

**BORDERLESS**

# Nine Years of Impact

*Reimagining immigration journalism in Chicago  
for a more just and equitable future since 2017*



# From the Desk of Our Cofounder

*Nine years of building the  
“Future of Local News”*

BY NISSA RHEE, EXEC. DIRECTOR

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When we launched 90 Days, 90 Voices in February 2017 — a rapid-response volunteer project covering immigrants affected by President Trump’s first travel ban — we had no staff, no budget, and no office. What we had was a conviction: that the communities most impacted by immigration policy deserved journalism that reflected their humanity, spoke their languages, and held the powerful accountable.

Nine years later, Borderless Magazine has grown into one of the most recognized immigrant-focused newsrooms in the country. We were named the “Future of Local News” in 2024’s national Next Challenge competition. We have a track record of stories that have changed laws, closed abusive facilities, and saved lives.

We have grown with intention since our founding, building a well-run business operation and newsroom alongside our revenue growth. In January 2026, we released our first strategic plan ahead of our ninth anniversary. This guiding document, the product of a year’s worth of listening and designing, charts our growth for the next three years.

In tandem with our strategic plan, this report documents what you — our donors and partners — have made possible since our founding. It is a record of impact: stories that moved government officials to act, communities that found their voice through our journalism, and a growing movement of immigrant and BIPOC journalists we have trained and mentored. We are grateful for your partnership.

