

RITA ALLEN 
FOUNDATION

Crossing Boundaries

REPORT TO COMMUNITY 2015

Public Lab members investigate sources of pollution in the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn, New York.

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Cover: Briana Burton, a 2011 Rita Allen Foundation Scholar, uses the bacterium *Bacillus subtilis* as a model system to study the transport of DNA across biological membranes. A time-lapse microscopy series shows the movement of two fluorescently labeled regions of the bacterial chromosome as it enters a developing spore compartment. (Image courtesy of Briana Burton and Janet Iwasa)



Fast Forward's
Accelerator for
Tech Nonprofits

CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Innovation and collaboration are among the Rita Allen Foundation's Guiding Principles (page 5)—characteristics we look for in the work we support, and foster in our own operations. We seek to root our work in evidence and to contribute to building new knowledge—while recognizing that, as in the scientific process, when questions are answered, new questions arise. In that spirit, we are pleased to share some of our recent work to support creative connections across boundaries.

Rita Allen Foundation Scholars—early-career scientists conducting pioneering research on cancer, immunology, neuroscience and pain—are increasingly reaching outside their disciplines, merging their own expertise with that of chemists, physicists and data scientists to tackle multiple dimensions of biological problems. Our 2015 Scholars are working to illuminate how our brains grow and change, how our genetic materials stay intact, and how our immune systems both fend off infections and propagate pain. Read more in **Exploring the Mechanisms of Life (page 6)**.

This year also marked the beginning of a boundary-crossing effort at the intersection of our work to support innovation in both science and civil society. We are supporting the work of a multidisciplinary committee gathered by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. The committee is synthesizing research across disciplines on effective science communication, looking for questions to direct future research and insights to help people better communicate about science. We also support public-interest media as a means of spreading the knowledge and conversations that create a vital democracy: The Conversation is an ambitious experiment in breaking down barriers to the

wealth of knowledge that resides in academia and making it accessible to many more people. Read more in **Advancing Public Engagement with Science (page 9)**.

Making the workings of government more accessible to citizens is also critical to building a more robust democracy. We are investing in pilot projects that employ digital tools to advance transparency and invite participation in the legislative processes of both state and local governments. Among these projects is Digital Democracy, a searchable, shareable video database of California legislative hearings; other efforts are making local government activities more accessible in New York City and Chicago. Read more in **Creating New Tools to Strengthen Civic Life (page 11)**.

Throughout our work we see the importance of taking extra time and effort to capture and share information that may be relevant to others. We support new tools and frameworks that help leverage developing knowledge and allow others to build on it—including a new Harvard Kennedy School case study, in which Democracy Works will share the lessons of its growth with aspiring social entrepreneurs. Read more in **Sharing Lessons in Social Innovation (page 15)**.

This Report to Community highlights a handful of the new ideas we've supported recently. Others can be found in the **full list of grants (page 17)**. We are optimistic about the power of crossing boundaries between different fields—including bringing innovative perspectives to solving complex problems.

Elizabeth Good Christopherson
President and Chief Executive Officer

2015 Board of Directors

Elizabeth Good Christopherson
President and Chief Executive Officer

Robbert Dijkgraaf, Ph.D.

William F. Gadsden
Chair

Sivan Nemovicher Hong

Landon Y. Jones

The Honorable Thomas H. Kean

Geneva Overholser

Samuel S.-H. Wang, Ph.D.

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Moore Gates, Jr.

Aristides Georgantas

Henry H. Hitch

2015 Scientific Advisory Committee

Members of the Scientific Advisory Committee are critical advisors to the Rita Allen Foundation Board of Directors on matters involving our Scholars program and other grant proposals.

Kathleen M. Foley, M.D.
Rita Allen Foundation Medical Advisor
Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer
Center (MSKCC)
Weill Cornell Medical College

Douglas T. Fearon, M.D.
Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory
Weill Cornell Medical College

Charles D. Gilbert, M.D., Ph.D.
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Cancer Research UK Cambridge
Institute
University of Cambridge
New York Genome Center
Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory

Jeffrey D. Macklis, M.D.
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Harvard Medical School

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2015 Staff

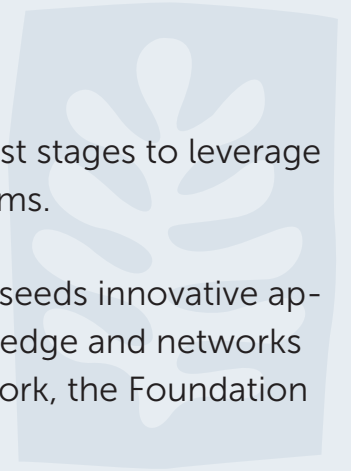
Elizabeth Good Christopherson,
President and Chief Executive Officer
Kate Belyi, *Communications, Knowledge and Secretary*
Jonathan Kartt, *Program and Evaluation*
Nancy Kovacevich, *Grants Administration*

Allison Litus, *Executive and Administrative Support*
Molly Sharlach, *Communications and Digital Engagement*
Kathleen Thompson, *Operations and Program*
Kari Williams Tyksinski, *Finance and Treasurer*

MISSION

The Rita Allen Foundation invests in transformative ideas in their earliest stages to leverage their growth and promote breakthrough solutions to significant problems.

