

STAY
SAFE

STATE OF SAHAN

Five years of reporting
news for everyone
in Minnesota



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Sahan Journal provides communities of color with free, fair and responsive journalism that shows everyone the way to a more equitable Minnesota.

Dear Sahan community,

Five years ago, I felt a mix of excitement and uncertainty as I prepared to launch Sahan Journal. It was a big leap, but one I knew was worth taking.

Creating a sustainable newsroom dedicated to communities of color — communities often overlooked by mainstream media and excluded from Minnesota's resources — felt like an ambitious uphill battle.

“How will this work?” I asked myself. “What if funding dries up after the first year? How will readers respond to seeing different communities and different faces in the news every day?”

Over the next 24 months, we took that founding vision and started to build an organization. We secured our first three grants in just a couple of months (thanks here to the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation, the Minneapolis Foundation and the McKnight Foundation). We hired our first full-time reporter, Joey Peters (you can read about Joey's accountability reporting in Chao Xiong's editorial report, on page 9.) We sold our first ad (thanks to the Saint Paul Public Library). And we raised more than \$20,000 in individual gifts from community members during our first end-of-year membership campaign.

Just as the initial blueprints for Sahan Journal were starting to take shape in the real world, COVID-19 arrived and shut things down. Then, the murder of George Floyd ripped it open again, exposing gaping wounds in our society and further highlighting the critical need for our mission.

At that moment, the importance of Sahan Journal crystallized.

Today, reflecting on Sahan Journal's incredible journey, I'm overwhelmed with gratitude. Our growth has surpassed even my wildest expectations. We've transformed into an organization with a \$3 million budget and 23 full-time staff. We've built systems in finance and human resources that can handle new investments and new hires.

This success wouldn't have been possible without the phenomenal team that has joined me on this journey — passionate, dedicated journalists and professionals who believe in reimagining news and information for Minnesotans.

In this report, I've asked a handful of those people to share their stories about working

at Sahan Journal and creating a new kind of newsroom together. You'll hear from Alfonzo Galvan, Sahan's business and labor reporter, about how he builds trust with entrepreneurs and small-business owners. Mayuri Utturkar writes about developing benefits packages that embody our organizational values. Hannah Ihekoronye reflects on what news meant to her family and how that informs her community engagement projects. And Chao Xiong, Sahan's editorial director, looks at the accountability stories we published last year and how they've led to tangible change in our communities. I hope you enjoy reading all these accounts — and a handful more.

Of course, the path hasn't been without its challenges. The environment for nonprofit news keeps changing — and Sahan keeps evolving. At the beginning, most readers discovered our daily stories over social media. But who comes across deeply reported news on their Facebook “NewsFeed” anymore? After the mass layoffs of the COVID era, the Minnesota job market has been expanding for several years now. This spring, we rolled out a brand new job board to help match our readers with job opportunities.

I've been thinking a lot lately about how Minnesota nonprofits can create more opportunities for diverse communities — and how I can help. In October 2023, I announced that I would be stepping down from my leadership role at Sahan Journal to pave the way for a new leader. This change fills me with excitement and optimism. Our board is energized, our leadership team is solid, our staff is motivated. Our funders and donors believe in our mission, and our communities trust us with their stories.

I'm confident that Sahan will continue to thrive, becoming a stronger bridge between cultures, and remaining a nurturing space where young journalists of color can flourish.

These past five years have been an extraordinary journey, and I'm incredibly proud of what we've achieved together. But this is just the beginning. With your continued support, Sahan Journal will grow and make a lasting impact for many years to come.



With gratitude,
MUKHTAR M. IBRAHIM
Publisher and CEO

Five years of photos that define Sahan

In the earliest days of Sahan Journal, we struggled to find file photos that matched our reporting. Where were the news portraits of Black shop owners, Hmong accountants, Latino nurse practitioners? Before long, we realized that if we wanted to represent our communities accurately, we'd have to take those photos ourselves. The images on these spreads come from five Sahan photojournalists (listed in order of when they joined the newsroom): Jaida Grey Eagle (our first staff photographer), Ben Hovland, Drew Arrieta (a friend of Sahan and frequent freelance collaborator), Dymanh Chhoun and Aaron Nesheim.





For photo captions,
please turn to page 30.



Some entrepreneurs of color can't believe that a business reporter wants to tell their story. It's my job at Sahan Journal to change that.

After a year of searching, I found a Latino florist making amazing and trendy bouquets called “ramos buchónes” for Valentine’s Day. Then, I had to convince her to talk to me.

BY ALFONZO GALVAN

AS THE BUSINESS AND WORK

reporter for Sahan Journal, I spend a lot of my work days covering labor complaints, strikes, work ordinances, business closings, and more.

Even when I’m reporting what some might call “good news,” I often run into obstacles with sources. One surprising challenge is needing to convince some of my sources that their story is worth telling. After all, some have never spoken to a reporter before us; they may not realize that the business press should be paying attention to them.

You would not believe the number of times a business owner has told me, “I thought you were some type of scam,” after we’ve finally met.

One recent example of this encounter occurred around Valentine’s Day. I’d set out to profile how different communities celebrate the holiday. In the process, I learned about a unique and trendy style of bouquets called “ramos buchónes” being created in the Latino community.

The sheer size of these showy, rose-filled bouquets blew my mind. I mean, in some cases the arrangements contained more than 100 flowers! That over-the-top style has proved irresistible on TikTok, where some #ramobuchon videos have collected more than 30 million views.

