CASW in 2023 at a glance

80% of CASW’s expenditures went to direct program costs

CASW awarded $82,500 in journalism prizes, fellowships, and grants

693 registered to attend ScienceWriters2023 in person

104 registered for our first Connector Chat

CASW’s YouTube learning channel had 12,595 visitors

3,201 viewed a conference session

8,950 viewed a Patruskys Lecture

303 received CASW-supported training

7 science writing graduate fellows
Taylor/Blakeslee University Fellowships

12 early-career fellows
SHERF

10 scientist-communicators
ComSciCon-SciWri23

4 travel grantees
ScienceWriters2023

270 international journalists
Spark Grant Initiative

54% of CASW’s fellowship, grant, and award recipients were journalists of color
In 2023, it’s fair to say that CASW’s Science Journalism Initiative hit its stride. Launched in early 2020, the Initiative is playing a central role, alongside CASW’s legacy programs and briefings, in strengthening and repopulating science journalism in the 21st-century media landscape.

New and expanded Initiative activities during the year included the debut of CASW’s Connector website and Connector Chat webinars, the second year of the Sharon Begley Science Reporting Award, a symposium bringing together the first two classes of National Science-Health-Environment Reporting Fellows, the convening of nearly 700 attendees at ScienceWriters2023 and New Horizons Briefings in Science in Colorado, and a symposium focused on advancing science journalism and communication training in Chile. The last event was supported by the Spark Grant Initiative, funded by CASW and science journalists’ associations in Europe and the United States.

We are especially pleased with the launch of CASW Connector, an online, curated library of resources for science journalists and science communicators. The library was developed with support from Schmidt Sciences and the Rita Allen Foundation, which also funded Connector Chats, online conversations with expert panelists sharing research, advice, and practical tools.

Our small but mighty staff and a distinguished panel of volunteer leaders collaborated with partners to carry out all of the above programs, along with our traditional offerings.

We invite you to page through our annual report and celebrate with us another year of CASW’s premier role in training and sustaining science journalists who serve the public with coverage that meets the highest possible standards for accuracy, accessibility, quality, and thoughtful analysis.

Robin Lloyd
President
Connector: A vital new resource for science journalism and communication

Science journalism and communication are ever more challenging in a complex world. How can aspiring science journalists find quality training and advice? How can communicators avoid common pitfalls and connect with important audiences?

A new online service launched in 2023, CASW Connector, aims to help students and professionals explore such questions and find the information and opportunities they need.

Launched in July 2023 at connector.casw.org, Connector offers a curated set of resources developed by project staffers Kate Travis and Betsy Ladyzhets. Extensive user input went into building a site that would help people find top-quality, up-to-date information. Some 350 resources were published in 2023 and were accessed by more than 2,100 site users. Many also visited the CASW Showcase collection of excellent science writing, which was updated with fresh work as part of the Connector launch.

Science journalists and communicators quickly adopted the service and asked for more. Since its launch, Connector has developed through user engagement: suggestions, requests, and feedback sparked by a newsletter spotlighting new resources.

In December, CASW launched Connector Chats—video conversations with experts around important topics. Each Chat is recorded as a resource, along with a sheet of tips prepared by experts and attendees.

Deborah Blum (lower left in screenshot), a CASW board member and director of the Knight Science Journalism Program at MIT, offers advice on fellowship applications during the first Connector Chat.
Reporters go to the ends of the Earth with mentoring, support

When CASW announced a reporting fellowship that would enable an early-career science journalist to accompany a research team sampling ocean biogeochemistry along the Antarctic ice shelf, applications poured in. Such experiences are both rare and life-changing.

Brazilian journalist Sofia Moutinho won the fierce competition and spent months preparing for the trip with support from her fellowship mentor, UK-based climate and environment journalist Gloria Dickie. Equipped with equipment to capture images and audio, Moutinho pushed off from Punta Arenas, Chile with the GEOTRACES ANT-17 expedition in late November.

Sofia’s multimedia journalism from the trip, including a series of podcasts for Scientific American, is one example of the mentored reporting done with CASW funding during 2023. Most of the work is being published in 2024.

SOFIA MOUTINHO’S PHOTOGRAPH OF SCIENTISTS BEING LOWERED ONTO ANTARCTIC SEA ICE WOULD GRACE THE COVER OF EOS MAGAZINE.

SAMPLES OF OTHER CASW-SUPPORTED MENTORED WORK PUBLISHED IN 2023

Eroding coastlines in Alaska, in Grist. By Saima Sidik, Taylor/Blakeslee Fellow. Mentor: Amy McDermott

The New Horizons Newsroom. Coverage of science from the conference by travel fellows and ComSciConSciWri workshop participants. Mentors: Marla Broadfoot, Pete Farley, Richard Harris, Karyn Hede, Dan Keller, Czerne Reid, Priyanka Runwal, Ashley Smart, Kate Travis, Jon Weiner

Partners

University of California Santa Cruz/National Science Foundation
Second SHERF training year wraps

CASW’s collaboration with organizations supporting health care and environmental journalism extended into a third year in 2023, when a dozen early-career journalists completed the National Science-Health-Environment Fellowships.

