



Sunlight

RESEARCH CENTER

**Research and
Reporting: At-Risk
Public Records**

MEET THE PRESENTERS



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Sunlight's Story



Learn more about Sunlight



Sunlight's Collective Impact

Collaborations span legacy and startup newsrooms, national and hyperlocal

400+
JOURNALISTS

100+
NEWSROOMS

25+
STORIES



RANGE Media: Spokane official pledged to divest from PFAS-linked stocks

Nevada Independent: Lawmakers called for revamped disclosure forms potentially increasing financial transparency for legislators.

Wisconsin Watch: Gableman exposé anchored by campaign finance history



How Sunlight can help: *Workshops and Tools*



Explore and register
for our Workshops

- Monthly community workshops
- Certificate, premium workshops
- Community office hours
- Members-only office hours
- Investigative toolkit



Sunlight's Investigative Toolkit

Workshop Recordings

If you've missed a live workshop or would like to re-watch one from the past, check out these recordings to learn about everything from digging through 990s to government data disappearing.

Tip Sheets

Almost all of our workshops come with a tip sheet component. These are valuable documents full of resources for investigative research and reporting.

Reporting Recipes

Check out our reporting recipes for a detailed walkthrough of how to do certain research and reporting. One example includes tracking PPP loans to political candidates.

How-To Videos

These quick and targeted how-to videos are there to help you learn how to navigate certain databases, find specific information, and best use open source resources.

Templates

Use these templates to keep yourself organized. They can help you organize a timeline, source list, or even track legislator activity.

Explore the whole toolkit here.





Our Investigative Toolkit: Government Data Disappearing

Workshop Recordings

Digital Lifeline: Saving At-Risk Data



Workshop Recording



Join Sunlight Research Center, Data Rescue Project (DRP), MuckRock, and the Data Curation Network (DCN) for a workshop on identifying, preserving and reporting on government data. In an era where federal data is at risk of disappearing or being altered, this training will equip you with the tools and knowledge to safeguard critical information.

- **Protecting Public Data:** Learn how to identify key datasets, track changes and proactively archive information at risk of disappearing. DRP will demo their Data Rescue Tracker, a tool for coordinating data preservation.
- **DIY Data Preservation:** Get hands-on experience with tools like Google Sheets formulas and Klaxon, guided by MuckRock, to archive data independently. The DCN will lead a DIY session on their CURATE(D) primers, empowering you to become a data preserver.
- **Reporting and Discussion:** Discuss how to report on government information using rescued data, guided by MuckRock and Sunlight Research Center.

Tip Sheets

Digital Lifeline: Saving At-Risk Data



Tip Sheet

with [Sophia Lafferty-Hess](#), [Mikala Narlock](#), [Dillon Bergin](#), and [Mike Nolan](#).



This tip sheet from *Digital Lifeline: Saving At-Risk Data* is best used alongside the workshop [recording](#). You'll find valuable information on identifying, preserving and reporting on government data. Using the tip sheet and recording, you will be well equipped with the tools and knowledge to safeguard critical information.

Watch the recording of this workshop session [here](#).

Reporting Recipes

DOGE Scraper



Reporting Recipe



The DOGE receipt scraper project maintains a set of data tables tracking changes made to the ["savings" website](#) hosted by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), formerly known as the United States Digital Service. Sunlight Research Center researcher and data specialist Michael Nolan wrote this script to support their data reporting work at the Minneapolis-based publication MinnPost by tracking DOGE's reported funding cuts and how they impacted the people of Minnesota. The scraper code is written in python and can be found at the following github repository: <https://github.com/m-nolan/doge-scraper>

The scraper tracks changes made to the data tables on DOGE's website — added items, removed items, and changed items — and saves them in more accessible and analyzable



Tools to Track Changes

- **Klaxon**, part of **MuckRock's DocumentCloud**, lets you set up alerts for when a page or a particular part of a page is updated. It works on most government and campaign websites.
- **The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine**
- ***IRE 2025 and AccessFest 2025 Tip sheet***: When government data disappears: How to cross-check, preserve, and investigate

<http://bit.ly/4nFgEUj>

Tools to Detect Changes

- Visualping – Visual/text change tracking with alerts, Chrome extension (*freemium*)
- WebSite-Watcher – Advanced local tool for Windows (\$\$)
- Distill.io – Content tracking with local app, browser, Chrome extension (*freemium*)
- PageCrawl.io – Team-friendly archiving and alerts (*freemium*)
- Wachete – Tracks private/password-protected pages (*freemium*)
- ChangeTower – Keyword and content change alerts (*freemium*)
- Fluxguard – HTML, visual and text tracking, translation (*freemium*)
- Follow That Page – Basic email alerts for text changes
- SiteDelta – Firefox-only in-browser tracker
- KeyCDN Tools – check HTTP header for when page was last modified

Tip Sheet: <http://bit.ly/4nFgEUj>





Are datasets you use at risk?

- Start by searching existing archives.
- Some datasets removed from agency sites still live on Data.gov
- GovWayback has historical versions of government websites prior to Jan. 20

TIP SHEET: Government Data Disappearing

When government data disappears: How to cross-check, preserve, and investigate



IRE 2025 and AccessFest 2025 Tip Sheet



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Tip Sheet: <http://bit.ly/4nFgEUj>



Preserving Public Records

- Data Rescue Project
- Data Liberation Project (DLP)
- Data Curation Network (DCN)
- Harvard Dataverse
- DataLumos
- Association of Health Care Journalists' Health Journalism Data
- PEW Research Center
- ProPublica





Tips to keep track of resources you use

- Archive early, and often.
- Always save a copy of a dataset or file — not just a link.
- Check robots.txt to find out if crawling is restricted.
- Check source code to see when a page was last updated.
- Monitor GitHub and other resources for changes to government open data repositories.
- Set up notifications to track changes.
- Timestamp all backup copies



More considerations with disappearing data

- Changes in how to describe government data
- Accountability mechanisms for secondary sources
- The government shutdown's impact
- Impact on local communities
- Ethical and methodological considerations



How Sunlight can help: Research Desk

- The on-demand Sunlight Research Desk supports high-impact stories with deep backgrounding, document gathering, data analysis and much more!





