

JOURNALISTS KNOW: FAC HAS THEIR BACKS!

Communities need journalists. And journalists need allies who have their backs.

That’s why FAC offers educational programs tailored for reporters and editors who do the important work of keeping communities informed. In 2024, we went to classrooms, newsrooms, conferences, and communities across the state, virtually and in person. Here are some highlights.

In partnership with the Central Valley Journalism Collaborative and the Institute for Public and Media Trust at Fresno State, FAC put on a Watchdog Workshop – a custom, daylong program on open government and press rights topics. The workshop, which drew journalists from Stockton, Merced, Bakersfield, and beyond, was designed to

support reporters and editors to fulfill their watchdog roles.

That’s especially important in communities that have seen a decline in local news reporters amid the economic crisis in the media business.

“Without large journalistic entities looking over their shoulders, public agencies have become almost smug in their disdain for providing public information to the public,” said Lois Henry, a veteran Bakersfield journalist. “After FAC’s training, our reporters now know they don’t have to take ‘no’ for an answer.”



Candice Nguyen, an investigative reporter from NBC Bay Area, participated in a FAC training for journalists on using public records to tell important stories.



Alma Martinez and Joe Kieta of the Central Valley Journalism Collaborative with FAC Advocacy Director Ginny LaRoe in Fresno, where we put on a daylong Watchdog Workshop.

Not taking “no” for an answer was also a theme at our workshop in San Francisco, where FAC’s Ginny LaRoe put on “Behind the Headlines, A Public Records Training Session.” Ginny led investigative journalists Candice Nguyen of NBC Bay Area, Julia Love of Bloomberg News, and Holly McDede, a KQED contributor, in a discussion about how to access and use public records in high-impact accountability journalism.

Recognizing the importance of supporting the next generation, FAC also continued its work with student journalists and early-career reporters.

Ginny gave a guest lecture at Laney College, hosted a student-led webinar for Student Press Freedom Day, mentored participants in the Journalists of Color FOI Bootcamp Program, and organized a training session for the California Local News Fellowship Program.

At the Journalism Association of Community Colleges’ NorCal conference in San Francisco, FAC Legal Fellow Annie Cappetta shared case studies in watchdog reporting and coached students on how to get started with public records reporting.

“Annie fired everyone up,” said Anne Sciacca, co-president of the association and co-chair of the Contra Costa Community College journalism program. “The workshop was accessible and very relevant to our students. We are grateful to FAC for being an incredible resource, especially to emerging journalists who are playing an increasingly important role in serving communities across the state.”

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Friends,

By the time you read this, FAC will have launched an ambitious and unprecedented expansion effort, hiring three new employees in 2025 to support and defend local journalists and to broaden our push for government transparency.

This growth is in response to what we've heard from you, our community of supporters. The need to shore up the fundamentals of democracy – free expression, a free press, and the right to know – is more urgent than ever before.

As you read this Impact Report, I hope you'll see that in 2024, FAC continued to fulfill the promise of your support.

But let's be honest: Things don't look great out there. A free press, for one, is under attack. A combination of hard economic times for many media outlets and attacks from elected officials have undermined journalists' ability to do their jobs.

In 2024, we met this challenge head-on, bringing FAC's expertise to journalists across California. Suing to defend your rights. Advocating in the legislature. Defending journalists subpoenaed for their sources and notes.

FAC achieved so much in 2024 with your support, but there is much more to do. Fortunately, in 2025, FAC will be bigger, better and even more effective.



For that, we thank you.

DAVID SNYDER

Executive Director
First Amendment Coalition

FAC HONORED FOR PRESS ADVOCACY

FAC Advocacy Director Ginny LaRoe received the Distinguished Service to Journalism Award, given by the Society of Professional Journalists Northern California Chapter, for her dedication to advancing press rights and government transparency. The chapter noted in its release announcing the award "SPJ is proud to honor LaRoe for her stewardship of our California journalism community, helping connect journalists to attorneys in times of need and remaining vigilant to ensure the public access required by law for all – and especially for journalists."



MAKING OUR EDUCATION SYSTEMS MORE TRANSPARENT

California spends billions on education. Taxpayers have the right to know how those funds are spent, and they rely on journalists to report the facts. Last year, FAC successfully fought on behalf of two journalists to get important public records from California's education system.