It enables early-career biomedical scholars to do pioneering research, seeds innovative approaches to fostering informed civic engagement, and develops knowledge and networks to build the effectiveness of the philanthropic sector. Throughout its work, the Foundation embraces collaboration, creativity, learning and leadership.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Innovation

We will be an innovative and agile organization; to this end, we will rely on strategic, collaborative approaches to initiate and support pioneering programs that break new ground and challenge the status quo.



Core Values

We will bring to our work and seek in our relationships with others a commitment to, and belief in, the positive power of courage, hope, passion and shared aspirations; we are committed to translate these core values into effective action.



Focus

We will focus our efforts on enduring areas of domestic and global concern; our goals especially include advancing the frontiers of biomedical science, leadership and education. We will respond to short-term societal needs and undertake programs consistent with the mission and vision of the Foundation.



Leadership

To be a leader and a model both in our programs and in our operations, we will embrace appropriate levels of risk; we will foster an entrepreneurial spirit informed by inquisitiveness, due diligence, creativity and responsible stewardship of our assets.



Lasting Outcomes

We seek to advance new ideas and discoveries that address the root causes of challenging problems; we will define success by objectives linked to a significantly positive and lasting impact on individuals and the broader society.



Learning

We will engage in a collegial process of continuous learning, hard work and reassessment; we recognize that these qualities are essential to achievement of our mission.



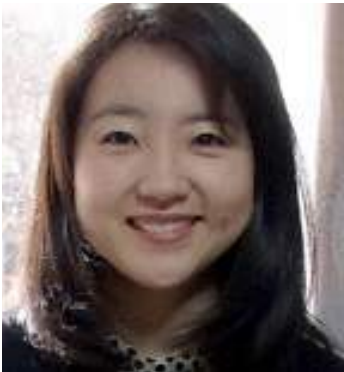
Collaboration

We will work with and convene leaders to develop and implement strategies that support innovation and bring new ideas and information to targeted groups; new areas of collaboration will evolve as we continually reevaluate human needs.

EXPLORING THE MECHANISMS OF LIFE

Rita Allen Foundation Scholars unravel processes of disease, development and damage control

Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Class of 2015



Minoree Kohwi
Columbia University



Yevgenia Kozorovitskiy
Northwestern University



Julie Law
Salk Institute for
Biological Studies



John Schoggins*
The University of Texas
Southwestern
Medical Center



Robert Sorge
The University of Alabama
at Birmingham



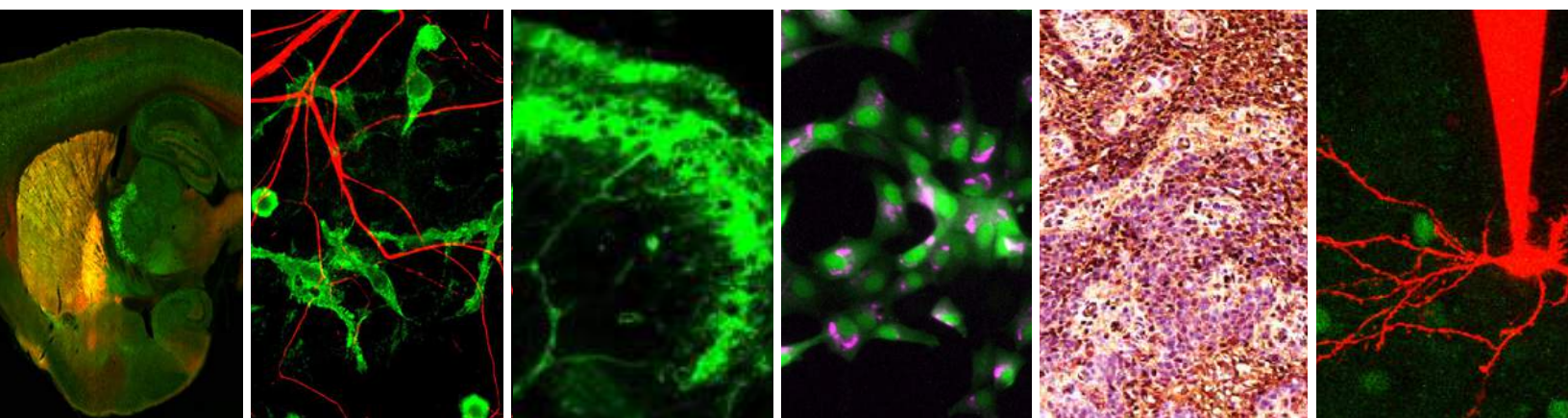
Jeremy Wilusz
Perelman School of
Medicine at the University
of Pennsylvania



