



Biodiversity Tour at the SEJ Annual Conference in Chattanooga.

Photo Credit: Bear Guerra, 2013

2013 Annual Report of Activities

The Society of Environmental Journalists strengthened environmental news reporting in 2013 by connecting, educating and empowering news professionals who deliver coverage across all media platforms. Staff, board and volunteers developed effective peer training and useful publications for thousands of journalists, students, and educators. Other constituencies benefited from SEJ’s annual conference, information systems, and media attention that was drawn to specific issues, informed or generated through SEJ’s work.

Major Accomplishments

The 23rd Annual Conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists took place in Chattanooga, Tennessee, hosted and sponsored by the [University of Tennessee at Chattanooga](#) and [The Chattanooga Times Free Press](#). The agenda involved 543 journalists, students, scientists, government officials, business representatives, environmental leaders, educators, and others concerned with news coverage of environmental science and policy issues. Pre-conference events featured a workshop for freelancers to improve business skills, and a full slate of events for international journalists visiting from Africa and Asia sponsored by the [Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars](#). SEJ members led by Pam Sohn of the Chattanooga Times Free Press and Anne Paine of The Tennessean in Nashville, organized dozens of tours, panels and workshops on the theme “Sustainable Cities.” They covered energy issues,

manufacturing, food systems, biodiversity and cultural diversity. Craft workshops explored nonprofit news startups, use of drones, data reporting on dam safety and radio technique. Pitch slams with book and article editors were very popular.

SEJ signature full-day tours in 2013 gave journalists access to:

- The Kingston site of the [Tennessee Valley Authority](#)'s 2008 coal ash impoundment disaster, where more than a billion gallons of slushy coal ash spilled over farms and homes into area waterways. Conference attendees saw mammoth cleanup engineering still underway and heard what experts on all sides of this issue have to say about what is - and isn't - being done about the coal-ash problem still faced in the region.
- [Oak Ridge National Labs](#), the Department of Energy's largest open-science laboratory, to explore the Manhattan Project's environmental legacy and fast-forward to a firsthand look at cutting-edge nuclear energy and environmental research.
- [Volkswagen of America](#)'s platinum-LEED-certified auto plant and solar farm, on a once-contaminated brownfield left from a U.S. Army TNT production site.

Other conference tours explored biodiversity, city planning, shale oil and gas development, and historic preservation. Credible sources and veteran journalists brought deep expertise to questions and discussions.

Concurrent and plenary sessions asked, "What is a sustainable city?" and examined inter-related issues of biodiversity, cultural diversity, and sustainability. Exhibit halls, plenary discussion and ride-and-drive opportunities gave journalists new perspectives and cutting edge information on the auto industry investment in alternative fuel vehicles, including the US debut of Volkswagen's most highly advanced prototype, the "XL-1" plug-in diesel hybrid capable of 260 miles per gallon. Scores of stories were filed. Background information and new contacts gained by journalists at the conference will yield a ripple effect, with coverage to continue through the coming year.

Evaluation response from SEJ members was overwhelmingly positive, despite some shortfalls in the program due to speaker cancellations caused by the US government shutdown on conference week. Organizers were gratified to see a high percentage of younger journalists attending, many for the first time, and evaluation comments that crystallized SEJ's basic methodology and philosophy of peer-to-peer training and grassroots leadership development for the field. Reinforcing what SEJ has seen from previous surveys, 2013 attendees reported their top-three takeaways of value to be "new contacts and networking," followed by "deeper understanding of issues," and "reporting tools." Significant numbers of journalists cite other values of attendance, including speaker contacts, story leads, technical learning and job leads.

24th Annual Conference planning: SEJ staff, board and volunteers began organizing a rich five-day agenda for the 2014 Annual Conference, set for September 3-7 in New Orleans, with program chair Mark Schleifstein, Pulitzer-prize-winning reporter for NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune. The conference theme will be "Risk and Resilience."

SEJ publications, social media, and SEJ-Talk Listserv continue to be popular with journalists, educators, students, and other stakeholders in environmental coverage. The annotated daily news digest *EJToday*, biweekly *Freedom of Information Watchdog TipSheet* and quarterly *SEJournal* were

distributed to several thousand journalists, students, educators and subscribers of varied descriptions through email. There was also wider dissemination through RSS feeds. SEJ-Talk engaged more than 400 members in real-time discussion on a daily basis, with remarkable support on deadline. SEJ currently has more than 8,270 followers on Twitter @SEJorg.