I started my hunt for a Latino florist in late January 2023, about a month after I joined the Sahan newsroom. I called around, but nobody had the bouquets.

Well, a year went by, and I decided to try again. This time, to my surprise, I found multiple at-home florists crafting the bouquets. None of them were working out of a traditional flower shop. Rather, these young women and new entrepreneurs were jumping in to fill a need in their community, and to make some money for themselves. They all worked from home and had built up small but loyal followings on social media.

The first few florists I contacted online seemed hesitant to talk to me. Finally, I got in contact with Brittany Vega, from Designs by B, who agreed to meet me at a Starbucks near her home.

I explained who I was and how Sahan Journal covers our communities, and I offered to answer any questions she might have. Building trust in journalism isn’t hard work—but it’s not automatic, either.

Vega admitted to me that she’d originally thought I was a “scammer.” Just to be on the safe side, she’d brought along her older brother, who sat a few tables down to keep an eye. But once we got to talking, she invited me to her house to witness the creativity and care that go into creating these special bouquets.

Having gotten a great interview and published the story for Valentine’s Day, I can laugh off the skepticism and suspicion I originally encountered. But that experience does serve as a strong reminder of the importance I see in the work we do here at Sahan Journal.

We have the ability to build trust with a unique and often ignored part of our community. I’m grateful I have the opportunity to put these business success stories on the front page. **S**

INSIDE SAHAN We’re in business

- Alfonzo Galvan became Sahan’s first full-time business and work reporter in January 2023.
- Sahan’s coverage of immigrant-owned restaurants circulate widely on TikTok and Reels, with some stories attracting 50-75K views.
- The two business topics Sahan has reported on most often? Labor organizing among East African drivers for Uber and Lyft. And labor complaints and walkouts at Amazon fulfillment centers.



An immigrant in prison told me why Sahan’s journalism matters

Most sources don’t send reporters a thank-you card. One immigrant had a hard story to tell me about his life — and his freedom. **BY HIBAH ANSARI**

I don’t report stories to seek out thank-you notes. It’s certainly not why I took my first reporting job, at Sahan, four years ago. But the first time I ever received one, the experience brought me to tears.

I was sitting in Sahan’s office when a colleague handed me an envelope addressed from the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Inside the envelope was a hand-drawn card with four thorny roses intertwined, with one rose positioned between two butterflies. The card held a four-page thank-you note from Jorge Vargas Perez.

I had recently published a story about Vargas Perez and the experience of immigrant prisoners in Minnesota. Because he is not a citizen — Vargas Perez came to the U.S. from Mexico in 2002, and holds a green card — he could not access certain programs in the prison system. He was not eligible for work release, which is when inmates work for pay or join vocational programming in the community. He couldn’t enroll in a drug-rehabilitation program. And, after serving two-thirds of his sentence, he was not eligible for supervised release.

These programs help integrate people back into society. But if a prisoner has a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainer — a legal status that puts them on the agency’s radar for deportation — they’re barred from access.

I connected with Vargas Perez over the phone, while he was held at a prison in Faribault, speaking in 15-minute increments—the time limit for phone calls at Minnesota correctional facilities. We had long conversations about how he’s studying law from the inside so that he can better understand the complexities of ICE and immigration legal cases. He told me about his three kids and how he misses them.

“Have you ever experienced despair? That’s what I would boil it down to. You see people leaving to bootcamp or to all of these programs, and you know you can’t,” he told me. “Then you see them come back and tell the story of how they couldn’t stay off the pipe, and not taking advantage of the opportunity they were given. There’s people here that would kill for an opportunity like that.”

After I published the story about Vargas Perez, he said his case received a lot of attention. I called one of his legal advocates to relay my thank you for the beautiful card. She updated me that

his (complicated) appeal had been accepted and he would start early release about a month later. She was adamant that my story had helped change Vargas Perez’s fate.

Five months later, I attended a news conference at the State Capitol. Minnesota legislators were announcing a bill, the North Star Act, that would prohibit state or local officials from sharing data or accepting funds that require cooperation with ICE—or enforcing ICE detainers.

As I settled into my seat and prepared to take notes, a man I didn’t recognize leaned over to introduce himself.

It was Vargas Perez: We had only ever spoken over the phone. He told me he had been working as a paralegal for the Puerta Grande Law Firm in Minneapolis. Just two weeks prior, he’d gotten out of Faribault through the early-release program.

He had another mission now beyond the law firm. Vargas Perez told me was advocating for passage of the North Star Act. **S**

INSIDE SAHAN

Covering immigration in Minnesota

- In 2023, Hibah Ansari reported more than eight stories about the push to get drivers’ licenses for undocumented people.
- Data reporter Cynthia Tu joined the newsroom as a fellow last fall. Her census analysis has allowed Sahan to tell more detailed stories about Afghans, Ecuadorians, and the newest arrivals in Minnesota.
- This fall, Sahan will be reporting on candidates from immigrant communities seeking elected office for the first time.



Growing up, I saw how news empowers immigrant families—starting with mine

Community engagement at Sahan Journal means finding out what really matters and sharing the reporting process.

**BY HANNAH
IHEKORONYE**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO BRING community voices into the reporting process? Well, for me, it goes back to my childhood in St. Paul. I grew up in the city and lived in the Frogtown, Midway and North End neighborhoods.