Yi Ye
New York University

* Milton E. Cassel Scholar

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MINOREE KOHWI, RICHARD GABER/NORTHWESTERN, COURTESY OF SALK INSTITUTE, DAVE GRESHAM/UT SOUTHWESTERN, COURTESY OF UAB NEWS, MARY LEONARD/UPENN, LEO SOREL/NYU COLLEGE OF DENTISTRY



IMAGES (LEFT TO RIGHT): COURTESY OF YEVGENIA KOZOROVITSKIY AND ARPIAR SAUNDERS, WIKIMEDIA/GERRY SHAW, YI YE, JOHN SCHOGGINS, YI YE, YEVGENIA KOZOROVITSKIY

Since 1976, the Rita Allen Foundation Scholars program has provided transformative grants to young leaders in biomedical science, whose pioneering research is advancing our understanding of the human condition. The Scholars program supports basic research in the fields of cancer, neuroscience and immunology. The Rita Allen Foundation also collaborates with the American Pain Society to sponsor a joint award to scholars studying mechanisms and potential treatments for pain. Through the Scholars, the Foundation embraces innovative research with above-average risk and groundbreaking possibilities. The nearly 150 recipients have made significant advances in their fields of research and have received honors including the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, the National Medal of Science, the Wolf Prize in Medicine and the Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences.

Scholars are nominated by select research institutions in the United States and chosen by a Scientific Advisory Committee of leading scientists and clinicians. Scholars and their affiliated institutions receive grants of up to \$110,000 annually, for a maximum of five years. Scholars in the class of 2015 are using new techniques and approaches to investigate subjects including brain development, antiviral immunity, gene regulation mechanisms, and the interplay of cancer, inflammation and chronic pain. Visit the Rita Allen Foundation website to learn more about the Scholars' research.

www.ritaallen.org/foundation-scholars.htm

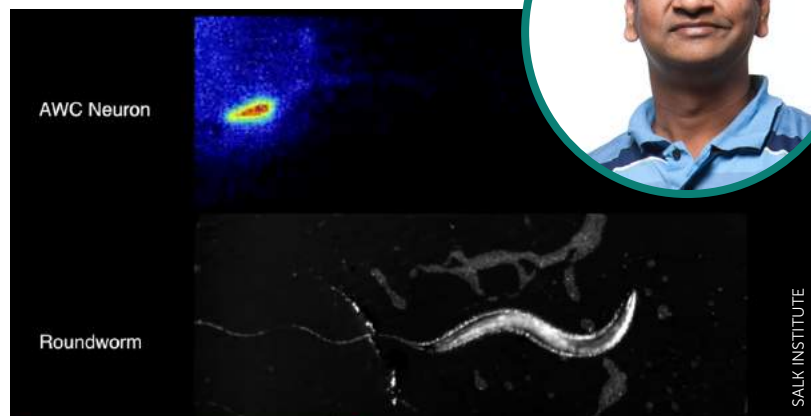
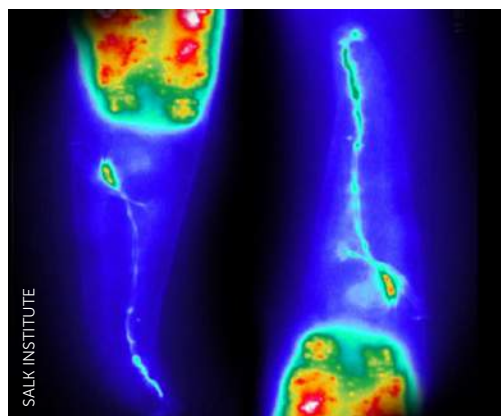
"The goal is to understand how genome stability is achieved under normal conditions. Such knowledge will be critical in determining how alterations in chromatin can lead to developmental defects and disease."

—JULIE LAW

"There are several new kinds of rapid-action antidepressant drugs under development already. Having a more basic fundamental understanding of what these drugs are doing to specific neural circuitry is going to allow us to design new drugs much better and much faster, and be able to predict their effects more efficiently."

—YEVGENIA KOZOROVITSKIY

Research in Action



The ability to stimulate specific neurons using beams of light, a technique known as optogenetics, has led to great advances in neuroscience over the past decade, helping to establish critical links between brain and behavior. But this approach has its drawbacks. Notably, light is easily scattered by the body's tissues, and optogenetics requires surgery to implant a fiber optic cable in the brain of a laboratory animal—usually a mouse or rat.

New research points to a similar but less invasive method for controlling individual neurons. In a first for neuroscience, a team of researchers led by Sreekanth Chalasani, a 2012 Rita Allen Foundation Scholar and a neurobiologist at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, successfully used low-frequency ultrasound waves to activate neurons in the millimeter-long roundworm *Caenorhabditis elegans*, a technique they call sonogenetics.

