

Editor's Note: Bright Days Ahead for National Sunshine Week

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National [Sunshine Week](#), scheduled for March 10-16, 2024, will provide new avenues for journalists, government officials, advocates, and scholars to educate the public about their rights to civic information.

This year, the effort will be coordinated by the University of Florida [Joseph L. Brechner Freedom of Information Project](#), in partnership with the Society of Professional Journalists, MuckRock, and other groups supporting access to government information.

Since 2005, Sunshine Week has been led by [News Leaders Association](#), formerly the American Society of News Editors, encouraging newspapers to publish editorials and news articles about how freedom of information laws shine light into the dark recesses of government. The week is timed with the March 16 birthdate of James Madison, heralded as a promoter of an informed public.

On Dec. 8, NLA's board [voted to dissolve](#) by June 30, 2024, and transfer the Sunshine Week trademark, website, and archives to the Brechner FOI Project, which has been dedicated to research and education in freedom of information since 1977.

We are honored to carry on the tradition, and we thank NLA for serving a central role in promoting FOI since its founding in 1922. Indeed, the organization, initially named the American Society of Newspaper Editors, has long championed the public's right to know, beginning in 1950 when its Freedom of Information Committee launched a campaign to promote open meetings and public records.¹ The organization commissioned Harold L. Cross to assess the legal landscape in his 1953 book "The People's Right to Know,"² and ASNE leaders lobbied heavily for passage of the federal Freedom of Information Act in 1966.³

¹ *Open Meeting Statutes: The Press Fights for the 'Right to Know.'* 75 HARVARD L. REV. 6, 1199-221 (1962), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1338482>.

² See Harold L. Cross, *THE PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO KNOW: LEGAL ACCESS TO PUBLIC RECORDS AND PROCEEDINGS* (1953). Also, David Cuillier, *The People's Right to Know: Comparing Harold L. Cross' Pre-FOIA World to Post-FOIA Today*, 21 COMM L. & POL'Y 4, 433-463 (2016), DOI: 10.1080/10811680.2016.1216678.

³ Sam Archibald, *The Early Years of the Freedom of Information Act. 1955 to 1974*, 26 POL. SCI. & POL. 4, 726-731 (1993). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/419539?origin=JSTOR-pdf>.

In 2005, ASNE launched national [Sunshine Week](#) with support from the [John S. and James L. Knight Foundation](#), promoting the power of FOI through newspaper editorials, editorial cartoons, news articles, TV video packages, and online resources. The effort was coordinated by Ray Ollwerther and Debra Gersh Hernandez, with assistance from Pete Weitzel from the Coalition of Journalists for Open Government. Sunshine Week was based on Sunshine Sunday, which was started in Florida in 2002 by the Florida Society of Newspaper Editors, aided by Barbara Petersen from the Florida First Amendment Foundation. Previous iterations had been coordinated by Brechner and other groups under the title FOI Day.

So, where to now? The Brechner FOI Project has started preparing for the next Sunshine Week, and beyond, and we hope we can fulfill the mission that is so critical today. Secrecy continues to increase at all levels of government. Advocacy organizations, such as Open the Government and the National Freedom of Information Coalition, have suffered funding cutbacks, and some have folded completely, such as the Sunlight Foundation and, soon, NLA.

Plans are still in motion, but we are working to reinvigorate Sunshine Week in several ways:

- We will hire a coordinator dedicated to building Sunshine Week, and enlist the aid of students at the University of Florida and elsewhere. If you have students who would like to participate, let us know. Diana Mitsu Klos, a former journalist who previously has worked for ASNE, the Student Press Law Center, and Brechner, will oversee the transition and 2024 planning.
- We are contracting with [The Agency](#) and the [Atlas Lab](#) at the University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications to analyze past Sunshine Week communications, and develop a marketing strategy to increase reach.
- Collaborations with the Society of Professional Journalists and MuckRock will expand participation in Sunshine Week. We will invite hundreds of other groups to engage the public – across journalism, government, and civil society – and we will promote their efforts through the [online calendar](#) and other communication channels.
- We will seek new ways of connecting scholars with practitioners – translating academic research for journalists, government, and the public.

We are exploring new ways of engaging the public in Sunshine Week, for this March and beyond. Check the website, sunshineweek.org, this spring for updates, and let us know what you might be planning for the event – speakers, research, student projects, or published pieces.

Also, we welcome your feedback and thoughts. Feel free to email me at cuillierd@ufl.edu, or Diana Mitsu Klos consultdmk@gmail.com. Promoting FOI is a collective effort, toward the collective good of an informed public.

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