

Appendix to “Untold Stories: Project Word Survey on Freelance Investigative Reporting”

A Partial Selection of Qualitative Comments

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What follows are select comments from freelancers who responded to Project Word’s 2014 survey, loosely following the structure of the [survey report](#).

Note: The report’s Resources section includes many important programs and organizations for freelancers—two more are below. Please contact us at info@projectword.org for additional resources. Thank you.

Mongabay.org

Facilitates the development of new education and journalism initiatives and leverages to raise awareness about social and environmental issues relating to forests and other ecosystems.

mongabay.org

The International Reporting Project

IRP provides opportunities for journalists to report internationally on critical issues that are under covered in the news media, filling the gap left by much of the mainstream media's reduction of international news.

internationalreportingproject.org

SELECTED COMMENTS

I. Challenges Overview

Loss of public interest

At least three outlets a radio producer used to report for regularly have closed in recent years. And other outlets “don't use freelancers, [so] I'm locked out. . . . It's not . . . an adequate way to inform the public of the world's richest and most powerful country.

(radio and multimedia reporter, former radio staffer, age 34–43, 11–15 years freelancing)

Freelancers will become more and more the primary content providers for the media. We need to make certain they have adequate income and expense reimbursement to do the job well.

(photojournalist and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

Freelancers make up a growing segment of the journalism field, enabling publishers to do an end run, around unions and the benefits they have helped provide. If freelance journalists must work outside the field to pay the bills; if they fall behind in their investigative and story-telling skills—in short, if they can't give their full measure to their work—the public is the big loser.

(print and online reporter, editor, former newspaper staffer, age 54–63, 6–10 years freelancing)

“I only have one outlet in a city of over 100,000 [because] the focus is not [on] investigative reporting. This city needs badly an investigative reporting project, which nobody dares to do as in organize the funding etc.

(online blogger and former newspaper staffer, age 64–73, 0–5 years freelancing)

Local publications have eliminated so many beat reporters and no longer have staffers to sit through City Council meetings or School Board Meetings etc., which means that these organizations go unmonitored. Thus the potential for abuse and corruptions have

multiplied. . . . It is hard for freelancers to dedicate the necessary time given what they are paid for articles.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

Freelance fees are criminally low, contracts are increasingly one-sided, editors are besieged, so little receptivity . . . a function of outlets being understaffed.

(print reporter, former newspaper, radio, and magazine staffer, age 64–73, 6–10 years freelancing)

Impossible to do complex stories—grants that barely cover expenses, let alone salary. Outlets willing to pay nothing for stories/pieces. No budget for research, assistants. Next to impossible to get editorial support.

(television and multimedia reporter, age 44–53, over 20 years freelancing)

What will help freelancers is more support for reporting and journalism. Right now they're just the most squeezed of the squeezed.

(non-freelancer: Staff editor who works with freelancers.*)

It's a mystery to me how anyone could make a living doing this or not die from frustration.

(print and television reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34–43, 0–5 years freelancing)

I have been freelancing successfully for 10 years. For all intents and purposes I am a very successful writer/reporter, in demand by numerous high-profile clients. And yet my livelihood is constantly under threat, and I live under the continual stress of not having enough money, having to back-pay credit cards when checks arrive, having no savings and no retirement and no promise of ever having it, and the sense of failure at not being able to provide enough for my family or enough security for my children. It is simply unsustainable, and heartbreaking.

(print reporter, age 34–43, 6–10 years freelancing)

Loss of diversity:

I shudder as I watch laid-off journalists now think that they can earn a decent wage purely on investigative work paid by news outlets.

(editor and project manager, former newspaper staffer, age 54–63, over 20 years freelancing)

I cannot imagine how a person could continue to work full-time freelance internationally and raise a child without a partner with a steady income and health insurance.

(print, radio, and multimedia reporter; former magazine staffer; age 34–43, 0–5 years freelancing)

If you need to be independently wealthy to be a journalist, then it silences certain voices, voices [that] are already marginalized.... I saw how this happened when I was an intern at a left-leaning magazine that had a very poorly paid internship. Virtually all the interns were recent graduates of Ivy League schools.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34–43, 6–10 years freelancing)

It seems to me that economically privileged individuals are much more likely now than ever before to enter into this business and, especially, are more likely to be able to pursue investigative reporting. Racial diversity is also a huge issue, but I'm not sure there's an active conversation happening about economic diversity in the journalism world, let alone the world of independent journalists.

(print, television, and multimedia reporter, age 24–33, 0–5 years freelancing)

Unless writers and reporters can make reasonable livings (i.e., your age x \$1,000/year, let's say) no one but trust-fund babies will be able to afford to do this work. Pity.

(print and online reporter, age 54–63, 16–20 years freelancing)

II. Challenges: Analysis

I. Unworkable Economics

A few acquaintances work with Rolling Stone, make some money. But nearly all of them wait for checks, getting kill fees. It only takes one or two dry months to jeopardize your rent and food. I have two kids. They have to be fed. (Interview)

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 64–73, over 20 years freelancing)

I do 5 stories a year. How are you going to get \$15 to 20K per story freelancing?

Non-freelancer: staff reporter for a nonprofit newsroom.

At least three outlets I used to report for regularly have closed in the last 5 years due to budget constraints. Fewer outlets mean fewer opportunities. Many times over the last 3 years, I've failed to cover my monthly expenses with freelancing income.

(radio and multimedia reporter, former radio staffer, age 34–43, 11–15 years freelancing)

Time and Money

As it is now, there is often a paucity of support for freelance writers to begin with. . . . It becomes more severe when you ratchet up the ante and attempt to do freelance investigative journalism.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64–73, over 20 years freelancing)

Reporters need to make decent money to support the long work of investigations; if projects are funded as one-offs or single assignments, it becomes a bad, beat-the-clock scenario—you have tons of work to do, and the more deeply you dive into your subject, the less money you make per diem.

(print and online reporter, age 54–63, 16–20 years freelancing)

Even the decision to PURSUE a particular lead is affected by lack of funds. As a freelancer, I have to pick and choose, and I tend to follow the leads that seem like they'll bear fruit sooner rather than later, with less upfront legwork. After all, all of that legwork is unpaid. And leads that end up being dead ends then become weeks of unpaid work.

(print reporter, age 34–43, 11–15 years freelancing)

Investigative pieces take many multiples the amount of work and time than a non-investigative piece does

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 44–53, 16–20 years freelancing)

Most difficult is keeping the story mill going while trying to undertake significant enterprise work.

(print, radio, television, and multimedia reporter, photojournalist, former television staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

I have [no] time to see investigative reporting projects through because I'm scrambling to write/edit other stories or reports that I know will turn around and pay me in a timely or predictable manner. Need more financial support.

(print and online reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34–43, 11–15 years freelancing)

I am extremely successful as a freelance writer, but I have had to . . . limit how many investigative stories I pursue each year because I cannot rely on that kind of assignment

to pay my bills. These stories are always my best and most important work, [but] it's simply impossible to make a full-time living on investigative work alone.

