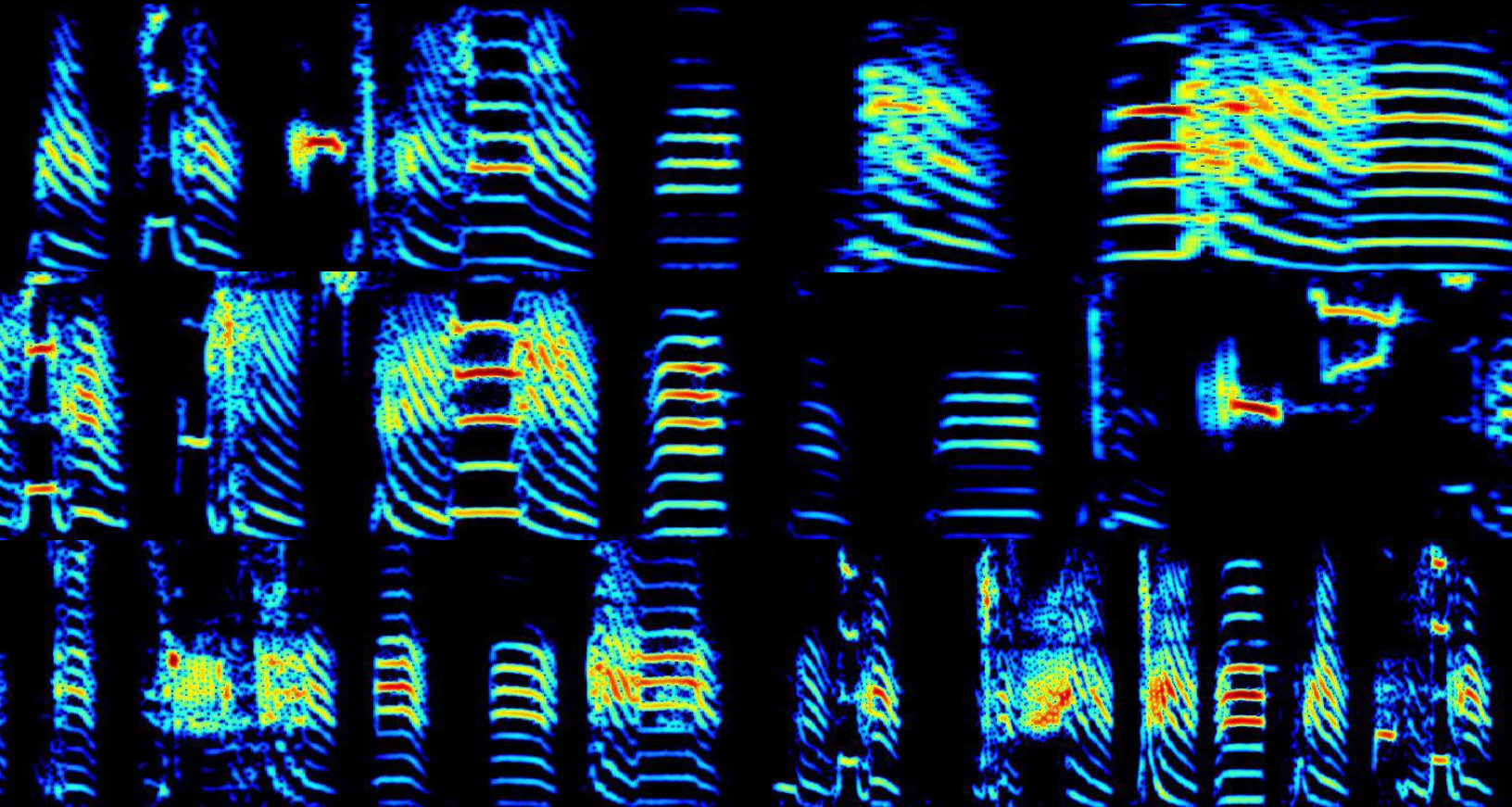


# Crossing Boundaries 2.0

REPORT TO COMMUNITY 2016





Poster session at the 40th anniversary plenary meeting of Rita Allen Foundation Scholars in July 2016

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Cover: Michael Long, a 2012 Rita Allen Foundation Scholar, investigates how male zebra finches (left) learn mating calls from their fathers—a model system for exploring the neurobiology of learning and memory. These spectrograms represent sound frequencies produced by singing finches in Long's studies. (Image courtesy of Kalman Katlowitz and Michael Long, NYU School of Medicine)

# Crossing Boundaries 2.0

When I asked Johanna Joyce, a 2005 Rita Allen Foundation Scholar, to describe her most important achievements from a decade of research on the roles of immune cells in tumor dynamics, she responded first by emphasizing what “a pleasure and an honor it is to be a scientist” engaged in a process of continuous learning.

Curiosity and shared learning are two driving forces of the Rita Allen Foundation. We invest in those who seek to extend the limits of what is currently known and possible, spurring progress on solving complex problems in science and in civic life. These challenges require collaboration across disciplines; listening to those we seek to serve; experimentation to generate possible solutions; and iteration on the most promising efforts.

Looking back on the past year, we have learned a great deal—thanks to grant partners, funder colleagues, networks of thought leaders, and members of our extended community who are working at the frontiers of science, society, civics and philanthropy. This Report to Community offers us a chance to share some of what we’re learning, how we’re collaborating and how this new knowledge informs our work.

