

Hi, my name is Sarandon Raboin and I'm a reporter who helped contribute to the Southwest Stories of the COVID-19 archive as a part of ASU/ Luce Foundation.

My main focus throughout the project was on rural communities in Arizona and how they were impacted by the pandemic. Some of the stories I worked on were about dairy farmers, small businesses needing financial help, mask mandates, and mental health resources.

It was really interesting for me to connect with these communities and shed light on what was going on. I'm from Arizona but have never really had the chance to learn about the rural communities within my state. It was fun to interview and tell their stories about how they are being impacted by the pandemic.

There were quite a few challenges for me going into this project. One of which is that I had to report completely remotely. As a broadcast journalist, it's really hard to find footage or videos of things that you need, solely on the internet. It's a lot easier when you are at the location with the interviewee you are talking with to get footage to use in your story. You also need to make sure that the zoom interview you are doing looks good. You can't adjust the camera or the lighting or any technical aspect. This type of storytelling forces you to think creatively about how to tell a story and make it local without actually being there. It was definitely a challenge to do that all remotely.

Another challenge was that rural communities in Arizona are all different. Some of which put a lot of information online, but there were others that don't have websites, or they haven't been updated in a while. It took a lot of time to find the right people to talk to about certain situations. Since these communities are spread all across the state, the situations and responses to the pandemic can be completely different. It was tough to keep track of all the diverse communities, but it allowed for me to have a variety of story ideas.

Even though there were some challenges, it was a worthwhile experience to work on this project. I met so many interesting people and heard impactful stories. Speaking with those in rural communities, you really get the sense of how widespread the pandemic is. That everyone is affected. But I am so grateful to have told the stories of the people who mattered.