(print and online reporter, former magazine staffer, age 24–33, 6–10 years freelancing)

More time (less money)

If there were more outlets willing and able to pay decent wages (\$1/word or more) for stories, I could quit some of my non-writing work and devote more time to investigative journalism.

(print and online reporter, age 44–53, over 20 years freelancing)

I live check to check, and I often take work that pays quickly (or more quickly) simply because I need the money, and then it squeezes out more enterprising work.

(print reporter, age 34–43, 6–10 years freelancing)

Investigative stories are expensive and time consuming. It's often much more profitable to write fluffier stories for magazines. As an example, I recently spent several months chipping away at an investigative story and I was only paid \$200 for it. Whereas if I write a piece for a special issue of a magazine I can easily make \$800 in a single week

(print reporter, age 44–53, 0–5 years freelancing)

Getting reasonable rates for the amount of time I've put into a story is extremely difficult.

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 24–33, 0–5 years freelancing)

Big problem is that “outlets pay by word length rather than research time.”

Print reporter, age 44–53, 16–20 years freelancing

Even places that will pay \$1/word, plus expenses, still amount to \$3,000–\$6,000 at most, which is a pretty small amount for a story that can take upwards of a year to report and write. Not to mention that you get paid on publication, so what are you supposed to eat during the year of reporting and writing?

(print reporter, age 34–43, 11–15 years freelancing)

Affect of online ascendancy: blogs pay less

I was recently given an option to do 10 blogs for \$700 per month for outlet X. Each blog is between 300 to 500 words, so that averages to between \$0.14 and \$0.23 per word for each blog.

(print reporter, former magazine and online staffer, age 34–43, 11–15 years freelancing)

Newspapers need us more than ever. They still want to get us as cheaply as they can and try to take advantage that we would compete amongst ourselves. (For example, one outlet I used to freelance for, which already paid very low—\$250 USD/ fully reported 800-word story—then introduced blogs that they hoped would cover similar enough topics. The blogs only pay \$50USD! I thought freelancers would refuse, but to my unpleasant surprise, the race to the bottom won out, and freelancers indeed do these \$50 USD blogs. On the other hand, I have an excess of work offers—I routinely turn down work opportunities and a freelance friend here has joked with me that she built a career on my refused work. We are needed, but outlets do not want to firm up a commitment with us.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24–33, 0–5 years freelancing)

Declining income in online age

Traditional print and broadcast media alongside web, pays much less than it used to,
(print and television reporter, photojournalist, age 34–43, 11–15 years freelancing)

Not only is it much harder to get a staff job as a journalist—where you make a living wage and get health insurance—the per word rate for freelancers has plummeted, even at major media outlets where I work, such as the Washington Post.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

Freelance rates now are lower than when I began working in journalism almost 30 years ago. In-depth journalism (particularly long-form narrative nonfiction and investigative features) [is] very labor-intensive and often requires travel expenses, so it is increasingly difficult to find funding for [it], and often they must be done as labors of love. The huge expense of health insurance complicates the economics of freelancing even more.

(print and multimedia reporter, editor, former magazine staffer, age 54–63, 6–10 years freelancing)

Online: the dark side of free content

I'd like to draw attention to these new outlets like BuzzFeed and Vice. They say they want to support journalism but they don't pay living wages. The contracts are also very restrictive. The BuzzFeed contract is particularly egregious. This concerns me.

(print reporter, former magazine staffer and website editor, age 34–43, 16–20 years freelancing)

Many outlets pay less than they did 10 years ago. Many online outlets pay nothing. Every few months I hear a breakdown and seriously consider leaving this profession because it is so hard to scrape by.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34–43, 16–20 years freelancing)

Income for freelancing used to be much greater, but the advent of digital journalism and the blogosphere has greatly devalued the written word, commentaries. It's no secret that most news outlets have slashed budgets and staffs, along with benefits.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper, magazine, radio, and broadcast staffer; age 54–63, over 20 years freelancing)

I find that fees are dropping and, due to new media, the possibilities for resale (and ability to recoup more income) are almost nil. There is more pressure to work for free. I could never live on my freelance reporting income—it's ludicrously low.

(print and online reporter, former magazine staffer, age 54–63, over 20 years freelancing)

The web has created more outlets for writers/journalists but the pay is far below good national print magazine rates . . . [and] very few publications pay expenses. I want to do thorough, systematic and deep reporting . . . gathering information and just thinking about the issues, connecting dots, etc. . . which is frustrating because I get paid nothing for my time . . . don't have the support a staff writer has . . . rarely [CAN] travel . . . have spent my retirement money on my health care . . . [and] own almost none of the writing I've done in the last 25 years.

(print and online reporter, age 54–63, over 20 years freelancing)

The editor of a new investigative site (after I complained about the fee) said she had worked for the New York Times and had taken a cut to 1/3! Her 1/3 is more than I have ever made in my life! (Do I run her a benefit, as my mother would say?)

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64–73, over 20 years freelancing)

Now that I'm back to freelancing [after leaving for a staff job], those same outlets are not hiring me at my previous contract rate (\$1/hour).

(online reporter, age 24–43, 6–10 years freelancing)

I'm constantly busy, but there are too many public radio stations or shows that have no (or very little) freelancer budget, so that limits the number of places I can repurpose stories. Systems like PRX are great for sharing work, but they do not result in significant pay.

(radio reporter, age 44–53, 6–10 years freelancing)

Supply and lack of demand

Absolutely the #1 reason why I can't pursue more investigative pieces is resource constraints—if there were more outlets willing and able to pay decent wages (\$1/word or more) for stories, I could quit some of my non-writing work and devote more time to investigative journalism.

(print and online reporter, age 44–53, over 20 years freelancing)

There's a glut of would-be investigative reporters so editors can afford to be choosy and/or stick with ones they've had experience with.

(print reporter; former newspaper, radio, and magazine staffer; age 64–73, 6–10 years freelancing)

The editor I worked under . . . was known to prefer dealing with freelancers because they were cheap and less of a worry, while at the same time their word rates kept being reduced as freelancers are known to be desperate.

(print and multimedia reporter, photojournalist, former magazine staffer, age 34–43, 0–5 years freelancing)

Actually, a lot of outlets seem to be relying MORE on freelancers because so many staff writers or contract writers have been laid off. Unfortunately, at the same time, they have cut the per-word rate for freelancers. They have also cut the length of stories. This results in a double-whammy. [Compared to a project six years ago], the reporting still takes just as long, but the financial gain for this work has fallen from \$10,000 to \$3,000.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

Pay per minute has remained the same for the last 10 years so I've been getting poorer every year.

(radio and podcast reporter, former radio staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

It has never been easier to gather and show good photojournalism and simultaneously it has never been harder to get paid for it.

(photojournalist and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

Payment flow: up front expenses, etc.

