



2019 RETROSPECTIVE

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Irving Washington

DATE

January 23, 2020

MISSION STATEMENT

Inspire and support innovation
and excellence in digital journalism

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Acknowledgements

This report was assembled with input and contributions from the entire Online News Association team:

Irving Washington, Executive Director/CEO

- Provides oversight of all operations, partnerships and strategic planning;

Trevor Knoblich, Chief Knowledge Officer

- Oversees all programming and events;

Jessica Strelitz, Chief Strategic Partnerships Officer

- Oversees all sponsorships and new revenue development;

Bill Brady, Strategic Partnerships Coordinator

- Supports business development strategy, including managing exhibit spaces at events;

Diana Lopez, Administrative Assistant

- Supports team needs and manages ONA's general administrative activities;

Jen Mizgata, Director of Programs

- Directs our grant-funded initiatives and diversity programs;

Meghan Murphy, Senior Manager, Communities & Local Journalism Initiatives

- Manages our growing ONA Local community and local programming;

Adam Martin, Meeting Manager

- Manages event logistics, including food and beverage, audio/visual and some travel;

Adam Nekola, Senior Digital Manager

- Manages all of our digital properties and design, including this report;

Karolle Rabarison, Communications Manager

- Manages organizational communications strategy and messaging;

Hollie Schultz, Program Manager, Awards and Grant-Making

- Manages the Online Journalism Awards, as well as supports application processes and microgrant distributions.

Consultants

Laura Bertocci
Communications

Melinda Cooke Vandaveer
Events

Brian Duff
Learning Consultant

Ashley DaSilva
Online Journalism Awards

Julia DiLaura
Development

Kelly Jones
Volunteers

Amber Krosel
Web Consultant

Joyce Rice
Designer

Hanaa Rifaey
ONA19 Midway Producer

Leah Rush
Registration and Operations

Anne Saul
MJ Bear Fellowship

Carolyn Skinner
Accounting

Sam Stewart
Journalism 360 Program Manager

ONA's 20th Anniversary



2019 marked 20 years of the Online News Association and saw our community rally to celebrate the milestone throughout the year.

Highlights included a weeklong program showcase in New York City; numerous stories of ONA's impact shared online using the hashtag #Happy-20thONA; celebratory events hosted by ONA Local organizers in various cities; and ONA on Air's anniversary series, a podcast produced by our volunteer conference audio team. Special programming during ONA19 in New Orleans also highlighted some of the defining moments in ONA's history and connected people who have been involved in different ways, from founders and key early contributors to program alumni, volunteers and Board members.

ONA's 20th Anniversary

Celebrating our 20th anniversary was an opportunity to reflect on ONA's impact and set the tone for continued leadership in an ever-changing industry. Since 1999, ONA has grown from a small forum of digital news pioneers to a diverse global community that includes journalists, technologists, newsroom and news business leaders, educators and other digital media innovators.

Looking forward, we identified five focus areas to guide our mission of inspiring innovation and excellence in digital journalism:

- **Developing strategies for emerging technologies:** We will provide insights into trends and best practices for using immersive reality, artificial intelligence and other emerging tools for journalism — supporting newsrooms to tell stories in new formats while making informed, ethical decisions for investing resources.
- **Sharing best practices on audience engagement and metrics:** We will support news providers in understanding how individuals engage with the information they deliver and help deepen their relationship with the communities they serve.
- **Innovative news storytelling:** We will continue to push the boundaries of how stories are told and how journalism inspires change.
- **Experimenting and finding new revenue and business models:** We will invest in more trainings and events dedicated to discovering models for thriving news ecosystems.
- **Cultivating newsroom leadership, culture and diversity:** We will significantly increase our efforts to ensure the industry has diverse leadership equipped to navigate uncertainty. ■





Training, Education, Resources



01



Annual Conference

New Orleans' legendary hospitality shone as the city hosted one of our biggest and most dynamic conferences to date across two venues, the Sheraton New Orleans and InterContinental New Orleans.

ONA convened more than 2,700 journalists, educators and technologists for three days of networking, learning and recognition. It was a truly global audience, with 53 countries and more than 1,100 organizations represented. Our most diverse presenter group to date hosted 120 conversations exploring emerging trends, best practices and under-the-hood looks at innovative digital projects.

The conference attracted a record number of sponsors, exhibitors and supporters (120+). We also hosted a record number of sponsored events, including breakfasts, lunches and receptions with a diverse array of programming. ONA also received a number of new in-kind support for the event.