In 2016 we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Foundation’s Scholars program, which has supported more than 150 extraordinary biomedical scientists at the early stages of their careers. Many of these researchers have made transformative contributions to their fields, and their stories illustrate that vital discoveries often come from unexpected directions. For the first time, we brought Scholars from across the program’s history together for a plenary meeting, providing opportunities for connections among the disciplines of cancer, immunology, neuroscience and pain research. (To find out what we’re learning about **the spark of scientific discovery, read more on Page 4.**)

We are supporting a number of efforts to examine the complex dynamics surrounding public engagement with science and evidence—an increasingly important and challenging part of democratic decision-making. We encouraged and supported work by an interdisciplinary committee convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to assess what we know about effective science communication and set a research agenda to guide new efforts. An initiative

of the American Press Institute is building knowledge about effective fact checking, as well as helping newsrooms connect readers with fact-checking resources in an age of widespread mistrust in media. (To find out what we’re learning about **the role of evidence, read more on Page 9.**)

Successful public engagement is built on listening—particularly to those who are most affected by social and scientific discoveries, interventions and decisions. For several years, the Rita Allen Foundation has helped to establish new frameworks that foster listening and knowledge sharing in the social sector. Feedback Labs, founded in 2013, has enabled hundreds of organizations to more effectively respond to those they serve, and it helped catalyze the creation of the Fund for Shared Insight to advance greater openness in philanthropy. (To find out what we’re learning about **the value of listening to diverse voices, read more on Page 14.**)

Today’s digital media and social technology present significant challenges for evidence-based communication—yet they also hold remarkable new opportunities for listening and responding to people’s needs. We are investing in experiments that use technology, media and social networks to build public knowledge and voice. With our ongoing support, the Engaging News Project and Democracy Works have conducted research and created tools to expand the reach of quality journalism and voting information, respectively. And pilot projects at National Public Radio and WGBH are examining how to engage with new audiences using science storytelling. (To find out what we’re learning about **the intersection of media and public engagement, read more on Page 17.**)

The curiosity and creativity of scientists and innovators who respond to great challenges through collaboration, experimentation and continuous learning serve as models for our work in philanthropy, science and democracy. Together, we seek to cross boundaries into new realms of possibility—and then ask again, listen harder, look more carefully to find the next boundaries to cross and to discover potential breakthrough solutions.

Elizabeth Good Christopherson  
President and Chief Executive Officer

# WHAT WE'RE LEARNING about the spark of scientific discovery

*This year marked the 40th anniversary of the Rita Allen Foundation Scholars program, which has enabled more than 150 early-career scientists to take their research in bold new directions. Seeking to encourage broader support for such discovery-driven science, in 2016 the Foundation joined the Science Philanthropy Alliance.*

## Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Class of 2016



**STEVE DAVIDSON**  
University of Cincinnati  
College of Medicine

How does the brain's processing of emotion affect the perception of pain?



**CAMILA DOS SANTOS**  
Cold Spring Harbor  
Laboratory

What is the molecular basis of pregnancy-induced breast cancer protection?



**MONICA DUS**  
(MILTON E. CASSEL SCHOLAR)  
University of Michigan

How does sugar in the diet influence feeding behavior?



**KATHERINE HANLON**  
University of New  
England College of  
Osteopathic Medicine

How do interactions between neurons and immune cells at the roots of spinal nerves impact sensitivity to pain?



**ALEX KENTISIS**  
Memorial Sloan Kettering  
Cancer Center

How does DNA transposition contribute to the development of childhood cancers?



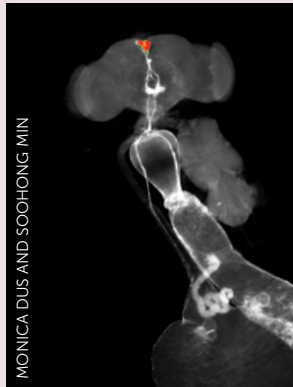
**BO LI**  
University of North  
Carolina at Chapel Hill

Do molecules produced by gut bacteria modulate the human nervous system?



**KATHARINA SCHLACHER**  
The University of Texas  
MD Anderson Cancer  
Center

How do defects in the protection of stalled mitochondrial DNA replication forks impact the development of cancer and other diseases?



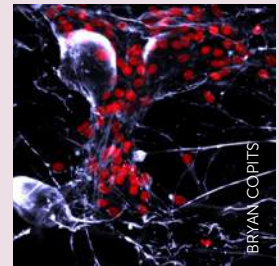
**MONICA DUS** is using fruit flies as a model to understand how a high-sugar diet “deregulates the dynamic balance between hunger and satiety.” She hopes that her research into the neural, genetic and epigenetic regulation of feeding behavior will shed light on obesity and overeating—“not as a problem of willpower, but really as a problem of biochemistry—of sugar in the environment changing the brain persistently.”

*Monica Dus uses fruit flies (left) as a model system to study the regulation of feeding behavior. A fluorescent microscopy image (right) shows neurons in the fruit fly that respond to sugars.*

Since 1976, the Rita Allen Foundation Scholars program has provided transformative grants to young leaders in biomedical science, whose pioneering research is advancing our understanding of the human condition. The Scholars program supports basic research in the fields of cancer, neuroscience and immunology. The Rita Allen Foundation also collaborates with the American Pain Society to sponsor a joint award to Scholars studying mechanisms and potential treatments for pain. Through the Scholars, the Foundation embraces innovative research with above-average risk and groundbreaking possibilities. The more than 150 recipients have made significant advances in their fields of research and have received honors including the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, the National Medal of Science, the Wolf Prize in Medicine and the Breakthrough Prize in Life Sciences.

Scholars are nominated by select research institutions in the United States and chosen by a Scientific Advisory Committee of leading scientists and clinicians. Scholars and their affiliated institutions receive grants of up to \$110,000 annually, for a maximum of five years. Scholars in the class of 2016 are exploring the origins of childhood cancers, illuminating how diet changes our brains and affects our health, and investigating how chronic pain alters the central nervous system. Visit the Rita Allen Foundation website to learn more about the Scholars’ research.

<http://ritaallen.org/scholars>



*Human sensory neurons and surrounding glial cells*

Some patients with injuries to limbic areas of the brain experience pain asymbolia—a condition in which they are aware of pain but are not distressed by it. **STEVE DAVIDSON** is studying how neurons in the brain’s thalamus participate in the emotional perception of pain. “Pain is a multitude of different things, and it may be possible for us to achieve better success if we pare down what we’re attacking in pain, and just focus on one aspect of it that causes the most suffering,” he says. “I believe that’s the emotional component of pain.”