My environment changed quite a bit, but consuming the news remained constant. My parents immigrated to the United States in the 1980s and have made Minnesota home for almost 40 years. For my close-knit family — five siblings and immigrant Nigerian parents — the news was our way to get a better understanding of the world around us.

But being a news consumer is not why I set out for a career in journalism. The truth is as a middle-schooler, I always felt like the least informed person in the room. At first that feeling rattled me. Left me shy and silent. But after a while, I didn't mind it. It turned into my superpower.

In fact, that curiosity empowered me to ask the questions others feared. As an 11th-grader, for example, I attended a school-board forum and asked the candidates how they planned to provide a quality education for all of the district's students.

It's not just that I wanted better answers; I wanted to ensure everyone in the room — starting with my own family — had all the information they needed. Looking back today, I sometimes wonder, *If my family had possessed better information and resources, would we have struggled*

as much? Could we have gone beyond surviving to flourishing?

Jump forward now to my role as a community engagement manager at Sahan. Here, I have the privilege of helping to discover what our community members need to know. We do this by building relationships, bringing reporters to libraries and community centers, asking questions, and listening to people's untold stories. Then, our reporters report on these issues — the ones that matter most.

We also give people of color the opportunity to include themselves in the process of reporting the news. Through our 2023-24 community conversation series, we've been holding in-depth forums that focus on topics like immigration, mosque safety, and substance addiction.

In February we hosted a conversation about immigration in Minnesota, with the MPR News North Star Journey Live series. The event brought together immigration lawyers, an advocate for Minnesota's Latino community, and a leader for an international refugee nonprofit. The discussion unpacked the challenges and failings of our current immigration system: unprecedented numbers of migrants, case backlogs and limited resources.

During the event, I sat in the front row as the producer, keeping track of time, the script and all the questions coming in from audience members. You see, opportunities like this feed the inner child in me. The person who wanted to ensure that everyone has a voice and a chance to gain understanding.

As journalists, we're just the vessel; the stories belong to the community. **S**

INSIDE SAHAN Community engagement at Sahan Journal

- In 2024, Sahan Journal reporters will be holding Office Hours for community members to ask questions and share story ideas.
- In 2022, Sahan Journal founded a text/SMS news service for Afghan refugees in Minnesota.
- Interested in hosting a Sahan listening event in your community? Email Hannah Ihekoronye at hihekoronye@sahanjournal.com.



Sharing stories from underserved communities is a benefit to everyone

As the leader of Sahan’s newsroom, I’ve seen the power our reporting has to inform diverse readers and change public policy. **BY CHAO XIONG**

I spent 18 years in mainstream media covering everything from the national baton-twirling championships to the trials of the Minneapolis police officers charged with killing George Floyd. Then, in early 2022, I made the leap from legacy media to Sahan Journal.

Why the move? Mainstream media seemed to be adapting at a glacial pace to our post-George Floyd world. Little had changed about how other newsrooms were covering the state’s diverse communities, even though Minnesota had served as the epicenter of a worldwide racial reckoning.

Meanwhile, Sahan was proving to be a formidable force in local journalism, publishing nuanced human stories and deeply reported articles on current events. Sahan showed that building a diverse newsroom was possible, and that sharing stories from underserved communities is a benefit to all communities.

In the past few years, our strong accountability reporting has started to demonstrate that impact. Last summer, housing reporter Katelyn Vue requested and received more than 400 pages of emails about an affordable housing development in the Twin Cities suburb of Shakopee. Three years earlier, city officials had pre-approved an affordable housing complex for a nonprofit developer whose rental clientele is more than 90 percent people of color.

The newly unearthed emails from city officials revealed that city leaders had run into public pressure and then hatched a plan to rezone the plot of land, effectively killing the project. A month after Katelyn’s story ran, the city withdrew its rezoning effort. The move meant construction of the 46-unit apartment complex could move forward. While officials never disclosed the reason for their change of heart, there’s no doubt in my mind that Katelyn’s intrepid reporting played a role.

We strive for hard-hitting reporting across all of our beats. Climate reporter Andrew Hazzard broke a story last November about a metal plant, Smith Foundry, belching toxic fumes into one of Minneapolis’ most diverse neighborhoods. The foundry violated the federal Clean Air Act for five years with no consequences from the state agency that regulates pollution.

Andrew’s article prompted

widespread public outcry. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency had been sitting on information about the pollution; after Sahan’s coverage, the agency hosted public meetings.

Sometimes, it takes a little longer to see the impact of our work. Sahan Journal reporter Joey Peters teamed up with ProPublica reporter Jessica Lussenhop in 2022 on an investigative article about the sale of homes through contracts for deed. The practice — legal but poorly regulated — often involves flippers selling houses at inflated prices to buyers who either don’t qualify for conventional home loans or who abstain from them for religious reasons.

A year after our story ran, the Minnesota Attorney General’s Office announced an investigation of the practice. In early 2024, lawmakers on a state and federal level cited our reporting while introducing legislation that would regulate contract-for-deed home sales.

Sahan Journal remains committed to this kind of bold reporting. Our editorial staff has doubled since I joined two years ago, and we’re publishing more stories and videos than ever before, telling stories that matter to all Minnesotans. **S**

INSIDE SAHAN

What’s the news

- Chao Xiong joined Sahan Journal as managing editor in March 2022, and now serves as director of editorial.
- Over the past three years, Sahan’s newsroom has won four Page One awards from the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.
- Sahan publishes two weekly newsletters. Sahan Sunday offers a reporter’s notes, plus news links. The Pathfinder covers arts, events and service.



