

# CASW's Strategic Plan

---

June 2014

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### I. Background

---

The core mission of CASW remains unchanged since its founding in 1959:

*to improve public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of science by enhancing the quantity and quality of science news reaching the public.*

The Board of Directors embraces the wisdom of CASW's founders and the enduring importance of this mission.

CASW's core program activities advance this mission by:

- *educating science writers;*
- *encouraging talented individuals to pursue careers in science writing;*
- *promoting good science communication; and*
- *supporting and recognizing independent journalism.*

These activities also remain important and urgent in the 21st century. However, trends require that CASW update its programs to address new realities. Key trends include:

- *the collapse of the traditional publishing economy and associated developments:*
  - *reduction of staff positions in science writing*
  - *increase in freelancing*
  - *diluted authority of major media*
  - *the rise of social media as the dominant way that people get their news*
  - *the "silo-ing" and polarization of audiences, leaving many science journalists isolated in niches with peers and enthusiasts*
- *changes in science, e.g. the rise of big-data science;*
- *reductions in government funding for science;*
- *dilution in the quality of science news reaching the public as a result of churnalism, information overload and plagiarism;*
- *personal branding, self-marketing, continuous interaction with readers and business entrepreneurship as major aspects of the writer's life;*
- *experimentation with new models including nonprofit and long-form journalism;*

- *globalization of science, news, culture and the economy;*
- *loss of the journalist's filtering role: direct communication of science by scientists, institutions and interest groups; and*
- *rise of online multimedia, including video and infographics.*

Meanwhile many of the challenges that made CASW important during its first 55 years remain:

- *the persistence of anti-intellectual, anti-science and denialist sentiment in mass culture;*
- *public mistrust of journalists;*
- *the tendency of science reporting to be done by nonspecialists, e.g. writers on business, health and technology as well as local writers and bloggers covering natural disasters and other stories;*
- *poor public understanding of risk; and*
- *the perception and reality of science as an elitist pursuit.*

Strategic analysis of CASW's strengths and weaknesses suggests the Council is well positioned to continue current programs but must adapt in order to maximize its effectiveness in the current environment.

strengths	weaknesses
As an independent 501(c)(3) organization rather than a professional association, CASW has the flexibility to work with donors and partners to pursue ideals rather than serve member interests.	Membership organizations have higher online visibility, generated by member participation and service.
New Horizons in Science remains a program of high educational value for science writers.	New Horizons is not regarded as important by many attendees of the joint meeting and needs to be more innovative and responsive.
CASW has a highly prestigious Board.	The Board is a relatively untapped resource that has not been effectively engaged in program and fundraising activities and may have limited fundraising capacity as now constituted.
CASW has a good financial cushion.	Annual support and activity level have been low; financial strength is mainly owing to conservative budgeting and management of early gifts.
CASW has a competent and stable staff.	Staffing level is too low to support program innovation and growth and higher visibility.

CASW has an up-to-date web platform.	The website is static and lacks fresh content and activity.
CASW has excellent fellowship and awards programs for encouraging excellence in science writing.	These programs should be larger and more visible.

## II. Action Plan

---

In the Board's vision, CASW three years from now will:

- *be better known*
- *have a stronger financial base and financial stability*
- *continue to present New Horizons in Science, retooled for the 21st century with less emphasis on the needs of traditional journalists*
- *carry out its education mission through online activities, regional and targeted programs in partnership with groups in addition to NASW to improve the coverage of science in every story*
- *be known as a clearinghouse/"go-to" place for science writing resources online*
- *be more active on social media*
- *have more program staff*
- *have additional program pillars to complement New Horizons*
- *have strong relationships with science writing programs*
- *be known for risk-taking and bold programs*
- *find new and tangible ways to improve science writing*
- *provide more program targets for donors to support*
- *be known for advocacy of standards, ethics and best practices in science writing*

In response to these trends and challenges, over the next three to five years CASW will emphasize five themes in its fundraising and programmatic activities:

- *education of science writers and communicators*
- *mentoring and support of student and early-career science writers*
- *resources for science communication*
- *enhancing diversity in science writing*
- *partnerships with other organizations*

The first steps toward these aspirations will be taken in the coming year. Potential activities this year include:

- *a review and update of bylaws and board structure*

- *a fundraising push focused on programs for young science writers and online and regional programs as extensions of New Horizons*
- *expansion and promotion of travel fellowships and the New Horizons Student Newsroom*
- *enhanced synergy with the NASW workshop program*
- *improved communications about New Horizons*
- *launching an early-career program with a partner organization*
- *a survey of science-writing programs and courses*
- *starting a year-long mentoring program*
- *an intentional effort to infuse diversity into all these programs*