# Exploration and Discovery: 40 Years of the Rita Allen Foundation Scholars Program



The Rita Allen Foundation Scholars program selected its first class of Scholars in 1976 as one of the first philanthropic fellowship programs of its kind for early-career biomedical scholars. The program grew out of a deep interest in improving human health, guided by leaders in biomedical research who pointed to the long-term promise of supporting scientists early in their careers—a time when they were exploring vital but still unproven ideas and struggling to find resources. With the Scholars program, the Foundation began what would become its defining approach to philanthropy: investing in the earliest stages of big ideas that have the power to be transformative.

In 2016 the Foundation marked the program’s 40th anniversary by extending an invitation to all current and former Scholars to gather to share their research and perspectives on the future of their fields. This convening at Stanford University in July sparked new connections among Scholars across generations and disciplines, as well as with leading thinkers in science, philanthropy and civic life.

*Top: 2016 Scholar Monica Dus (right) and research specialist Olga Grushko in Dus’ laboratory at the University of Michigan. Bottom Left: 1983 Scholar Bruce Stillman (left) and Frederick Asselbergs at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in 1979. Bottom Right: 2012 Scholar Christopher Hammell at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory.*



## Reflections on Scientific Progress and New Frontiers

In six keynote talks, prominent former Scholars recounted their journeys of discovery and brought attention to emerging opportunities and challenges in their fields. Robert Weinberg (1976), whose research transformed the field of cancer genetics, shared his recent work on cancer metastasis. Titia de Lange (1995), an expert on the biology of telomeres, or the ends of chromosomes, spoke about new investigations of telomeres' roles in cancer. Neuroscientists Thomas Jessell (1984), Charles Gilbert (1986) and Jeffrey Macklis (1991) illuminated advances in understanding the neural control of movement, processes that wire and re-wire the brain's circuits, and more. All reflected on the critical role of the Rita Allen Foundation's support for young scientists pursuing new directions in their research: Andrew Fire (1989) said he appreciated the benefits of having funding from a foundation "that was willing to fund whatever crazy thing we wanted to do." His research eventually led to the discovery of RNA interference, for which he shared the 2006 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.



CLIFF MOORE

**"It was, I think, unprecedented in our science." The Rita Allen award was the "greatest gift" new faculty members could receive, "because it gave them a chance to move in new directions."**

**—ARNOLD LEVINE, HONORARY CHAIR OF THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY PLENARY MEETING, EMERITUS CHAIR OF THE FOUNDATION'S SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE AND A PIONEER IN CANCER RESEARCH**

## Insights and Collaborations to Tackle the Problem of Pain

The Foundation's Scholars program has sought out young investigators pursuing complex topics that benefit from the freedom to move across traditional academic and institutional boundaries. Among these is research into the underlying mechanisms of pain—a largely uncharted field when the program began. Building on its longstanding interest in pain research, since 2009 the Rita Allen Foundation has partnered with the American Pain Society to select promising early-career pain researchers to receive the Rita Allen Foundation Award in Pain. Recent recipients of the award presented their latest work, and the Foundation's Medical Advisor, Kathleen Foley, moderated a panel discussion of leading researchers addressing new horizons in understanding pain—such as the still-enigmatic transition between acute and chronic pain. This research often brings together the fields of neuroscience, immunology and cancer.



MEMORIAL SLOAN KETTERING  
CANCER CENTER

**"I think it was a credit to the Rita Allen Foundation that someone believed pain research might be reasonable work. And if the Foundation had not identified pain in its list of topics, then I would never have been an applicant. It is as simple as that. At that point in time there were not any funding sources for pain research."**

**—KATHLEEN FOLEY, RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION MEDICAL ADVISOR, 1978 RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION SCHOLAR AND TRAILBLAZING RESEARCHER IN PAIN MANAGEMENT AND PALLIATIVE CARE**

COURTESY OF THOMAS KEAN



"We've got no problem, in my mind, that cannot be solved. We examine the big questions in both science and public life, and we undertake inquiry with the intention to turn its answers into solutions that benefit humanity... You are the scientists whose work will be cited as evidence to mark our country's progress."

—THOMAS KEAN, RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION DIRECTOR AND FORMER GOVERNOR OF NEW JERSEY, IN HIS WELCOME ADDRESS AT THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY PLENARY MEETING

## The Science Philanthropy Alliance: Strengthening Support for Fundamental Research

Formed in 2013, the Science Philanthropy Alliance is a community of funders dedicated to inspiring and advising philanthropists who wish to invest in curiosity-driven science. While there is a limited pool of government funding for research on topics such as the inner workings of cells and atoms, or the dynamics of dark energy, over the last century basic science has fueled technological advances with enormous benefits to human health and the economy. At the anniversary gathering, Marc Kastner, President of the Alliance, spoke about the critical role of philanthropy in supporting high-risk basic research, as the Rita Allen Foundation Scholars program does, and jump-starting federal funding in new areas. In 2016 the Rita Allen Foundation joined the Alliance, whose purpose is to maximize the effectiveness of private investments in ambitious basic research initiatives.

<http://www.sciencephilanthropyalliance.org>



HAYLEY DURACK



"We've seen over and over again that philanthropic support for areas of science has jumpstarted things that would not happen otherwise."

—MARC KASTNER, PRESIDENT OF THE SCIENCE PHILANTHROPY ALLIANCE



# WHAT WE'RE LEARNING about the role of evidence

*Informed civic participation depends on understanding the value of science and evidence. The Foundation supports efforts to conduct and apply research on engaging the public with quality journalism and scientific research. Several initiatives are bringing together scientists and communicators with scholars of politics and behavior to guide fresh approaches for building scientific and civic literacy. Media Impact Funders is helping philanthropists benefit from the latest research on effective science communication, while the American Press Institute, First Draft News and the Internet Archive are creating tools and resources for better fact checking and accountability journalism.*



"This will not be easy. But the alternative—slipping further into a post-truth world where disdain for evidence creates risks that could be avoided—gives us little option but to dig deeper into the science of science communication, so that science and evidence are more effectively incorporated into the decisions people make."