The second SHERF class wrapped a year of mentoring and training with a deep dive into urban climate resilience in Chicago and presented reflections from the year and work coming out of the year, including a Grist-Associated Press series on climate and infectious disease. Program graduates are now working at regional and national news organizations or as freelance journalists.

In October, graduates from the first two SHERF classes convened for the first SHERF Symposium, held in Boulder, Colorado ahead of ScienceWriters2023. The fellows talked with Patrusky Lecturer Michael Mann, enjoyed a statistics refresher, received coaching in trustworthy journalism, and organized their own story pitching session.

“It’s hard to quantify, but I use things I learned in SHERF every day at work. It made me a better reporter and opened me up to new opportunities and knowledge.”

“As a journalist from a low-income background who hasn’t been able to afford many of the pathways to more prestigious journalism jobs, I’ve really struggled with impostor syndrome. [SHERF] has inspired me to hopefully make a big career change.”

Partners

Howard Hughes Medical Institute | Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation | Center for Excellence in Health Care Journalism | Society of Environmental Journalists
Seventh Taylor/Blakeslee fellowship added

CASW’s Taylor/Blakeslee University Fellowships expanded to seven in 2023 with the addition of a mentored fellowship supporting training in physical sciences reporting. The new fellowship was suggested by The Brinson Foundation to encourage journalists-in-training to pursue coverage of physics, astronomy, and related fields.

Physicist Joseph Howlett, winner of the first physical sciences fellowship, worked with Dennis Overbye of The New York Times to develop story ideas as Howlett began his year of study in the science communication program at the University of California Santa Cruz. In addition to mentorship, the new fellowship provides funds for reporting travel.

Taylor/Blakeslee fellowship stipends, set at $5,000 since the fellowship was launched in 1996, were increased to $6,000 this year. Contributions to CASW’s general funds supplement generous underwriting by The Brinson Foundation.

The fellowships brought to 190 the total number of science writers aided by CASW’s graduate fellowships since 1981.

“I’m looking forward to growing next semester, and so appreciative of being a 2023-24 Taylor/Blakeslee Graduate Fellow. Ahéhee nitsaago!”

—Alastair Lee Bitsói Columbia University
Science writers roam the Front Range

It was more than worth the wait. Postponed twice by the COVID-19 pandemic, the first ScienceWriters conference in Colorado finally took place in October 2023. CASW’s extensive programming included a range of New Horizons in Science sessions, workshops, and a listening session organized with Native American leaders and our conference partner, the National Association of Science Writers.

Highlights of CASW’s 2023 conference program included:

Patrusky Lecturer Michael Mann, speaking remotely as a health precaution, opened the conference at the University of Colorado Boulder with a review of evidence about Earth’s climate variability, concluding that there remains time to mitigate the risks of global warming through strong action.

Science writers heard from a panel of experts on unexplained aerial phenomena or UAPs (NASA’s new name for UFOs), as well as an update on solar science ahead of 2024’s total solar eclipse. A long COVID patient advocate, a journalist, and a researcher shared their fight for answers and treatments. Topics of other sessions included wildfire impacts and Indigenous knowledge.

Journalist Natalie Drake (above) shared her experience on a NASA panel on UAPs onstage in Boulder. Long COVID patient advocate and writer Chimére Sweeney (right) described her experience and work in a session on Long COVID at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus, now available on YouTube as a recording.
Science writers asked their questions of Patrusky Lecturer Michael Mann over Zoom from the Boulder conference site. Colorado’s Flatirons (below) provided a dramatic backdrop for events organized by university hosts, including Lunch With a Scientist talks, held at CU’s Folsom Field stadium, and a field trip to a mountain research site.

In special sessions, Sharon Begley Award winner John Sutter shared outtakes and behind-the-scenes insights from the unique climate change documentary project the award will support. And Victor Cohn Prize winner Maryn McKenna shared the story of her reporting in a “Story Behind the Story” session co-organized by CASW vice president Christie Aschwanden.

Outside the formal session program, CASW organized a hands-on workshop on working with new electronic health record databases for public health stories and the listening session, co-organized with NASW and the Centers for Native American and Alaska Native Health.

The conference drew an estimated 650 science writers to the University of Colorado Boulder and to CU’s Anschutz Medical Campus, where a day of health-related sessions and tours was offered.
Student writers hone their skills

COMSCICON-SCIWRI PARTICIPANTS “GRADUATE” INTO AAAS MASS MEDIA FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Graduates of ComSciCon-SciWri workshops often go on to work full-time at media outlets as AAAS Mass Media Fellows. Examples:

2022: Sam Zlotnik, Smithsonian

2023: Skyler Ware, Science News

2024: Alonso Daboub, El Nuevo Día

2024: Rudy Molinek, Smithsonian

Again this year, science graduate students and postdoctoral researchers gathered ahead of the ScienceWriters conference for a one-day immersion in the craft of science writing. And they immediately put their new skills to work: Each took on a conference science topic as a story assignment.