The team made use of the roundworm's naturally occurring neural machinery to make neurons responsive to ultrasound signals—with just 302 neurons, this worm is a valuable model organism for studying the nervous system. A protein called TRP-4 forms channels in the worm's nerve cell membranes. Normally, TRP-4 enables worms to sense the stretching movements of their bodies, but Chalasani and his team discovered that TRP-4 is also sensitive to ultrasound signals, similar to the sound waves often used to image fetuses or monitor heart functions in humans.

The researchers engineered specific neurons, whose action is known to cause worms to reverse their crawling direction, to produce TRP-4 membrane channels. Then, they placed the worms on an agar surface in a petri dish and added gas-filled "microbubbles" to amplify the ultrasound waves. They found that an ultrasound pulse caused a crawling worm to swiftly change its direction. Chalasani and his team published their results on September 15, 2015, in *Nature Communications*.

Sonogenetics is unlikely to replace optogenetics, but it may develop into another useful tool for deciphering and manipulating brain activity—perhaps even in humans. Chalasani's group is currently testing the technique in mice.

"The real prize will be to see whether this could work in a mammalian brain," Chalasani said in a news story announcing the findings. "When we make the leap into therapies for humans, I think we have a better shot with noninvasive sonogenetics approaches than with optogenetics."

ADVANCING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WITH SCIENCE

The Foundation supports innovative approaches to elevating the role of science in our democracy



PEXELS/JAY MANTRI

Climate Central and the National Research Council The Science of Science Communication: A Research Agenda

In an effort to build knowledge about how to effectively communicate about science, particularly as it relates to controversial public issues, the National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine has gathered a multidisciplinary committee to produce a consensus report on findings to date in the study of communication of contentious scientific topics. The report will also outline questions that should direct future research, ultimately with the goal to strengthen the role of science in crucial social decisions. The Rita Allen Foundation is supporting the committee's work as well as a connected project by Climate Central, an independent organization of scientists and journalists researching and reporting on climate change, to apply the committee's findings through original social science research. The committee is engaging with a variety of science communication practitioners and experts as it examines a wide range of factors that affect how science is perceived and used, including in the domains of psychology, culture, context, politics, communication tools and social issues.

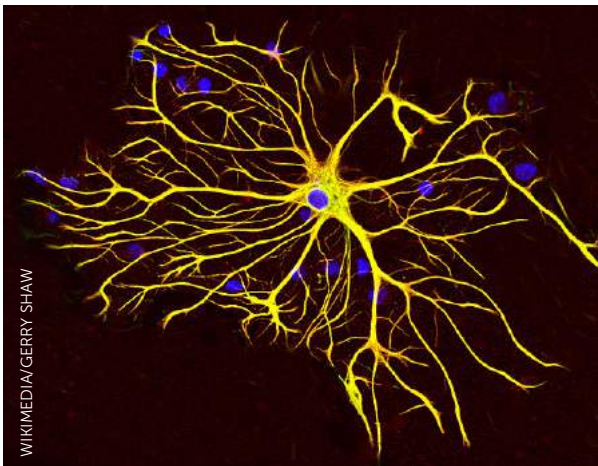
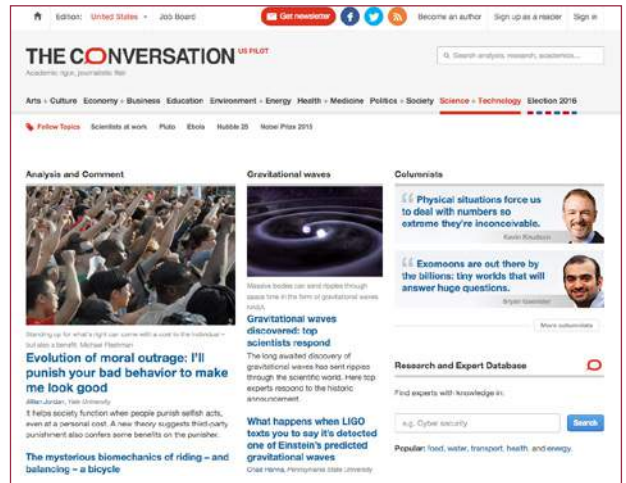
<http://www8.nationalacademies.org/cp/projectview.aspx?key=49754>

<http://www.climatecentral.org/>

The Conversation US Unlocking High-Quality Science for the Wider Community

The Conversation, first launched in Australia in 2011, is an independent news organization that actively seeks and supports academics who apply their expertise to write accessible, engaging articles on newsworthy topics. The Conversation US, launched in 2014, accounts for a growing proportion of The Conversation's total readership. With funding from the Rita Allen Foundation, The Conversation US is building an editorial team for science and technology, expanding the volume and reach of its content and growing its network of contributors and partner institutions. The team is placing a special focus on working with a new cadre of early-career scientists from U.S. universities. These researchers will gain valuable experience with communicating their work to the public, thanks to The Conversation's collaborative editing process, which includes a content management system that automatically flags overly complex language. Crucially, The Conversation's content is Creative Commons-licensed, allowing anyone, including popular news sites such as *The Washington Post*, *Slate*, *Quartz* and *The Huffington Post*, to republish articles at no cost, thus reaching more than 5 million readers each month.