—DIETRAM SCHEUFELE (UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN—MADISON), VICE CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE SCIENCE OF SCIENCE COMMUNICATION; AND ANDREW MAYNARD (ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY), COMMITTEE MEMBER IN "WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY ABOUT HOW TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE ABOUT SCIENCE?," THE CONVERSATION, DECEMBER 13, 2016

## Climate Central and the National Research Council

### Communicating Science Effectively: A Research Agenda

Providing more information is rarely enough to change people's minds when scientific findings run counter to their beliefs and values. This is one overarching conclusion of a committee of scientists and science communicators convened by the National Research Council of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine to assess the current state of knowledge about effective science communication. Despite a common assumption that people's choices would be more consistent with scientific evidence if only they were better informed—the "deficit model" of science communication—research points to the need for science communicators to take into account a complex system of goals, needs, perceptions, values and beliefs as they shape their approach in different contexts. The committee's report, "Communicating Science Effectively:

A Research Agenda," synthesizes a wide range of research findings, and points to specific targets to continue to build knowledge about communicating science effectively.

The Rita Allen Foundation invested in the formation of the committee along with its grant partner Climate Central, a nonpartisan group of journalists and researchers. In the second phase of the project, Climate Central's research teams are working to more clearly identify the common underlying issues in public distrust of scientific consensus, and testing communications techniques and approaches that might best counter this skepticism. In addition to the Rita Allen Foundation, the committee was supported by the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and the Hewlett Foundation.

<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/23674/communicating-science-effectively-a-research-agenda>

<http://www.climatecentral.org>

# American Academy of Arts and Sciences The Public Face of Science

Growing evidence suggests that the divergent views of scientists and the general public on key science and technology issues result not from lack of knowledge, but rather from differences of culture, beliefs and values. The Rita Allen Foundation is supporting the American Academy of Arts and Sciences as it explores the sources and implications of these differences through a new initiative, The Public Face of Science. The Academy is convening leading scientists, science journalists and science communication specialists to examine aspects of public trust and perception of the scientific process, as well as the role of media in shaping public attitudes. The project is also investigating how scientists have helped to inform public decision-making processes, and how these efforts might be made more effective in the future. For example, the Academy has surveyed nearly 400 of its members on their experiences serving as expert witnesses in the legal system. Along with these studies, the Academy will conduct a systematic examination of the challenges associated with communicating science to the public through the media, public relations offices at research institutions, and other intermediaries. The Public Face of Science will disseminate its findings through its website, public symposia, and radio and television programs produced in partnership with WGBH, Boston-based public broadcasting.

<https://www.amacad.org/publicfaceofscience/pfs.html>



CARNEGIE INSTITUTION FOR SCIENCE/  
ROBIN KEMPSTER

**“More research is needed to develop a better understanding of how scientific advances can both mitigate and exacerbate social inequality, and how social inequality can influence how various segments of the public perceive the potential benefits of scientific research.”**

**—JONATHAN FANTON, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES IN “A FEW REFLECTIONS ON THE CHALLENGES OF ENGAGING ACROSS DIVISIONS,” RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION, DECEMBER 21, 2016**



MARGARITA CORPORAN

*Famed documentary filmmaker Ken Burns was interviewed by On the Media’s Brooke Gladstone at the Media Impact Funders event *Maladies and Miracles: Funding Media to Illuminate Health and Science*, a day-long series of panels on health-related media coverage and storytelling projects.*

<http://mediainpactfunders.org>

## Media Impact Funders

# Building the Knowledge and Capacity of Funders Supporting Public Engagement with Evidence

Media Impact Funders (MIF) is a network of philanthropists and foundations that fund public-interest media and technology projects, including documentary films, investigative reporting and social media campaigns. Through programs and communications, MIF enables funders to collaborate and increase the effectiveness of their work. Amid a rapidly changing media landscape, an epidemic of mis- and disinformation, and dwindling public trust in experts and traditional sources of information, there is a critical need to apply the latest research in developing public-interest media. The Rita Allen Foundation previously supported the creation of Assessing Impact of Media, an evolving collection of research, articles and tools to help grant makers evaluate and improve the projects they support. Now, MIF will expand on this model to curate and publicize emerging research on connecting audiences with science and other evidence-based topics—beginning with findings from The Public Face of Science project and the National Academies’ Committee on the Science of Science Communication. MIF will convene funders and share resources to help grant makers and media producers apply new knowledge about how to meaningfully engage audiences—with a focus on complex and contentious issues related to health, the environment, and other areas where understanding evidence is vital to making informed decisions.

# The Aspen Institute, Citizenship and American Identity Program Science & Civics



The Aspen Institute's Citizenship and American Identity Program focuses on the challenge of sustaining strong citizenship in America and coherent national identity in an age of demographic flux and severe inequality. One of its projects, "What Every American Should Know," explores how, in an age of increasing diversity and widening inequality, this country can cultivate a sense of shared destiny and common civic purpose. The Rita Allen Foundation's support launched a new branch of this work, the Science & Civics initiative. The Science & Civics initiative is based on the premise that there is an interconnected gap in both civic literacy and scientific literacy in the United States—and that addressing them together is vital to cultivating a citizenry capable of informed self-government. The work aims to help scientists become more powerful citizens, and help to enable citizens to make sense of the world and complex problems more like scientists. At the initiative's first convening, leading practitioners and communicators of civics and science came together to address two questions: what should every American citizen know about science, and what should every scientist know about civics? They identified a number of key challenges and opportunities, including the need for an infrastructure to help scientists connect with the needs of communities, as well as the need for citizens to understand the relationships between science and policy. The Institute has shared a blueprint for overcoming these challenges and other barriers to scientific and civic literacy, which will serve as a basis for public discussions and pilot projects in communities facing specific science-related issues.