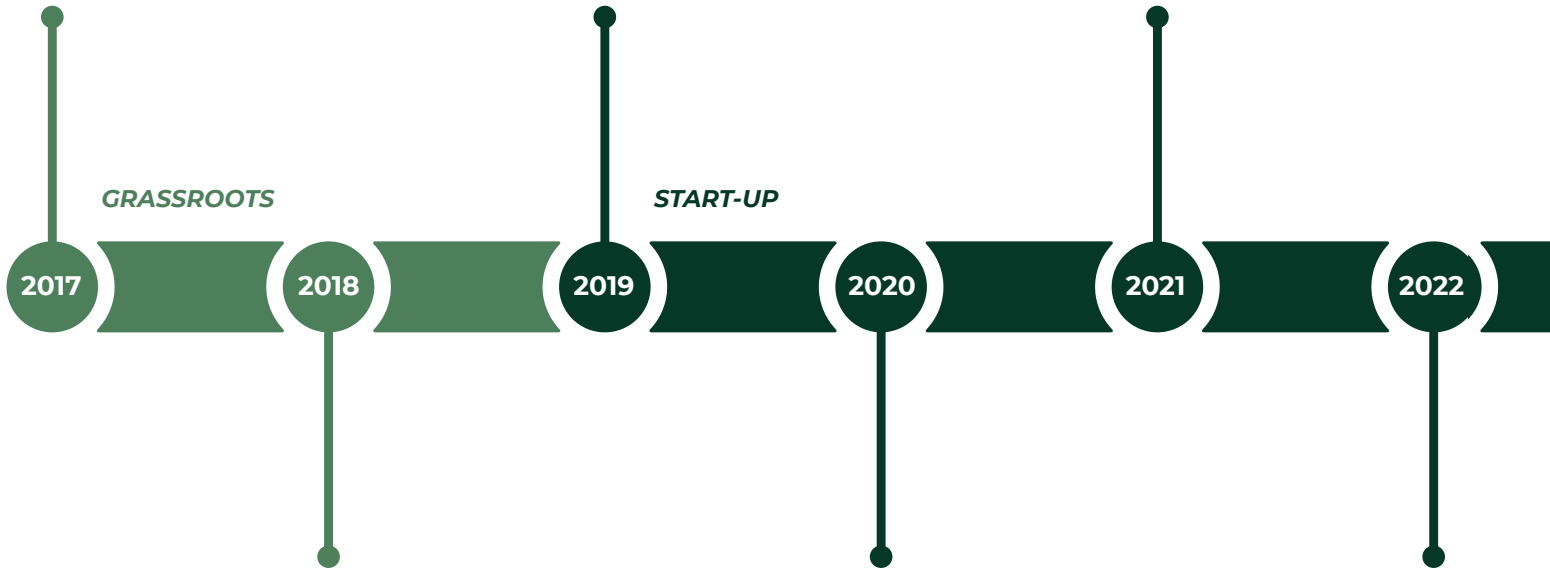
# Recognition Highlights

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>HONOR</b>	<b>AWARDING BODY</b>
2017	"Best Start-up" for early impact	Chicago Headline Club
2021	"Best Visual Journalism Project" for bilingual comic book "Reclaiming the Sacrifice Zone"	LION Publishers
2022	"North America Innovation Challenge Award" for innovative field canvasser work	Google
2022	"Community Engagement Award" for field canvassing and being only local news outlet in the country to publish in Dari for Afghan refugees	LION Publishers
2023	"Best Short Story/Essay" for "After the Buses" series on migrants bused to Chicago	Chicago Review of Books
2023	"Gather Award in Community-Centered Journalism" for field canvassing work	Online News Association
2024	"Breaking Barriers Award" for investigations into Chicago's migrant shelters	Institute for Nonprofit News
2024	"Journalistic Impact Award" for investigations into Chicago's migrant shelters	LION Publishers
2024	"Ripple Effect Award" for publishing journalism that inspires people across the country	Chicago's Public Narrative
2024	"Future of Local Journalism Award" for providing free and accessible news to Chicago's immigrants	Next Challenge
2025	"Leader for a New Chicago Award" for Cofounder and Executive Director Nissa Rhee	MacArthur Foundation and Field Foundation

- Three Chicago journalists launched 90 Days, 90 Voices to amplify the experiences of Chicago immigrants impacted by the Muslim Travel Ban
- Chicago Headline Clubs named 90 Days the **"Best Online Start-up"**

- We relaunched in October as Borderless Magazine
- We partnered with a marketing firm to **wheat paste posters with stories from our Asylum City series across Chicago**

- Our reporting on a group of transgender asylum seekers stuck in Mexico attracted so much international attention that **Biden made an unprecedented exception to allow them to cross the border**



- 90 Days, 90 Voices incorporated as an Illinois nonprofit
- With our first grant from the International Women’s Media Foundation, we **published “La Vida de La Villita,”** a bilingual series uplifting immigrant youth, business owners, and organizers in Little Village
- Our all-volunteer team held our first training workshop for journalists

- We hired two of our cofounders as our first full-time employees
- We hired our first Pathways fellow
- Our investigations into the spread of COVID-19 in immigration courts and detention centers **led to the Department of Justice temporarily shutting down the Chicago Immigration Court**

- After we published our bilingual comic book, “Reclaiming the Sacrifice Zone,” **the Chicago Dept. of Health denied the company at the center of our reporting a new permit,** citing health concerns for vulnerable communities
- The day after we published our investigation into the radioactive legacy of the Kerr-McGee factory in West Chicago, **the city announced a federal funding proposal of \$2 million for remediation and transformation of the Superfund site into a community park**