The first is Holly McDede, a freelance journalist who covers sexual misconduct in schools. After Matthew Shelton, a former teacher with Napa Valley and Benicia Unified School Districts, was charged with sexual abuse of students at Benicia Unified, McDede asked each district for public records related to Shelton's alleged misconduct. Shelton then filed a lawsuit seeking to prevent the districts from fulfilling her request. Represented by FAC, McDede intervened to defend the public's right of access. FAC convinced the court to refuse Shelton's demand to keep the records secret, allowing McDede to report on how the records showed that Shelton was able to regain his teaching credential after previous accusations that he had abused students.

FAC is also representing McDede in a similar lawsuit brought by a former employee of Mill Valley

School District seeking to prevent disclosure of records about conduct the district has identified as "boundary crossing or grooming behavior."

The second reporter is Elizabeth Wilson, a journalist with Mustang News, the student newspaper at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. Wilson asked the university for records related to sexual assaults on campus, labor violations alleged by student employees, and a top administrator's failure to respond to sexual harassment and other complaints. After the university withheld the requested records for over 18 months, FAC filed suit on Wilson's behalf to compel disclosure. The university disclosed the requested records within three months of that filing. FAC then persuaded the university to reach a settlement under which campus staff have been trained on their obligations to disclose public records promptly and must meet regularly with Mustang News reporters to discuss the status of open requests, the criteria and process staff use to queue requests for processing, and suggestions for overcoming delays or denials of access to records.

FIGHTING FOR YOUR RIGHTS STATEWIDE

1 Humboldt: We protested Cal Poly Humboldt's campus closure and press restrictions following protests and questions about treatment of reporters documenting events.

2 Solano: The attorney for a former Vallejo police officer attempted to stop the Vallejo Sun from publishing a police misconduct story. We came to the Sun's defense; the court rejected the attorney's attempt to censor the story.

3 Sacramento: We protested the Sacramento City Unified School District's retaliation against a high school journalism advisor who defended her students' right to publish a controversial comment by another student.

4 Santa Clara: Protected press rights by keeping local journalists at the Silicon Valley Voice from having to divulge confidential newsgathering information in a high-profile criminal case they were covering.

5 Merced: We urged the Merced City School District board to stop chilling speech at its public meetings. Citing our advocacy, the board has reformed its ways.

6 Monterey: After we demanded that the City of Seaside comply with a public records request for a copy of a claim made under the Government Claims Act, the city disclosed the claim.

7 Fresno: FAC presented a Watchdog Workshop for Central Valley journalists. The training provided tips on newsgathering, including accessing public records, covering public meetings, and protecting confidential sources.

8 Shasta: The Shasta County Board of Supervisors violated open-meetings laws when it removed press and the public from meeting in November. We sent a letter that pointed out serious First Amendment concerns.

9 Tuolumne: As part of a statewide effort to remove financial barriers to public records, we advocated for Tuolumne County to repeal a public records fee ordinance we warned was unlawful.

10 Los Angeles: FAC joined the ACLU of Southern California in protesting the Los Angeles Police Department's harassment of Lexis Olivier-Ray, a journalist covering homeless encampment sweeps.

11 San Bernardino: Following a high-profile shootout, the San Bernardino County sheriff refused to release audio and video recordings to investigative reporter Joey Scott. Only after FAC sent a letter were the recordings disclosed.

12 Orange: Urged the Santa Ana City council to stop interfering with photojournalists' ability to document public meetings. After opposition by FAC and press organizations, Santa Ana City officials in 2025 rescinded the problematic restrictions.

13 San Diego: FAC objected to proposed changes to public comment rules for the San Diego County Supervisors that would violate the Brown Act and First Amendment.



MAP KEY

- Served by the hotline
- Not served by the hotline

LEADERS IN MEDIA, LAW, AND PHILANTHROPY JOIN FAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Ashley Alvarado



Janice S. Gin



Antonia Hernández



Irene Lee

In October, FAC welcomed four new members to our board of directors: Ashley Alvarado, Janice S. Gin, Antonia Hernández, and Irene Lee. They bring decades of experience and leadership to FAC as it continues expanding its impact in defense of a free press, open government, and free expression.