SEJ's Freedom of Information WatchDog Project monitored, reported and acted on a variety of FOI and open-government issues relevant to environmental coverage. Activities included:

- Publishing 26 issues of *FOI WatchDog Edition TipSheet*
- Hosting listserv discussions on deadline topics
- Making public statements on key issues
- Negotiating for improved press policies at EPA and other agencies
- Structuring FOI sessions and tours at the annual conference

When in the spring of 2013 the *New York Times* eliminated its *Green Blog* and later disbanded its environmental reporting team, SEJ spoke out and was widely quoted, including a reference in *The Public Editor* column of the *Times* itself. SEJ posted and circulated a statement objecting to the moves, and provided [aggregated coverage of other industry response](#). Also in the spring, SEJ circulated a statement, made calls, and faxed /mailed /emailed EPA and Arkansas state officials, to protest treatment of [InsideClimateNews.org](#) reporters who were attempting to cover an Exxon oil-pipeline spill in Arkansas. ICN is the news organization that won a *Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting* for coverage of the 2012 Dilbit Disaster in Michigan. Part of the problem was ICN's status as a startup news organization. But the big issue was that the incident-management center in Arkansas had been set up - inappropriately - on Exxon property. Also in March, SEJ circulated *OpEd* pieces and gave interviews on [failures of EPA press policy](#) - which raised issues anew during Gina McCarthy's EPA-Administrator confirmation hearings, to apply public pressure, increase awareness on transparency, and improve journalists' access to agency personnel and government scientists. SEJ's public statement received coverage by various D.C. outlets and attracted an [eloquent statement from Patrick Boyle](#), a former chief of public affairs for the U.S. EPA's Mid-Atlantic Region, bolstering SEJ's position. In response to this pressure, EPA personnel convened conversations with SEJ leaders to revisit goals. In light of personnel change at the agency, efforts are in the works to convene new conversations and keep up the pressure for greater transparency and timely response to journalists.

SEJ's Fund for Environmental Journalism processed 56 applications and distributed \$26,870 in grants to nine [winning projects](#) over two competitive cycles. Freelancers and journalists in both nonprofit and for-profit newsrooms applied. Topics included fracking, food systems, fisheries, climate change, biodiversity and nuclear issues.

SEJ Awards for Reporting on the Environment recognized excellence in environmental reporting in print, broadcast and online media, in large-market and small-market categories, to build the stature of the beat, increase its visibility and bring great work to the attention of new audiences and media gatekeepers. This program operates largely on volunteer power. [Each winner and runner-up](#) is selected by a panel of three judges.

SEJ's Diversity Task Force, led by member-volunteers, engaged new members and discussed issues of special interest to communities of color. A wish list developed by the task force led to a successful grant

proposal to Gannett Foundation. Their funding paid for an [e-booklet](#) and two *TipSheets*, providing a primer on environmental justice issues and guidance for adding diversity to environmental reports.

[SEJ's Freelance Task Force and Mentoring Program](#) took on a number of new projects, including coordinating both pre-conference workshops for freelancers in Chattanooga, as well as mentoring for grantees in the Fund for Investigative Journalism and SEJ's Fund for Environmental Journalism, the latter drawing on veteran reporters in the SEJ membership, who also serve as mentors to new SEJ members. Currently, there are 63 pairs working together.

[Collaborations and strategic partnerships:](#) SEJ has been successful in cultivating a university-based funding model for annual conferences over two decades: local host committees and private foundations stepped in to underwrite conference events in Chattanooga and will do so again New Orleans; and the University of Oklahoma, home to the National Weather Service and NOAA labs, will host SEJ in 2015.

Over an eighteen-month period SEJ organized a series of highly successful workshops for journalists and scientists period called, "Translating Science/Telling Stories: What We Talk About When We Talk About Climate Change." One event was held at the Cleveland Science Center, and the other two took place in 2013 at the [Kellogg Biological Station](#) (KBS) in Hickory Corners, Michigan. SEJ developed an innovative agenda to deepen and advance coverage of climate change. SEJ and MSU partners matched journalists with scientists one-on-one prior to the meeting, during breakout activities and in the field, with group presentations, discussion and relationship building. The final event was national in scope and involved hand-picked scientists doing research through the LTER "Long Term Ecological Research Stations" network. All events, travel costs and staff time were fully funded by the [National Science Foundation](#) and [Michigan State University's Knight Center for Environmental Journalism](#). The project also included sessions at the SEJ annual meetings in Lubbock 2012 and Chattanooga 2013. The [Ecological Society of America](#) invited a special presentation on this project for their 2013 convention. SEJ is currently seeking funding to continue the work in 2014 and beyond.