<https://theconversation.com/us>



Harvard NeuroDiscovery Center RELIEF: Coverage of Pain Research for Patients to Elevate Public Awareness and Understanding of Chronic Pain

The Pain Research Forum has created RELIEF, a new website devoted to educating patients and the general public about the latest progress in understanding and treating chronic pain. Chronic pain is an under-recognized and costly problem that affects more than 100 million individuals in the United States alone. By producing webinars and podcasts, accessible stories about new research, and enhanced resources, RELIEF seeks to empower audiences "so they can spark and contribute to a worldwide conversation about chronic pain and help rally support for research." This grant builds on the Foundation's support of pain research through the Rita Allen Foundation Award in Pain.

<http://neurodiscovery.harvard.edu/>


<http://relief.news/>

CREATING NEW TOOLS TO STRENGTHEN CIVIC LIFE

The Foundation fosters pilot projects to make the workings of government more accessible



digital
democracy



“In a state that Snapchat, Google, Twitter and Facebook all call home, our government is failing to provide citizens with basic online tools and resources. Search engines have been around since the mid-’90s. YouTube just turned 10 years old. California tech companies are obsessed with constantly improving their user experience. Shouldn’t our government be doing the same?”

—GAVIN NEWSOM, LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF CALIFORNIA; AND SAM BLAKESLEE, FOUNDED DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY AND PUBLIC POLICY IN “HACKING A 21ST CENTURY GOVERNMENT,” HUFFPOST POLITICS, MAY 6, 2015

Institute for Advanced Technology and Public Policy Digital Democracy

Digital Democracy is an online platform using technology to increase the transparency and accountability of state legislatures. Housed at the Institute for Advanced Technology and Public Policy at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, Digital Democracy is a searchable video database of recorded California legislative hearings. The database empowers the media, citizens and watchdog groups to find and share video files and transcripts of hearings on topics of interest. Integrated data on campaign contributions and lobbying activities, special interest gifts and bill histories help users track influences on the legislative process. Funding from the Rita Allen Foundation allowed the Digital Democracy team to develop and deploy new features to better enable users to discover, track and share video clips of key moments in the deliberative process. The new features are built to scale in preparation for introducing Digital Democracy to other states.

<http://www.iatpp.calpoly.edu/>

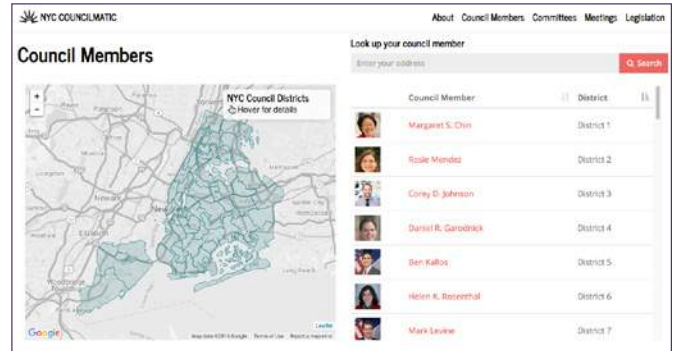
<http://www.digitaldemocracy.org/>

Participatory Politics Foundation Councilmatic

To provide citizens with better access to the workings of city councils, the Participatory Politics Foundation has developed an online tool called Councilmatic. This open-source application allows community groups and individual citizens to follow the actions of their city council and local agencies by searching a user-friendly database of proposed legislation, voting records and meeting minutes. Councilmatic will also provide simple text-messaging tools to improve communication between council members and their constituents. With funding from the Rita Allen Foundation, the Participatory Politics Foundation is partnering with HeartGov, the Open Civic Data project and with several elected officials to pilot Councilmatic in New York City and Chicago, with the goal of bringing the tool to more American cities in the future. NYC Councilmatic launched on September 30, 2015, at the Code for America Summit. In March 2016, Councilmatic was a finalist in the inaugural South By Southwest Interactive “Civic Pitch” event, which included a live demonstration for a group of a dozen U.S. mayors. Civic technologists sponsored by Code for America, which the Rita Allen Foundation has also supported, created an early version of Councilmatic currently in use in Philadelphia.

<http://www.participatorypolitics.org/>

<https://www.councilmatic.org/>



“Pure legislative transparency alone isn’t going to give a site as much impact as we want it to have. Open data alone isn’t enough, [but] if you provide official information in a shareable format with participation tools, you can see communities organically coming together to take action.”