Outlets are less and less willing to cover expenses, or even acknowledge the existence of expenses.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44–53, 11–15 years freelancing)

Budget and staff cuts make it much hard to reach editors. Support staff cuts means it takes much longer to get paid.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 54–63, over 20 years freelancing)

The stress of [financial strain and] waiting for invoices to come in can really take away from the time it takes to pursue stories. I've discouraged myself from pursuing important stories specifically because, and for no other reason than, I'm struggling financially.

(print, television, and multimedia reporter, age 24–33, 0–5 years freelancing)

One-time commissioned stories are often paid (and expenses reimbursed) with months of delay. Freelancers have to have savings so that they can finance and spend to report, only getting reimbursed long after the fact.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24–33, 0–5 years freelancing)

View from the outside: How nonprofit newsrooms affect freelancers

Some don't use freelancers at all (Pro Publica, Center for Public Integrity).

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Places like the Center for Investigative Reporting and Pro Publica generally don't work with freelancers and when they do they pay a pittance.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Presumably the support for staffing/resources at legacy outlets and at nonprofit newsrooms would be to allow them more funds to hire freelancers like me correct? If not, if it's just money to help these groups, that doesn't really help me much.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper and online staffer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

I think some legacy media want to treat freelancers that they team up with through nonprofit newsrooms as uncredited researchers. That was my experience. About three or four years ago a major daily newspaper ran an investigation of mine on the front page with someone else's name on it. That reporter won awards, appeared in national media to talk about the story, appeared in trade journals, promotional videos for the newspaper, and was shortly thereafter recruited to work for one of the largest, best-funded investigative journalism organizations in the world. . . . Now that I think of it, I could see participating in an organized shame campaign for this kind of stuff.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

II. Overstrained and Underfunded Outlets

Shift in Audiences (as perceived by outlets)

With the increasing use of new media . . . it's really a challenge to make people understand and appreciate the difference between immediate information and in-depth stories.

(print reporter and blogger, former newspaper staffer, age 44–53, 0–5 years freelancing)

There are very few ways to earn a living by writing about important, abstruse, long-term subjects requiring investigative reporting

(print reporter, former online writer, age 34–43, 16–20 years freelancing)

[We're seeing] shifts in how media is produced, so much emphasis on new media start-ups (e.g., Vox, 538) and emphasis [on] other outlets on non-investigative reporting (or not even reporting) as a support for reporting (e.g., Buzz Feed quizzes and animal listicles).

(print reporter, age 54–63, 6–10 years freelancing)

At magazines (the medium with which I'm most familiar), there are very few remaining staff jobs for writers and reporters, and editors are spending a lot of their time on the rapid production and aggregation of superficially reported 'content.'

(print and multimedia reporter, editor, former magazine staffer, age 54–63, 6–10 years freelancing)

If the time and \$\$ pressure are such that one has to produce with speed or fall behind, the end result is slipshod work—which doesn't seem right for anyone (the writer's byline, the publication, the issue, the greater good).

(print and online reporter, age 54–63, 16–20 years freelancing)

Feature assignments grow more and more complex and demand significant amounts of reporting and writing time. I don't want to write slideshows for BuzzFeed—I want to write stories that matter, and I believe mine do. But the falling pay rates are a real problem.

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 34–43, 6–10 years freelancing)

Someday in the near future only stories that start and end on one smartphone screen will be purchased.

(print reporter; former newspaper, radio, and magazine staffer; age 64-73, 6-10 years freelancing)

Media outlets . . . seem to think either [the] audience does not care or that bad coverage through digital playform and citizens (twitter, FB) is enough (or cheaper).

(print and television reporter, age 24-33, 11-15 years freelancing)

Outlets seem obsessed with metrics these days—perhaps due to grants that fund metrics projects. The quirky and snarky stories tend to get more clicks than hard investigative reports, which can make editors favor quirk and snark in the pitch process.

(radio and multimedia reporter; former radio staffer; age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

We have a duty to tell people things they don't care about hearing. Used to be news was protected from financial considerations by living sections that brought in the revenue. News isn't protected anymore. Editors are still in it to tell stories, but have to be concerned about audiences. Audience driven.

Non-freelancer who facilitates journalism

Skepticism: do outlets sell audiences short?

My experience is not that there is less appetite for reporting or complex investigative stories, but that the budget for freelancers is non-existent.

(online reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years experience freelancing)

I don't think audiences really want shorter articles. I think publishers want articles less likely to offend, so as to maximize audience and profit.

(print reporter, former public relations, age 44-53, 0-5 years freelancing)

I don't actually think the audience has shifted. I think publishers and editors (particularly book editors) have that perception and that makes them less open to complex investigative pieces. They don't see an obvious market and don't see how to create one.

(print and online reporter, former magazine staffer, age 24-33, 6-10 years freelancing)

I don't believe that the audience truly has diminished interest in investigative reporting. My reports, when I can have the time to research and write them/or broadcast them, get excellent pick-up.

(print and television reporter; former newspaper, magazine, and television staffer; age 54-63, 11-15 years freelancing)

If it made more financial sense for publishers to use freelancers/contractors working remotely instead of staffers, pay might rise. Short of that, I don't see much motivation for publishers to pay most freelancers any better than they are now. When the bottom dropped out of traditional media 5 years ago, rates plummeted and companies like Demand Media were paying freelancers pennies. Since then, rates have come back up as publishers realized that copy of that quality doesn't attract readers. At the same time, many publishers concluded that by shortening stories, adopting an 'info-graphic' approach, and republishing other people's content, they didn't have to have as many reporters and they could augment their work with contributions from readers and advertisers.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

Displaced from the new regime

I actually doubt whether a large slice of the philanthropic sector actually cares to improve support for journalists, freelance or otherwise—I just don't know if the will is there. I think many people see the internet and its 'newsy' sites as decent substitutes for news organizations; I think the cultural appetite for investigations has been replaced by a near-constant desire for dish (gossip, facts, insider scoops, leaks, etc.) that readers can string together and make their own sense—rather than something crafted, laid out in a narrative way. The big news outlets—like the big newspapers—can afford to do it, but no one else can.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

Commercial media, '60 Minutes' included (my old gig), shy away from politically ambiguous, controversial, in-depth stories much more often due to management's perception of what the audience wants. Veer right after 9/11, stop doing foreign stories once 'war-weariness' sets in, do more entertainment-related pieces, etc. Pathetic.