How to build a newsroom that looks more like the real Minnesota? Start from the ground up.

Over 40 years in journalism, I've seen mainstream media waver in its commitment to more inclusive journalism. That's why Minnesota needs Sahan Journal.

BY FRED DE SAM LAZARO

LAND ON SAHAN JOURNAL'S “front page” on any given day, and you’ll find that just about any story possesses the relevance, timeliness and rigorous reporting that you’d hope to see in so-called mainstream news outlets. Indeed, Sahan has broken its share of “firsts,” which have later been picked up by other Minnesota news outlets. However, much of Sahan’s content is likely to be seen almost exclusively here, reflecting — almost literally — the diverse immigrant and longtime communities of color that this media organization is pledged to serve.

For some time, legacy media outlets — particularly public broadcasters like MPR News and TPT, where I served years ago — have attempted to provide more inclusive news coverage: stories that more accurately reflect the fast-changing demographics of our state. But these efforts, though perhaps in good faith, have often felt “supplemental”; as a result, they’ve had limited shelf life, especially amid wrenching financial challenges in the news business.

Sahan Journal represents a bold new model, built from the ground up to serve communities that can no longer be excluded. Its reporters bring visibility to these communities’ needs and challenges, as well as to the vitality of their civic engagement. Sahan has partnered frequently with public radio and the Star Tribune

— a cross-pollination that leads to more thorough coverage and a keener understanding of issues we all face in Minnesota.

Many of Sahan’s diverse reporters grew up in the communities they cover. That familiarity and credibility has enabled high-quality

reporting, whether deep dives into education or health care, or fearless examinations of uncomfortable stories, such as the criminal indictment of many immigrants in the so-called Feeding Our Future scandal.

Perhaps because I’m a journalist who happens also to be an immigrant, it is easy for me to see the void that Sahan Journal is filling in Minnesota’s news ecosystem. It’s been a signal honor to serve since 2019 on the board, a diverse group that brings expertise and guidance from across disciplines such as medicine, law and financial management. It’s a group of talented people, dedicated to help steward this critical civic resource. With every financial or development report, on every visit to the Sahan site, I find myself reassured.

Along with the commitment to quality journalism, there’s a laser-sharp focus on building a sustainable business, thanks to the vision of our founder, Mukhtar Ibrahim. In just five years, Mukhtar has assembled a committed team that has transformed a promising idea into a kinetic 23-person news organization. While Mukhtar begins to explore his next professional adventure, he has thankfully agreed to serve Sahan in whatever capacity will best ensure the organization’s uninterrupted upward trajectory.

Sahan has drawn accolades and support from major journalism philanthropies and other funders, who see it as a model worthy of replication in other cities and states. Minnesota has long led the nation in the vitality of its public media organizations, like MPR and TPT, whose work is sustained in no small part through direct public support.

It’s time — and timely — for Sahan Journal to be included on the list of these community treasures. **S**

INSIDE SAHAN Meet the board

- Fred de Sam Lazaro is a correspondent for PBS NewsHour and the executive director of the Under-Told Stories Project.
- The Sahan Journal board has drawn from a range of professions: law, financial management, social entrepreneurship, medicine and (naturally) journalism.
- Matching Sahan’s inclusive vision, almost all of Sahan’s board members have been leaders of color.



What Sahan means to Minnesota

Too often throughout history, the voices of communities and leaders of color have been ignored, or even silenced, in decision-making arenas and on issues that directly impact them, including climate change and the clean energy transition. Sahan Journal is doing the important work of lifting up perspectives in a way that allows more people to see themselves in the story of Minnesota, and is helping to move us toward a more just future where people and planet thrive.

Ben Passer
SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER,
MIDWEST CLIMATE AND ENERGY
MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION

Sahan Journal is ambitious in the best sense of the word. They've built an organization that hasn't existed before, that fills a huge gap, and that they know is necessary and vital to the future of Minnesota. Sahan is poised to become an enduring institution in Minnesota and for Minnesotans, and one that other news organizations can learn from.

Sarabeth Berman
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
AMERICAN JOURNALISM
PROJECT

It's been amazing to walk alongside Sahan Journal as it has grown in size and scale – to play a role in strengthening Sahan's platform and ensuring that diverse representation in news media is a force-multiplier for change has been a privilege. Their news stories — centering on immigrants and communities of color — are real, they're relevant, and also reflect the future of Minnesotans.

GHR Foundation is honored to invest in Sahan Journal to unleash their limitless potential for good.

Kevin Bennett
PROGRAM DIRECTOR,
GHR FOUNDATION

 **Senator Tina Smith** ✨
@SenTinaSmith

Stellar reporting from @ProPublica and @SahanJournal uncovered predatory real estate practices targeting Somali communities in Minnesota. Their coverage informed the legislation I co-led to protect homeowners and discourage exploitation by sellers. I'm ready to organize and get this bill passed!



Reaching new communities

Sahan Journal’s reliable journalism cuts to the core of the issues that impact the greater Twin Cities the most, often coming at these issues with a unique and fresh perspective. This, in combination with their unfailing professionalism, makes including them in so many of our county campaigns an easy decision.