—DAVID MOORE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE PARTICIPATORY POLITICS FOUNDATION IN “OPEN GOV’T PLATFORM FOR CITIES NOW IN NYC,” CIVICIST, NOVEMBER 23, 2015

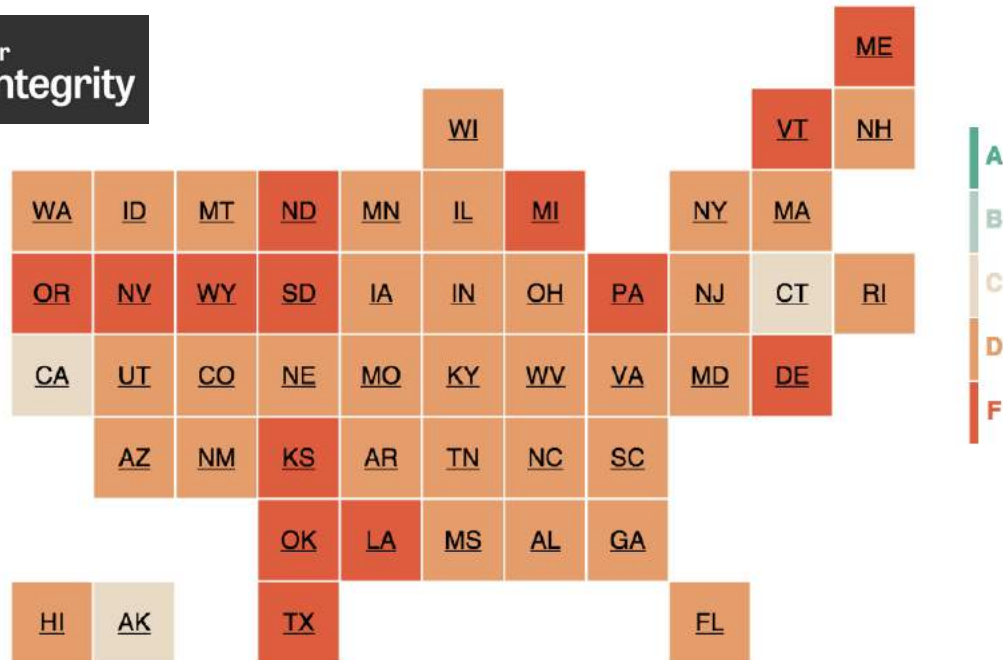


The OpenGov Foundation The Chicago Way

A partnership between The OpenGov Foundation and the office of Chicago Clerk Susana Mendoza aims to fully digitize the city’s legislative process, streamlining the system and expanding opportunities for citizen involvement. The Chicago Way will provide the first-ever unified digital platform for crafting, sharing and amending legislation. The OpenGov Foundation will collaborate with city employees to develop a law-drafting tool that produces a standardized, machine-readable output, in contrast to the typical hodgepodge of PDF documents that continues to create headaches for governments and citizens alike. To enable citizen feedback on proposed legislation, The OpenGov Foundation will adapt Madison, “a government policy co-creation platform” that invites annotation and interaction. After laws are signed, the new integrated system will continue to provide user-friendly access and opportunities for feedback. The Chicago Way builds on ChicagoCode.org and other open-source tools already being tested by local and state governments as part of The OpenGov Foundation’s Free Law Founders collaboration. The system is intended to be broadly applicable, with the potential to modernize lawmaking in the nearly 90,000 government entities across the United States.

<http://opengovfoundation.org/>

The Center for Public Integrity State Integrity Investigation 2.0



YUE QIU, CHRIS ZUBAK-SKEES AND ERIK LINCOLN FOR THE CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

The Center for Public Integrity’s State Integrity Investigation is a comprehensive assessment of government accountability and transparency for every state, involving research by 50 state-based reporters who examined 245 integrity indicators and used them to give the states letter grades reflecting their susceptibility to corruption. The investigation was released on November 9, 2015, and was conducted in partnership with Global Integrity with leadership support from the Rita Allen Foundation.

Of the 50 U.S. states, only three earned a D+ or better, and 11 states received failing grades. States were graded on both the existence and the implementation of ethics laws—for example, restrictions on gifts from lobbyists to lawmakers—and on the accessibility of government records. The indicators addressed 13 categories of integrity overall, ranging from electoral oversight to pension fund management. The investigation revealed a profusion of loopholes and exemptions, as well as ethics commissions with inadequate resources for enforcement.

This is the second State Integrity Investigation undertaken by the Center—the first, released in 2012, was also supported by the Rita Allen Foundation. Most states scored lower this time around, due in part to updates in the project’s research methodology. In particular, the latest assessment had a greater focus on issues of open data, as digital technology has raised standards for access to public records.

“The report’s take-away is that state officials still love operating with minimal scrutiny and public access,” *The Washington Post*’s editorial board wrote in a commentary on the investigation. “It will take sustained pressure to nudge most of them into the 21st century.” The State Integrity Investigation’s interactive graphics were selected as “Infographic of the Day” by *Fast Company*’s Co.Design, in a piece that praised the report for laying out “this immense amount of data in a way that’s comprehensive, easy to understand, and pretty fun to use.”