With help from the [Joyce Foundation](#), SEJ and [Institutes for Journalism and Natural Resources \(IJNR\)](#), have developed a strong partnership for expedition-style learning projects. The Joyce grant focused on the Great Lakes region. Leaders of SEJ and IJNR are seeking funding together for new programs in 2014, emphasizing tours, scientific research, news-making issues and multi-media training. [Investigative Reporters and Editors](#) (a sister J-group) has invited SEJ to collaborate on high-impact opportunities to work together through conference panels, regional training events and database projects.

SEJ and The Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies in Washington, D.C. co-hosted *SEJ Predicts* in January 2013. Top energy and environment reporters previewed news stories with accurate and thought-provoking suggestions on EPA trends, non-legislative approaches to climate action by the Obama Administration, and other topics. This program was live-streamed for Web viewers.

SEJ co-organized four Webinars: one with producers of a documentary film on the environmental movement (*A Fierce Green Fire*); one on California's cap-and-trade program, with the [Reynolds Center for Business Journalism](#); one on environmental-health issues, with the [University of Southern California's Reporting on Health](#); and one for the [Environmental Grantmakers Association](#). The [Environmental Law Institute](#) has asked SEJ to collaborate on projects in 2014.

Organizational effectiveness and sustainability: Over the past year SEJ board and staff have focused on organizational effectiveness through a variety of surveys, studies and discussions. Through a grant from the [Brainerd Foundation](#) SEJ hired outside consultants and researched a variety of questions to guide decision-making, resource allocation and business plans going forward. Over the coming year, SEJ will implement the results of this study and develop programs that result in a quadruple bottom line as measured in the organization's:

- Value to journalists and others in SEJ's larger community of interest who care about public understanding of environmental issues
- High impact toward highly valued outcomes for *journalists* and *journalism*
- Sustainable program-related income associated with an activity
- Sustainable gift and grant income associated with an activity.

Through the effectiveness project SEJ came to define its strategic position as the *ultimate resource for journalists who cover environment-related issues* and *change agent for more and better environmental coverage*. SEJ affirmed the purpose of all programs and services is to:

- build a stronger, better-educated, and more closely connected network of journalists who are reporting on environment-related issues; and
- improve and increase news coverage of critically important environmental issues across all media platforms, to inform and engage all communities.

Imperatives

SEJ must build and maintain its membership.

SEJ must provide opportunities for member-to-member engagement and communication on topics of professional interest.

SEJ must provide members and other journalists with opportunities for cutting-edge learning and career development on environmental topics and best practices in journalism.

SEJ must cultivate relationships that help enhance the quality, credibility, reach and viability of environmental journalism and that help build the organization.

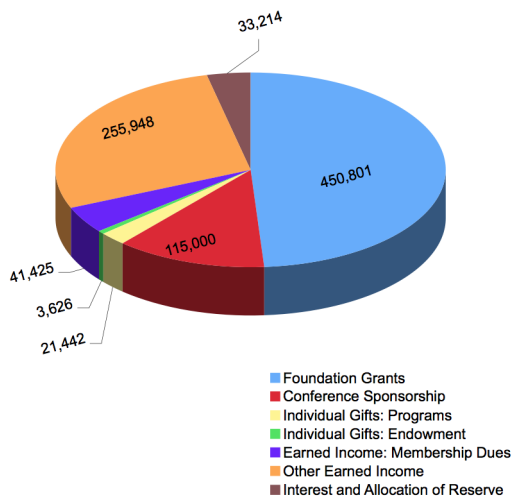
SEJ must generate and maintain the financial and organizational resources to achieve its mission and objectives in both the short and long term.



Typical Sources and Allocation of Income

Over the last two decades, SEJ became well established through generous investments of general support from foundation underwriters. This funding has allowed the organization to grow and thrive in a dynamic professional field that prizes its independence and self-determined peer-led programs. The following charts show SEJ's income streams and allocations for 2012. Audited financial statements and Form 990s are also available for this period on [Guidestar](#) and on SEJ's [website](#).

SEJ 2012 Sources of Income



SEJ 2012 Allocation of Resources