Highlights of the event included a conversation about journalism in the climate change era with former EPA administrator Gina McCarthy; a conversation on press freedom with Rappler CEO Maria Ressa; and a bittersweet farewell to media futurist Amy Webb, who gave the 12th and final version of her popular Tech Trends in Journalism presentation, handing the reins to a new crop of leaders to continue these conversations in the future. ■



ONA LOCAL LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

About 60 people attended the ONA Local Summit, held Sept. 11 at the Intercontinental New Orleans.

This day-long workshop is an opportunity for ONA Local organizers and other community builders in journalism to meet each other, get in-person training and celebrate their hard work leading innovation in local journalism, and is our flagship training event for ONA Local organizers.

Sessions touched on how to adapt organizing strategies into journalists' everyday work, nurturing creativity, building a volunteer team, diversifying newsroom leadership through mentorship, and more. ■



STUDENT NEWSROOM

The Student Newsroom and Innovation Lab immerses 20 undergraduate and graduate college students in a digital media environment, providing hands-on experience as they cover ONA's annual conference with guidance from experienced volunteer mentors.

In 2019, co-chairs Michelle Johnson and Katia Hetter led with a product mindset and organized the program into five cross-functional teams: Conference Coverage, Industry Future, Industry Now, Voices and New Orleans. The new setup encouraged writers to work more closely with developers and visual journalists than they had in previous years.

Stories they produced covered topics such as navigating parenthood and a journalism career, climate reporting and the industry's union movements. Students also gained sourcing and breaking news experience when a double-booking led to a last-minute venue change for the conference's opening reception. ■



The 2019 Student Newsroom members and their mentors during the first day of the ONA19 conference.

