

“We’re not used  
to having data  
scientists on our  
side...”

Human Rights Data Analysis Group  
2021 year in review

**HRDAG**

Statisticians  
for human rights

# What It Means to Partner for Justice

**Our partners often tell us that powerful institutions use data and technology against them. HRDAG transforms that dynamic by using scientific methods to strengthen human rights and to fight for justice and accountability.**

When we partner with human rights defenders, from truth commissions to UN missions to local activists, we help them understand how data science can be used to answer questions about human rights violations. HRDAG's team brings scientific and technical expertise to a problem, and our partners provide local, substantive expertise to bring context and interpretation to our analyses. We collaborate closely with our partners to identify the questions of fact that are important for their advocacy, and that are answerable with rigorous data analysis, and we assist them with that analysis.

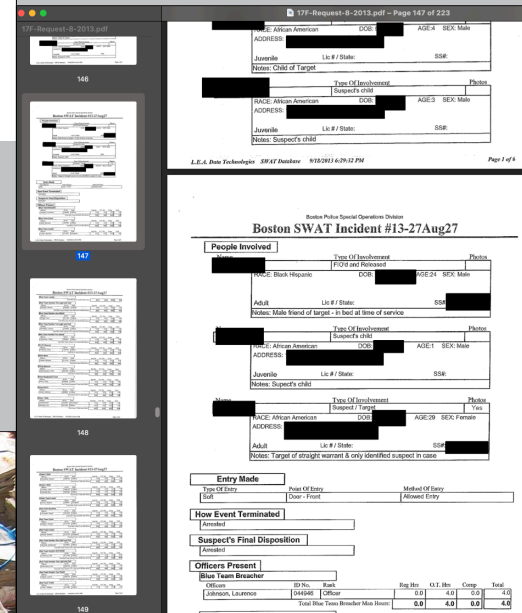
When I think about the depth of our partnerships, I think about the public health concept of *accompaniment*, in which solidarity and compassion are as important as technical expertise. I believe this captures how HRDAG treats the relationships we are privileged to have with our partners.

Our partners' goals and priorities drive our analyses, and our starting point is wherever they are in terms of technical readiness and data literacy. Not every partner may want to conduct their own

About the cover: "We're not used to having data scientists on our side..." was a crisp observation made by a participant at one of our 2021 workshops, leading us to the Partnership theme of this year's report.

## Data dump: 2005

(GUATEMALA) 80 million pages discovered in a police archive, which include evidence of the role police played in extrajudicial disappearances.



## Data dump: 2014

(MASSACHUSETTS) 1,320 pages of incident reports describing 182 SWAT raids, including details about use of military weaponry and when children were home at the time of the raid.

**The data dumps received by human rights advocates can be overwhelming. They may arrive as mountains of physical paper from a warehouse, or as thousands of pages of pdf images on a thumb drive.**

**Our team has decades of experience helping our partners make sense of data, regardless of the form it takes.**

analyses, but they all need to be able to make sense of numerical arguments, both those used on their behalf and those used against them.

As a result, we always try to convey to our partners the "why" for all of our methods and interpretations.

*Why do we use this tool and not another?*

*How are we reaching a particular conclusion?*

*Why can (or can't) we make an important statement of fact?*

For those partners who do want to dig deeper, we value training the next generation of data analysts as part of our mission. Our team spends hundreds of hours training partners, teaching them how to train *their* partners, building tools to help with their work, and empowering them to take the lead in their communities.

Growing the field of experts with the skills to do this work, and accompanying those already doing the work, are two ways in which HRDAG is on the side of our partners. It's all part of our model of radical service.

Each partnership begins with a conversation. The stories highlighted in the following pages are just two examples of projects that can result when technical experts and subject matter experts work together. I hope they prompt you to consider what questions you might have about data, and what conversations you want to begin.

# The Quest for Answers in Colombia



**(COLOMBIA) GUIDING A PARTNER THROUGH COLLABORATION, TOOLS, AND TRAININGS**

After decades of armed conflict, a peace accord was reached in Colombia in 2016, triggering a formal peace process. In June 2020, HRDAG's team began working with Colombian analysts, marking the **tenth truth commission** HRDAG has advised.

