Seeking Conviction:
Justice elusive for NC sexual assault survivors

How 10 media outlets—working together—changed state law
This is where we're going.

- Carolina Public Press and Staff
- It Began with a Tip
- Data Told the Story
- The Need for Collaboration
- Choosing Partners
- Challenges
- Outcomes
- Lessons Learned
Carolina Public Press is an independent nonprofit news organization dedicated to nonpartisan investigative and in-depth reporting, built on the facts and delivered in a context that North Carolinians need to know.

Our award-winning, breakthrough journalism dismantles barriers and shines a light on overlooked and under-reported issues facing our state’s 10.5 million residents.
Why did CPP start?

Founded in 2011, CPP initially focused on the issues, topics and challenges faced by Western North Carolina.

In February 2018, we expanded coverage to all of North Carolina.

Since its launch, CPP has attracted a growing statewide and national audience and secured financial support from hundreds of individuals and dozens of foundations across the region, state and nation.
Project Manager
Stephanie Carson

Journalism Background

Project Manager Experience
Special projects producer for CBS and the owner of an Event Company.

Here I am ...
CPP News & Community Partnerships Manager …. (and Ski Bum)
Managing Editor
Frank Taylor

Journalism Background
26 years of experience as a journalist throughout North Carolina, Georgia and Florida

Award collector
Two-time winner of the N.C. Press Association’s Freedom of Information Award, among dozens of other awards

Here I am ...
Managing Editor, CPP
(and resident North Carolina geography expert)
It Began With a Tip…

We got a tip:

"no sexual assault cases were being prosecuted" in a particular county in North Carolina.

We requested NC State Court Data.

Our initial tip wasn't entirely true… but the number of prosecuted sexual assault cases was very low.
But first ... that data ...
Enter Kate Martin, Data Super Hero

Kate used her data analysis experience (plus tricks from her nuclear scientist husband) to untangle and compile reams of data.

What she found showed: we had a story.
# The Need for Collaboration

We had a great story. Why share the wealth?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Exposure</th>
<th>Pool Resources</th>
<th>Data Validation</th>
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<td>The large volume of geographically diverse data would benefit from on-location reporting and local contacts.</td>
<td>Collaboration could expand the reach of our reporting across communities and mediums.</td>
<td>We needed a range of skills and additional resources to contribute to the project.</td>
<td>Kate could benefit from sharing her data analysis to validate it with other experts in data reporting.</td>
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Choosing Partners

• We identified partners based on:
  ◦ Geography
  ◦ Expertise
  ◦ Audience reach
  ◦ Individual relationships

• We shared a short synopsis of our findings, and discussed basic expectations.

• Our initial goal was just five partners.
We were looking for 5:

10 Partners signed on

Then what?

We developed a Memorandum of Understanding that spelled out:

- Quality of work expectations
- The basic premise of investigation
- Trust: no one would "scoop" another
- Legal review process for stories and data
- Workflow for project
Challenges we faced ...

- Google Docs (sigh)
- Understanding of data among partners
- Missed deadlines
- Pushback from local district attorneys
- Different media platforms have different deadlines (e.g., print releases in the AM; broadcast TV prefers evening primetime).
What did we find?

Statewide, sexual assault cases have a one-in-four conviction rate*

* average, state-wide % of convictions after arrest, results varied across counties.
OUTCOME
What did we produce?

Four days of coordinated publication.
Data-rich graphics
Broadcast content
Community engagement through listening sessions and forums
What did we accomplish?

**Audience reach**
Collectively, we reached 1.5 million views across NC

**New connections**
30 people worked across 11 media outlets
What did we accomplish?

Policy change
Community organizations and law enforcement agencies began reviewing policies as a result of our reporting, at times before our eyes in the room.

Highlighted problem
Our data analysis provided insight. Even the State AG didn't have access to all the data. We highlighted vulnerabilities in the system.
SB 199
Signed into Law
Nov. 7, 2019

The law closed the loophole that prevented victims of sexual assault from withdrawing consent.
Lessons Learned

• Make sure partners know how to use Google docs (and have access to the shared account)
• "Lock" the spreadsheets so people cannot modify.
• Specify roles and responsibilities. Know who is doing what. (Don't wait for people to volunteer.)
• Identify a point person (i.e., a cat herder)
Lessons Learned

• Make sure media partners understand the data. Have them explain it to you before they go on interviews.

• Hold any community events involving the reporting two weeks after reporting releases.

• Set deadlines at least two weeks before publication.

• Recognize that some reporters are squeezing in your projects between their regular “day job.”
Thank you to our partners.
Questions?