to stem the spreading tide of threats to a free press, the consequences will be considerable and potentially uncontrollable.”
— JAMES RISEN, DIRECTOR, PRESS FREEDOM DEFENSE FUND

SUPPORT FOR JOURNALISTS AND WHISTLEBLOWERS

In addition to its education and training initiatives, the Fund provides fixed, capped support to imperiled reporters' legal defenses.

PFD does not cover all legal expenses in the adopted cases. Rather, PFD support is designed to attract lawyers to a case and unlock more value toward its defense. PFD works with the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press to help identify and screen applicants in the United States, while also collaborating with international press organizations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists, to help identify applicants overseas. Since its founding, PFD has taken on dozens of individual cases, successfully defended press freedom, protected and strengthened media law — and, crucially, enhanced modern understanding of free speech as a foundational right.

PFD's commitment to defending reporters is manifested in three strategies: defending against defamation and legal retaliation; defending against subpoenas for sources and newsgathering material; and defending whistleblowers.

Defending the Press

2021 Nobel Peace Prize winner Maria Ressa is the celebrated co-founder and CEO of Rappler, an investigative online news source in the Philippines and “one of the country's most popular and influential media platforms,” according to the New York Times. Since 2018, the Philippine government has worked overtime to silence Ressa and Rappler for their skillful reports on President Rodrigo Duterte's extrajudicial killing campaigns. Following her 2019 arrest on trumped-up charges of cyber libel, PFD has become the largest financial backer of the marathon legal defense of Ressa and Rappler. Ressa was among those named as Time's Person of the Year in 2018, in a collection of journalists from around the world who combat fake news.

It Won't Stop With Me: Why the Current State of Press Freedom Should Alarm the World

The thought of hosting an event seemed all but foreign for most of 2020. However, PFD managed to virtually convene partners in October for an event that addressed an urgent issue. Government harassment of journalists and news organizations is on the rise around the world. Designed to intimidate the media from reporting and publishing critical information, attacks against the press have far-reaching and destabilizing implications for democracies.



From top left, clockwise: The Intercept Editor-in-Chief Betsy Reed, NPR's David Folkenflik, Rappler co-founder Maria Ressa, and PFDF Director Jim Risen. Still: Press Freedom Defense Fund

The roundtable discussion with Maria Ressa, NPR's David Folkenflik, and The Intercept's Betsy Reed tackled how those in power are using legal threats to silence journalists and whistleblowers and erode press freedom. They also examined the impact of these tactics on the exercise of fundamental freedoms and how the rise of disinformation in social media is contributing to this global trend. Lastly, the panelists spoke about concrete steps concerned citizens and other groups can take to support threatened journalists.

Featuring:

Maria Ressa, Co-Founder and CEO of Rappler

David Folkenflik, Media Correspondent, NPR News

Betsy Reed, Editor-in-Chief, The Intercept

Introduction by Jim Risen, Director, Press Freedom Defense Fund

Defending Against Subpoenas

In May 2019, San Francisco police stormed freelance videographer Bryan Carmody's home, taking a sledgehammer to his door, handcuffing him for hours, and seizing dozens of cameras, computers, and notebooks. The raiding of a journalist's home to obtain his confidential sources was an alarming measure, and legal scholars noted that California's "shield law" protects journalists against such attacks.

A generous grant from PFDF helped line up Carmody with First Amendment and defense attorneys. All of the search warrants were eventually nullified, San Francisco Police Department Chief Bill Scott issued a rare apology for the department's actions, and Carmody received a settlement of several hundred thousand dollars.

Defending Whistleblowers

Private citizen Rui Pinto was arrested in 2019 for his involvement in the so-called Football Leaks, which exposed shadowy financial transactions and tax avoidance schemes in European professional football. His subsequent whistleblower revelations, the "Luanda Leaks," implicated the richest woman in Africa, leading Portugal to seize her assets in the country and Angolan authorities to accuse her of embezzlement and money laundering.

PFDF continues to provide funding for Pinto's defense, helping to bring about his April 2020 release from prison to home confinement, pending trial.

PFDF LAUNCHES JOURNALIST EMERGENCY RELIEF PROGRAM

In June 2020, PFDF recognized a crisis in the landscape of journalism. Freelancers, local newspapers, nonprofits, and independent news organizations were reeling from the economic fallout caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many journalists continue to struggle with unemployment, illness, the needs of dependents and children, as well as the basic demands of meeting daily living expenses.

