

SOLITARY WATCH

Grants Available to Journalists for Reporting on Solitary Confinement

Through the generosity of the Vital Projects Fund, Solitary Watch (www.solitarywatch.org) is able to offer small grants to journalists working in all media with the goal of expanding public awareness and understanding of solitary confinement in U.S. federal and state prisons, local and tribal jails, immigration detention centers, and juvenile justice facilities.

While it contains more than two million people—a population larger than all but four U.S. cities—the American carceral system has been kept largely off-limits to the public and the press. Solitary confinement, which functions as a prison within a prison, has been even more difficult to access.

Despite an increase in media attention to solitary confinement over the past decade, recent polling shows that most Americans still lack the knowledge needed to make informed choices about this widespread and controversial practice.

Grant Guidelines:

Solitary Watch is looking for stories that have yet to be told about all aspects of solitary confinement, with a national, state, local, or thematic focus, in all media. Topics and approaches can include, but are not in any way limited to:

- Data-based stories and data visualizations that provide new insights on the use or impact of solitary.
- Work that draws on the lived experience of people in solitary confinement, solitary survivors, and their families and communities, as well as of staff working in solitary confinement units.
- Stories that look at alternatives to solitary or at alternate solutions to the problems solitary purports to solve.
- Analyses of the political context or political fallout of the use of solitary, for example as an issue in local elections.
- Investigations of rural and suburban jails and detention centers that are run with even less oversight than prisons.

In addition to written work, we welcome short video and audio pieces, photography, and graphic narratives. We encourage proposals from journalists working in local areas where solitary has received little coverage. We also encourage incarcerated and formerly incarcerated journalists to apply.

Grants are meant to cover both payments to journalists and reporting expenses, and can be for any amount from \$1,000 to \$5,000. While we expect to provide one or two \$5,000 grants for in-depth investigative stories, most grants will be in the \$1,500 to \$2,500 range for relatively short, impactful work. Applicants are free to negotiate additional payment from outlets that publish their work.

Proposals may be submitted by individual reporters and teams, and also by small newsrooms (especially nonprofit newsrooms) who may need additional support to undertake this subject. If the applicant is a newsroom, a reporter should still be designated for the grant project.

Projects to receive grants will be chosen by two veteran journalists:

- **Wilbert Rideau** won renown as a prison journalist and editor of the magazine *The Angolite* during 25 of his 44 years in custody at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. He received a George Polk Award, a Sidney Hillman Prize, and a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award. He is the author of the autobiography *In the Place of Justice*, and has collaborated on radio and film documentaries.
- **James Ridgeway**, Solitary Watch's founder and co-director, is an investigative reporter with more than 50 years of experience at the *Village Voice*, *New Republic*, and *Mother Jones*. He is the author or co-author of 20 books and co-director of two documentary films, and he received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship for his recent reporting on prisons.

Application Instructions:

Applications must be received **no later than midnight on January 31, 2019** (earlier is encouraged). Please send only the following materials **as attachments** in the designated formats to journalism@solitarywatch.org.

Incarcerated journalists may submit their applications via a friend on the outside, or may send their typed or handwritten application materials to the following address. Please allow extra time for delays in prison mail: Reporting Grants Project, Solitary Watch, PO Box 11374, Washington, DC 20008.

1. A proposal of no more than three pages total, in 12-pt. type with 1-inch margins, **formatted as a Word document**. This should include:

- Name(s) of reporter(s)
- Email and phone number
- Whether you are a freelance reporter or attached to a newsroom
- Grant amount requested
- Medium and length of proposed project
- Up to 750 words describing your project and reporting plans
- Name of a secured outlet for publication, or names of three possible outlets to which you will pitch your project
- A list of any anticipated reporting expenses
- A professional biography of up to 300 words
- A list of the two work samples you are submitting (see below)

2. Two work samples. Samples of print and online written work, photography, and graphic work should be formatted as PDFs. (Please send no more than one longform piece.) For audio and video samples, please either attach files to your email or provide links at the end of your proposal.

Grant recipients will be notified and announced in late March. Recipients will be asked to provide first drafts of their work to Solitary Watch for (non-binding) feedback. Funded projects must be completed by the end of 2019.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to review your proposal!