**Current project: 18 months and counting**  
**Analysts trained: 20+**



**María Alejandra Ortiz is an analyst with the Colombian truth commission (formally La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia**

**y la No repetición, or CEV). When she started this project she was nervous about all the new technical tools the team would be using. Now she confidently teaches those same tools and principles to new colleagues.**

Colombia's formal peace process involves investigations and a lot of documentation. With 40 organizations contributing unique datasets describing the violent conflict, there are 20 million records to integrate and analyze. We are working with Colombian researchers to tackle this enormous task.

Typically for this kind of project we would go on-site to work with and teach our colleagues in person. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, we adapted our training to be virtual. The HRDAG team led three 90-minute sessions a week,

in Spanish, to train our colleagues in Colombia. Those colleagues, like María Alejandra, are now training new analysts at their own institutions.

Maria Gargiulo spent the summer of 2018 as an intern with HRDAG. She returned in 2020 as a statistician on our team and, together with Patrick Ball, she led much of the training of the analysts in Colombia. This is one example of how we grow the field of data scientists working on the side of activists.



**Maria G, HRDAG statistician and former intern: "The science communication aspect of this work is crucial.**

**Helping the analysts grasp the concepts, math, and code takes time and trust. After learning these skills comes the hard part — comprehending and sharing what the data really means."**

Photo at top by Policía Nacional de los colombianos, CC BY-SA 2.0; modified by David Peters

# Uncovering Hidden Violations by Police



**(CHICAGO) A PARTNER RECRUITS HUNDREDS OF VOLUNTEERS EAGER TO ANALYZE POLICE DATA**

Complaint Records contain detailed descriptions of interactions with police. A record may specify multiple violations, but these can be obscured by official coding procedures that flatten accounts into a single category, like "Improper search of person" or "Conduct unbecoming." A team of volunteers in Chicago is working to uncover these vital details and share with their community what they're learning.

**Current project: 8 months and counting**  
**Volunteers-in-training: 200+**



**Trina Reynolds-Tyler, Data Director at Chicago nonprofit the Invisible Institute, knows the power of data analysis. And she wants to put that power in the hands**

**of more community members, who are eager to be trained.**

Trina leads teams processing and analyzing hundreds of thousands of pdf files turned over as a result of two lawsuits: *Jamie Kalven v. City of Chicago* (2014) and *Charles Green v. Chicago Police Department* (2020). These files represent decades of citizen complaint reports filed against the Chicago Police Department.

Trina and Tarak Shah from HRDAG offer weekly virtual training sessions with a Chicago-based group of analysts and volunteers to identify all the violations described in a complaint. This approach both raises the visibility of

under-documented forms of misconduct (such as gender-based violence) and enables a single record to serve as evidence in multiple different types of investigations.

**"It was a little bit overwhelming, because I was really unsure how we would process so much information, and where do we start?"**

It's the mission of organizations like the Invisible Institute and HRDAG to help affected communities and their allies discover how to collect, preserve, and analyze data to hold institutions accountable and challenge impunity.

One important step is teaching communities how to get the most out of the data they have worked so hard to get.

Photo at top by Isadora Ruyter-Harcourt, CC BY-2.0; modified by David Peters

## HRDAG BY THE NUMBERS

### A THREE YEAR SUMMARY

HRDAG's fiscal year is July 1–June 30

	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
Beginning cash balance	\$ 339,583	\$ 527,801	\$ 213,428
<b>Income</b>			
Foundation grants	1,008,334	955,452	1,386,971
Revenue from contracts	145,643	10,700	22,474
Direct public support	123,099	95,968	89,555
<b>Total income</b>	\$ 1,277,075	\$ 1,062,120	\$ 1,499,000
<b>Expenses</b>			
Salaries and consultants	1,134,809	1,073,492	946,281
Travel and conferences	1,129	16,468	34,350
Rent, utilities, and technology	38,432	36,359	47,745
Supplies and other direct costs	10,549	28,411	19,892
Administration <sup>1</sup>	117,634	95,608	136,359
<b>Total expenses</b>	\$ 1,302,553	\$ 1,250,338	\$ 1,184,627
Ending cash balance <sup>2</sup>	\$ 314,106	\$ 339,583	\$ 527,801

<sup>1</sup> HRDAG operates as a fiscally sponsored project of Community Partners (communitypartners.org), a nonprofit organization that helps community leaders build and sustain effective programs that benefit the public good. Administrative fees to Community Partners support their back-office services and the legal framework that allows HRDAG to focus on our mission.