“FAC is thrilled to welcome such a remarkable group of women to its board of directors,” said David Snyder, Executive Director of the First Amendment Coalition. “As FAC embarks on a new era of growth in the coming year, their vast knowledge and expertise will strengthen FAC’s ability to advance its mission to serve even more individuals and organizations across the state.”

Ashley Alvarado is the newly appointed President and CEO of Texas Public Radio (TPR), a nonprofit media organization that serves South Central Texas. Before joining TPR, Ashley was the Vice President of Community Engagement and Strategic

Initiatives at LAist, where she led the diversity, equity, and inclusion program and strategized how the station could further engage with new and existing audiences throughout Southern California. She is also an award-winning journalist and previously served as president of Journalism That Matters. She also serves on the boards of the Online News Association and Greater Public.

An award-winning journalist, **Janice S. Gin** brings decades of experience as a broadcast news executive. Janice’s most recent newsroom position was as the News Director at KITV, the ABC affiliate in Honolulu. Her career has taken her to leadership positions across the country, including stops in San Francisco, Oakland, Sacramento, Phoenix, and Atlanta. Janice is currently a journalism lecturer at the University of Hawaii at Manoa and is a member of the Radio Television Digital News Association, Society of Professional Journalists, and the Asian American Journalists Association.

For 20 years, **Antonia Hernández** served as President and CEO of the California Community Foundation (CCF). During her tenure, CCF’s assets grew from \$540 million to \$2.3 billion, and more than \$3.4 billion in grants were distributed to fund CCF’s education, health, housing, and immigration priorities in Los Angeles. During her tenure, CCF created a civic engagement department and an immigration program to respond to the diverse needs of the immigrant community. Before joining CCF, Hernández was President and General Counsel at the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund and worked as staff counsel for the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Irene Lee is an Associate Attorney at the law firm Cannata, O’Toole, & Olson, where she specializes in media and public records act litigation, commercial and real estate litigation, and employment law. In a previous role at Common Sense Media, she evaluated the use of educational technology in K-12 classrooms.

FAC DEEPENS ITS COMMITMENT TO DEI

Amid constant assaults on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategies and values in American politics, FAC is deepening its commitment and investment, weaving these values into every aspect of our organization.

Our first steps were to examine the composition of our Board of Directors and to design a proactive and methodical approach to building a representative governing body that reflects our industry and the communities California's journalists serve. We then initiated board training and revised recruitment efforts, rebuilding our Board of Directors to better align with our strategic goals.

In the fall of 2024, with a generous investment from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation, FAC launched a three-year effort to bring quantified data analysis to inform our DEI efforts across our education, advocacy, and litigation programs.

Jiquanda Nelson, CEO of People Decoders, will design and conduct anonymous and confidential surveys of FAC subscribers, members, donors, program participants, and partners. The first survey – launched in April 2025 and remaining online through June 2025 – will capture FAC clients' needs, values, and expectations, allowing for deep demographic profiling, creating context, and ensuring alignment of values. People

Decoders will manage all responses, and FAC will never directly review individual survey results.

Specifically, results from our first survey will allow FAC leadership to:

- Identify how FAC's expertise can best reach and serve our constituents.
- Set a baseline for the organization's DEI efforts to date.
- Update our DEI strategy, ensuring actions reflect verified constituent metrics, concerns, and feedback.

People Decoders will deliver the survey results and highlight key themes related to needs and inclusion, ensuring alignment with FAC's organizational values. These themes and program recommendations will be embedded in our next Strategic Plan, which will be revised in 2026. We will use the results to define our DEI goals.

To track our progress, and hold ourselves accountable, a second follow-up survey will be launched in the Spring of 2026, and a third in the Spring of 2027.

A final report based on the first survey will be shared with FAC stakeholders on our website later this year.

VICTORY! COURT HALTS STATE LAW THAT SUPPRESSES JOURNALISM, CHILLS SPEECH

The First Amendment guarantees the right to report on matters of public concern such as arrests. But California law exposes anyone who shares information related to a sealed arrest record to civil penalties of up to \$2,500 per violation, regardless of how they acquired the information or how newsworthy it is. Working with the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, we sued the San Francisco City Attorney and California Attorney General to stop them from enforcing this unconstitutional law.