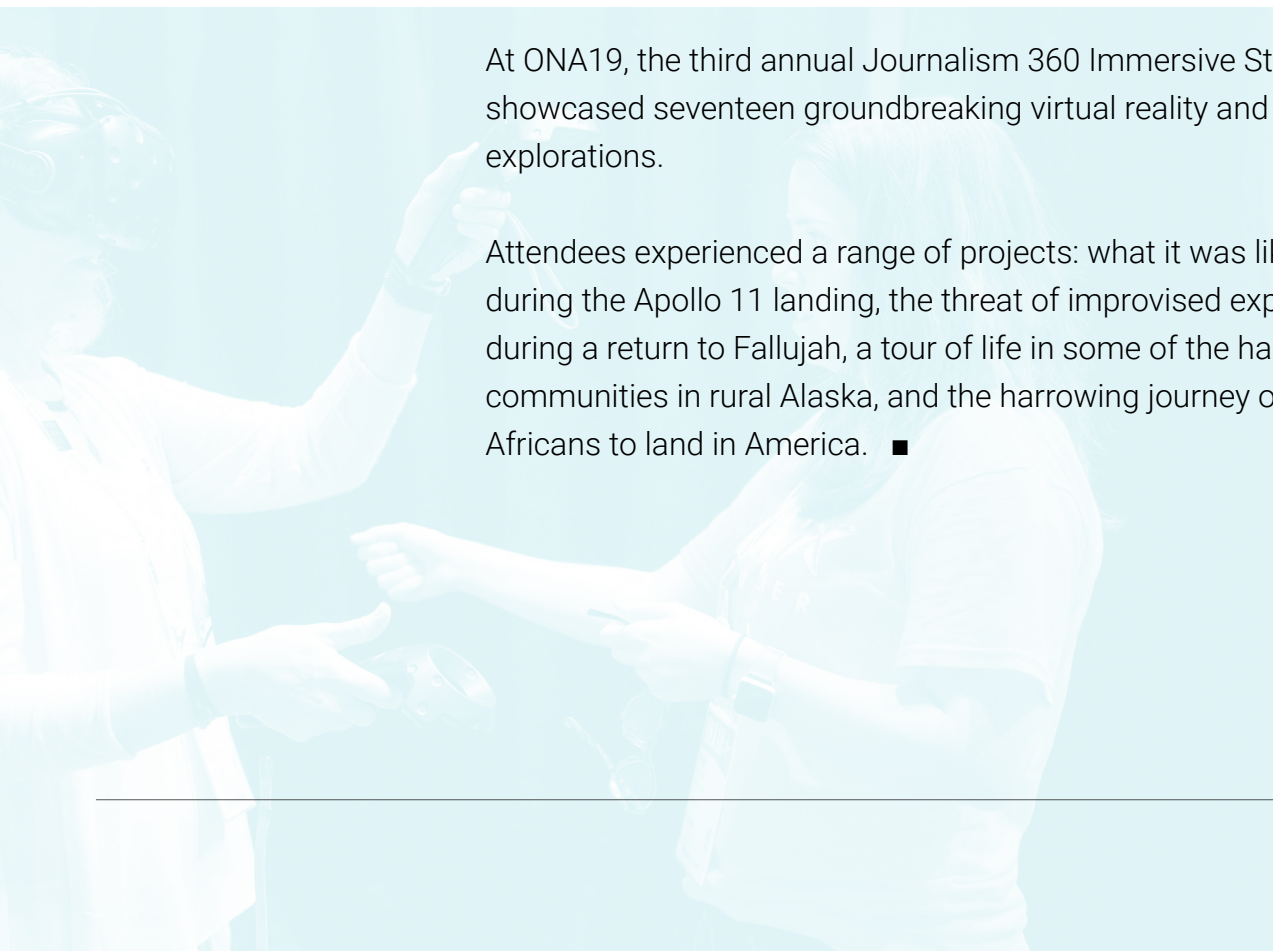
JOURNALISM 360

Thanks to Journalism 360 events, hundreds of people experienced new immersive technology firsthand and saw how journalists are telling stories through augmented reality, virtual reality and 360 video technology.

In July, the Journalism 360 Unconference brought together leaders in the field, including speakers from Emblematic, New York Times, McClatchy Video Lab, NYU, TIME and more, who shared insights into how they built their projects. Journalism 360 grantees also debuted a number of never-before-seen projects, giving attendees a first look at new experiences and technology.

At ONA19, the third annual Journalism 360 Immersive Storytelling Festival showcased seventeen groundbreaking virtual reality and augmented reality explorations.

Attendees experienced a range of projects: what it was like on the moon during the Apollo 11 landing, the threat of improvised explosive devices during a return to Fallujah, a tour of life in some of the hardest-to-reach communities in rural Alaska, and the harrowing journey of the first enslaved Africans to land in America. ■





CAREER DEVELOPMENT

ONA is committed to elevating journalism changemakers and journalism innovation by connecting our community members to financially sound careers. We continued to bolster career resources for the digital journalism community in 2019.

Take for example ONA's Career Center, an excellent resource for jobs, fellowships and internships in digital journalism. The platform served more than 26,000 people in 2019, an 8% increase year over year, and the number of candidates applying to new opportunities increased by an impressive 36%. We're always looking for ways to improve people's experience with the Career Center and connect more candidates with relevant opportunities. This year we introduced a quarterly email update for recruiters, added FAQ material to help people navigate the resources and — as part of our efforts to support the New Orleans journalism community during the closure of the Times-Picayune — offered free listings for any recruiters with openings in the greater New Orleans area.

At ONA19, 15 media groups—about a quarter of all exhibiting groups—recruited in the Exhibit Hall and Midway areas. We also showcased about 50 jobs and fellowship opportunities from on-site recruiters and non-exhibiting groups on a physical job board at the conference. ■

RESOURCE CENTER

A year after we launched the ONA Resource Center, the portal now covers over 400 topics sourced from various ONA events and trainings, including six annual conferences. These materials include video, audio, slide presentations, social media commentary, and other related items. ■

COMMUNITIES AND COHORTS



02

ONA LOCAL

ONA Local is a global network of volunteer-run meetup groups hosting networking and training events for local journalism and technology communities.