(print reporter and former broadcast staffer, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

It's harder to place longer, meaningful pieces. Despite the rise of online media, I face more space constraints than I did a decade ago. Editors want shorter stories, and many pay less per word today than they did in the past.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

Bad times all around . . . no respect for professional writing . . . too much emphasis on social media dreck . . . who gives a rats ass about twitter . . . yech.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 64-73, 16-20 years freelancing)

Most editors at publications that can't pay well, particularly online-only outlets, seem to be aware of that fact and to feel bad about it. But the status quo remains and by virtue of their models they prioritize quicker turnaround stories. For the same outlet, a story I wrote in a day was paid a fee that was a full third of what I was paid for an investigative piece that took three months to report and has subsequently won awards. The latter was exponentially more rewarding and more important for the public interest, but if I was paying more attention to my own self-interests, I'd obviously have to opt instead for writing more one-day stories that add little new information to the world. It's frustrating and demoralizing.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Lack of commitment from outlets

The most challenging problems are finding outlets that will pay for all the time and travel needed to report the important stories.

(television reporter and photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

I've found that some magazines, under budgetary pressure, are trying to produce more stories in-house. I had a dispatch assignment with The Atlantic, for example, but before it was published the magazine got rid of its dispatches section, replacing it with essays written in-house by editors and staff writers. The editorial staff wasn't pleased with the change; it certainly cut down on the opportunity for editors there to develop relationships with more freelancers.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Despite the fact that I work with so many staff writers and am their right arm when they come to [a foreign country], my main client has resisted giving me a [retainer] contract . . . I have out-of-pocket health insurance costs . . . I took on a market research project . . . to pay my [student] loan. It's a shame. It takes up a large portion of my time and is not journalism.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Turnover of editors

My experience is that freelancers must always approach every publication like a supplicant, with hat in hand, continually justifying oneself again & again. This also happens at publications when there's been a turnover in editors. The new editor could arrive in the middle of a big investigative story and have no idea that a freelancer had been working on it for three months.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

I like having solid relationships with editors but I have also learned as a freelancer that they change all the time. It's not worth it to put too much stock into one.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Many of the editors I've worked for in the past—whom I've respected and enjoyed working with—don't have their jobs anymore! When I think about many of the top publications I've worked for, those editors are no longer on staff, have had to take shelter elsewhere.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper, magazine, radio, and broadcast staffer; age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Nearly all of the editors I work with now were not in their position five years ago. There seems to be a factory in New Jersey that churns them out.

(photojournalist and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

Understaffed, inexperienced editors

The best editors these days are often found at smaller publications and nonprofit news organizations, rather than big consumer outlets. Also, editors are getting younger and more inexperienced all the time. The experienced ones (like me) were laid off when we acquired enough seniority to begin commanding decent salaries.

(print and multimedia reporter, editor, former magazine staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Seems all outlets are being forced to do more with less. Editors are spread thin and it shows.

(radio and multimedia reporter, former radio staffer, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Bandwith: Unresponsive editors

Editors are too busy and distracted to spend much time cultivating writers. They are demanding, critical, stingy with praise (even when they like your work), and often indecisive and uncommunicative. Many now seem to think of freelancers as vendors rather than partners and collaborators. The best editors these days are often found at smaller publications and nonprofit news organizations, rather than big consumer outlets.

(print and multimedia reporter, editor, former magazine staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

One of the most dispiriting aspects of being a freelancer are the months spent being strung along by editors who will express interest and then spend up to 6 months not committing to a story. The ratio of pitching these editors to actually reporting and writing the story is way off.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Reporters are at the bottom of their interest. We are the cannon fodder. They use and throw away. There are so many young people coming up who will work for near nothing. (Even less than they pass us.)

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

They are so short-staffed that they rarely have the time to work closely with a writer and communicate barely at all. Then when it's time to close the story, we have to work around the clock because they haven't left enough time. This is all extremely disruptive to a freelancer's work-flow, as it means less predictable schedules and far too much time sunk into assignments.

(print and multimedia reporter; former newspaper and magazine staffer; journalism school faculty; age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

The biggest issue for me is not having an editor (and colleagues) to learn from. My editors have been extremely generous with their time, but they're stretched thin.

(print reporter and former radio staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

[Too much] time spent pitching and trying to track down non-responsive editors.

(television reporter and photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

I abhor the lack of response from editors. I find it impolite, a reflection of poor manners and bad business sense. It wouldn't fly in any other business. But freelancers are expected to take silence from editors as part of the game. When I pitch a story and an editor doesn't want it, a simple and timely 'no' would help me immensely

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

It's become increasingly difficult to get editors to respond to story pitches and even to respond to questions about ongoing work.

(print reporter and photojournalist, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

I work in radio. The cheapest way to fill air is with host interviews. And there has been a lot more of that. That means there's less room for freelancers, and editors have become very choosy and demanding of those they work with. Sometimes even dismissive. I am a very experienced editor with many awards to my name. I would not have ever treated the rankest reporter the way I have been treated at times.

(print and radio reporter; photojournalist; former newspaper, radio, and wire staffer; age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

The market has changed so much that you used to get the favor of a reply, even if it was a form letter saying ‘no thank you.’ Now, you don't even get that—even from editors you know who have used your work before. They say they are swamped. Also, fewer places pay kill fees or even give written contracts.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Editors don't seem to value freelancers anymore, especially newspaper editors, as their situations deteriorate.

(print and radio reporter and photojournalist, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Strained trust

I pitched a unique and as yet unreported story to a NYC editor, who in turn gave my pitch to a New Yorker magazine staffer. I've decided on certain stories to write on spec, and pitch completed articles instead of story ideas.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Constrained news rooms are stealing stories without credit or even a call back. I don't expect much but a thank you instead of #\$\$@% is just polite.

(print, radio, television, and multimedia reporter, age 44-53, 16-20 years freelancing)

I see my research taken by Bloomberg and others without credit.

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

III. Inequitable Contracts

Copyright

At one time, editors accepted your desire for ‘First North American rights’ and copyright. Now outlets and editors want access to electronic rights and it is difficult to go up against their legal staffs or publishers.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper, magazine, radio, and broadcast staffer, age 54–63, over 20 years freelancing)

Really grabby contracts . . . make reselling information impossible . . . making it increasingly difficult to make a good living as a freelance writer.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

Outlets/editors treat you like peasants, with little respect. They insist on owning the story. (Years ago writers sold First North American serial rights. That is over.)

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Safety and liability and libel insurance

Contracts that put all of the liability on the freelancers has a chilling effect on investigative reporting. Some publications really can't be trusted . . . some editors are all too eager to throw a freelancer under the bus for the sake of a juicy story.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 44-53, 16-20 years freelancing)

Money is the biggest challenge in doing these stories—never mind the liability insurance needed to safeguard a reporter/editor/photographer. The cost of doing bigger stories is high, and so are the risks for the individual journalist.

(print and multimedia reporter, photojournalist, and editor, former newspaper and radio staffer, age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

Lack of (or the extreme expense of) libel insurance . . . tends to put a brake on aggressively going after stories about litigious subjects.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

I've often felt deeply the lack of institutional support. . . . Even (this has come up a number of times) another person to come with me to confront a potentially hostile source (someone I suspect of being the true perpetrator of a crime someone else was wrongfully convicted of). As a female, I wouldn't feel safe doing this alone, which means I either do something that makes me feel physically literally in danger, or I don't get the story.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

An unwillingness of major outlets to provide legal support to freelancers who might take on controversial stories.

