

January 25, 2014

To the Judges:

The Guardian US was established in 2011 to cover US and international news for an American audience. As a New York-based company -- incorporated in the US as Guardian News and Media LLC -- we maintain a growing and largely autonomous editorial presence with a US staff of 60, a bureau in DC and reporters across the nation. The newsroom produces news articles, opinion, live-blogs and interactive and multimedia content that reaches over 20 million online US readers each month. The series of NSA stories -- enclosed for consideration -- were reported, edited and published by Guardian US staff.

In early 2013, Edward Snowden was working as an intelligence analyst for a US government contractor at an NSA facility in Hawaii. Snowden was one of a huge number of intelligence contractors with clearance to access large quantities of data about surveillance activities. In May, Snowden began anonymously providing samples of top-secret NSA documents to Guardian US journalist Glenn Greenwald and independent filmmaker Laura Poitras. In June, Greenwald, Poitras and veteran Guardian US Washington bureau chief Ewen MacAskill were dispatched by Guardian US editors to Hong Kong to verify and interview the anonymous source. They would be the first reporters to interview Edward Snowden, who, days later, would reveal himself as the source of the largest US intelligence leak in history.

On June 5, 2013, Guardian US exclusively revealed that the NSA was collecting the phone records of millions of US citizens, shown in a top-secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act court order. On June 6, Guardian US and the Washington Post revealed the PRISM program, which enables the NSA to collect vast amounts of Internet communications "directly from the servers" of leading technology companies, including Google, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft. With its PRISM story, Guardian US was the first to accurately report responses from technology companies, reflecting their confusion over NSA's claims of "direct access".

On June 9, Guardian US published the first, exclusive, video interview with Snowden, which subsequently aired on broadcast networks worldwide. His identity was revealed at his request. A week later, on June 17, Snowden held a live Q&A with readers at theguardian.com, which shed further light on the substance of his revelations. It was an interview that all the world's major media organizations were chasing, but instead Guardian US suggested that he answer questions directly from the people he was trying to inform. Two subsequent reports, published on June 27 and August 9, including a top-secret draft report by the NSA's inspector general, gave Americans the first look at the political and legal underpinning for much of the NSA's surveillance.

Over the next seven months, the Guardian US team led by Greenwald, MacAskill, Poitras, James Ball and Spencer Ackerman reported a series of exclusive stories, based on thousands of documents, which exposed the vast scale and scope of domestic and international surveillance programs. The reporting revealed the close relationship between technology companies and intelligence agencies, and showed how technology has led to the widespread, indiscriminate and routine mass collection of telephone and Internet data of millions of Americans. And it shed unprecedented light on the scale and sophistication of domestic and global surveillance, and showed how both political oversight and law have failed to keep up with changing technology.

The first step was to establish and master a range of encryption and security procedures to ensure the safety of the documents and the integrity of the reporting process. The team made use of sophisticated search tools essential for finding and reporting the more complex stories -- many of which pieced together dozens of disparate documents to turn fragments of information into a coherent whole. These documents range from court orders and internal PowerPoint presentations to agency newsletters, briefing memos and schematic diagrams, and require a great deal of contextualising and analysis.

The Guardian US' team of reporters and editors pored over each new potential story. Many of the documents -- among the most classified material in existence -- are dense primary source material with little or no historical precedent. Corroborating them proved difficult, with very little in the public domain to provide background or context. As a result, the team consulted senior administration officials, current and former intelligence officials, lawyers, IT and encryption specialists, constitutional rights activists and academics to verify and contextualize the revelations and perform due diligence. Editors also worked with administration and intelligence officials on each story to ensure a high public interest bar was met and appropriate redactions were made.

In a climate of intense political and legal pressure from the UK government, the Guardian brought in the New York Times and ProPublica to ensure that globally important stories about the structure and future of the Internet could continue to be told. The files revealed in the September 5 report, "How US and UK Spy Agencies Defeat Internet Privacy and Security," were obtained by Ewen MacAskill for Guardian US and shared with the Times and ProPublica. The stories were co-reported and published by all three outlets in an unprecedented collaborative partnership.

The impact of the NSA Files has been resounding. Guardian US reporting elicited responses from the highest levels of government, including the White House, Congress and courts, and led to numerous congressional hearings, as well as major legislative and legal challenges to the NSA's activities. A district court judge in Washington, DC for the first time ruled that mass collection of phone metadata is likely unconstitutional. An independent civil liberties review board -- prominently citing our reporting -- concluded that the NSA's bulk phone data collection program is illegal and should be shut down. On January 17, President Obama announced proposals for significant reforms, increased oversight and transparency for NSA programs based on the recommendations of a presidentially appointed panel tasked with the first review of US surveillance activities since 9/11. On the heels of President Obama's speech, a USA Today/Pew poll showed that, for the first time, a majority of Americans oppose the NSA's bulk phone records collection program.

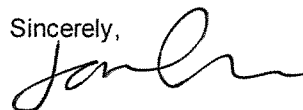
The stories have prompted a global debate and ignited a national conversation about the need to balance security and privacy in the digital age. They have exposed misleading statements by senior US administration officials -- including Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. They have led to calls from leading technology companies for "aggressive reform" of surveillance practices that undermine the trust of their users. They have also led to the declassification of thousands of documents by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, including documents showing that the NSA's searches of a database containing the phone records of nearly all Americans violated privacy protections for three years. The supplemental material submitted for consideration provides a look at the some of the impact, as well as the ways in which other news organizations have devoted substantial coverage to the issues raised by Guardian US reporting.

"NSA Files: Decoded," an explanatory multimedia package featuring a series of 30-60 second video interviews and interactive graphics, captures and distills a complicated series of stories into an accessible, relatable visual narrative. This approach allowed us to explain how the individual revelations fit together and convey the significance of them to readers in an intimately personal way. (The introductory video includes a preview of interviews, along with the "metadata" of each interview: name, title, location, and a timestamp reflecting the total amount of footage filmed, not the actual viewing time of each video.)

We also brought the public much closer to the journalism, through regular conversations -- hosted at theguardian.com and elsewhere -- with reporters, editors, and even Edward Snowden himself. We believe the process of reporting material of such sensitivity is something we should be accountable for, to our readers as well as to government.

We thank you for considering "The NSA Files" for the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

Sincerely,



Janine Gibson  
Editor in Chief, Guardian US