Alix Kost

MEDIA PLANNER, METRE AGENCY

NorthPoint worked with Sahan Journal throughout the COVID pandemic to circulate critical messages to the community about quickly changing circumstances. We have always found Sally and the entire team to be intuitive, conscientious and flexible collaborators. We appreciate the community connections that Sahan Journal has cultivated!

Stella Whitney-West
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
NORTHPOINT HEALTH &
WELLNESS CENTER

The Bakken Museum is so proud to work and partner with Sahan Journal! We really value Sahan Journal’s mission and commitment to delivering authentic stories in our community and beyond.

Hattie Peach
MARKETING MANAGER AT THE
BAKKEN MUSEUM

I always appreciate working with the Sahan Journal because not only does it provide stories that matter to the communities Theater Mu serves, but I trust its advertising team to give me their honest recommendations and to help my ad look the best it can.

Lianna McLernon
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS
DIRECTOR, THEATER MU

The Walker Art Center’s advertising partnership with Sahan Journal has positively impacted our programs. We see many new people visiting the Walker for the first time after our ads run. Sahan Journal is crucial to exposing the work we do to the community.

Rachel Joyce
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, PUBLIC RELATIONS, WALKER ART CENTER





Building an advertising program from scratch isn't business as usual

Diverse news for everyone? Amazing idea. My job at Sahan is to share that message with Minnesota businesses. **BY SALLY WATERMAN**

On a weekday afternoon in the winter of 2020, I drove to a shared workspace in downtown St. Paul to meet Mukhtar Ibrahim. I'd taken a call from Sahan Journal's then-managing director, Kate Moos, about an informal meeting. I knew and respected Kate from working together years before at MPR, and I was more than a little curious about this startup wunderkind, Mukhtar, and wanted to meet him.

Mukhtar showed up to the meeting with this little notebook (which it turns out he always carries) and started asking questions—a lot of questions. Although neither Kate nor Mukhtar had a background in business, they knew what Sahan Journal needed to ensure its success: a diversified revenue program. I saw straightaway they were building something important.

We talked a few more times after that initial meeting. I sent a small donation and wished them well. "Diverse news for everyone? Great idea at the right time," I thought. "Such ambitious plans!" I was happy to be of some small assistance and secretly grateful I didn't have to build what we'd discussed.

Well, we know how that turned out. In March 2021, I joined Sahan Journal to develop an advertising and sponsorship department from the ground up.

After more than 35 years in media sales, (23 of those in digital), I've latched onto a motto: *How hard can it be?* Turns out, it's one of Mukhtar's, too. That first month, he sent me a constant stream of links, usernames, passwords, videos and Google sheets, and he trusted me. Many days I knew exactly what I was doing and how to get there. Other days I was in over my head but too stubborn to admit it.

Still, I was confident there were businesses out there that wanted to be part of Sahan Journal: an authentic news source that spoke (and listened) to Minnesota's fastest-growing communities. I believed our readers would benefit from learning more about offerings in education, health care, finance, internet access, arts and events, public policy and more. Equally important, Sahan's clients would benefit too.

A month after starting, I closed my first advertising agreement for \$1,000. I had hundreds of thousands of dollars left to sell to reach our advertising goal, but we were on our way.

One giant leap forward came when Nicole Jošavac joined the department in June 2022 to help fulfill all the commitments we make to advertisers and readers alike. With her persistence and energy, Sahan's sponsorship revenue has exceeded expectations.

Some businesses became early advertisers, wanting to reach Minnesotans of color, support Sahan Journal, or both. Some, while wishing us well, told me they wanted to wait and see. Despite our growth, there's still plenty of work to do. After the racial reckoning we all experienced in 2020, many companies still don't prioritize reaching communities of color in their advertising budgets, treating it as a tertiary ad buy. We're working to change that.

As we celebrate five years, I need to say thank you to our advertisers and sponsors. We are grateful for your business and for your support of the people and communities Sahan Journal exists to serve.

To be true to my mission at Sahan Journal, I've got to close with my other motto: "If you're interested in reaching our engaged audience, please contact us. We'd love to have you as an advertiser on Sahan Journal." 

INSIDE SAHAN

Opportunity knocks

- **In 2019, Sahan sold \$300 in advertising; in 2023, sales totaled nearly \$402,000.**
- **Clients can now engage with our readers through annual sponsorship of editorial sections and through our live-event series, Community Conversations.**
- **In April, Sahan debuted its job board: a space to connect our young, diverse readership with work opportunities.**

By the Numbers

45

Number of trips Mukhtar has taken over five years to speak on panels about diverse, nonprofit journalism.

3

Number of St. Paul Public Schools serving immigrant communities that reversed closure plans in 2021, following reporting in Sahan Journal.

100

Percentage of Sahan staffers who participate in the company's retirement-plan match, initiated in 2022.



Number of babies born to the Sahan family, after the rollout of a parental leave policy in 2023. (Hi Mary, Muscab, and Etta!)

300,891

Dollars given by Sahan readers in individual contributions in 2023

1,062

Readers who contribute to Sahan as sustaining members, each and every month (thank you!)

650K

Number of Instagram Reels views for Dymanh Chhoun's video coverage of the winter evictions at Camp Nenookaasi, an encampment of unhoused people in south Minneapolis.

1.5M

Dollars awarded by the GHR Foundation to support Sahan's mission to advance racial equity in Minnesota journalism.

3 Full-time Sahan staffers as of May 2020. 

WE ♥ TO WIN AWARDS

10.2021

Mukhtar M. Ibrahim, founder of Sahan Journal, wins **Emerging Leader of the Year** award from **The Institute for Nonprofit News**. Sahan Journal is a finalist in three of the contest's nine categories.

