

To the judges:

As a candidate, Donald Trump made a signature campaign promise: He would “Build the wall” on the southern border.

Like America, we had questions. Could a wall be built? Would it work? Would there be unintended consequences?

Our border-state newsrooms — in Phoenix, Las Cruces, El Paso, Corpus Christi, Palm Springs and Ventura — set out to answer those questions in a bold, transparent and groundbreaking way.

But before we traveled the first mile of the border, we made another crucial decision. We would work on every possible platform, and present our work in as many ways as possible. We planned for video, audio, interactivity, live events, virtual reality. Then we got to work.

Our team flew and drove the entire border. We interviewed migrants, farmers, families, tribal members — even a human smuggler. We joined Border Patrol agents on the ground, in a tunnel, at sea. We patrolled with vigilantes, walked the fence with ranchers.

The result was “The Wall,” a report that pushes the boundaries of journalism:

- The hallmark of The Wall was the most complete, current and interactive map of border fencing ever created. Our team flew every foot of the 2,000-mile border and created a high-definition video record of the entire line. Journalists reviewed all the video, plus satellite imagery, federal data, and GPS position coordinates taken from the ground to confirm the existing locations of every piece of border fence. Then, a data graphics team synchronized the video with the map. You can touch any point along the line and see what’s there. And our map creates the permanent record of how the border was fenced before any wall construction began.

- Documentary videos became a centerpiece of the report, with beautiful and technically exquisite visual storytelling from all along the border. These are reports people don’t just see, they feel.

- The Wall came to life in virtual reality for the Vive VR system. Now, even if you’ve never been to the border, you can reach out to the border fence in California, gaze up at a holy mountain on the border outside El Paso, and wade across the Rio Grande in a stunning canyon in Big Bend National Park. The Wall is a new landmark in VR journalism, conveying video stories, interactive mapping and engrossing virtual locations.

- We launched live storytelling nights in three states, sharing personal histories of the border and allowing audiences to experience the virtual reality project hands-on.

- A 10-part podcast series lets you get to know the journalists who reported the stories, and shares the behind-the-scenes challenges they faced. As you listen, an interactive chatbot can send you photos and more details about each story. (For example, as you listen to the report about the jaguar, text JAGUAR to ask our bot for more stories, videos or other topics.)

- We made sure the decision-makers saw The Wall. Our team built a database of thousands of stakeholders – politicians, law enforcement officials, activists and community leaders – and we emailed each one of them with a personal invitation to see and share the project.

The Wall was about purpose.

We provided clarity on a noisy and divisive national issue.

We educated, informed and empowered our communities.

We invited America to learn, discuss, debate and decide.

And to do that, we brought America to The Wall, and The Wall to America, in every possible way.



If you receive a paywall message from azcentral.com, use this login:

Login: digitalpartners@usatodaynetwork.com

Password: bawE42Ya

Thank you,

Nicole Carroll
Vice President/News
Executive Editor