



theinvestigativefund.org

## WAM-IT-YOURSELF - NEW YORK CITY - 2013

### SIMPLE WAYS TO DEEPEN YOUR REPORTING

#### *Are you reporting on a company?*

- Give the company's recent Annual Reports a read, typically available on the company's website.
- Look over any company press releases, also typically available on the company's website.
- If you have access to a LexisNexis account, do a Nexis search.
- Try more sophisticated Google searches that allow you to find company documents, by searching for the company name and .ppt or .pdf or .doc or using such phrases as "for internal use only."
- If the company is ranked by a business magazine like *Forbes* or *Fortune*, read the company profiles on those sites.
- If you want to see what a company was saying a few years back (say BP before the Gulf oil spill), try the Way Back Machine at [www.archive.org/index.php](http://www.archive.org/index.php), which will allow you to see earlier versions of the company's website.
- Check whether they've received any federal grants at the non-profit group OMB Watch, which has a web tool for finding federal government grants and contracts, at <http://www.fedspending.org/> or [www.usaspending.gov/](http://www.usaspending.gov/).
- If they've received government contracts, check out the Project on Government Oversight's database of contractors who have been reprimanded or penalized for wrongdoing: <http://www.contractormisconduct.org/>.
- Figure out whether the company has been sued by looking up records of litigation, available at <http://www.pacer.gov/>, a service of the United States court system. You are required to register, and a modest fee is charged for each search and retrieval.
- To check whether the company has health and safety violations, go to: <http://www.osha.gov/pls/imis/accidentsearch.html>
- To see if it's violated labor laws, go to: <http://www.nlrb.gov/> and click on "Cases & Decisions"

#### **If the company is publicly traded:**

- Give its Securities and Exchange Commission reports a read, searchable at <http://www.sec.gov/edgar.shtml>.
- Go to <http://www.implu.com> and put in a company name to see who the officers and directors are, what their compensation is, and what other company boards they serve on.

**If the company is privately owned:**

- Look up state corporate filings, typically found at the web site of a State Corporation Commission or Secretary of State. The Georgia Secretary of State has a handy list at <http://sos.georgia.gov/corporations/states.htm> . Some states have useful features where you can click on an officer's name and see the other corporations (both for-profit and non-profit) with which they are affiliated.

***Are you reporting on a nonprofit?***

- Search the nonprofit's website for press releases.
- Consult Guidestar at <http://guidestar.org> to look at a foundation's tax return (known as a **Form 990**), which they are required to file annually to the federal government. This will include names of key players and major expenses.
- Required state filings typically go to the attorney general's office in the state where the charity is registered; go to <http://www.nasconet.org/documents/u-s-charity-offices/> for a listing of state regulatory offices.
- If you have access to a LexisNexis account, do a Nexis search.
- Try more sophisticated Google searches that allow you to find company documents, by searching for the company name and .ppt or .pdf or .doc or using such phrases as "for internal use only."
- Check whether the charity has gotten into legal trouble through Pacer <http://www.pacer.gov/>
- Check whether they've received federal grants at OMB Watch's tracker: <http://www.fedspending.org/> or [www.usaspending.gov/](http://www.usaspending.gov/) .

***Now that you have some names, how are they trying to wield influence?***

**Federal:**

- Open Secrets will help you find campaign contributions, information about lobbyists and lobbying, and more. At <http://opensecrets.org> you can:
  - ✓ check for campaign contributions from individual officers (and, with the aid of a little web searching, contributions from their spouse or children as well);
  - ✓ check to see if the company has a PAC, who contributed to it and who it supported;

- ✓ check to see if the company hired lobbyists, how much they paid them, and what legislation or issues they lobbied on.
  - ✓ check to see if the lobbying firm has a PAC;
  - ✓ check to see if the lobbyist or the lobbying firm made contributions to elected officials they lobbied;
  - ✓ also check the lobbying disclosure forms to see if the company lobbied any federal agencies (see below)
- Public Citizen has a database of bundlers and major donors to presidential campaigns at <http://whitehouseforsale.org/>

#### **State:**

- You can find links to each state's lobbying disclosure site at: [http://www.opencongress.org/wiki/State\\_Lobbyist\\_Disclosure\\_Forms](http://www.opencongress.org/wiki/State_Lobbyist_Disclosure_Forms)
- For campaign finance disclosure at the state level, go to the National Institute on Money in State Politics web site, <http://www.followthemoney.org/> .

#### ***Did their spending have any impact?***

- After you've checked the lobbying disclosures and campaign contributions, you'll want to get a sense of whether these efforts yielded any results. If they lobbied for H.R. 111 and made campaign contributions to Rep. A, did Rep. A vote for H.R. 111?
- The Sunlight Foundation offers a great site for this, <http://maplight.org/us-congress/bill> , which correlates individual votes cast with financial contributions.
- For bill tracking, use the Library of Congress site, <http://thomas.loc.gov/> .
- To check for earmarks, the Office of Management and Budget (a government agency) has a database: <http://earmarks.omb.gov/>. Another useful database is a joint project of the Sunlight Foundation and Taxpayers for Common Sense: <http://earmarkwatch.org/>

#### ***Has the company, nonprofit, or key individual had interactions with federal agencies?***

- You may want to consider a Freedom of Information Act request. Ripe targets for FOIAs might be communications between the company or nonprofit and officials at the agency that regulates them or the agency from which they've received a federal contract or grant. You can get fascinating information this way, but it typically takes a few months.
- For a list of federal exemptions and other FOIA tips, go to: <http://www.rcfp.org/fogg/> . For links to various state Freedom of Information laws, go to: <http://www.nfoic.org/state-freedom-of-information-laws>.
- A great way to start on your federal FOIA request is to use the FOIA generator created by the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press at: <http://www.rcfp.org/foia> , which will automatically generate the address for your agency's FOIA office and the legal language that it's useful to include.