

Wisconsin Center For Investigative Journalism

A new nonprofit news organization is collaborating with Wisconsin broadcast, online and print media to examine government integrity and quality-of-life issues. The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, based at the University of Wisconsin- Madison School of Journalism & Mass Communication, aims to boost the quality and amount of investigative journalism by working with mainstream and ethnic media and the Center's partners -- the journalism school, Wisconsin Public Radio and Wisconsin Public Television.

The Center's multimedia content will be distributed for free to Wisconsin news media and will be made available to the public on its Web site, WisconsinWatch.org. In addition, the Center will teach residents how to begin investigating issues such as government ethics, school performance, neighborhood safety and water quality in their communities. With for-profit journalistic business models facing severe cutbacks, the Center is among a small but growing number of efforts across the country to create nonprofit newsrooms investigating state and local issues. Similar centers have opened in New England and Texas, and journalists in at least half a dozen other states are exploring the idea.

The Center is operated by a staff of professional journalists under the guidance of a board of directors with national reputations for managing nonprofits and news organizations. Its executive director is Andy Hall, who in January left a 26-year-career as an award-winning investigative reporter to establish the Center. He reported for the Wisconsin State Journal for the past 18 years. The center also has hired interns and is drawing upon the services of journalists who are volunteering their skills and time.

As a tax-exempt public charity, the Center will fund its work primarily through contributions from foundations and individuals. In February, it received a \$100,000 start-up grant from the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, based in Oklahoma, after the foundation's leaders concluded that the Center might become a national model for other ventures. Wisconsin broadcasters are invited to contact the Center, which is an associate member of WBA, to discuss story ideas and to seek free advice on issues such as public records and investigative journalism techniques.

More information is available from Hall at ahall@wisconsinwatch.org or 608-262-3642.