(print and online reporter, former magazine staffer, age 24-33, 6-10 years freelancing)

IV. Inadequate Tools

Freelance investigative journalists can avail themselves of [very few] research tools—such as the higher-powered versions of LexisNexis, or Accurint—that are typically available to staff investigative journalists. That typically forces freelancers into “beg, borrow or steal” mode, and is a huge brake on their ability to effectively [work] on the front end of a story.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Unlike newsroom staffers, freelancers must finance their own physical operation. Given the limited income, it is a challenge to stay current with equipment and the training to use it to maximum advantage.

(print and online reporter, editor, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

There are nowhere near enough truly affordable programs to help independent workers advance their skills.

(print and online reporter, editor, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

I've often felt deeply the lack of institutional support that would help me to pursue projects like this, e.g. data people who can help me sift through information.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Access to databases, records-search expenses, travel expenses.... In my experience, fair compensation for the writing isn't the issue; it's support for the related expenses that come with doing full-on investigations.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Mentoring is a HUGE one for me living in a rural area yet trying to work with national outlets (they're the only ones that pay). This also ties into networking, meeting contacts, etc. Very hard to do [as] it's rare the editors who want to make the effort.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Opportunities: Overview

Create a reporting cooperative that pays a monthly stipend to cover basic life expenses. Sort of like how wait staff in restaurants receive a low minimum wage that is expected to be supplemented by tips—or, in this case, story fees.

(photojournalist and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

I said before and I'll say again—grants for a body of work rather than a specific piece would be wonderful. Gauge a reporter based on their past production, and give no-strings-attached money for them to pursue their beat for a set period of time.

(print reporter; former magazine, television, and online staffer; age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

[Funders should be] targeting areas for funding, with goal of developing a cadre of journalists with real expertise in specific fields—which makes for better and more impactful journalism.

(print reporter and former nonprofit journalist, age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

Non-freelancer staff reporter

I think when it comes to legacy news organizations, freelance investigative reporters might be taken more seriously if their services were offered as part of a consortium of journalists who have been ‘vetted’ in some way that gives editors a comfort level with skills and competence.

Vetting a network: Insider “certification”

Resources need to be spread around—not concentrated in a handful of awards. More money made available with no (or few) strings attached to people with proven track records.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

We need either a certification system or some other method of establishing our credibility and bona fides so that good, honest, responsible reporters can be distinguished from irresponsible rumor-and-fear-mongers.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Staff editor who works with freelancers

[There's a need for] some kind of pool or some kind of ranking to help editors determine the quality and reliability of their work.

We developed a business model, called Investigative SmartGrid that was shortlisted for the European Press Prize 2013 (<http://www.europeanpressprize.com/winners/shortlist-2013/>) for the Innovation Award. I could explain in detail how it works, as it is designed to endorse independent groups of investigative journalists and freelancers.

(print, radio, television, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Current forums and collective arrangements for freelancers

More fellowship and sharing of contacts among freelancers. I think we guard our connections to editors and publications. And often that is, unfortunately, the best course of action.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Creating clearinghouses for reporters and their projects to find editors and outlets; gathering metrics that demonstrate the impacts of freelance investigative or public-interest reporting; providing opportunities for freelancers to network, brainstorm, and form collaborations that can result in high-impact projects

(print and multimedia reporter, editor, former magazine staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

More forums for networking and interacting with publications that pay for freelance contributions. A database of contact information for such publications. Freelancer union/support network, perhaps by region.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

I'd like to see journalists come together to say no to abusive contracts.

(print reporter, former magazine staffer and website editor, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

I think organizing freelancers to demand fairer pay from editors would be a great benefit to the community. Currently we are isolated and that isolation makes our labor easily exploited.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 6-10 years freelancing)

Major national publications have offered to publish my stories for little or no money. Sometimes I have accepted but not without feeling like I was being a scab, undermining my own profession. I wonder how long this state of affairs can continue. I feel there might need to be some kind of solidarity among freelancers. I am moving towards no longer accepting insufficient pay for my labor.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

On a large scale, freelancers need better representation to fight for better conditions: safety, support, better contracts, etc., from large media outlets.

(television reporter and photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

The Pacific Media Workers Guild has a freelance unit that advocates for legislation to support independent journalists—for instance, the Payment Protection Act. The unit also provides programs, supports and benefits for freelancers. But funds are limited.

(print and online reporter, editor, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Organizing is a great idea, but there's no way a union of freelancers can have any sway over the diverse and numerous powers of legacy and online media that are hiring them. There's always another freelancer in the wings. Unionizing is hard enough at a single media organization, let alone in the vast media landscape that freelancers operate in.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper and online staffer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

I think freelancers need to organize and unionize, though I'm pessimistic about whether that's likely in the current economic climate.

(non-freelancer, staff reporter)

I'm not averse to a strike. You'd fear that you'd be the only one with a picket sign. If we all have a secret meeting and decide to strike, I'm in. (interview)

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Bulletin board: share info about editors, fees

I'd love to see a sharing of information about how much different outlets pay—it would help with negotiations.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

Better connection to editors seeking stories—currently they have to advertise broadly on listserves, but knowing which freelancers are covering which stories and have the time to do their ideas would allow for more precise targeting. In contrast, for freelancers seeking editors it is sometimes difficult to find email addresses for specific editors on websites. Having an updated database of editors accepting pitches would be better.

(print reporter, former magazine and online staffer, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

It would be great to have access—for a reasonable fee—to experienced researchers who are current on the most efficient way to find information on any subject and any person. An online regional anonymous ‘depot,’ for insider story tips (from public agencies, law firms, government offices, etc.) would be most useful. An organized, updated list of typical freelance fees should be readily available from a credible journalism site. In a perfect world, all public records should be available online for free.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

It would be helpful if there were some kind of clearinghouse where freelance journalists—including freelance investigative journalists—could gain referrals to more outlets for their work.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Organizations representing freelancers should publish and advertise payment standards, along with a "recommended outlets" list of newspapers and websites that meet those minimum standards.

(non-freelancer, journalism facilitator)

Saying No

I've run in to outlets with unfavorable contracts, but it's easy to say no to work I don't want to take so that is not a major concern for me right now.

(print, radio, and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

I don't write for free . . . too many of these hobbyists out there and bloggers who do it for free.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 64-73, 16-20 years freelancing)

My stories are self-enterprised and self-financed. Without support, they take longer to produce and end up with half the assets.

(photojournalist and former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

I will not accumulate debt to do the work I want to do, or give up basic benefits like healthcare.

(print and multimedia reporter, photojournalist, former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

‘Income to report stories—and still pay bills’: This doesn't make sense and is from perspective that freelancing is a hobby. If there are expenses, the publication pays them, not me. My income pays my bills.