The ComSciCon-SciWri workshop was created in 2015 as a collaboration between CASW and ComSciCon, an organization of graduate students and postdocs who facilitate communication training for their peers. Instructors, mentors, and editors are drawn from the professional community attending the conference. The stories provide coverage of the science discussed at the conference on the CASW website.

Ten students completed the workshop and assignment in 2023. Several have gone on to fellowships and internships in science writing or to freelance work; others draw on their training to better communicate their science as they continue research careers.
Awardees set high bar

In 2023, CASW was pleased to honor science journalists doing extraordinary reporting on two of the foremost challenges of the 21st century: accelerating climate change and infectious disease.

Independent documentary journalist John Sutter is the second recipient of the Sharon Begley Science Reporting Award, CASW’s newest career prize. First awarded in 2022, the award honors the legacy of the late science journalist and celebrates the work of a superb mid-career science journalist, providing a $20,000 grant to support a reporting project undertaken by the winner.

Sutter is at work on an unusual documentary project, called BASELINE, that will document climate change by following the lives of individuals living on the front lines of change over several decades. The first episode is expected to air in 2024.
Maryn McKenna, a journalist and author specializing in public health, global health, and food policy, is the winner of the 2023 Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Science Reporting, which increased from $3,000 to $5,000 with support from Michelson Philanthropies. McKenna was senior writer at WIRED and is a senior fellow of the Center for the Study of Human Health at Emory University.

And CASW’s award for a young science journalist, the Evert Clark/Seth Payne Award, went to Sarah Kaplan of The Washington Post for four stories focused on climate change that one judge said “deftly explore how climate change is upending our landscape and the lives of everyday people.” This year was the 36th for the Clark/Payne Award, which honors journalists 30 years old or younger.

“Sometimes, events like a historic pandemic make it easier to churn out amazing projects, with death, disease, heroics, and pain making for compelling narratives. But the best of public health reporting is borne from years of commitment to the craft. Maryn has this.” —Diane Lore, medical communications consultant
Chile is a science-rich country, with a rate of scientific publication per population higher than any other Latin American nation. Interest in the public communication of science led to the founding of the Chilean Association of Journalists and Professionals for the Communication of Science (ACHIPEC). But training in science communication is scarce.

The three-day event included panels on lessons from COVID-19, science-based policymaking, in-country and international training and career opportunities, and demonstrations of journalistic and institutional projects.

The Spark Grant Initiative will continue into 2024 with training events planned in Asia and Africa.

With support from the Spark Grant Initiative, some 270 Chilean professionals and students held a historic gathering in April 2023—the country’s first symposium focused on advancing science communication and journalism. Major funding came from the Spark Grant Initiative, a grant competition organized by CASW and partner organizations funded with proceeds from the 2017 and 2019 World Conferences of Science Journalists.

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Financial summary

Audited Statement of Financial Position
December 31, 2023

ASSETS
Cash and cash equivalents 173,593
Investments 1,540,910
Accounts receivable 80,000
Prepaid expenses 224
TOTAL ASSETS $1,794,727

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS
Accounts payable and accrued expenses 17,892
Total current liabilities $17,892
Without donor restrictions 840,515
With donor restrictions
Purpose- and time-restricted for future periods 177,167
Quasi-endowment (Sharon Begley Award) 710,299
Endowment fund (Clark/Payne Award) 48,854
Total with donor restrictions 936,320
Total net assets $1,776,835
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS $1,794,727

Prepared by Rich and Bander, LLP
April 2024

2023 sources of funds
- Foundation grants and contributions
- Individuals and sustainers
- Sponsorships and program support
- Investments and legacy funds

2023 expenditures
- Programs
- Management & general
- Fundraising

Prepared by Rich and Bander, LLP
April 2024
A debt of gratitude

CASW’s Sustainers
Howard Hughes Medical Institute
American Chemical Society
American Association for the Advancement of Science

ScienceWriters2023 | New Horizons in Science
University of Colorado Boulder
University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus
National Association of Science Writers
Michelson Philanthropies

Workshop and Fellowship Programs
The Brinson Foundation
Howard Hughes Medical Institute
Burroughs Wellcome Fund
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
Center for Excellence in Health Care Journalism/AHCJ
Society of Environmental Journalists
University of California Santa Cruz/NSF
ComSciCon

CASW Connector
Schmidt Sciences
Rita Allen Foundation

International Programs
Donors to WCSJ2017
Organizers of WCSJ2019
World Federation of Science Journalists

Awards
Donors to the Sharon Begley Fund and Ev Clark Fund
Michelson Philanthropies
On the front cover, from upper left: Sofia Moutinho on the deck of the R/V Nathaniel B. Palmer in the Southern Ocean; science writers queue to ask questions during a CASW session at ScienceWriters2023; ComSciCon workshop participants relax during the conference opening reception at the University of Colorado Boulder; and SHERF fellow Neel Dhanesha learns about Chicago’s massive underground water management system from an engineer during a fellowship field trip. Photographs in this report were taken by Sofia Moutinho, Sylvia Kantor, Rosalind Reid, and Casey A. Cass (University of Colorado Boulder).

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