<sup>2</sup> We strive to close every fiscal year with a non-zero cash balance. A portion of this balance constitutes our reserves which we maintain year-to-year for financial stability and programmatic agility. The majority of this non-zero cash balance represents funds with donor restrictions, meant to be spent over a specific period of time and/or on a specific project. The size of this balance varies year-to-year, depending on when grant funds are received.

## THE PEOPLE AT HRDAG

HRDAG's team includes Executive Director Megan Price, Director of Research Patrick Ball, Data Scientist Tarak Shah, Statistician Maria Gargiulo, Operations Coordinator Suzanne Nathans, as well consultants, interns, and fellows. Our team is based in San Francisco, and our partners are located in countries around the world. We are supported by an advisory board composed of Julie Broome, Margot Gerritsen, and William Isaac.

A digital version of this report is available at [hrdag.org/report/2021-review](https://hrdag.org/report/2021-review)

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## 2021, AND 30 YEARS OF RADICAL SERVICE



As you read this year in review, we mark 30 years of using data science to advance human rights, and we are steeped in the work of our 10th truth commission. Over the course of the next year, we look forward to sharing more stories from three decades of radical service, accompanying and training partners.

Much of HRDAG's work happens behind the scenes — providing training and support to our partners — and we generally prefer it that way. But we are also gratified when our work is highlighted and celebrated in more public forums. This year we were especially satisfied to hear the United Nations High Commissioner present our analysis of

conflict-related deaths in Syria during her report to the Human Rights Council.

And we were honored and humbled to be named the 2021 recipients of the Rafto Prize for Human Rights, and to see our work acknowledged alongside that of 35 previous Rafto laureates from around the globe.

At HRDAG, we are profoundly grateful to our loyal and generous community for believing in and supporting the role we serve with our partners, and for sharing our commitment to rigorous scientific methods in the fight for human rights and justice.

*Megan*

Megan Price

Executive Director

### WE THANK THIS YEAR'S GENEROUS SUPPORTERS

Anne R. Dow Family Foundation	Anne-Marie Cowsill and Jeremy Shaw	Sreeja Kondeti	Bruce Spencer
Cooper Schneier Fund of The Minneapolis Foundation	Katherine Crecelius	Joey Kotfica	Paul Spinrad
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Selina Choo	Max Kaehn	David Rockoff	Foundation Matching Gifts
Jay Clarke	Julie Kaplan	Philip Rowe	LinkedIn Matching Gifts
Cindy Cohn and Patrick Ball	Jim Kleckner	Andreas Schagerer	Microsoft Corporation
	Reid Kleckner	Frank Schulenburg	Matching Gifts
	Michael Bear Kleinman	Robert Shea	Nike Matching Gifts
	Jeff Klinger	Michael Sherman	
	Josh Knight	Sue Sherry	
		Brendan Shillingford	
		Ethan Siller	

## WHY HRDAG MATTERS

For 30 years, HRDAG has been working very closely with partners to build their capacity to use data science, empowering them to answer their own human rights questions — I call that radical service. Because of HRDAG, there are human rights data analysts around the world who know how to tackle some of the thorniest problems out there. — **Julie Broome**, Advisory Board Chair, political scientist and international human rights expert

We are all so grateful to all the survivors and witnesses brave enough to tell their stories of human rights abuses. And thank goodness for the scientists at HRDAG — they use the most rigorous data science to make sure that those stories are counted, and they also make sure we can draw conclusions about the number of stories that didn't get told. — **Margot Gerritsen**, Advisory Board Member, professor and computational mathematician

HRDAG is at the frontlines of the movement to foster greater accountability in criminal justice. One way they do this is by partnering with community organizations to use policing data to offer greater transparency on the behaviors of police forces across the United States. That work is also paving the way for a brighter future, as communities learn that they can use data to make cases that will make the United States a safer, more just country for everyone. — **William Isaac**, Advisory Board Member, staff research scientist and data ethicist

# HRDAG

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HRDAG gratefully  
acknowledges our major  
funders for their support,  
including:



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