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/citizenship-and-american-identity-program/science-civics-every-american-know>



FLICKR/THOMAS HAWK

*A family learns about Earth's origins at the Chabot Space and Science Center in Oakland, California*

## ScienceCounts

### Raising Voices for Science: A Test Campaign

Americans have an overwhelmingly positive view of science, yet remain ambivalent toward government's leading role in driving scientific advancement. According to a recent benchmark study conducted by ScienceCounts, a nonprofit focused on enhancing public support for federally funded science, only one in four Americans recognize that government's support of the scientific enterprise is irreplaceable and cannot be offset by funding from the private sector. "Raising Voices for Science" is a social marketing initiative launched by ScienceCounts to bolster public support for scientific research. The initial step—a groundbreaking national benchmark study completed in 2016—yielded invaluable data and insights into public attitudes toward science. The Rita Allen Foundation, in partnership with funders from philanthropy, industry and academia, is sponsoring the next stage of this work—a test campaign that seeks to discover, through careful measurement and analysis, public engagement strategies that effectively garner public support for a robust federal role in scientific research. Beginning in four mid-sized communities, the campaign will conduct and evaluate engagement approaches—including activities in schools and museums, community events, and broadcast and online media. These projects will take advantage of existing enthusiasm for science among broad swathes of the public, and help to connect the promise of scientific research with concrete benefits for individuals and communities. The results will inform a larger campaign and a suite of proven engagement strategies to be shared with the scientific community through the American Association for the Advancement of Science and other professional societies.

<http://www.sciencecounts.org>

American Press Institute

## Improving and Increasing Fact Checking in Journalism

The American Press Institute (API) conducts research and provides resources and training to advance the practice of journalism in the digital age. One key focus for API is improving accountability and fact-checking journalism. As media coverage of the 2016 election season revealed, these activities are more important than ever for informed civic engagement. Beginning in 2014, the Rita Allen Foundation partnered with the Democracy Fund and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation to support API's fact-checking journalism project. This project has coordinated research by media and political science scholars from six universities to examine which kinds of fact checking are most effective at influencing political actors and informing citizens. API has shared these findings and other fact-checking guidance at workshops and conferences, and through an online course, developed in conjunction with the Poynter Institute's News University, which has reached more than 1,500 journalists. During the 2016 election season, API assisted with the creation of new fact-checking features for National Public Radio, Univision and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The project's current work includes a study of social media teams in newsrooms and how they can become a key part of fact-checking efforts in journalism; and a study on alternative story formats (such as videos and other visuals) and how they may be more effective at promoting facts and fighting misinformation.

<https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/category/fact-checking-project>



## FIRST DRAFT

### First Draft News (a sponsored project of Meedan)

First Draft News is a coalition of newsrooms, human rights organizations and social technology companies that work together to address challenges related to the use and verification of news content sourced from the social web. It produces guides and online tools, and conducts training to help journalists and others identify the origins and assess the authenticity of images, videos and other information shared by eyewitnesses. These resources enable newsrooms to publish content from the social web with confidence and transparency. Since its founding in June 2015, First Draft has grown from a group of nine founding organizations to a network of more than 100 global partners, including many major newspapers and broadcasters, as well as social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. First Draft has also launched an Academic Partner Network of social science and journalism schools from around the world, which will conduct and share research to make news verification more effective. In a time of heightened need for structures that promote trust and transparency in journalism, a planning grant from the Rita Allen Foundation is allowing First Draft News to establish robust nonprofit governance and staffing—thus increasing the organization's capacity to secure independent funding and develop new collaborations, training and research.

<https://firstdraftnews.com>

## Internet Archive

# Political TV Ad Archive

To help journalists and the public understand the origins and effects of political advertising, the Internet Archive created the Political TV Ad Archive, a freely available database of TV ads related to the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The Archive utilized the “Duplitrn,” an open source audio fingerprinting tool, to track occurrences of ads backed by candidates, super PACs and other groups—all linked to fact-checks and to downloadable data on where and when ads were aired, sponsors, subjects and messages. The project used the same technology to track which clips TV news shows chose to air when reporting on the presidential debates. The project archived more than 2,000 unique ads; leading to more than 2 million views of ads, as well as logging more than 130 fact-checks of the ads and informing election reporting by major media outlets such as *The Washington Post*, *Forbes*, *The Atlantic* and *Fox News*. The Internet Archive is currently exploring new partnerships with experts in machine learning (artificial intelligence) to make such curated collections far less labor-intensive to create and analyze. By doing so, journalists, scholars and the public will have enhanced tools to establish the provenance of public statements, help assess the veracity of factual assertions, track the evolution of “talking points,” and provide deeper insight into the flow of ideas and the news.

The Rita Allen Foundation supported the initial development of the Archive’s technology through a pilot project, the Philly Political Media Watch Project, which collected ads aired in the Philadelphia region in the lead-up to the 2014 midterm election. In 2016 the Foundation helped to sponsor the primary election phase of the Political TV Ad Archive through the Knight News Challenge on Elections; a separate grant allowed the Archive to record general election advertising in eight battleground states, as well as improve its technology and extend its outreach and training to journalists, scholars and nonprofits.

<https://politicaladarchive.org>



*The Political TV Ad Archive collected data on ads broadcast more than 350,000 times over 26 media markets during the 2016 election season.*



RUDY RUCKER

“With this presidential election, we spent a lot more time and effort trying to massage the data into usable form and reaching out to very busy journalists. Now there are data journalists in almost every large news organization, and they’ve been able to run with these data in ways that we hadn’t expected.”

