

The Initiative for Science Journalism

Ensuring a future for accurate, socially responsible, high-impact science reporting

A project of CASW and its partners

Science and technology lie at the very center of today's critical issues: climate change and sustainability, ethical use of genetic technologies, food security, privacy, election manipulation. These challenges call for intelligent, informed social conversation and concerted action by the world's leaders and institutions. How will these debates be informed?

Accurate, incisive, responsible professional science journalism has never been more essential. Journalists ask questions, verify facts, hold powerful institutions accountable, and provide the transparency essential for democratic decision making.

Yet the traditional publishing economy has collapsed, and with it the training and support of journalists. Populist movements feed on suspicion of educated elites, including both scientists and journalists. Self-interested communicators and social-media influencers now deliver "news" to splintered audiences. These trends erode the ability of a free press to inform public dialogue and hold powerful institutions accountable.

Sixty years ago, a different crisis in science journalism spurred a group of journalists and scientists to found the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing. Reporters were struggling to produce accurate coverage as science moved onto the public stage in those post-Sputnik days.

Today CASW plans to mobilize a response to our current crisis, creating opportunities for partnerships to help launch a suite of programs to:

- build the skill, ethical caliber and diversity of science journalists;
- address the economic sustainability of the field;
- propagate techniques for rigorous science reporting to all journalists whose beats involve working with scientific information; and
- find new tools and alliances for confronting public skepticism, building trust and respect for journalism, and reaching underserved audiences.

We will be seeking grants and partnerships to provide training, networking, mentoring and support for reporting, especially for the freelance writers who now do most science journalism. For science journalism to survive, professional journalism organizations and organizations concerned with science communication and civic discourse must join hands. At stake are the future of public discourse, science's relationship with and accountability to the public, and the health of the planet.