06.2022

Sahan Journal wins **three Page One Awards** from the **Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists**: Hibah Ansari is honored as Young Journalist of the Year, Jaida Grey Eagle takes first place in News Photography, and Michael Tortorello wins award for best Online Newsletter.

2020

10.2020

Sahan Journal wins **The Current's "Local That Works"** contest, which recognizes innovative journalism produced by public and nonprofit media orgs.

2021

11.2021

Sahan Journal wins a **Community Engagement and Service award** from **LION Publishers** for its community engagement and service to readers, including a voter-guide collaboration and a live event on barriers to homeownership and generational wealth-building.



Countries and territories where someone read a Sahan story in 2023, according to Google Analytics.

2 Readers who logged in from Antarctica in 2023.



1 Bills introduced into the U.S. Congress prompted by Sahan's reporting. (The Preserving Pathways to Homeownership Act of 2024, introduced by Sen. Tina Smith and Sen. Cynthia Lummis, follows reporting by Sahan and ProPublica about exploitative "contract-for-deed" home sales.)



3 Bills introduced in the Minnesota Legislature prompted by Sahan's reporting. (The proposed legislation would affect charter-school contracting, rainbow flags on public property and contract-for-deed home sales.)

6 How-to-help guides created by Sahan reporters to offer community support for people affected by tragedies, war and natural disasters in Brooklyn Center, Morocco, Turkey, Afghanistan, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan.

150 Photographs featured in the landmark Minneapolis Institute of Art exhibit "In Our Hands: Native Photography, 1890 to Now," co-curated by Sahan's founding photojournalist Jaida Grey Eagle.

23 Full-time Sahan staffers as of May 2024.

Sahan wins the **Liberty Bell Award** from the **Ramsey County Bar Association**, which honors an individual or organization that has helped promote a better understanding of law and government.

Sahan wins the prestigious **Rising Star Award from Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press**. The award honors leaders in the news media and legal fields whose work embodies the values of the First Amendment.

Sahan Journal wins a **General Excellence Award** for Financial Health from **LION Publishers**, for its efforts in building a solid financial foundation and building relationships with local funders.

2022

05.2023
Jaida Grey Eagle wins the **Spot News Photo award** in **Report for America's** first-ever journalism competition; her winning photo features a couple embracing near George Floyd Square.

2023

07.2023

Sahan Journal wins another **Page One Award** from the **Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists**, this time for Best Social Media Account.

For championing the spirit of community in its civic engagement and leadership, Sahan Journal wins the **Community Impact Award to a Local Newsroom** from the **Asian American Journalism Association**.

2024



Showing up in the community

Visiting a classroom to watch a Minnesota Teacher of the Year deliver a lesson. Talking to rideshare labor organizers after a major City Council vote. Catching up with a state naturalist on an early spring day. Many of our newsroom's favorite photographs start with our reporters having a daily presence in the communities Sahana covers.



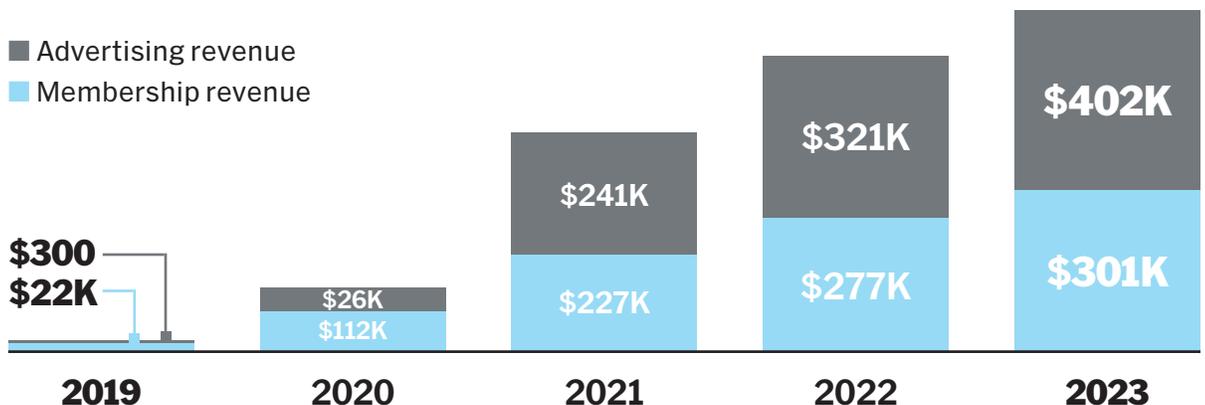


2023 STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

INCOME	Without Restrictions	With Restrictions	Total
Grants and Contributions	\$537,491.36	\$2,634,415.77	\$3,171,907.13
Advertising Sales	\$392,788.51	–	\$392,788.51
Other Earned Revenue	\$454,38.60	–	\$45,438.60
Net Assets Released from Restrictions:			
Satisfaction of Restrictions	\$1,589,349.88	(\$1,589,349.88)	–
Total Support and Revenue	\$2,565,068.35	\$1,045,065.89	\$3,610,134.24
EXPENSES			
• Program Services			
Newsroom	\$1,460,453.53	–	\$1,460,453.53
Advertising	\$276,421.15	–	\$276,421.15
Total Program Services	\$1,736,874.68	–	\$1,736,874.68
• Support Services			
Management and Services	\$357,455.36	–	\$357,455.36
Fundraising	\$354,365.30	–	\$354,365.30
Total Support Services	\$711,820.66	–	\$711,820.66
Total Expenses	\$2,448,695.34	–	\$2,448,695.34
Change in Net Assets	\$116,373.01	\$1,045,065.89	\$1,161,438.90
Net Assets – Beginning of Year	\$861,236.00	\$965,250.00	\$1,826,486.00
Net Assets – End of Year	\$977,609.01	\$2,010,315.89	\$2,987,924.90

Increase in diversified revenue

Sahan Journal leveraged early foundation support to quickly build revenue streams in advertising and membership.





