

# CASW Council for the Advancement of Science Writing



CASW will select the first winner of the Sharon Begley Science Reporting Award in 2022. To be given annually, this award will recognize and support reporting that embodies the high standards embodied by Sharon Begley (1956–2021), a science journalist of unflinching dedication, skill, moral clarity, and commitment to mentoring. The Sharon Begley Award comprises both a career prize, recognizing the accomplishments of a mid-career science journalist, and a grant of at least \$20,000 to enable the winner to undertake a significant reporting project.

## **The entry process**

Entries for the Sharon Begley Award will be accepted between January 1 and April 30, 2022. Once the submission platform is open to accept entries, a link will be provided on this page.

Candidates must be experienced journalists who have compiled a substantial body of work in science journalism, defined as print, audio, video, and online reporting on science, health/medicine, environment, mathematics and technology.

## **Eligibility**

Candidates should have been working journalists for at least 8–10 years, including significant experience in science journalism, or provide equivalent evidence of commitment to the field. Time spent as an editor counts toward eligibility.

CASW aims to consider a highly competitive and highly diverse pool of candidates and encourages all mid-career science journalists to consider entering. Toward that end, there is no entry fee, and applications will be accepted online. Staff and independent journalists living and working anywhere in the world are eligible if they have published in news outlets that are available to international audiences. Although the award can be won only once, there is no limit of the number of times one can enter.

Current CASW board members, staff, and contractors, as well as members of their households, are ineligible. Journalists who have served on the Sharon Begley Award Advisory Committee become eligible three years after their service ends.

## Components of an award entry

Each entry consists of work samples, supporting documents, and a project proposal.

✓	Work samples: 3-5
✓	Supporting documents
✓	• Cover letter
✓	• Resume
✓	• Supporting letters
✓	Project proposal

## Work samples

The submitted body of work should include three to five published clips or other work samples that illustrate the candidate's best work in science journalism. Eligible work includes:

- news
- features
- heavily reported columns, analysis, and other commentary
- newsletters
- book chapters (not entire books)
- podcasts
- video, audio, and multimedia storytelling

Submissions may include data narratives and visualizations. Video and audio stories must have been scripted as well as reported by the candidate.

If collaborative or produced work is submitted, candidates must detail their reporting and writing roles. In the case of multi-author reported features, the candidate should have done a significant portion of the reporting.

Work submitted to the 2022 competition should have been published in English. Self-published work is excluded.

## Supporting documents

The entry should include a *cover letter* making the case for the candidate and the proposed project. Elements of a successful letter:

- Summary of applicant's work in science journalism and examples of how that work has had an impact.
- Personal statement conveying motivation and commitment.
- Additional personal information:
  - may have to do with journalism advocacy or teaching work, mentoring, or innovation;
  - may be about the arc of the applicant's career: education and experience, the pivot into science journalism, excursions into other fields;
- Overall "why now? why me?" pitch for proposed project.

A *resume* should be submitted. The resume should include details that help the judges assess a candidate's commitment and broader contributions to science journalism as well as the candidate's career and publication record. The resume should include, as applicable:

- A summary of published work and/or a link to a portfolio website.
- Contributions to science journalism including:
  - Volunteer service, collegial and leadership activities
  - Journalism advocacy
  - Teaching
  - Mentoring
  - Innovation
  - Outreach activities such as public lectures, workshops, residencies, and presentations

The entry should include one to three *supporting letters*:

- A letter of support or nomination from an editor or publisher who is familiar with the candidate's work
- One or two additional letters from a senior colleague or second editor.

### **Project proposal**

Each candidate must submit a *project proposal* describing a reporting and writing project to be undertaken with the award grant. The proposal:

- Should show that the project is viable, novel, and well conceived.
- Should demonstrate that the candidate has done enough research to know that there is a story and has thought through how to approach the project.
- Should describe the research already done and outline a plan of work that the grant would support.
- Should include a project timeline.