The plaintiffs are FAC, its advocacy director Ginny LaRoe, and Eugene Volokh, a Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution and Professor of Law Emeritus at UCLA School of Law. The law chilled their speech about the arrest of a former technology executive, the records of which had been sealed. The San Francisco City Attorney's office previously invoked the statute in a letter to a journalist who reported on the arrest.

After we filed suit, the defendants agreed to a preliminary injunction preventing them from enforcing the statute against anyone who shares information about a sealed arrest that is already publicly available. Following this early victory, we continue to litigate the case in search of a final resolution that protects the First Amendment right to report on matters of public concern.



FAC AWARDED LARGEST SINGLE GIFT SINCE ITS INCEPTION

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has committed \$1,650,000 to FAC over the next three years. This grant will expand FAC's support for local journalists and allow us to launch a financial and fundraising strategy to ensure continued success and stability.

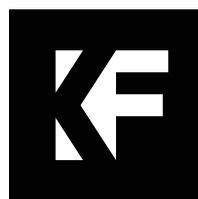
"We are humbled and honored to receive this transformative grant from Knight Foundation. It comes at a critical time for California and our nation, as journalism faces daunting challenges on many fronts," said FAC Executive Director David Snyder. "Democracy depends on strong, fearless journalism; FAC's work supporting local journalists is more crucial than ever. We are profoundly grateful to Knight for supporting FAC's work to shore up our democracy."

The grant will empower FAC to deliver its unique, successful, and proven model – a locally based and comprehensive toolbox of resources for journalists – to more journalists throughout California.

The unmet need is undeniable. In four months in 2023-24, FAC had to turn away 39 matters for lack of staffing – legal representations that could have vindicated journalists' (and the

public's) right of access to records, meetings, and court proceedings, as well as important First Amendment rights and rights under California's journalist shield law.

With the support of Knight Foundation, FAC is ready to tackle these legal matters while also ensuring journalists working in a shifting media landscape have access to high-quality tutorials, workshops, guides, and other tools for accessing public records and government proceedings.



KNIGHT FOUNDATION

"For almost four decades, FAC has been a strong First Amendment defender in the nation's most populous state, but recent years have produced a case volume that has stretched resources," said Jim Brady, Knight's vice president of journalism. "This grant will assure that more legal representation will be available to support local journalists across

California, and will also help FAC as it tries to strengthen its own long-term sustainability."

Leveraging the Knight grant, FAC will create three new positions in 2025 to support local journalists. These positions are:

A **Senior Staff Attorney** to expand FAC's ability to represent journalists and others seeking access to government records and meetings, and journalists facing subpoenas for their confidential sources or notes.

A **Press Education Manager** will grow FAC's educational programs for journalists.

A **Programs Coordinator** will support outreach and execution of FAC's education programming and, as necessary, contribute to other programmatic areas.

ABOUT KNIGHT FOUNDATION

We are social investors who support a more effective democracy by funding free expression and journalism, arts and culture in community, research in areas of media and democracy, and the success of American cities and towns where the Knight brothers once published newspapers. Learn more at [KF.org](https://kf.org).