(print and multimedia reporter and photojournalist, former magazine staffer, age 34-43,
6-10 years freelancing)

Less than ¼ IR. Some with legacy. Real estate income. “Yes, my spouse is employed.”
There already ARE groups available that are organized on behalf of freelancers—NWU,
ASJA, etc. Don't reinvent a wheel that already exists [and] if today's new freelancers are
going broke doing freelance work then they need to rethink their career paths. Don't work
on behalf of corporate owned media entities that aren't paying well. Just DON'T do it.
You are sacrificing your lives for people who don't really care.

(editor and project manager, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, over 20 years
freelancing)

Some work with legacy

Train reporters to run a quality freelance business. Reporters simply do not have to sign
junky contracts and accept low pay. These are the two biggest mistakes being made in our
business. The third is people spinning their wheels organizing when they could be
working. Reporters who accept horrible pay for quality work and horrible contract terms
are the root cause of the industry's problems, and my experience is that these are the only
reporters who think the industry needs fixing

(print,-multimedia, and online reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years
freelancing)

The most helpful reform would be higher pay for freelancers, particularly in web media. I
find freelancers' willingness to publish with online outlets for very little pay to be a very
troubling trend, and one that encourages poor reporting and undermines those who want
to write stories that take more time and resources to report.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Pay has been stuck or shrinking for years now. I work for organizations that pay at least
\$50 an hour—or the equivalent and I don't take jobs that pay less. It just doesn't work for
me. /

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

How do you stop people from writing for almost nothing? It's on the demand side: if
people want high-quality work, they should pay for it.

Non-freelancer; staff reporter for a nonprofit newsroom

Affirmation

More value and recognition needs to be given to reporters who do research intensive
work and tend to recognize the importance of a story before the rest of the media pack

gets to it. This is a challenge for international freelancers because editors in distant newsrooms tend to rely on English-speaking legacy media to tell them what's 'news' abroad.

(radio and multimedia reporter, former radio staffer, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

More stories in the general press about recognition for successes by freelance writers and reporters; more attention to the plight of freelance reporters among foundations and grant makers (for example, it's very typical of foundations and donors to assume that writers can just go to book publishers and pitch their story ideas, that there are editors and publishers just sitting there waiting for their projects). More awards for good freelance stories....

(print, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper, magazine, radio, and broadcast staffer; age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

More mentorship for young and emerging investigative reporters. More public acknowledgement of good work.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Health insurance, tax and policy advocacy

Health insurance reforms/collectives; laws that allow freelancers to manage their own Health Savings Accounts (instead of paying exorbitant fees to insurance companies to do that); tax reforms that recognize how many Americans do not work for corporations; strengthening copyright to prevent over-aggregation and plagiarism on the Internet; writers' unions that actually work (i.e., more like the Screen Actor's Guild, less like the National Writers Union).

(print and multimedia reporter, editor, former magazine staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

When government contracts or public private partnerships are exposed for waste, fraud and abuse, and wind up saving taxpayer dollars, the reporter deserve a percentage of the savings, just like in a qui tam suit. That would surely create an incentive!

(print and radio reporter, former radio staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

The Ontario Ministry of Labor has just outlawed another form of journalistic exploitation, unpaid internships. I wonder if something akin to that could be worked out for payment for articles, a minimum wage of sorts.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

We do not lack work. I have more work than I can handle. What I need is to have less anxiety over my high, fixed costs (principally, health insurance and student loan payments). In my case, I would deeply appreciate a fund that forgave student debt in appreciation of journalism as a public service.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Better health insurance options. No self-employment tax. Plus family support, in whatever form (for freelancers with kids).

(print reporter, former magazine staffer, age 34-44, 11-15 years freelancing)

Pass more FOIL legislation that would make government agency operations more transparent and enable reporters to locate records more easily.

(print and multimedia reporter, age 44-53, 16-20 years freelancing)

Reinstall the Fairness Doctrine; return to prior restraints on cross-platform ownership and market saturation.

(non-freelancer, staff editor who works with freelancers)

First of all a media reform to establish general competition rules. Market is extremely concentrated all around Latin America. We have a monopoly or a duopoly in many cases. Second would be a favorable fiscal treatment to journalists and outlets who contract their work. Independent workers pay too much tax.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 0-5 years freelancing)

Having nationalized health care

(print reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Opportunities: Analysis

I. Create sustainable Economics

Alternate outlets and approaches: business models

I am encouraged by unique platforms like Beacon to fund quality journalism.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

A business model that pays for journalism. A reinvigorated crowdfunding mechanism (what happened to Spot.us?). I am excited about the Mongabay initiative. Beacon Reader looks promising.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

With granting orgs, it seems there's a reliance on publication in traditional outlets as validation of the work they support. I feel it's important to embrace the changing nature of viewer consumption of content and the rise of the independent publisher. If one looks to Omidyar's new endeavor, the reporting is increasingly built around the journalist, not the outlet. That said, journalistic integrity—and support for the research that goes into good journalism—must exist, be transparent, and held accountable by the industry as a whole.

(multimedia reporter, photojournalist, documentary filmmaker, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

'Wire services' that could help freelancers resell and syndicate their work; centralized business services for freelancers (taxes, contracts, bookkeeping, etc.).

(print and multimedia reporter; editor; former magazine staffer; age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Editors and media managers must be reminded that the stories we (journalists) source are not ours, but belong to the public in whose names we often solicit for information, 'In the Public Interest.' Hence, even commissioned story, if spiked/killed should not be kept away from the public.

(print and multimedia reporter, photojournalist, former magazine staffer, age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

Grants are great and important but it would also be good to look at sustainable business models because without that, everything will be BuzzFeed and BuzzFeed will be everything.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Lately I have been thinking that bringing on freelancers with part-time contracts could be good for everyone. Editors could expect a certain amount of content from trusted reporters, and the freelancer would be guaranteed some dependable income each month.

(print, radio, and multimedia reporter; former magazine staffer; age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

The promise of nonprofit newsrooms: enlist freelancers to improve regional coverage

The question about staffing non-profit newsrooms is tricky. You need to make sure you have a system to support nonprofit newsrooms around the globe, so you have hubs and research groups active in more places than just Washington, DC; New York; and the Bay Area. . . . Otherwise you will have few very well-staffed offices, with editors paid full time, who will ask a lot of journalists around the globe to do a lot of pre-research for free, or to make countless changes. Usually the reporter is paid a fixed fee and the editor is a staffer who can afford sitting a year on a story.

(print, radio, television, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

I just wish there were scores of mini Pro Publicas centered on commissioning and supporting freelance journalists on projects, both individual and collaborative. Just imagine a ‘Center for Freelance Investigative Reporting’ in each of all major regions of the US to start, then spread across the hemispheres!

(print and online reporter, former magazine staffer, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

I think an opportunity is to make mandatory for nonprofit news orgs to hire a certain percentage of freelancers and a certain percentage of international freelancers or require international partnership with independent investigative centers; this way you develop capacity with good local journalists in various countries where there are no money for such media operations.