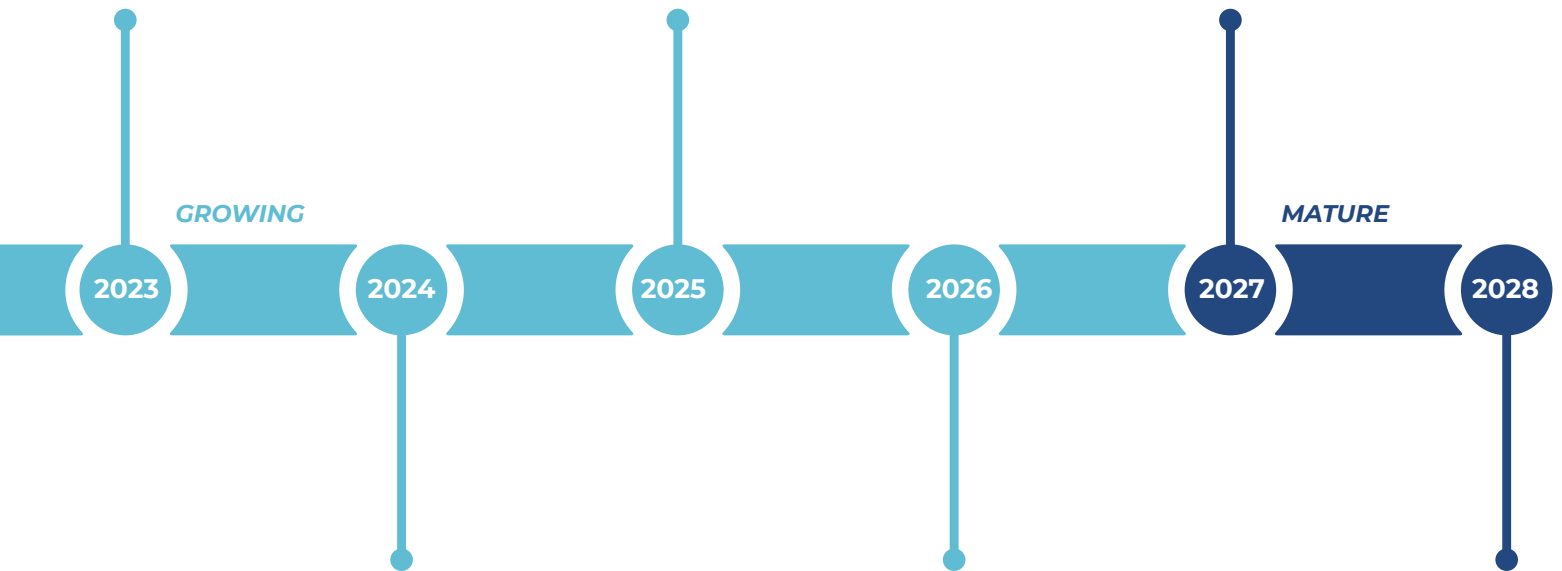
## ANNUAL REVENUE



- Our **investigation into the dangerous conditions at a city-run migrant shelter becomes an international story** when, days after we published our story, a young boy died
- We doubled our audience

- We hit 2.8 million Total Audience Reach
- Our coverage of a migrant-run soup kitchen facing eviction **brought new visibility to the triple crisis in Chicago: homelessness, hunger and deportation.** Following our reporting, evicted migrants found housing

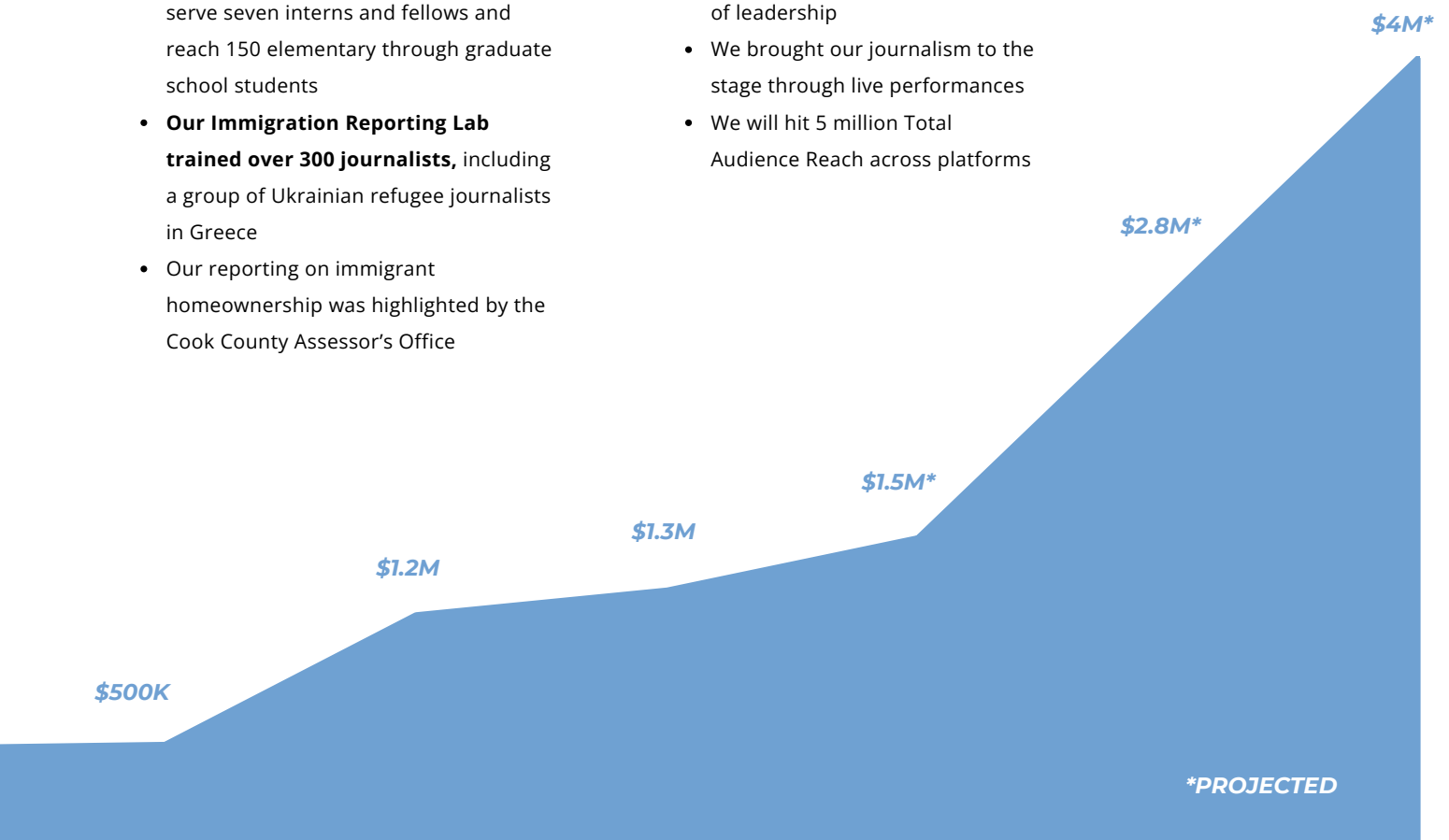
- We will raise \$3 million to **support the expansion of our newsroom\***
- We will leverage our existing national reach and expand editorial coverage and fundraising outside of Chicago\*