BY THE NUMBERS

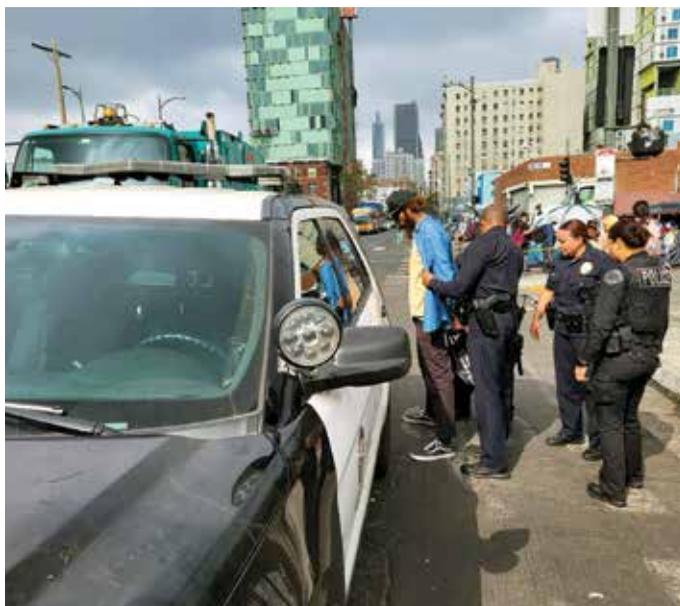
1,111 SERVED BY THE
LEGAL
HOTLINE

15 STATE & FEDERAL
BILLS FAC
INFLUENCED

605 MENTIONS IN THE
MEDIA

14 FRIEND-OF-THE-COURT
BRIEFS OR
LETTERS TO COURTS

CONFRONTING THREATS TO NEWSGATHERING



Journalist Lexis-Olivier Ray was handcuffed and placed in the back of a squad car by the Los Angeles Police Department in October while he was covering homeless encampment sweeps. FAC has fought back against this kind of law enforcement interference with journalists' ability to document activities in public places across the state. (Photo: Courtesy of L.A. Community Action Network)

From Santa Ana to Shasta County, FAC responded rapidly to threats to press rights and barriers to newsgathering. Examples:

- Organized a coalition of more than 20 press and civil liberties groups to demand officials respect the role of the press at sweeps of homeless encampments across the state.
- Condemned the San Francisco City Attorney's role in a censorship campaign against an independent journalist.
- Led a coalition of two dozen local and national organizations to oppose prosecution of a student journalist arrested at Stanford University while covering protests on campus.
- Led rapid responses to threats to press freedom and transparency in cities of Brentwood and Santa Ana.

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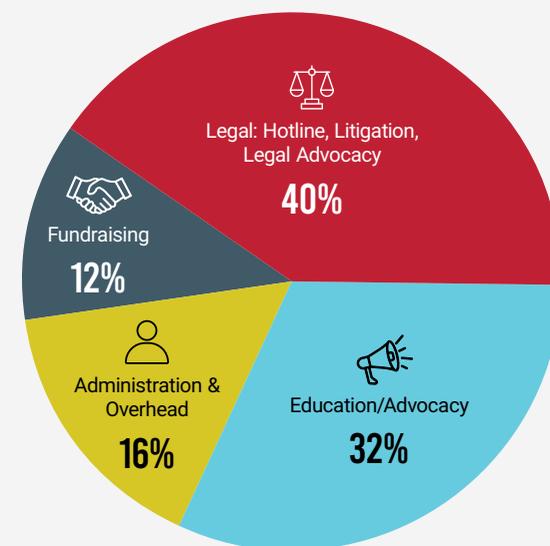
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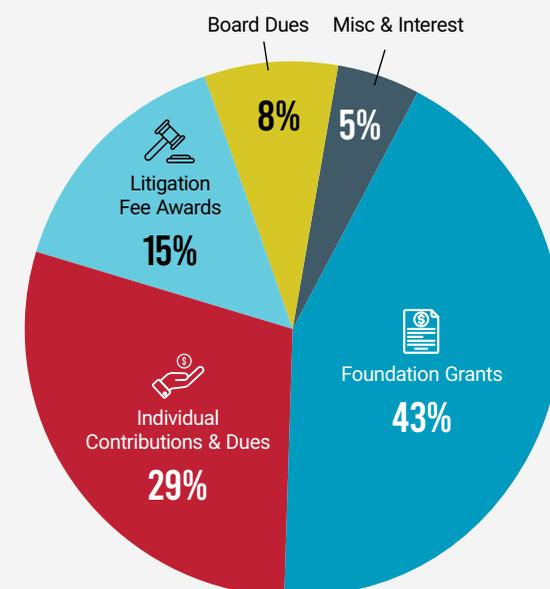
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REVENUE



Revenue does not include in-kind (donated) legal services. Totals may be adjusted pending 2024 audit. In 2024, FAC converted from cash-basis to accrual-basis accounting.

OUR MISSION

The First Amendment Coalition protects and promotes a free press, freedom of expression, and the people's right to know. Nonpartisan and nonprofit, FAC believes that engaged and informed communities are essential to the health of our democracy, and that the values expressed by the First Amendment provide a blueprint for an inclusive, equitable society, and a responsive, accountable government. To that end, FAC educates, advocates, and litigates to advance government transparency and First Amendment protections for all.

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