A healthy, supportive work culture takes work

Readers pay attention to Sahan’s unique news coverage. Behind the scenes, we’ve been building benefits and financial systems that reflect our values. **BY MAYURI UTTURKAR**

This has been a year of transitions for Sahan Journal, and I find myself at the heart of it. In five years, Sahan Journal has grown from a one-person startup to a vibrant community of 23 talented individuals — and counting. As of early May, we have hired four new staff members and one reporting fellow.

Amid this change, Sahan’s founder and CEO announced plans to step down this year, and he has set in motion the search for a new executive director. The news is always churning, but this feels like an especially busy and dynamic year.

That growing staff has called for a new level of sophistication in our operations, financial management, and administrative policies. There are the obvious issues: Last fall, we realized our staff couldn’t all fit in the conference room at the same time. And then there are challenges that may be less visible — but matter just as much to the organization’s success. For example, how do we create transparent reporting systems that show our funders and supporters the impact of their grants and gifts?

In the midst of all that hiring, we moved to a new office in St. Paul: a space with dedicated desks for all our staff and easy proximity to restaurants and public transit. Behind the scenes, we also moved HR platforms, enabling more efficient employee management, comprehensive reporting and better benefits.

This is the spot where I get the chance to talk about the personal and organizational values that underlie the work we do in finance and operations. Nowhere is our growth more notable, and noticeable, than in the benefits we offer our staff.

Many studies have identified how financial stress negatively impacts the wellness of any workforce. Right from the beginning, Sahan Journal has covered 100 percent of health-insurance premiums for any staff that opt into our health plan. Similarly, Sahan has been committed from its first days to providing fair and equitable salaries and wages: pay that matches or exceeds what’s offered by other Minnesota news organizations. Two years ago, we added a retirement plan and offered a matching contribution: We’re thrilled that almost 100 percent of our staff take advantage of that benefit.

At times, Sahan’s efforts have run into headwinds. Since the strains of COVID, inflation has continued to affect our staff. Our challenge, then: How do we expand our benefits in a way that meets the needs of our staff

and empowers them with tools to fight financial stress?

Here’s how we’ve responded to that challenge:

- As more of our staff choose to have kids, we added a 529 education-savings plan.
- We are giving our staff the option to use their retirement-match funds to instead pay off their student debt.
- Finally, we are also offering our staff the opportunity to book one-on-one financial coaching to plan and organize their personal finances and achieve financial literacy.

As I sit at my desk on a Wednesday afternoon — that’s our weekly “in-person” day — I cannot help but notice the faces and energy that make Sahan Journal such a vital newsroom. Our staff is diverse, dedicated, relatively young, and full of potential. My job is to make sure everyone here enjoys a supportive and nurturing workplace: an environment that promotes their well-being and growth, so they can focus on our organizational mission.

When our staff — and our stakeholders — look at our policies and culture, I hope they see the same values that we espouse in our journalism. **S**

INSIDE SAHAN

Working out

- **This year, Sahan Journal will roll out a year-round internship program to create more opportunities for young journalists of color.**
- **As of May, Sahan employs 15 staffers in the newsroom, five on its revenue team, and three in finance, leadership and growth.**
- **Readers can find Sahan Journal’s 990 form — our full, nonprofit tax filing — on the Sahan website.**

These readers support our journalism

As a nonprofit news organization, Sahan Journal relies on reader support to sustain our local, community-centered journalism. The team at Sahan Journal would like to extend a big thank you to the 1,878 readers who supported us in 2023. Thank you for making local journalism possible!

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Immigrant journalism matters.
Community journalism matters.
Nonprofit journalism matters.

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As a child of immigrants, I appreciate your commitment to stories and voices that mainstream outlets tend to overlook.

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I learn something new about my fellow Minnesotans every time I read your articles.

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Accurate and reliable local reporting is vital to maintaining democracy and creating a just society.

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WHY I SUPPORT SAHAN

*I believe in
community
journalism and
telling our stories
correctly.*

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and Ann Peters
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OCT
2021

Sahan Journal's newsroom met in person for the first time on a Sunday afternoon in July 2020. Outdoor picnic. Sambusas for everyone! It didn't occur to anyone to take a proper staff photo — and most reporters continued to work remotely, in our COVID caves, until the following spring. This staff portrait — Sahan's first — took place on the patio of our shared workspace in downtown St. Paul. We forgot to include our advertising and development leads, Sally Waterman and Dawn Flinsch. (Sorry!)