(print, radio, television, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

[We need] an examination of media constraints in a company, totally company town which is where I work. A means to get locals to support and fund an investigative reporting team.

(online blogger and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, 0-5 years freelancing)

Don't forget the for-profit newsrooms

More funding to rescue financially failing outlets.

(print and television reporter, age 64-73, 0-5 years freelancing)

Make grants available to selected for-profit outlets for to fund more freelance projects.

(print reporter, former newspaper, radio, and magazine staffer, age 64-73, 6-10 years freelancing)

I wonder if there are ways in which the philanthropic sector can tackle the problem of there being insufficient outlets that buy freelance investigative pieces at fair rates.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

More people like Bezos, Buffet and Carlos Slim willing to place large bets on the future of news.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, 0-5 years freelancing)

[Funders should] create and support outlets that publish our work.

(print, radio, and multimedia reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

II. Assist Overstrained and Underfunded Outlets

Help with editing, help for editors

Editorial support is critical. If, for example, the FIJ had staff editor(s) to help reporters, that would make a huge difference. Other support that could help: assistance with pitching stories, negotiating fees/contracts.

(television and multimedia reporter, age 44-53, over 20 years freelancing)

Foundations and other organizations that support freelance work through grants might consider hiring staff editors to provide support for freelancers.

(television and multimedia reporter, age 44-53, over 20 years freelancing)

Interview with Non-freelancer.

We need freelance editors, not just reporters. Walk reporters through things. Really not enough editors—breaking news, web etc. Investigative pieces. They take an enormous amount of time, front, middle, end. I never get enough editing myself.

Also recognize that many editors are working on contract, too [presumably meaning, they need help too].

(print and multimedia reporter; photojournalist; editor; former newspaper and radio staffer; age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

More opportunity to collaborate with editors during story development, help with story placement.

(print, television, and multimedia reporter; former newspaper, television, and online staffer; age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

One thing not mentioned is the time and capacity for small, independent outlets to fact check, which (having worked on the staff of one) is currently non-existent and does nobody any favors.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

When it comes to legacy news organizations, editors need to be educated about how freelancers could successfully be utilized, including issues of indemnity, etc. Editors should be educated on new ways to use freelance talent, such as in conjunction with staff reporters.

(non-freelancer staff reporter)

Story placement

Help finding an outlet for a story. The Nation Institute provided this assistance when they awarded me an IF Stone Award and it was instrumental in getting my investigation placed in a national publication.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

What would be great would be a placement service. It has been a rare day when I have responded to an ad looking for an investigative reporter. And it would be great if an organization could help place them. Also, freelancers don't have much clout—it's who are you—if you don't have a position with an organization.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

As a full-time freelancer who's received grants for specific projects, it would be nice to be able to afford to develop projects as well as produce them and then have help with distribution; too often traditional outlets are too burdened, understaffed, and under-resourced to take content they didn't have to pay to create but still have to pay to license.

(multimedia reporter, photojournalist, documentary filmmaker, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Help reporters get hooked up with publishers in order to receive funds to cover the remaining research.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 11-15 years freelancing)

Assist in making deals to distribute and publicize the work.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer and journalism school faculty, age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

More support in story placement and developing relationships with editors.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

Standards for editors, training of editors

From my perspective, the best reform would be the simplest one: an outlet sticking to their commitments.

(print and television reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

It would be helpful if there were a more developed relationship between outlets and foundations that fund freelance reporting, so that editors could be clued in to what money might be available to subsidize the reporting being done by the freelancer.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

And editors need to be educated about how they make freelancers' lives difficult. Because aside from the industry issues which are harder to tackle, our biggest impediment and frustration is with nonresponsive and unsupportive editors.

(television reporter and photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

III. Standardize Contracts

Contract: pay structure

I would look at the guidelines set up by NPR and Marketplace Radio. They have various levels of compensation for quality of reporting. They also have kill fees.

(print and radio reporter; photojournalist; former newspaper, radio, and wire staffer; age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

I also think that, if an assignment takes far longer than expected—as investigative reporting sometimes requires—there should be a contractual obligation of outlets to pay more for that time.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Pay has to depend on the amount of time spent on research, NOT on the word count, which is what they tend to use. Word count is absurd as a basis of paying for an investigating. . . . I exist only on social security, food stamps, Medicaid. I live in one room and buy clothes at thrift shops. As a prize-winning investigative journalist, I find this disgusting. When I see all the self-serving stuff put out by Pro Publica and Center for Public Integrity, I want to spit.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Some payment towards fees as well as expenses—that reflect that the total amount of days invested in [before], during and after a report, are way in excess of the total amount paid by outlets for that work. It is currently unsustainable.

(print and television reporter, photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Contract: copyright, indemnification

I'm sick of contracts where the publication makes freelancers assume all legal risk. This is really unfair, but what can you do if you need the work?

(print and online reporter, former newspaper magazine staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

I would love to see a boiler-plate template that a freelancer could send an outlet, rather than the other way around. Once we get their contract, we are already at a negotiating disadvantage.

(print and radio reporter; photojournalist; former newspaper, radio, and wire staffer; age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

I'd love to see . . . legal contracts/ suggestions for existing contracts, to protect copyright.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

We need to recover our intellectual property rights in what we create, and they should be inalienable; we need some sort of licensing system like ASCAP/BMI to cope with new media so that if we have a 'hit' we will receive compensation.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Contracts where publications accept at least some legal responsibility would be most helpful. Second would be rates that reflect the much larger amount of work that investigative pieces require.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 44-53, 16-20 years freelancing)

A way to encrypt or somehow protect stories from being copied and pasted would be immensely helpful.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

As a member of the class action lawsuit, I know how vital it is for freelancers to have the right to edit contracts. I was with McGraw-Hill long before electronic rights were an issue. [Recounts story] Freelancers need to really think about these issues. Your publishers do.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Have more staff who are trained in media relations, with editorial contracts, and who know how to work with freelancers to place stories and negotiate good contracts.

(print, television, and multimedia reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

IV. Improve Services

Strengthening FOIA and state transparency reforms, and strengthening reporter shield laws. I would similarly support fundraising and organizing around legal aid services for reporters.

(print,-multimedia, and online reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Support freelancers should they be accused of malfeasance such as libel.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

More readily available/affordable legal protection.

(print, television, and multimedia reporter; former newspaper, television, and online staffer; age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Affordable insurance

Good media perils insurance is expensive. The nonprofit sector could help freelancers find—and pay for—affordable policies.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

People are not going into places where we absolutely need to know what's going on. [We need] some kind of insurance consortium, for protection.