<http://www.publicintegrity.org/accountability/state-integrity-investigation/state-integrity-2015>

Progress in Public-Interest Journalism

The Foundation supports initiatives to improve the quality and impact of reporting on vital civic information. Following are three highlights of success and expansion in 2015 from projects initiated in 2014.



Internet Archive – Political TV Ad Archive

The Internet Archive's Political TV Ad Archive began in 2014 as the Philly Political Media Watch Project, a collaboration led by the Internet Archive and supported by the Rita Allen Foundation. The project aimed to serve journalists, scholars and other civic organizations by making election media, including political ads and related data on ad spending, more accessible. Project resources were used by journalists to contribute to campaign fiscal transparency and hold sponsors accountable for their messaging. Collaborating scholars published research on relationships between political ads and local TV news coverage. Last year, the project's researchers went on to develop technology to automate political ad identification, allowing their model to be expanded this year to 20 media markets in nine key early primary states. Launched in January 2016, the Political TV Ad Archive presents archived versions of the ads, joined with professional journalism fact-checking and other analysis. The Archive also includes searchable and downloadable data on every ad, including when and where ads aired, candidates, sponsors, sponsor types and more. These data have been cited in news stories in *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, the *PBS NewsHour*, *The Economist* and other popular outlets.

<http://politicaladarchive.org/>



American Press Institute – The Fact-Checking Project

The American Press Institute's fact-checking journalism project produces research to identify effective and informative fact-checking practices. The project applies this research by conducting workshops and providing resources to news organizations to advance their fact-checking, especially in coverage related to the 2016 election cycle. The project's research has found, for example, that the number of fact-checking stories in the U.S. news media increased threefold from 2008 to 2012, and has shown that fact-checking stories measurably improve readers' knowledge of politically relevant facts. The Rita Allen Foundation supports API's fact-checking project in partnership with the Democracy Fund and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/category/fact-checking-project/>



ONLINE NEWS
ASSOCIATION

Online News Association – Challenge Fund for Innovation in Journalism Education

Since 2014, the Online News Association's Challenge Fund for Innovation in Journalism Education has supported 22 collaborative journalism education projects by U.S. universities. Each group receives a \$35,000 micro-grant to "hack their curriculum through live news experiments" involving students, educators, local media outlets and other partners. By forging new connections and creatively applying digital and multimedia tools, each journalism education experiment aims to engage audiences in critical issues while training the next generation of journalists. In September 2015, two 2014–15 winners were awarded grand prizes: the Georgia News Lab received additional support to build on the success of its investigative reporting initiative; and the New Mexico News Port received funding for its collaborative publishing platform, which involves five partner media organizations and more than 75 student journalists. The Challenge Fund is supported by a collaborative that includes the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, the Democracy Fund, and the Rita Allen Foundation.

<http://journalists.org/next-gen/challenge-fund/>

SHARING LESSONS IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

The Foundation champions evaluation and knowledge sharing from pioneering civic engagement efforts



WITH PERMISSION OF THE HKS CASE PROGRAM

Harvard Kennedy School of Government Democracy Works Case Study

Democracy Works is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization using technology to help voting information “fit the way we live” in the 21st century. Democracy Works technologists partnered with the Pew Charitable Trusts, Google, and state and local election officials to develop the Voting Information Project, which has been supported in part by the Rita Allen Foundation. The Voting Information Project collects and disseminates polling information and election results into standardized, readily available online formats, and will provide data for more than 70 elections in 2016. The Rita Allen Foundation also supported the advancement and expansion of Democracy Works’ TurboVote, an online application that streamlines voter information. Partnerships with higher education networks helped to bring TurboVote services to more than 250,000 people by 2014. Additional funding from the Rita Allen Foundation will allow Democracy Works to move toward financial sustainability through new partnerships with companies and other nonprofits.

The Rita Allen Foundation is also supporting a project that will bring the lessons of Democracy Works’ growth to aspiring social entrepreneurs. Seth Flaxman and Kathryn Peters launched Democracy Works after earning master’s degrees in public policy from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Now, the Harvard Kennedy School Case Program has created a case study and companion video on Democracy Works, to be used in teaching public policy students how to analyze a problem, gather resources and take actions to address it.

<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/>

<http://democracy.works/>

Fast Forward 2016 Accelerator

Fast Forward aims to bolster and broaden the success of emerging tech-based nonprofits by providing startup funds, training and mentoring to teams of social entrepreneurs through its annual Accelerator. Each summer, Fast Forward chooses a new cohort of groups working to apply technology for social good, with special attention to fostering diversity among tech nonprofits. Each organization receives support to help improve and scale its product, establish nonprofit governance, and raise funds. The groups also benefit from connecting with tech and philanthropy leaders, building “an ecosystem of support for tech nonprofits.” Fast Forward occupies a distinctive niche, seeking to apply the model of for-profit tech accelerators to the nonprofit world. In 2016, Fast Forward is partnering with the Rita Allen Foundation to select a promising startup that seeks to strengthen civic engagement through technology.