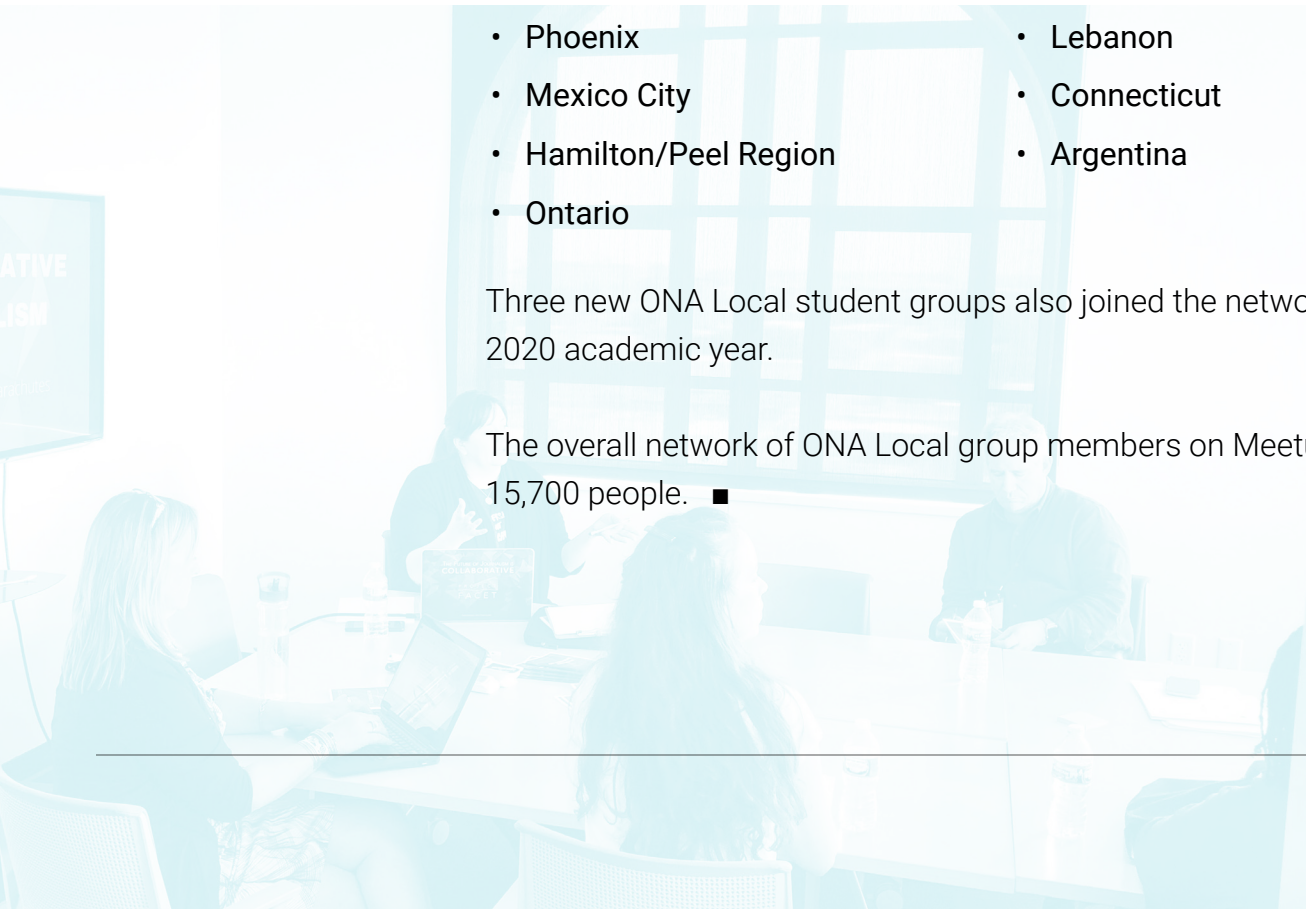
In 2019, 92 ONA Local organizers hosted 120 events around the world, strengthening connections and sharing resources. ONA Local organizers received training throughout the year designed to help them lead innovation both in their newsrooms and more broadly in local journalism communities, focusing on skills such as recruiting and managing diverse teams, mentorship and leading through influence.

Organizers launched eight new ONA Local groups this year:

- Baltimore
- Phoenix
- Mexico City
- Hamilton/Peel Region
- Ontario
- Uganda
- Lebanon
- Connecticut
- Argentina

Three new ONA Local student groups also joined the network for the 2019-2020 academic year.

The overall network of ONA Local group members on Meetup.com grew to 15,700 people. ■





ONA Local leaders held office hours event at ONA18 for attendees interested in starting their own groups



At the ONA Local Leaders Summit, attendees broke into groups to discuss strategies for running their groups.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ACCELERATOR

This year, we welcomed 26 incredible women—selected from a pool of more than 400 applicants—to the 2019 Women's Leadership Accelerator cohort.

They joined a community of over 100 women who have gone through ONA's transformational training. The impressive group includes entrepreneurs, freelancers and leaders at diverse news organizations, from local news to broadcasting to international digital media.