PFDF distributed \$200,000 in emergency financial assistance directly to journalists experiencing financial hardship as a direct result of the pandemic. Cash assistance of up to \$1,500 per recipient was given in two waves. The majority of grantees were people of color and journalists from other marginalized communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

PFDF also partnered with the National Press Photographers Association to spearhead a Legal Advocacy Initiative, which provided financial support and civil rights legal assistance for reporters who were arrested or injured while covering the news, especially during the protests that arose after the police killing of George Floyd. PFDF convened a series of meetings with media law organizations, leading legal practitioners, and national and local news organizations to plan effective strategies. Those meetings resulted in the creation of a national study of police regulations by First Amendment clinics at law schools throughout the country, a database of police regulations in the 50 largest municipalities, training materials for police departments, and, in the near future, model policies.

IMPACT + RECOGNITION

The scale of First Look Institute's impact and the recognition of work produced in 2020 demonstrates the magnitude of collective action and the power of independent voices. FLI teams work tirelessly to bring hidden truths into the light, elevate underrepresented voices, and defend journalists in crises.

\$645,000

Financial support given by PFDf to support journalists, news organizations, and whistleblowers targeted by powerful figures — often while uncovering information in the public interest — and those impacted by the economic wake of Covid-19

\$250,000

Investments by Field of Vision to freelancers working in the documentary field, distributing emergency relief funds through the Documentary Freelancer Relief Fund in collaboration with Topic Studios

"Truly, please know how appreciative I am for this support; please know how much this assuages the financial and economic weight and pressure of these curious, concerning times; please know these funds will go to serve immediate necessities for my household; and please know that being a recipient of this fund serves as motivation for me to press on, undeterred, in my writing endeavors." – J.S.

"With our small operation this funding will be instrumental in helping us get through the rest of the year and continue to bring our readership the content they have gotten quickly accustomed to seeing daily. Thanks again and we will continue forging ahead and will earn your generosity." – C.V.

"This is an extremely meaningful amount of money to me and a vindication of the work I've been doing despite the challenges of the pandemic." – A.C.

"I would like to express my sincere thanks for this support — your assistance will make a really big difference to journalists across the globe, particularly those of us in the freelance community." – F.B.

Work created by The Intercept was recognized with a number of prestigious awards and nominations at the highest levels of journalism. Celebrated projects include:

SOMEBODY

- National Magazine Award / Ellies: Podcasting, 2021 win
- Pulitzer Finalist: Audio Reporting
- Scripps Howard: Excellence in Radio/Podcast Coverage, honoring Jack R. Howard, 2021 win
- Independent Documentary Association: Best Audio Documentary, win
- Adweek: Podcast Host of the Year, win
- Gracies Award: Podcast / Investigative, win
- Ambies: Best True Crime, nomination
- New York Times' list of "True Crime Podcasts at the Intersection of Race"
- Rolling Stone's "Best Podcasts of 2020"
- The Atlantic: "The 50 Best Podcasts of 2020," second place

"THE CIA'S AFGHAN DEATH SQUADS"

- National Magazine Award / Ellies: Competitive Reporting, 2021 nomination
- Overseas Press Club: Hal Boyle Award for "best newspaper, news service, or digital reporting from abroad," 2021 win
- Headliner Award: Best in Show (Online), 2021 win

"This shocking and meticulously reported story exposed the CIA-supported murders of dozens of Afghan children and civilians that can only be described as unprosecuted war crimes. Reporter Andrew Quilty painstakingly pieced together one of the darkest chapters of the Afghanistan War, where women and children as young as eight were summarily executed by CIA-trained paramilitary units that were supported by American air power and advisers — who helped select civilian targets, called 'jackpots,' in 10 raids."

– JUDGE PANEL, HEADLINER AWARDS

“AFRICA’S EXPLODING PLASTIC NIGHTMARE”

– Society of Environmental Journalists: First Honorable Mention, 2021 nomination

“This entry illuminates how international companies continue to dump the environmental problem of plastic bags, bottles and other single-use items onto people in Africa, India and other countries who can least afford to deal with the problem. Even readers who know our relationship to plastic isn’t healthy will be jolted by Sharon Lerner’s deeply reported story. She reveals the web of connections between international corporations, and the practices of U.S. and international recycling programs that have made other places our dumping ground. But this bad behavior may not be able to continue. Lerner closes her story with the revelation that an international agreement may force places like the United States to come to grips with the real cost of our use of plastic.”