Collaborations



Analysis: Which Nevada candidates have benefited from federal loans?

A new analysis shows that 9 out of 19 top candidates running in Nevada’s federal races were connected to businesses that in total received more than \$10.1 million in federal government loans from 2007 to 2021...

For this analysis, *The Nevada Independent* and *Sunlight Search* searched for all businesses registered to a candidate or lawmaker or their spouse and cross-checked the names of the businesses against the publicly available list of businesses that received a PPP loan. The



Campaign finance records don’t capture total spending on Amarillo abortion “travel ban” election

BY JAYME LOZANO CARVER DEC. 9, 2024 5 AM CENTRAL

LUBBOCK — Campaign finance records cannot account for all the money spent on advertising over an anti-abortion policy proposal in Amarillo that voters rejected last month, an analysis by The Texas Tribune and *Sunlight Research Center* found.



Press for the People

Commissioner French pledges to sell family stock in ‘forever chemicals’ manufacturers

The county commissioner, who says the investments belonged to his mother and were willed to him, has been the target of outcry in public meetings over nondisclosure of PFAS contamination.

Research and data analysis contributions by *Sunlight Research Center*’s *Jonmaesha Beltran* and *Seraphina Feron*.

Spokane County Commissioner Al French, who has been accused of covering up “forever chemicals” contamination in West Plains groundwater, reported in his financial affairs disclosure forms stock

Research is collaborative, not a handoff

Transparency and fact-checking are baked into process

We protect your sourcing and editorial independence

Research Desk:

Stories with research support from Sunlight

★ THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

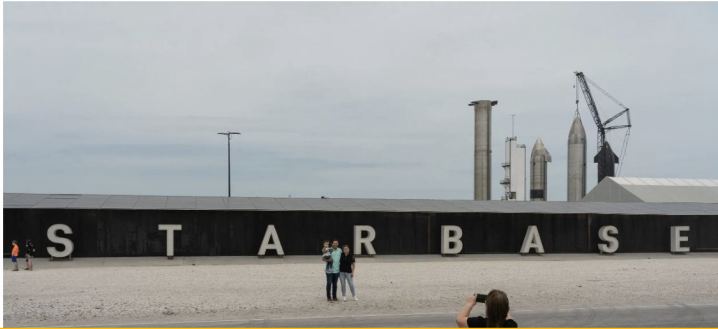
INVESTIGATIONS GUIDES ABOUT

Everything we know about the 3 people who want to run Starbase, Texas' next city

All three — running unopposed — have longstanding connections with SpaceX, Elon Musk's company headquartered in South Texas.

BY BERENICE GARCIA MAY 2, 2025 5 AM CENTRAL

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Wisconsin's Supreme Court has become hyper political. The rise and fall of Michael Gableman's career shows how that happened.

The former Supreme Court justice has agreed to surrender his law license after years of avoiding consequences for his behavior, including a previously unreported incident at the 2016 Republican National Convention.

by Tom Kertscher / Wisconsin Watch
April 16, 2025 [Why you can trust Wisconsin Watch](#)



Research Desk: Stories with research support from Sunlight

Government Economy Elections Education Health Care Environment Legislature Courts Energy

NEVADA INDEPENDENT

Nevada lawmakers often fail to disclose rental property income, point to confusing forms

Although they are more consistent about reporting whether they own homes, omissions on whether they make money on the properties can draw an incomplete picture.

Tabitha Mueller · Eric Neugeboren · April 20th, 2025 at 2:00 AM · Government · Housing · Legislature · SHARE



Housing for rent in Reno on April 7, 2025. (David Calvert/The Nevada Independent)

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE

INVESTIGATIONS GUIDES ABOUT

2024 TEXAS ELECTIONS

Campaign finance records don't capture total spending on Amarillo abortion "travel ban" election

Several prominent Amarillo business people donated to support the so-called travel ban. Meanwhile, statewide progressive groups helped the opposition.

BY JAYME LOZANO CARVER · DEC. 9, 2024 · 5 AM CENTRAL

SHARE · REPUBLISH



Research Desk: Stories with research support from Sunlight

Half the candidates in Southern Arizona's congressional special election don't live in District 7

Though living within the district boundaries is not a requirement to run for the U.S. House seat, it raises questions about local representation

by Becky Pallack and John Washington
June 16, 2025

Email Bluesky X Facebook



Lighting the path so you can take action

Jimmy Rodriguez is running for Congress. He's also on federal probation.

This Republican seeking Arizona's District 7 seat is on federal probation until 2029 for PPP loan fraud and owes hundreds of thousands in restitution and campaign finance fines

by Becky Pallack, John Washington and Audrey Nielsen
June 17, 2025

Email Bluesky X Facebook



Research Desk:



On-Demand Support for High-Impact Reporting

- FOIA support and document retrieval
- Dataset identification, verification and instruction
- Verification of older, missing or partial data
- Fact-checking and rebuilding datasets
- Data scraping, parsing and metadata documentation



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Membership**



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RESEARCH CENTER

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<https://bit.ly/sunlight-research>*