The 2019 cohort of the Women's Leadership Accelerator during their program kickoff week at the UCLA campus in February 2019.

The 2019 program kicked off with a week of hands-on personal and professional work; candid discussions about leadership, work-life balance and problem-solving in the newsroom; and inspiring visits with leaders at Netflix and The Getty Museum.

Cohort members received an expenses-paid trip to ONA19, where they had their final workshop. We have received overwhelmingly positive

feedback from the group, who continue to actively turn to each other for support as they work on their challenges throughout the year.

Beyond the flagship cohort-based program, the Accelerator hosted two free public events. In Los Angeles, KCRW's President Jen Ferro and Hammer Museum's Head of Public Programming Claudia Bestor shared insights on how to build audiences through meaningful experiences.

In New York, Julia Beizer, CPO of Bloomberg and Dheerja Kaur, CPO of the Skimm shared their experiences of leading from the product side with over 120 women at the AP, where they were welcomed by AP Executive Editor Sally Buzbee. ■



VOLUNTEERS

Hundreds of volunteers served ONA's mission across a variety of programs and initiatives in 2019. Here are just a handful of examples of their contributions:

- Greeting attendees at ONA19
- Mentoring talented student journalists in the Student Newsroom and Innovation Lab
- Creating the ONA On Air podcast
- Organizing training and networking opportunities in ONA Local groups around the world
- Screening and judging entries for the Online Journalism Awards
- Selecting programming for our annual conference
- Guiding organizational strategy as members of the Board of Directors



AWARDS, RECOGNITION, GRANTS

03



Online Journalism Awards
2018

Explanatory Reporting, Medium
Dirty Gold, Clean Cash
Jay Weaver, Nicholas Nehamas, Jim Wy
Kyra Gurney, Aaron Albright, Pedro Portal,
Jose Iglesias and Noel Gonzalez, Miami Herald

Online News Association

Explanatory Reporting, Large
The W

The Arizona Republic
S.A. LA NACION

Online News Association

Online Journalism Awards
2018

Excellence in Audio Storytelling,
Medium
Prosecutor Nism
Interceptions Mapped in
Playlists

Online News Association

ONLINE JOURNALISM AWARDS



ONA honored 39 individuals, projects and organizations at the 2019 Online Journalism Awards Ceremony, a celebration emceed by Sam Sanders, NPR correspondent and host of the podcast *It's Been a Minute*. More than 1,200 entries submitted from 34 countries competed for the awards.

We made several changes to the awards program this year. We introduced the Gather Award in Engaged Journalism category, in partnership with the Agora Journalism Center at the University of Oregon School of Journalism and Communication, to recognize the expanding body of work centering community as part of a story or reporting process. We updated the Excellence in Audio Digital Storytelling by creating three content distinctions – ongoing series, limited series and use of audio storytelling. Finally, we re-introduced our Digital Video Storytelling category after several years' hiatus.

Several people received special recognition during the ceremony for outstanding contributions to the field of journalism.

- Photojournalist Tomas Ayuso was presented with the James Foley Award for Conflict Reporting.
- ONA's Community Award, focused on transformational contributions in journalism, was presented to the Journalists of Color Slack Administrators: Aaron Williams, Sisi Wei, Tauhid Chappell, Erik Reyna, Julia B. Chan, Lam Thuy Vo and Lo Bénichou. ■



Sarah Whitmire accepts an OJA on behalf of McClatchy from ONA Board Vice President and OJA Chair P. Kim Bui during the 2019 ceremony.



ONA Board member Benét Wilson reacts to the Journalists of Color Slack Administrators being honored as winners of the ONA Community Award.

ONA/Google News Initiative Local Community Leader Scholarship

New this year, the ONA/Google News Initiative Local Community Leader Scholarship recognized 13 diverse leaders who are creating the environment for positive change in local news communities beyond their own newsrooms.

Scholarship recipients had projects ranging from organizing networks for journalists of color, to connecting community members and journalists, to building mentorship programs for local media professionals. The scholarship included travel, lodging and registration for ONA19 and community leadership training at the ONA Local Summit. ■

CHALLENGE FUND

The Challenge Fund for Innovation in Journalism Education continues to support universities to partner with news organizations and explore new ways of providing information to local communities.

The fund is a partnership between the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, Robert R. McCormick Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Democracy Fund, Rita Allen Foundation, The Scripps Howard Foundation and ONA. In total, 42 collaborative projects have received over \$1.5 million of support through the fund.

