

Inside/Outside Co-Reporting: A Case Study

How Incarcerated and Non-Incarcerated Journalists Can Collaborate to Produce Investigative Reporting

ARTICLE

'I don't have the funds': a diabetic prisoner pleaded for insulin supplies before his death

Clifford Farrar collapsed after seeking care last year. His death exposes the health crisis in Washington state prisons

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What is inside/outside co-reporting?

These are reporting partnerships in which one reporter is incarcerated and the other reporter is not. The incarcerated reporter has access to stories and sources but may not have the ability to use some common reporting tools like the internet and email. The outside reporter is a partner for research, interviewing non-incarcerated sources, and submitting press questions to government agencies, like the Department of Corrections.

How this story happened

"Because of my organizing work, I was contacted by some community advocates about what tragically happened to Clifford and if there was anything that folks on the inside could do to support his family. After some personal reflection, I asked to be put in direct contact with Clifford's family. From that initial conversation of grief, vulnerability, and love... I knew I had to do something. And that's when I decided to just write." — Felix

Felix worked with [Empowerment Avenue](#), a collective that supports incarcerated writers and pitched drafts on his behalf. *The Guardian* accepted his pitch, and Sam Levin was assigned as co-reporter to provide additional research, fact-checking, and sourcing.

“This was Felix’s story idea, so the piece would not have existed if he hadn’t brought it forward. He was able to help provide a rare firsthand account of what it was like inside the prison when the emergency code went off. The lede he wrote in the story is not the kind of anecdote I’m generally able to include in prison stories, and I think it made a huge difference in helping take readers inside the prison and better visualize the circumstances. We wouldn’t have had the same kind of access to other incarcerated people if it wasn’t for Felix’s reporting, and in general he was in a position to explain the mood and daily conditions in the prison in a way that is not possible for outside journalists.” — Sam

Building a relationship

Any co-reporting relationship requires trust, honesty, and open communication. Inside/outside co-reporting is no different. Sam and Felix took time to get to know one another and clearly outline their roles for the story. They regularly navigated prison communication systems to stay in touch.

“We agreed that having direct contact with one another would be the best way to proceed. We spent a significant amount of time discussing our own personal principles in reporting...This was extremely important in building trust.” — Felix

Costs

Prison communication costs money. Ideally news outlets set aside funds to support this work.

“There were costs for all emails and phone calls. While I was fortunate enough to be able to cover the costs of some of the communication, Empowerment Avenue came through to cover a majority of the financial burden. Sam also made sure to have funds on his phone and paid for his own emails.” — Felix

Retaliation

Felix, like all incarcerated journalists, took a risk to tell this story. Outside reporters should trust their inside co-reporter when they share the risks they're willing to take, or not. The outside reporter should also be the point person when it comes to working with Department of Corrections communications departments. Publications should be aware of the risks the inside reporter is taking and be willing to protect the reporting on both an editorial and legal level.

"Once I had an edited draft, I read it to Felix on the phone. My editors and I preferred that the prison did not have access to a full written version of the story prior to publication, so I decided not to send it through JPay." — Sam

"Sam was in charge of contacting the Department of Corrections for comment." — Felix

Compensation

There are different rules and restrictions around paying incarcerated people, so bring up the topic in an open-ended manner. ("If we were to compensate for your work, what would that look like and what's the best way to talk about it?") Many incarcerated people will request you get in touch with an outside loved one and send the money to them. There's no single way to pay people in prison. Work directly with the inside reporter to figure out a system that works — and kick off the conversation as soon as possible.

Stay in touch and share the impact

After the story is published, the incarcerated reporter may not be able to see it online or share it on social media, so it is helpful for the outside reporter to share information about the story's reception. It's also important to check in about potential retaliation.

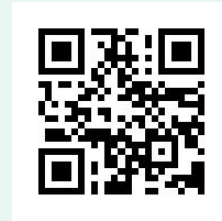
"Readers don't often pay much attention to bylines, but I know some of my readers and sources were moved to learn it was a collaboration with a journalist who is currently incarcerated. Readers and advocates who work in criminal justice were excited to see the work of an incarcerated writer reach our audience and in particular to see a journalist inside do traditional news reporting." — Sam

Read the full story



<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/nov/15/prison-healthcare-washington-diabetes-death-clifford-farrar>

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