

Thomas Hayden and Kendall Powell, NASW members

Scilance: A freelancer's guide to the craft, commerce and community of science writing

\$43,000

March 29, 2011

Dear NASW Program Committee and Executive Board,

Thank you for considering our proposal for an NASW member project. We're requesting a grant of \$43,000 to support the writing and editing of a comprehensive, up-to-date guide to freelance science writing.

For the past six years, we've been part of Scilance, a close-knit online (and occasionally offline) community of freelancers within the larger NASW community. Our 33 members have published in *The New York Times*, *Nature*, *National Geographic*, *Smithsonian*, *Wired*, *Mother Jones*, *Prevention*, *Outside*, NPR, NOVA ScienceNow, and numerous other print and broadcast outlets; won journalism awards from AAAS, AGU, AHCJ, ASJA, and NASW; contributed to *Best American Technology Writing* and *Best American Science and Nature Writing* anthologies; co-authored two national bestselling books; and won Scripps, Knight, Alicia Patterson Foundation, and Banff Centre journalism fellowships.

During our daily conversations, we trade advice on everything from editor etiquette to self-employment taxes, vet pitches, and cheer one another's accomplishments. Most importantly, we extend the camaraderie we find each year at ScienceWriters into our home offices: We help each other laugh about the inevitable difficulties of the freelance life, and enjoy the creative and personal freedom that freelancing affords.

The informal community we've built has advanced our careers, increased our incomes, and repeatedly saved our sanity. It's already inspired the formation of at least two other small online groups of NASW members, so we know our model can serve others as well as it serves us. In *Scilance: A freelancer's guide to the craft, commerce and community of science writing*, we'll draw on the insights of the broader NASW community and share lessons from our combined freelancing experience (a collective 225-plus years) with the rest of the science-writing world.

NASW published the second and most recent edition of its *Field Guide for Science Writers* in 2006, and the book is still a terrific resource for all science writers. On the other hand, it devotes only one chapter to freelance writing. In the past five years, journalism, and science journalism in particular, has changed radically: Well over 11,000 journalists have lost or left their staff jobs, and many of them have turned to freelancing. New graduates of science-writing programs, who could once count on making seamless transitions from internships to staff jobs, are beginning their careers as freelancers or digital media entrepreneurs. Even science journalists with staff jobs have had to

become more enterprising, proving their worth to their bosses by acquiring new skills and experimenting with nontraditional approaches to science journalism. In a sense, we're all freelancers now. Science writers need a freelance-specific book to complement the *Field Guide*, one that speaks directly to the many strategic, creative, financial and personal decisions particular to building a freelance career.

Scilance will also appeal to the increasing numbers of graduate students, researchers, and others contemplating full or part-time careers in science writing. As experienced science journalists, we're frequently approached by scientists who not only want to know how we do what we do, but want to try doing it themselves. While there are several recent guides for researchers who want to better communicate their work to the media, such as Nancy Baron's *Escape from the Ivory Tower* and Cornelia Dean's *Am I Making Myself Clear?*, these guides don't address scientists and scientists-in-training who are considering careers in journalism and science communications. Our book will fill that gap.

The crisis in journalism has been painful and confusing for many, but we think this is also a time of opportunity. While freelance science writing has its frustrations, it is also full of independence, intellectual challenge, and unexpected adventures. And we've found that when freelancers join together to share information and encouragement — in person at NASW gatherings, and online in small, supportive groups like *Scilance* — freelancing can be bona fide fun.

There are, of course, many ways to make a living as a freelance science writer, and the members of *Scilance* represent most of them. The collection of personal essays will take an honest, often funny and irreverent look at all of the incarnations of the freelance science-writing life.

We're requesting a grant of \$43,000 to cover the time required to write, edit, and market *Scilance: A freelancer's guide to the craft, commerce and community of science writing*. While we plan to pursue a commercial publisher for the book, we don't expect this book to earn much, if any, money for the members of *Scilance*. We're motivated to write it because we think it would be a service to science writers. Our experience is hard-won, but hopeful, and we want to share it with the broader science-writing community. We would put a portion of royalties or other money earned toward additional marketing, and toward content updates via a website or electronic edition. We would also make sure the book is available and accessible to all NASW members.

A book outline, budget, list of contributing writers, and our resumes are included below. We'd of course be happy to supply any additional information you might need.

Thank you,
Thomas Hayden
Kendall Powell

BUDGET:

2 head editors @ \$4,000 each = \$8,000

Chief website builder/blogger: \$3,000

Copyeditor: \$2,000

Chapter authors (~30 chapters, ~2000 words each, \$900 per chapter) = \$27,000

Marketing: \$3,000

TOTAL = \$43,000

DELIVERY TIMELINE:

Although timing would depend on securing a commercial publisher and other factors out of our control, this budget would allow us to have a first draft of the book done by Spring of 2012.

ALTERNATIVE BUDGET AND TIMELINE:

2 head editors @ \$3,000 each = \$6,000

Chief website builder/blogger: \$3,000

Copyeditor: \$2,000

Chapter authors (~30 chapters, ~2000 words each, \$700 per chapter) = \$21,000

Marketing: \$3,000

TOTAL = \$35,000

This less ideal budget would allow us to finish a first draft of the book by the end of 2012.