



Leslie Hurtado

Bilingual Investigative Reporter | Immigration,
Environment, and Equity

CONTACT

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ABOUT ME

Leslie Hurtado is an award winning bilingual multimedia journalist whose work bridges immigration, environmental justice, and racial equity through data-driven, community-rooted reporting. Across digital, print, audio, and video, she has exposed environmental hazards, amplified immigrant and working-class communities, and earned top honors for impact, public service, and accountability journalism.

EDUCATION

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

- Class Salutatorian; Dean's List, 2018 – 2020.
- News Editor, The Independent student newspaper & Host, WZRD campus radio.
- Created the “Dacamentation” podcast on undocumented-student life—recognized at the North by Northeastern Festival and featured in Harvard Magazine.
- Student Media Board Advisor, 2025 - 2026.

SKILLS

- FOIA / PACER public-records retrieval.
- Bilingual reporting & translation for Spanish-speaking communities.
- Environmental & immigration reporting.
- Large-dataset cleaning & analysis.
- Door-to-door canvassing & community outreach.
- Multimedia work: audio & podcast production.
- Narrative investigative writing & fact-checking.

AWARDS

- 2025 — Peter Lisagor Award, Environmental Coverage – Winner, “Rooting Out Risk” (Cicero Independiente)
- 2024 — Chicago Headline Club Watchdog Award – Winner, “Profiled” traffic-stops investigation
- 2024 — Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Award, Investigative Reporting – Winner, “Profiled: State of Traffic Stops in Illinois” (IPR&E × WBEZ)
- 2023 — Peter Lisagor Award – Finalist, City Bureau coverage of Chicago’s Guaranteed Basic Income pilot
- 2022 — Edward R. Murrow Award, Excellence in Innovation (Regional) – Winner, WBEZ Curious City Pilsen episode
- 2022 — Peter Lisagor Award, Best Single Podcast – Finalist, WBEZ Curious City Pilsen episode

WORK EXPERIENCE

Cicero Independiente — Environmental Reporter Jun 2020 – Sep 2020 • Jul 2024 – July 2026

- Supported an INN reporting project with Borderless Magazine, Cicero Independiente, and Inside Climate News, working alongside Report for America corps member Adali Campa.
- Broke “Rooting Out Risk”: FOIA-based reporting on toxic soil at a \$2.7M inclusive-park site, prompting new remediation steps and winning the Peter Lisagor Award.
- Helped expose decades-long air-quality violations at Koppers’ coal-tar plant. Data analysis and resident testimony prompted renewed Illinois EPA scrutiny and the company’s pledge to shut its phthalic-anhydride line, cutting projected carcinogenic emissions by 50-70 %.
- Serve Cicero’s Latino community with bilingual explainers, neighborhood briefings, and continuous FOIA requests.

Investigative Project on Race & Equity — Investigative Apprentice September 2022 - June 2024

- Assisted reporters with “Profiled: The State of Traffic Stops in Illinois,” analyzing traffic stop records to reveal racial disparities.
- Combined data scraping, data and record analysis, and field interviews to transform complex findings into narratives co-published with WBEZ.
- Filed FOIA requests and pulled PACER court records to build case files, then distilled key findings for editors and project partners.
- Drafted memos outlining legislative timelines and detailing case-file evidence to guide reporting strategy.
- Assisted with radio scriptwriting and production.
- Helped adapt findings for audiences across WBEZ and Chicago Sun-Times platforms.

City Bureau — Civic Reporting Fellow (2x) Jun 2021 – Sep 2021 • Jun 2022 – Aug 2022

- Investigated environmental-justice fallout from Little Village’s industrial-corridor expansion, linking elevated airborne pollution uncovered through FOIAs and Cook County Circuit Court records; paired data with resident interviews to spotlight health risks.
- Co-created bilingual resource guides and presented findings at neighborhood forums, equipping local campaigns that pressed for tougher air-quality enforcement and informed debates on Chicago’s guaranteed-basic-income pilot.
- Mentored incoming fellows on public-records research, data trend analysis, and community-engagement methods, strengthening City Bureau’s collaborative reporting model.