– JUDGE PANEL, SOCIETY OF ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISTS AWARDS FOR REPORTING ON THE ENVIRONMENT

The acclaim earned by Field of Vision for projects released and recognized in 2020 is a fierce exercise in representation; each award is an opportunity to amplify previously unheard voices and stories, a platform from which to champion and celebrate powerful, unconventional, and paradigm-shifting narratives.

AMERICAN FACTORY

– Academy Award: Best Documentary Feature, 2020 win
– BAFTA: Best Documentary, 2020 nomination
– Directors Guild of America Awards: Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary, 2020 win
– Emmy Award: Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Director for a Documentary/Nonfiction Program, 2020 win
– Emmy Award: Primetime Emmy for Outstanding Picture Editing of a Nonfiction Program, 2020 nomination
– Film Independent Spirit Awards: Best Documentary Feature, 2020 win
– Peabody Awards: Documentary, 2020 nomination

MLK/FBI

– Critics Choice Documentary Awards: Best Archival Documentary, 2020 win
– Critics Choice Documentary Awards: Best Political Documentary, 2020 win
– IDA Documentary Awards: Best Director, 2020 nomination
– IDA Documentary Awards: Best Feature, 2020 nomination
– IDA Documentary Awards: ABC News VideoSource Award, 2020 nomination
– San Diego International Film Festival: Best Documentary, 2020 win
– Santa Fe International Film Festival: Best Documentary Feature, 2020 win

DO NOT SPLIT

– AFI Docs Film Festival: Special Jury Prize, 2020 win
– DOC NYC: Special Jury Recognition for Courage under Fire, 2020 win
– DOC NYC: Special Jury Recognition, 2020 short list

First Look Institute's Community of Supporters

First Look Institute is honored to be included in the philanthropic priorities of our supporters who number 70,000 strong. This list includes those who contributed \$1,000 or more during the 2020 calendar year.

First Look Institute's relentless work is only made possible by your continued support. Our community of donors provides the means to uphold free expression and a free press, alongside fiercely independent perspectives that ensure functioning democracies and inclusive cultures. We are ever grateful for your belief in our work.

In 2020, we continued to champion the momentous impact of elevating underrepresented voices while illuminating the most critical narratives of our time.

Please contact us at philanthropy@firstlookinstitute.org to share your thoughts on our work and to hear how you can continue your support in 2021.

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Financial Information

First Look Institute relies on the generosity of individual and institutional contributors to support the organization's mission: Freedom of expression and the press ensures a healthy democracy and a vibrant culture. First Look Institute believes in accountability and transparency in how these valuable donations are allocated to fulfill its mission.

In 2020, First Look Institute celebrated the growth of its membership community to 70,000. The organization's work is carried out by 89 staff who are dedicated to upholding and furthering its mission each day.

Statement of Activities

For the year ended December 31, 2020 (in thousands)

Operating Revenues:

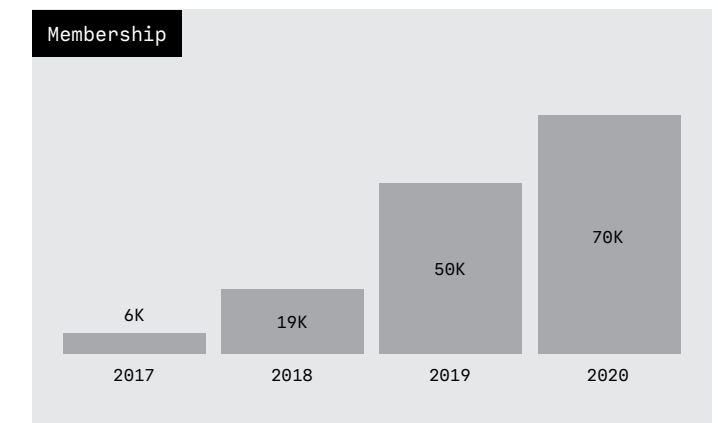
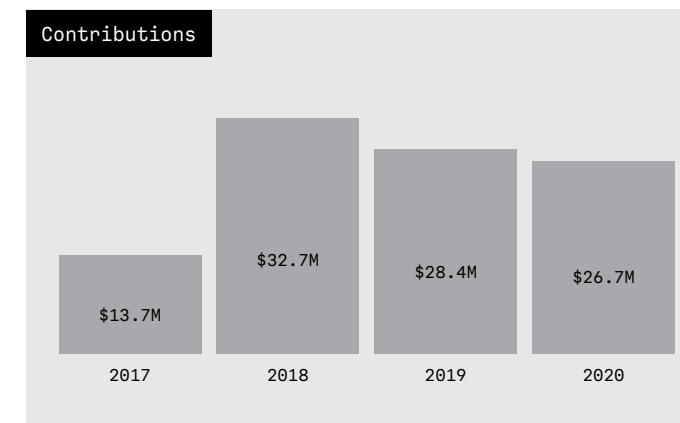
Contributions of Cash	\$25,875
Contributions in Kind	\$596
Content & Other Income	\$767
Interest & Dividends	\$30
Total Operating Revenues	\$27,268