—BREWSTER KAHLE, FOUNDER AND DIGITAL LIBRARIAN OF THE INTERNET ARCHIVE IN “[THE 20-PETABYTE IDEA](#),” RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION, JUNE 27, 2016

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

# about the value of listening to diverse voices

*The Foundation collaborates on projects to advance openness and encourage the productive use of feedback for more effective social change. The Foundation provided initial support to establish Feedback Labs, a catalyst for strengthening feedback loops, and is a core member of the Fund for Shared Insight, a broader effort that pools the resources and ideas of many foundations to foster openness, learning and listening—most recently through its Listen for Good initiative.*

## Fund for Shared Insight

Fund for Shared Insight is a collaborative effort among the Rita Allen Foundation and other foundations to bring greater responsiveness and effectiveness to philanthropy. Launched in 2014 as a three-year, \$20 million initiative by eight core funders, Shared Insight now includes 39 funders supporting 70 nonprofit organizations. Its grant making aims to increase foundation openness, and to improve feedback loops among foundations, nonprofits and the people they seek to help. In addition to the Listen for Good initiative (see Page 15), recent work sponsored by Shared Insight includes "Sharing What Matters: Foundation Transparency," a report released in 2016 by the Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP). To assess the meaning and current practice of transparency in philanthropy, CEP used survey data from 145 foundation CEOs and more than 15,000 grantees. Its analysis revealed that, while many foundations are openly sharing their grant-making processes, goals and strategies, there is room for improvement in sharing approaches to grant evaluation and lessons learned from grant making. Shared Insight is co-chaired by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the Ford Foundation. Other founding funders include the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, The JPB Foundation, Liquidnet, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

<http://www.fundforsharedinsight.org>

Fund for  
**Shared Insight**



Hilary Pennington



Fay Twersky

**"Slowly, with open minds and lots of experimentation, we are making strides toward ensuring that the process of seeking and acting on feedback from those we serve is part of standard nonprofit and foundation operating procedures. We are learning how to be better listeners and more responsive organizations...In this way, we can all improve our work to make this a more just and compassionate world."**

**—HILARY PENNINGTON AND FAY TWERSKY, CO-CHAIRS OF THE FUND FOR SHARED INSIGHT, IN "LISTENING TO BENEFICIARIES HELPS NONPROFITS LEARN WHAT DOESN'T WORK," THE CHRONICLE OF PHILANTHROPY, DECEMBER 20, 2016**

## Listen for Good

In 2016 the Fund for Shared Insight launched Listen for Good, a grant-making initiative aimed at exploring new ways for nonprofits to engage with the people they seek to help through high-quality feedback loops. Funders nominate nonprofits for Listen for Good grants, which are structured as co-funding arrangements between nominating funders and Shared Insight. This approach encourages funders to invest in building or advancing the feedback efforts of their grantees, recognizing that beneficiary feedback data may also serve to improve the practices of funding organizations. Shared Insight has awarded 46 grants of \$60,000 each to customer-facing nonprofits in the United States—including organizations working to improve communities through health care, technology and the arts. Among the key goals of Listen for Good is to enable nonprofit organizations to apply the Net Promoter System, a simple feedback approach widely used in the for-profit sector to assess and respond to customer experience.

In addition to its overall sponsorship of Listen for Good, the Rita Allen Foundation is co-funding a grant to the Public Laboratory for Open Technology and Science (Public Lab), which builds open-source hardware and software that enable scientists and community members to collaboratively investigate local environmental health issues. As Public Lab partners with science and environmental education specialists to develop a comprehensive evaluation framework for community science projects, a grant from Listen for Good is helping the organization examine how its diverse constituents define success—which may mean bringing people together to tackle questions of common concern, or working toward changes in laws and regulations.

<http://www.fundforsharedinsight.org/listen-for-good-overview>

<https://publiclab.org>

**“How could we measure the impact of deep, meaningful engagement in open science? Measuring that core theme has led us to begin asking questions that can’t be answered by looking at analytics, but by doing what we love most—talking and listening to people.”**

**—SHANNON DOSEMAGEN, COFOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC LAB IN “FINDING THE QUESTIONS THAT MATTER,” RITA ALLEN FOUNDATION, JUNE 29, 2016**



*A team from Washington University in St. Louis, led by Derek Hoeflerlin, uses Public Lab's DIY Mapping Kits to document conditions along the Mississippi River.*

## Feedback Labs

Feedback Labs is a network of organizations working to promote the widespread adoption of closed feedback loops in philanthropy, governance and international aid. Feedback Labs began in 2013 with seed funding from the Rita Allen Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and has been further supported by the Fund for Shared Insight to more broadly advance social-sector responsiveness.

By conducting research, developing resources and convening communities of learners, Feedback Labs has enabled hundreds of nonprofits and government agencies to successfully listen and respond to the voices of the people they serve, making feedback an integral part of how they function. In just one example of its growing impact during 2016, Feedback Labs collaborated with the U.S. Agency for International Development to launch the Practical Adaptation Network. The Network convened groups of development organizations for a 100-day “sprint” to design practical experiments for improving adaptive management—the smart adjustment of processes and resource usage in changing conditions. In a similar spirit of inquiry, in 2016 Feedback Labs hosted more than 30 LabStorms, collaborative brainstorm sessions to help organizations develop concrete approaches to address barriers to feedback. Feedback Labs also continues to offer guidance for effective listening and adaptation to many more groups through its online Quiz and Toolkit.

<http://feedbacklabs.org>



*An All America “postcard” celebrating changemakers in Atlanta*

## Ashoka All America Toolkit

Ashoka began elevating and connecting social entrepreneurs around the world in 1980, and since 2001 has supported more than 200 Ashoka Fellows striving for social change in the United States. In an effort to build a more robust and diverse network of U.S.-based changemakers, Ashoka has launched the All America initiative. The project is seeking creative leaders from overlooked regions and communities around the country, seeking to “incorporate the rich ethnic, racial, geographical and gender diversity America offers into our social change landscape.” Ashoka has embarked on a virtual “road trip” to collect the stories of changemakers and share them with journalists and media outlets through a partnership with the Solutions Journalism Network, among other channels. The Rita Allen Foundation is supporting the production of a “Celebrate Your Change Story” toolkit, which will help leaders of all backgrounds spread their ideas and attract collaborators—and ultimately become more visible and more effective at solving complex problems in American society.

