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Tracking guns and the criminal justice system

By IRE Conference Blog | 06.21.2013

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By Jordan Gass-Poore'

Investigative journalists shared their under-the-gun experiences with the [U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives \(ATF\)](#) Thursday during the panel "Criminal justice: Guns" at this year's IRE Conference in San Antonio.

Ted Crest with the nonprofit organization [Criminal Justice Journalists](#) moderated the panel and provided national-level story ideas that reporters might want to localize, like investigating where criminals get their guns and how background checks are completed.

Crest added that the website [SEARCH](#) is an invaluable resource when investigating justice and public safety organizations at the federal, state and local levels.

"Guns is a state, local, federal and international issue," he said. "You've got to check your facts at all levels."

Gerardo Reyes, director of Univision Investiga, Univision's 2-year-old investigative unit, has spent time investigating how guns are getting into Mexico from the U.S. with the station's series "[Fast and Furious: Arming the enemy.](#)"

The series first aired last November and discovered that the ATF was allowing guns to be sold across the border for the purpose of criminal activity in an attempt to detect its owner.

Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Raquel Rutledge with the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel described her experiences with the publication's [series about how the ATF](#) allowed criminal gun stores in the city to stay in operation by selling to family members.

The series, which began last September, evolved from a tip by an area landlord whose property the ATF rented and, according to Rutledge, has led to calls from members of Congress.

"Work the sources outside the system," she said.

Rutledge suggested that reporters localize the story by researching gun shops in their areas and cross-examine those whose licenses were revoked.

"Some of it was just dumb luck," she said.

Jordan Gass-Poore is a journalism student at Texas State University

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