- We won five local and national awards for community impact
- We expanded our Pathways program to serve seven interns and fellows and reach 150 elementary through graduate school students
- **Our Immigration Reporting Lab trained over 300 journalists**, including a group of Ukrainian refugee journalists in Greece
- Our reporting on immigrant homeownership was highlighted by the Cook County Assessor's Office

- We **published our first strategic plan** and announced our transition to the next generation of leadership
- We brought our journalism to the stage through live performances
- We will hit 5 million Total Audience Reach across platforms

- We will hit **8 million Total Audience Reach** across platforms\*



# Investigations That Spark Action

## *Three years of watchdog journalism on migrant shelters*

Borderless' investigations into inhumane conditions and data breaches inside Chicago's city-run migrant shelter system — including HIPAA violations that exposed migrants to extortion — forced the city to close its largest shelter and end its contract with a shelter staffing agency.

Our first investigations found that the city's largest migrant shelter, a former factory building in Pilsen, failed to meet the U.N.'s basic standards for immigrant

shelters: diseases were spreading quickly through the shelter; shelter staff were restricting migrants' access to water; and fiber-like particles and dust were falling from the ceiling onto beds.

Three days after publishing our investigation on the dangerous conditions in the Pilsen shelter, a five-year-old boy from the shelter fell ill and died. Borderless' investigation helped make the story of his death international news.

*A child leaves a candle at a vigil to mourn the death of Juan Carlo Martinez Rivero on Wednesday, Dec. 20th, 2023, across the street from Chicago's largest migrant shelter on S. Halsted Street in Pilsen. Sebastián Hidalgo for Borderless Magazine*





*Aydali Campa and Tara Mobasher discuss Borderless' reporting during a community panel at Nighthawk in Chicago's Albany Park neighborhood on Dec. 6, 2025. Max Herman/Borderless Magazine.*

## **Bilingual News Built for Communities**

*From food pantries to Tiktok, meeting people where they're at*

Borderless doesn't just publish journalism — we bring it directly to the communities who need it most.

Launched in 2022 with support from the Google News Initiative, our field canvassing program takes Borderless reporting into neighborhoods where residents have limited internet access or deep distrust of the media. Canvassers show up where people already are — food pantries, community fairs, CTA stations, cultural events — distributing multilingual resource guides and fighting disinformation in real

time. The questions people ask our canvassers don't disappear after the conversation ends. They become stories, resource guides, and the bilingual vertical videos we publish on Instagram and TikTok that have since become national models for community-centered journalism.

We believe that accessibility leads to accountability. With one in three Chicagoans speaking Spanish at home, Borderless is not only the only news outlet in the city publishing every story in Spanish, we are fostering civic engagement.

# Reporting from Democracy's Frontlines

*Local reporting trusted by our region's 1.7 million immigrants*

If you're talking about democracy in the United States, you're talking about immigrants.

Half of all immigrants in the Chicago region are naturalized citizens, a sizable voting population. If immigrants don't see themselves in our journalism, how do we preserve the idea of American citizenship?

Borderless is a trusted news source for Chicago's diverse population, with 59% of our readers identifying as immigrants or family members of immigrants.