<https://www.ashoka.org/en/collection/all-america-we-see-changemakers-everywhere>



## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

# about the intersection of media & public engagement

*The Foundation fosters creative uses of communications and technology to connect citizens with science, news and the democratic process. WGBH and National Public Radio are experimenting with ways to bring science stories to new audiences, while the Engaging News Project is helping newsrooms learn how to make their content more appealing and meaningful to readers. Democracy Works and Civic Nation are applying technology and working with diverse partners to broaden civic participation.*



### WGBH Educational Foundation

## Rita Allen Fellowship for Science Communication Science Media Awards & Summit in the Hub

The WGBH Educational Foundation has been a leader in science storytelling for more than four decades, with programs that include the award-winning science documentary series *NOVA*. To identify ways to expand how and to whom science news and information are communicated, WGBH has joined with the Rita Allen Foundation to create the Rita Allen Fellowship for Science Communication. WGBH is recruiting an early to mid-career science communicator, who will spend 2018 working with *NOVA* and other WGBH and community-based science journalism programs, assessing challenges and developing tools and opportunities for engaging wider audiences, especially underserved communities, with science storytelling. The fellow will complement WGBH's accessible science programming with experimental approaches, such as short-form video, podcasts or graphic novels, to inform and excite new audiences. Knowledge gained from the fellow's projects will guide new approaches to science programming at WGBH, and will be shared with other groups working to advance science literacy. The Rita Allen Foundation was also a major funder of the 2016 Science Media Awards & Summit in the Hub (SMASH16). Hosted by WGBH and Jackson Hole WILD, this three-day symposium convened more than 350 leading scientists, media professionals and educators seeking to improve public engagement in science through media, with a special focus on film, digital media and audio/radio.

<http://www.sciencemediasummit.org>

<http://www.wgbh.org/support/ritaallenfellowship.cfm>

## National Public Radio Innovative Science Programming

National Public Radio programs captivate and inform millions of listeners every day through a combination of rigorous journalism and riveting stories. With support from the Rita Allen Foundation, NPR is seeking to engage larger and younger audiences by expanding the reach and multimedia content of two popular science programs: Joe’s Big Idea (JBI) and Skunk Bear. JBI is a series produced by science correspondent Joe Palca, which provides a behind-the-scenes view of the people and processes involved in scientific research and innovation. JBI is developing its social media presence by recruiting a diverse cadre of young scientists to share their personal backgrounds and scientific interests with the JBI audience. JBI is also experimenting with new multimedia content, building on the success of its “Live Lab” videos on Facebook Live. Skunk Bear, NPR’s multimedia science blog founded in 2014, has attracted sizeable fan bases on Tumblr and YouTube. Now, Skunk Bear is building greater engagement and enhanced content by producing two seasons of videos responding to audience questions or topics in the news—with a focus on making content relevant and accessible for science classrooms. Recent episodes have tackled such questions as, “how old is your body really?” and “how is pencil lead made?”

<http://www.npr.org/series/156490415/joes-big-idea>  
<http://skunkbear.tumblr.com>



## Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, the University of Texas at Austin Engaging News Project

The Engaging News Project (ENP) evaluates ways that newsrooms can engage audiences by conducting trailblazing social science research—often in collaboration with news organizations—to understand how citizens interact with the news within the changing landscape of digital information. It then disseminates its findings to the broader journalism industry. The Rita Allen Foundation first supported ENP in 2014, allowing it to increase its capacity for research, partnerships and online resources, and to attract additional investments. In 2016 ENP produced 10 research reports, including one of the largest-ever surveys of online news commenters; refined its quiz and “engaging buttons” tools for newsrooms; and met with more than 100 working journalists to help them put these tools and research findings into practice. A new grant from the Rita Allen Foundation is enabling ENP to continue building awareness of its research, tools and strategies among the most influential and geographically diverse newsrooms.

<https://engagingnewsproject.org>

## Democracy Works Expanding TurboVote Corporate Partnerships

Democracy Works is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization using technology to help upgrade access to voting information through its online tool, TurboVote. The Rita Allen Foundation has supported Democracy Works with a series of grants since 2012, including grants for building partnerships with election officials, colleges and universities, and companies. With the TurboVote Challenge, launched early in 2016, Democracy Works began building a powerful coalition of companies and organizations committed to helping employees, customers and communities build their civic engagement. There are now nearly 50 partners in the Challenge, including Facebook, Starbucks, NBC, Univision, Target and Spotify. To date, more than 1 million people have signed up to receive text or email notifications from TurboVote, and partner sites helped millions more find voting information during the 2016 election.

<http://turbo.vote>



**"For us to succeed, mass civic participation can't be someone else's job. It can't just be the nonprofit or political people. It will only happen if it's a job that belongs to all of us. This initiative will keep growing, with the help of more companies and organizations that decide to join. There is nothing more powerful than a majority of people voting for something."**

**—SETH FLAXMAN, COFOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF DEMOCRACY WORKS**



## Civic Nation We Will Campaign Toolkit

Civic Nation was founded in 2015 as a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that creates campaigns to raise public awareness and forge pathways to action around a variety of challenges in American society. Working with the White House and other public and private partners, Civic Nation has launched campaigns on topics ranging from sexual assault prevention to support for young people navigating college and career plans. With funding from the Rita Allen Foundation, Civic Nation is developing an online toolkit for the We Will Campaign, which aims to draw more Americans in civic life by redefining civic engagement and strengthening the voices and capacities of local civic leaders. Civic Nation plans to conduct behavioral science research to inform the creation of the toolkit, which will help civic leaders channel their communities' passions and ideas into concrete actions. The toolkit will reach audiences through partner media and civic tech organizations, and will interface with social media platforms to allow users to create communities around their ideas.

<https://civiction.org>

## 2016 Board of Directors

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## 2016 Scientific Advisory Committee

Members of the Scientific Advisory Committee are critical advisors to the Rita Allen Foundation Board of Directors on matters involving our Scholars program and other grant proposals.