Leadership

- Mukhtar M. Ibrahim, Founding publisher and CEO
- Dawn Flinsch, Director of development
- Michael Tortorello, Chief growth officer
- Mayuri Utturkar, Director of operations and finance
- Sally Waterman, Director of advertising and sponsorship
- Chao Xiong, Director of editorial

Editorial

- Hibah Ansari, Immigration reporter
- Dymanh Chhoun, Visual journalist
- Trisha Collopy, News editor
- Becky Z. Dernbach, Education reporter
- Alfonzo Galvan, Business and work reporter
- Andrew Hazzard, Climate reporter
- Samantha HoangLong, Audience growth manager
- Hannah Ihekoronye, Community engagement manager
- Aaron Nesheim, Photojournalist
- Joey Peters, General assignment reporter
- Katrina Pross, Criminal justice reporter
- Cynthia Tu, Data reporter and AI specialist
- Katelyn Vue, Housing reporter

Business and development

- Mara Jezior, Membership manager
- Nicole Jošavac, Marketing and advertising manager
- Gabriel Kwan, Development specialist

Board

- President: Laura Yuen, Star Tribune features columnist
- Dr. Nusheen Ameenuddin, Mayo Clinic pediatrician
- Nancy Cassutt, EVP Content, I.E. Network
- Fred de Sam Lazaro, Under-Told Stories Project director and correspondent



MAY
2023

By the time we got everyone together again for a photo, the newsroom had almost doubled in size. Some of the new faces here joined Sahan to develop new projects and expanded programs: video journalism, membership, audience development.



APR
2024

Scheduling the latest Sahan staff photo almost broke our calendars. Parental leaves, conferences, breaking news: A group of 23 people is rarely available at the same time, in the same place. Notice the new backdrop? In winter of 2024, Sahan moved into a new shared workspace with Saint Paul Neighborhood Network. Our photojournalist Aaron Nesheim took this portrait in front of a black curtain in SPNN's deluxe studio. Only thing missing: sambusas.

The photos on these pages were taken by Sahana photographers Jaida Grey Eagle, Ben Hovland, Drew Arrieta, Dymanh Chhoun, and Aaron Nesheim.

Photo captions from pages 04-05

1. Artist Hibaaq Ibrahim, who is known for her botanical-themed murals, works in her former studio in northeast Minneapolis in May 2023 (Chhoun). **2.** Fifty people were sworn in as new U.S. citizens during a ceremony in the State Capitol rotunda on May 11, 2023, the 165th anniversary of Minnesota becoming a state (Grey Eagle). **3.** Iryna Petrus and her daughter, Polina, at the Ukrainian American Community Center in Minneapolis, on January 18, 2023 (Arrieta). **4.** Wakinyan LaPointe leads a prayer during a sunrise ceremony on Indigenous Peoples' Day, October 10, 2022, in Minneapolis (Grey Eagle). **5.** Baker Freddy Yupa shows off a fresh sheet of baked goods ready to satisfy customers of Panaderia Ecuatoriana Charito on March 1, 2024 (Nesheim). **6.** Kao Kalia Yang at home in St. Paul, in October of 2019. The author compares her writing to her gardening: "Those seeds that I planted emerged again, and I could begin to see the fullness of the garden." (Grey Eagle) **7.** Supporters of Camp Nenookaasi hold a drum circle as others warm themselves near a fire on Thursday, January 4, 2024 (Nesheim). **8.** Mirian Aguilar, an immigrant from El Salvador, sews face masks in her shop at the Mercado Central mall in Minneapolis, in June 2020 (Grey Eagle). **9.** Clemon Dabney (Dr. Dabs), chief scientific officer at Superior Molecular, at the company's facilities in White Bear Lake on December 2, 2022 (Arrieta). **10.** Serena Lee and Fahlada Yah strike silly poses as they eat breakfast before class on Thursday, January 18, 2024 (Nesheim).



Photo captions from pages 16-17

1. Ramsey County Commissioner Mai Chong Xiong speaks at a community meeting on police reform at the East Side Freedom Library in St. Paul, on February 24, 2023 (Arrieta). **2.** Seen here in March 2024, researchers Emily McTate and Gladys Asiedu, both Ph.D.s, decided to study how to create more welcoming spaces for Black and brown patients in healthcare settings, inspired in part by personal experiences (Chhoun). **3.** Adeline Tembera, 35, and her seven children arrived as refugees in Minnesota on July 21, 2022, with the help of the International Institute of Minnesota (Grey Eagle). **4.** Rideshare drivers Farhan Badel and Said Aidid celebrate after the Minneapolis City Council vote to override Mayor Jacob Frey's veto of a bill to increase wages for drivers on March 14, 2024 (Nesheim). **5.** Natalia Benjamin, a Minnesota Teacher of the Year winner, jokes with her English learners while teaching a class in June 2022 (Grey Eagle). **6.** Todd Moilanen, cultural resources director for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, canoes on Ogechie Lake in Kathio Township, in June 2023 (Chhoun). **7.** Kao Thao, an interpretive naturalist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, has been working at Fort Snelling State Park since 1998. Thao, who is Hmong, is pictured at the park on March 7, 2024 (Chhoun). **8.** Supporters cheer for Sunisa Lee along White Bear Avenue in Maplewood, during a parade for the Olympic gold medalist, in August 2021 (Hovland). **9.** Students of Mercedes Yarbrough (or Mizz Mercedes) make lists of their goals and look for pictures that demonstrate their dreams during a St. Paul Freedom School class in August 2022. **10.** Nadia Mohamed celebrates with supporters and campaign staff after winning her run for mayor of St. Louis Park on November 7, 2023 (Nesheim).



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