Operating Expenses:

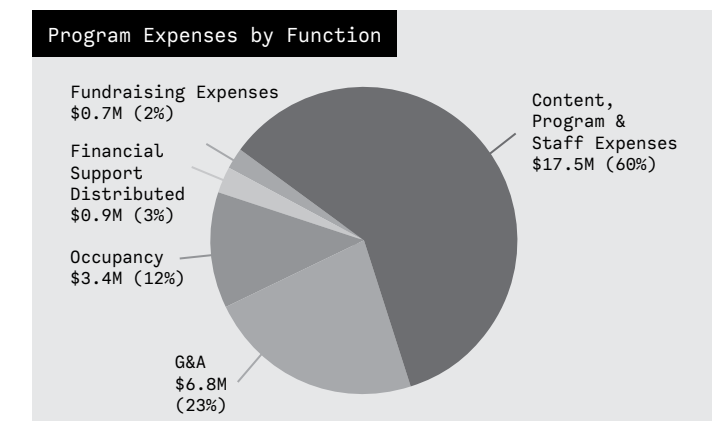
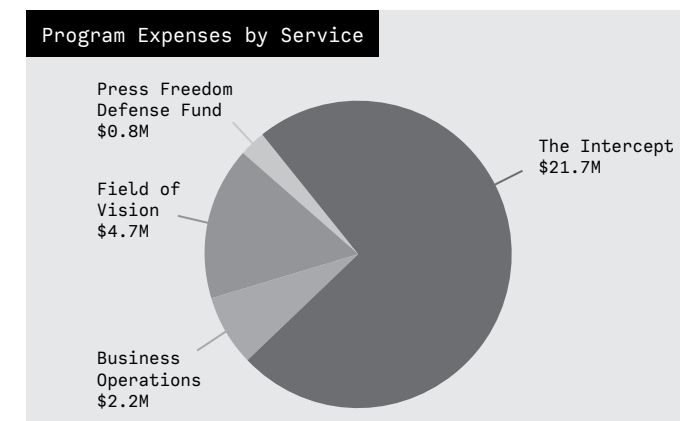
Program Services	\$17,463
Supporting Services	\$6,759
Occupancy	\$3,426
Financial Support Distributed	\$896
Fundraising Expenses	\$734
Total Operating Expenses	\$29,278

Net assets at end of year \$18,909

Revenue



Expenses



First Look Institute strives to provide accurate donor information. We apologize for any inaccuracies or unintended exclusions in our reporting.

The information presented here is extracted from First Look Institute's audited financial statements and presented for convenience. First Look Institute's Form 990 returns are available at our website: www.firstlookinstitute.org. Our audited financial statements are available on request.

Leadership:

Michael Bloom, CEO

Shani Boone, Chief Financial Officer

David S. Bralow, SVP, Law, for FLI and Legal Director, PFDF

Charlotte Cook, Co-Creator and Executive Producer, Field of Vision

Jeannie Kedas, EVP & Chief Communications Officer

Kay Murray, VP, Law, First Look Institute

Beth Nathanson, Chief Philanthropy Officer

Betsy Reed, Editor-in-Chief, The Intercept

James Risen, Director, PFDF, and National Security Correspondent, The Intercept

Jen O'Connell-Robertson, Senior Vice President, Marketing

Barbara Schiola, Senior Vice President and Head of Human Resources

Ian Stratford, Chief Legal Officer and Head of Business Affairs

Philanthropy Staff:

Thomas Crowley, Membership Communications Manager

Kate Miller, Philanthropy Operations Manager

Jill Mosebach, Associate Director, Institutional Giving & Partnerships

Marguerite Nutter, Associate Director, Revenue & Membership

Michael Sherrard, Senior Director, Membership

We are deeply grateful for the support and guidance provided by our Board of Directors:

Pierre Omidyar

Jeff Alvord

Pat Christen

Michael Bloom

Questions about supporting us? Please contact:

Kate Miller, Philanthropy Operations Manager, First Look Institute

philanthropy@firstlookinstitute.org

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For more information, please email
philanthropy@firstlookinstitute.org