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Kari Williams Tyksinski,  
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Stephanie Zimmerman,  
*Executive and Administrative Support*

# MISSION

*The Rita Allen Foundation invests in transformative ideas in their earliest stages to leverage their growth and promote breakthrough solutions to significant problems.*

*It enables early-career biomedical scholars to do pioneering research, seeds innovative approaches to fostering informed civic engagement, and develops knowledge and networks to build the effectiveness of the philanthropic sector. Throughout its work, the Foundation embraces collaboration, creativity, learning and leadership.*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



### Innovation

We will be an innovative and agile organization; to this end, we will rely on strategic, collaborative approaches to initiate and support pioneering programs that break new ground and challenge the status quo.



### Core Values

We will bring to our work and seek in our relationships with others a commitment to, and belief in, the positive power of courage, hope, passion and shared aspirations; we are committed to translate these core values into effective action.



### Focus

We will focus our efforts on enduring areas of domestic and global concern; our goals especially include advancing the frontiers of biomedical science, leadership and education. We will respond to short-term societal needs and undertake programs consistent with the mission and vision of the Foundation.



### Leadership

To be a leader and a model both in our programs and in our operations, we will embrace appropriate levels of risk; we will foster an entrepreneurial spirit informed by inquisitiveness, due diligence, creativity and responsible stewardship of our assets.



### Lasting Outcomes

We seek to advance new ideas and discoveries that address the root causes of challenging problems; we will define success by objectives linked to a significantly positive and lasting impact on individuals and the broader society.



### Learning

We will engage in a collegial process of continuous learning, hard work and reassessment; we recognize that these qualities are essential to achievement of our mission.



### Collaboration

We will work with and convene leaders to develop and implement strategies that support innovation and bring new ideas and information to targeted groups; new areas of collaboration will evolve as we continually reevaluate human needs.

# 2016 GRANTS

The Foundation's grant making falls into two broad domains: Young Leaders in Science and Social Innovation, and Civic Literacy and Engagement. In addition to these main categories, the Foundation also supports efforts to strengthen the philanthropic field.

## YOUNG LEADERS IN SCIENCE AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

All America Toolkit <b>Ashoka</b> <b>\$50,000</b>	DataKind Labs Open Blueprint <b>DataKind</b> <b>\$75,000 (over 18 months)</b>
Top Artist-Innovators Exemplar List <b>Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors – Upstart Co-Lab</b> <b>\$50,000</b>	Rita Allen Foundation Scholars <b>Class of 2016 and Continuing Scholars</b> <b>\$2,850,000</b>

## CIVIC LITERACY AND ENGAGEMENT

<b>First Draft News (a sponsored project of Meedan)</b> <b>\$40,000</b>	Science & Civics <b>The Aspen Institute,</b> <b>Citizenship and American Identity Program</b> <b>\$75,000</b>
Rita Allen Fellowship for Science Communication <b>WGBH Educational Foundation</b> <b>\$150,000 (over 15 months)</b>	Expanding the Reach of the COMPASS Message Box <b>COMPASS</b> <b>\$50,000</b>
Participation Lab <b>Participatory Budgeting Project</b> <b>\$200,000 (over two years)</b>	Political TV Ad Archive <b>Internet Archive</b> <b>\$110,000</b>
Innovative Science Programming <b>National Public Radio</b> <b>\$150,000 (over two years)</b>	The Public Face of Science <b>American Academy of Arts and Sciences</b> <b>\$225,000 (over three years)</b>
Foundation Funding for U.S. Democracy <b>The Foundation Center</b> <b>\$50,000</b>	Development of an Application Program Interface to Leverage Data Projects <b>ProPublica</b> <b>\$50,000</b>
We Will Campaign Toolkit <b>Civic Nation</b> <b>\$50,000</b>	<b>SeePolitical</b> <b>\$50,000</b>
Engaging News Project <b>Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life,</b> <b>the University of Texas at Austin</b> <b>\$225,000 (over three years)</b>	Voter's Edge <b>MapLight</b> <b>\$150,000</b>
Challenge Fund for Innovation in Journalism Education – Years Three and Four <b>Online News Association</b> <b>\$150,000 (over two years)</b>	

## PHILANTHROPIC EFFECTIVENESS

<b>Fund for Shared Insight</b> <b>\$750,000 (over three years)</b>	Listen for Good <b>Fund for Shared Insight</b> <b>\$60,000 (over two years)</b>
Research on the Roles and Perspectives of Foundation Program Officers <b>Center for Effective Philanthropy</b> <b>\$50,000</b>	<b>Nonprofit Quarterly</b> <b>\$50,000</b>

List includes core grants in reverse chronological order.  
Time periods are indicated for grants spanning more than one year.

# FINANCIALS

## Statement of Revenue, Expenses and Change in Net Assets (Modified Cash Basis)

2015 (Audited)

	Unrestricted	Temporarily Restricted	Permanently Restricted	Total
<b>Revenue and Support</b>				
Investment Income				
Interest and dividends	1,831,898	198,034	-	2,029,932
Net realized gain on investments	285,320	30,844	-	316,164
Translation gain	8,185	-	-	8,185
Costs attributable to investments	(1,139,853)	-	-	(1,139,853)
Net Investment Income (Loss)	985,550	228,878	-	1,214,428
Net assets released from restrictions	759,874	(759,874)	-	-
Total Revenue and Support	1,745,424	(530,996)	-	1,214,428
<b>Expenses</b>				
Grant awards	6,181,884	-	-	6,181,884
Program and foundation operations	1,694,241	-	-	1,694,241
Federal excise tax	110,000	-	-	110,000
Total Expenses	7,986,125	-	-	7,986,125
Change in net assets before appreciation (depreciation) in fair value of investments	(6,240,701)	(530,996)	-	(6,771,697)
Appreciation (depreciation) in fair value of investments	(10,506,184)	499,513	-	(10,006,671)
Change in Net Assets	(16,746,885)	(31,483)	-	(16,778,368)
<b>Net Assets</b>				
Beginning of Year	165,213,457	135,706	3,579,622	168,928,785
End of Year	148,466,572	104,223	3,579,622	152,150,417



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