Our stories enrich civic discourse by uplifting voices and lived experiences that are rarely seen in for-profit news. A Univ. of Texas study of 23 Chicago news outlets found that Borderless provided "the most coverage, including immigrants' country of origin, immigrants' culture and assimilation, and immigrants advocating for immigrants."

Our stories provide valuable context for Chicagoans to understand a rapidly changing immigration system, and our reporting fuels civic discourse on immigrants and asylum seekers.

*Ozzy Gámez pays for his wholesale pastry order from Salgado's Bakery in Albany Park on Feb. 3, 2026. Camilla Forte/Borderless Magazine/Catchlight Local/Report for America*



# Fellowships Helping the Next Generation

*Our Pathways program is changing the journalism industry*

Our Pathways program provides paid internships and fellowships to emerging journalists from immigrant and BIPOC communities. Pathways is just one of two programs nationwide that explicitly focus on workforce development for immigrant journalists.

Pathways alums have gone on to work at The Washington Post, NBC News, NPR, the San Francisco Chronicle, AFP in North Africa, and more. Locally, our alumni have gone on to report for Block Club Chicago,

Cicero Independiente, and more.

In an industry where just 7% of the workforce is Latino/Hispanic — compared with 18.5% of the U.S. population and 29% of the Chicago population — Pathways is building a pipeline for multilingual journalists to work in newsrooms around the world.

In the next three years, we will hire a Pathways program manager and triple the number of people served by Pathways.

*2022 Pathways Fellow Saleha Soadat interviews former Afghan district governor Salima Mazari in her home in the American Midwest in May 2022. Soldat was evacuated from Afghanistan by the U.S. military during the fall of Kabul and resettled in the Chicago region. Michelle Kanaar/Borderless Magazine*



# Our work is made possible by

- Allies for Community Business
- Borealis Philanthropy
- CatchLight
- Chicago Community Trust
- Crossroads Fund
- Driehaus Foundation
- Field Foundation
- Four Freedoms Fund
- Google
- Healthy Communities Foundation
- Institute for Nonprofit News
- International Women's Media Foundation
- Joyce Foundation
- Kresge Foundation
- LION Publishers
- Local Media Association
- MacArthur Foundation
- McCormick Foundation
- Medill School of Journalism
- Miami Foundation
- Press Forward Chicago
- Racial Justice Pooled Fund
- Report for America
- Reynolds Journalism Institute
- Scripps Howard Foundation
- Silicon Valley Foundation
- Square One Foundation
- Walder Foundation
- WF Fund
- **And readers like you**

*Gerald Bright stayed at the Shelter Placement and Resource Center in Pilsen for three months. SPARC's predecessor was shuttered after a Borderless investigation found dangerous conditions at the shelter and a young boy got sick and died there. Bright is now organizing with other homeless individuals for better conditions at SPARC and in Chicago's homeless services system. Max Herman/Borderless Magazine*



# How our community sees our work

"Your in-depth reporting ensures that the public hears about the important topics it covers."

- Borderless donor

"You tell critical stories that help our community feel less alone."

- Borderless donor

"[I give to Borderless] to support those who are dedicated to delivering information and resources that are vital for our community to make right choices and act on them."

- Borderless donor

"Borderless Magazine exemplifies community-centered journalism, ensuring those most affected are involved every step of the way."

- Public Narrative's "Ripple Effect" award

"[Borderless is] telling stories that are underrepresented elsewhere, especially in mainstream corporate media."

- Borderless donor

"I use your zine (Zona de sacrificio) in my Spanish class every year, and it's so eye-opening to my students to learn about struggles for access to resources not just in Latin America, but in their city. I'm so grateful for your storytelling!"

- Borderless donor

"At Borderless, I learned to reject the idea that extractive and impersonal journalism had to be the norm. Powerful, impactful reporting is people-driven at its core."

- Pathways Fellow Valentina Parra

"As a first-generation American from two immigrant parents, having a publication that gives a voice to immigrant communities is so very important, when I was taught growing up to keep quiet and fit in instead of being heard and speaking out."

- Borderless donor



# You are invited

*Join the community that is helping our impact grow.*

- Become a **member** by giving any amount
- Join the **Witness Circle** by donating \$1,000 or more
- **Sponsor** our annual symposium through your company or foundation



Reach out to CDO CJ Ortuño at  
[development@borderlessmag.org](mailto:development@borderlessmag.org) to  
accept your invitation.

**JOIN TODAY**

*Borderless Magazine NFP is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit news outlet, EIN 83-1266-434*