<https://www.ffwd.org/>

<https://www.ffwd.org/programs/accelerator/>



“Key to our mission is building closer ties between the nonprofit and for-profit tech community, as the tech world has the opportunity to have a huge impact on these organizations and therefore around the world.”

—KEVIN BARENBLAT, COFOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF
FAST FORWARD
IN “FAST FORWARD ACCELERATOR HELPS NONPROFIT
TECH STARTUPS,” SFGATE, MAY 16, 2014



A Public Lab team in Chicago prepares a helium balloon to capture images for an aerial map of an animal feed manufacturing plant.

The Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science Developing a Comprehensive Community Engagement Evaluation Framework

The Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science (Public Lab) builds open-source hardware and software that enable scientists and community members to collaboratively investigate local environmental health issues. The Rita Allen Foundation previously supported the expansion of Public Lab’s outreach efforts to communities in the Northeast United States confronting environmental health risks. With funding from the Rita Allen Foundation, Public Lab is now partnering with science and environmental education specialists at the University of California, Davis, School of Education, to analyze its impact on individuals and communities and create a framework for ongoing evaluation of community science projects. This project will contribute to a deeper understanding of community science efforts, and is intended to result in broadly applicable approaches to benefit a variety of organizations. The Rita Allen Foundation is also supporting Public Lab’s participation in the Fund for Shared Insight’s Listen for Good initiative, which is working with select nonprofits to create a widely applicable system for collecting and using feedback from stakeholders in the social sector. The Rita Allen Foundation is among the core funders of the Fund for Shared Insight.

<https://publiclab.org/>



2015 GRANTS

The Foundation's grant making falls into two broad domains: Young Leaders in Science and Social Innovation, and Civic Literacy and Engagement. In addition to these main categories, the Foundation also supports efforts to strengthen the philanthropic field.

*Grants are listed in reverse chronological order within each category.
Unless otherwise specified, the time period for each grant is one year.*

YOUNG LEADERS IN SCIENCE AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

RELIEF: Coverage of Pain Research for Patients to Elevate Public Awareness and Understanding of Chronic Pain

Harvard NeuroDiscovery Center
\$100,000 (over two years)

2016 Science Media Symposium
WGBH Educational Foundation
\$150,000 (over two years)

Developing a Comprehensive Community Engagement Evaluation Framework

The Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science
\$150,000 (over three years)

Rita Allen Foundation Scholars
Class of 2015 and Continuing Scholars
\$2,850,000

CIVIC LITERACY AND ENGAGEMENT

The Science of Science Communication: A Research Agenda

Climate Central
\$500,000 (over two years)

Unlocking High-Quality Science for the Wider Community
The Conversation US
\$350,000

Expanding TurboVote Corporate Partnerships
Democracy Works
\$150,000 (over 15 months)

2016 Accelerator
Fast Forward
\$50,000

The Chicago Way
The OpenGov Foundation
\$200,000 (over two years)

Participation Lab
Participatory Budgeting Project
\$75,000

Participatory Budgeting Evaluation, Research and Communications
Public Agenda
\$75,000 (over 15 months)

Democracy Works Case Study
Harvard Kennedy School of Government
\$30,000

Hearken
Public Media NJ (NJTV)
\$62,000

Knight News Challenge: Elections
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
\$125,000

Councilmatic
Participatory Politics Foundation
\$150,000 (over two years)

Networking Media Makers, Funders and Experts to Improve Science Communication
Media Impact Funders
\$50,000

Digital Democracy
Institute for Advanced Technology and Public Policy
California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
\$165,000

FINANCIALS

Statement of Revenue, Expenses and Change in Net Assets (Modified Cash Basis)

2014 (Audited)

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total
Revenue and Support				
Investment Income				
Interest and dividends	2,158,057	180,766	-	2,338,823
Net realized gain on investments	23,163,317	1,940,602	-	25,103,919
Translation gain	4,006	-	-	4,006
Costs attributable to investments	(591,676)	-	-	(591,676)
Net Investment Income	24,733,704	2,121,368	-	26,855,072
Net assets released from restrictions	795,238	(795,238)	-	-
Total Revenue and Support	25,528,942	1,326,130	-	26,855,072
Expenses				
Grant awards	6,507,483	-	-	6,507,483
Program and foundation operations	1,497,275	-	-	1,497,275
Federal excise tax	330,000	-	-	330,000
Total Expenses	8,334,758	-	-	8,334,758
Change in net assets before appreciation in fair value of investments	17,194,184	1,326,130	-	18,520,314
Appreciation in fair value of investments	(15,597,916)	(1,306,741)	-	(16,904,657)
Change in Net Assets	1,596,268	19,389	-	1,615,657
Net Assets				
Beginning of Year	163,617,189	116,317	3,579,622	167,313,128
End of Year	165,213,457	135,706	3,579,622	168,928,785



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