A publication agreement does not need to be in place, but letters from editors indicating interest in the project may be included.

- A simple budget is required. The purpose of the budget is to support the plan of work and show the judges how the grant will enable the proposed project. The budget may include:
  - Reporting expenses
  - Examples: travel, equipment, data, FOIA costs
  - Living expenses during writing and pitching
  - Pitching expenses (for example, meeting with editors to pitch a book proposal)
  - Multimedia production costs

Enough information should be submitted to enable the judges to form a clear opinion of the proposal, but the proposal need not be highly detailed.

The candidate should plan to begin reporting within six months of the award.

Projects that include developing and pitching a book proposal may be submitted.

In the case of a book proposal, the plan should include securing a publishing contract within 18 months. For all other projects, the timeline should aim for publication within two years.

### **An award honoring Sharon Begley**

This award is intended for science, health, and environmental journalists whose careers and work embody the extraordinary qualities of Sharon Begley's journalism, which was known for:

- depth, especially scientific depth
  - writing that helps the reader understand science
  - precision and care in explaining scientific evidence
- authority
- approachability, humor, and respect for the reader
- exhaustive reporting; careful, thorough sourcing
- powerful, vivid, clear, humane writing and masterful storytelling
- fearless pursuit of truth
- myth-busting and ground-breaking reporting
- insight

Although the award is not given to recognize character or virtue, the judges may also consider evidence of a candidate's:

- advocacy for journalism, fact-based public discourse, public accountability, quality and rigor in the communication of science
- collaborative skill and successful work as a member of a team
- mentorship and professional generosity
- courage, toughness in the face of barriers; leadership and trailblazing
- attention to social issues in journalism, including equity and inclusion in newsrooms and sourcing, and coverage that attends to issues of marginalization and injustice
- commitment to high-quality journalism and service to readers

Candidates are not required to have won any previous awards.

### **Judging and presentation of the award**

A panel of judges organized by the CASW Board of Directors will review all entries over a three-month period. The inaugural Sharon Begley Science Reporting Award will be awarded in late summer.

After notification, the award winner will receive an award letter indicating the purpose and the terms of the project grant. An initial \$10,000 will be disbursed once the awardee has signed the letter.

The award will be announced once the award letter is signed. It will be formally presented at the [ScienceWriters2022](#) conference, to be held in Memphis in late October. CASW will cover the additional costs of registration, travel, and lodging to allow the winner to attend the event. A reception celebrating the launch of the award and honoring the first winner is planned.

## **Project mentoring and requirements**

CASW will provide the award winner with a mentor to support the project. Ideally, the mentor will be a senior science journalist who has successfully completed a project of similar scope and type and has worked in the same medium. The mentor will:

- strive to be available to talk through the reporting plan, project organization, appropriate outlet and audience, and similar details as needed;
- provide an occasional check-in to help the award winner stay motivated, organized, and productive during reporting, pitching, and writing and talk through frustrations and obstacles;
- as appropriate, help the award winner pitch and place the story or offer comments on an early draft.

Mentorship is recommended by CASW but may be declined by an awardee.

In signing the grant letter, the awardee will agree that:

- The grant will be used to support a science journalism project to be undertaken within six months of signing the award letter.
- Any publication resulting from the grant will acknowledge that it was supported by a Sharon Begley Science Reporting Award from CASW.
- The awardee will notify CASW when the project is under way. This notice will include a description of any changes to the original project plan, to confirm that the grant will be used for a project that falls within the bounds of science journalism.
- The awardee will notify CASW when the work is published.
- Any tax consequences of the award are the responsibility of the recipient.

The remaining \$10,000 will be disbursed after the awardee has notified CASW that the project is under way.

If for any reason the project stalls or fails, part or all of this second payment, depending on circumstances, must be returned to the Sharon Begley Fund.

## **Contact**

Email: [info@casw.org](mailto:info@casw.org)

Website: <https://casw.org/awards-fellowships/sharon-begley-science-reporting-award/>