This year, we invited universities awarded grants in 2018 to compete for a \$50,000 Grand Prize and honored University of Maryland for impressive collaboration with local media partners on a data journalism project. Initially partnered with Capital News Service and Wide Angle Youth Media, the project expanded and attracted multiple reporting partners including NPR and The Baltimore Sun. “Code Red” and “Bitter Cold” include a range of reporting on how climate change affects the health of low-income residents with chronic medical conditions in Baltimore city. ■

FELLOWSHIPS

We invest in the future of digital journalism through our annual fellowship programs. In 2019, nine journalists received fellowship recognition from ONA for their innovative work.

MJ Bear Fellowship

The MJ Bear Fellowship honors outstanding journalists under 30 whose work in independent, community and corporate news represents the best of new media. Thanks to additional support from Microsoft News, ONA expanded the Fellowship in 2019 and selected six fellows from around the world leading innovative digital journalism projects.



The 2019 MJ Bear Fellows
at ONA19.

PROGRAMS: FELLOWSHIPS

The 2019 MJ Bear fellows include Taylor Blatchford, News Producer, The Seattle; Lance Dixon, Director, The New Tropic; Abbey Crain, Reporter, AL.com/Reckon; Shadab Nazmi, Visual Data Journalists, BBC News/South Asia, Nigel Ndlovu, freelancer; and Kevin Nguyen, Digital Producer, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Fellows came to ONA19 to discuss their projects, including providing live election results in 11 languages simultaneously, creating a virtual learning environment for journalists, a newsletter with resources for student journalists, an effort to give voice to women from the Deep South and efforts to focus on the human side of climate change.

HBCU Digital Media Fellowship

This fellowship, sponsored by Knight Foundation for six years now, honors students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), who attend and report on our annual conference. The students receive hands-on experience in creating multimedia packages, as well as mentorship focused on emerging technologies, tools and approaches to reporting and distributing news online. The fellows were:

Aiyana Ishmael, Junior, Journalism, at Florida A&M University; Donovan Dooley, Senior, Multimedia Journalism, at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University; Justus Hawkins, Senior, Strategic Communication, at Morgan State University; Nicholas Vaughn, Senior, Marketing/Sports Journalism, at Morehouse College; and Tia Humphries, Senior, Journalism at Howard University.

For three days, fellows worked closely with lead mentor Michael Grant, Teaching Fellow at Google News Lab and 2017-18 John S. Knight Fellow at Stanford University, and Michelle Johnson, Chair of the ONA Student Newsroom and Innovation Lab and Associate Professor of Practice, Multimedia Journalism at Boston University. ■



2018 HBCU Fellows along with lead mentor Michael Grant (right).

STANDARDS, ETHICS, ADVOCACY

ONA collaborated with press organizations and publishers throughout the year to help support digital journalists telling stories of public importance. Here is a snapshot of some of our efforts:

Access to information

ONA has joined efforts challenging federal and state agency attempts to narrow access to public records through FOIA and state freedom of information laws; challenging courts who close the courtroom to press during hearings on matters of public importance; seeking access to court records in a timely and cost-effective manner; challenging the federal government's use of gag orders on the recipients of National Security Letters and warrants; and challenging the use of nondisparagement clauses in police brutality settlements in Baltimore, which prohibited victims who settled from speaking to the media.

Protections for digital journalists

ONA joined an amicus brief in a case that won an important decision from the Nevada Supreme Court expanding that state's shield law to cover online publishers and journalists, even if they were not members of the Nevada Press Association. ONA also joined a coalition of press organizations helping to protect key elements of Texas's anti-SLAPP law from challenge by industry groups, and challenged state efforts to criminalize newsgathering efforts through "ag-gag" laws.

International efforts

ONA participated in a media amicus effort supporting Google in its long-running challenge to European efforts to enforce the "right to be

forgotten” globally. The EU Court of Justice held in Google’s favor, finding that search engines are not required to “de-index” content worldwide, and enforcement is limited to EU member states. ONA also joined a group of media entities to intervene in a case in Northern Ireland. Two documentary filmmakers were arrested and had materials seized from their homes and offices based on their reporting about an unpublished draft of a government report in their investigation of a high-profile murder case. Following significant international attention, the court quashed the warrants. ■

**STANDARDS,
ETHICS,
ADVOCACY**