(non-freelancer, staff editor who does not work with freelancers)

Resources and hands-on services

I personally don't feel that a huge focus on "freelancer rights" is a worthwhile investment for philanthropic funders. I think most legacy publications pay fairly, and don't have onerous contracts. I think the much more pressing needs are (a) financial support for the legwork that comes with investigations—records searches, travel, etc., and/or (b) some type of collectively available suite of research tools (LexisNexis, Accurint, online database access) to help freelance investigative journalists with the research, pre-source-development phase of their reporting.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

One of the things that makes freelance life taxing, I think, is not having a quiet, comfortable place to write; office space or shared work spaces would make a big difference, I think, for many freelancers. Most of all, having more paths to financial stability, healthcare, etc., so that we can focus on what matters: reporting meaningfully in the public interest.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Search engines that are weighted/tuned to give higher value to public-interest reporting than to misinformation and disinformation (e.g., conspiracy websites).

(print and multimedia reporter, editor, former magazine staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Support on non-answered FOIA requests.

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Database subscriptions such as Lexis-Nexis accounts.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

Trainings

Workshops and courses continue to be aimed at staffers and not freelancers. While the newspaper used to finance in-service and other training, freelancers must finance their own—something that organizations like the Knight Center clearly do not understand or appreciate. Their courses are exorbitant!

(print and online reporter, editor, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

I do wish that IRE and organizations like it would pay more attention to freelancers though; most of their materials and workshops assume you are working in a newsroom.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

I think organizations that offer journalism training, in particular Investigative Reporters and Editors, need to open their eyes to the growing number of reporters who are working independently. I've been disappointed that much training and advocacy continues to focus almost exclusively on traditional newsrooms, with some minor recognition of nonprofits and online enterprises but almost no awareness of freelancers.

(print, radio, and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

Partner with Poynter's NewsU to take advantage of their current offerings, and integrate advanced trainings into their platform. If funding not secured bring strength of freelancers to negotiate with Poynter advanced training. Try to reduce costs by enrolling 20 or 25 freelancers together in class.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

The philanthropic sector could . . . offer us training (like I mentioned with FOIA requests and a basic understanding of government contracts/expenditures) that would allow us not to have to take time off for a pricey masters course to learn precise and targeted skills.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Role of Philanthropy: Challenges and Shortcomings

Bias, ideology and conflict

There are subjects which become ‘hot,’ and easier to fund, and subjects which become ‘cold.’ The public interest is not necessarily served by this trendiness. I am most grateful to several foundations for very generous support of my environmental reporting, but I know many terrific, dedicated journalists who cannot get funding for pieces about mental health issues, poverty, urban problems, international reporting and reporting on under-covered federal agencies. This hurts everyone.

(print and television reporter; former newspaper, magazine, and television staffer; age 54-63, 11-15 years freelancing)

An issue of increasing concern is journalism that is paid for by foundations or institutions with clear ideological or financial interests in the outcome. Foundations concerned with human rights fund human rights reporting; foundations concerned with environmental issues fund environmental reporting; foundations concerned with tax reform or health reform or immigration reform fund reporting in those areas. Even if there is an effective editorial firewall, this poses ethical problems for both freelancers and outlets that may be interested in distributing the work. One wishes for ‘clean’ sources of funding that support public interest journalism regardless of the topic, or of who or what is likely to be championed or skewered.

(print and radio reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Make sure there is a firm firewall between reporting and other interests, such as political considerations, corporate public relations and advertising concerns—even if the publisher is a nonprofit. Reporters and editors **MUST** have the scope to report issues without having to water their findings down for political reasons.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Insufficient Funds

Too many grants and fellowships support stories and not journalists. They cover reporting expenses (often after the fact, requiring the journalist to foot the bill up front) and expect the freelancer to pay health insurance, mortgages, etc. from . . . I don't know what.

(photojournalist and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

I've been lucky to secure several grants and fellowships in recent years, but they typically do not cover living expenses—only the expenses of reporting. What I make from story sales does not cover all my living expenses. Freelancers need opportunities that help pay the bills, not just the business of reporting.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

I've been fortunate to have [received] several grants to do investigative reporting but they've all been fairly modest grants. After taking out for taxes and direct expenses, I'm certain I'm not making even minimum wage (the articles I do require a lot of time). Then, pay is generally between \$300 and \$500 for a feature length article. I'm at the point of wondering if I can continue to do this kind of work because I simply cannot support myself.

(print reporter and photojournalist, age 54-63,-16-20 years freelancing)

Real investigative freelancing is impossible for a parent of young children to do, which means it cuts a person off from growing their portfolio, reputation and earnings at the most important point in a growing career. When we do apply for grants, we tend not to add in that expense in the factor for the story, afraid that the additional financial request will get rejected. I've seen many freelancers talk about how difficult it is to juggle small children and a freelance career, and the stories they are forced to give up or put on hold for years because of it.

(print and online reporter, former online staffer, age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

I've received a number of grants/fellowships to help with reporting stories, but the grants are so tiny that I have to spend thousands more of my own, but then the grant-giving outlet demands a story be published, even if the best story, doing the story right, would require more reporting (e.g., more than one shoestring visit to a place to really uncover). Most grants can't support the kind of reporting needed for more difficult stories.

(print and radio reporter, former radio staffer, 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

The size of one grant is never enough for the whole project and there is a need to scramble for the other part of the funding. One project (pre-Kickstarter), I spent a great deal of time raising the remaining project costs. This really compromised the reporting.

(print, radio, and television reporter; former radio and television staffer; age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

Even with expenses covered by Nation [Institute] or other philanthropic sponsor, the final amount we are paid for a fee—after all the huge amount of work that goes into the project before during and after—is too small to actually make this viable in the long term. A labor of love!

(print and television reporter, photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Insufficient funds: the stories that don't get done

If indeed they could find a way [to sell the story] to make it pay the rent, they would. Freelancers are such committed people.

But that insurance is not there. Exactly the problem—no question that grants are often inadequate. A good reporter will look at grants, [see there's] not enough there, [and decide not to] go down that road. Isn't enough there to make it attractive. So you do the knock-off feature stories.

Non-freelancer. Veteran broadcast news executive for all the legacy networks. (Interview)

I had the good fortune of getting a couple of fellowships in recent years, the I.F. Stone award for investigative reporting and a Soros Justice Fellowship. But publications . . . pay almost no money, which becomes a problem when the fellowship money runs out.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Also, fellowship applications take huge amounts of time and usually require multiple recommendations, all of which further squeezes my already impossible schedule

(print reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

They give you a very minimum amount. Nothing relating to the time of the research or writing.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Youth over experience?

At this stage of my career, when I've proven my ability to put together projects that break news and bring about social change, it feels insulting to have funders who feel they're doing journalists a favor by giving them just enough money for a plane ticket. And it seems like some of those models may be aimed more at early-career journalists whose living expenses are lower, and who are more willing to work without adequate compensation as they're still learning the ropes.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Problems with multiple grants

In the case of my FIJ grant, I needed additional funding to complete the reporting. I secured a grant from The Nation Institute, which helped with more travel. Unfortunately, The Nation Institute had different requirements regarding acceptable outlets for publication. The two organizations also ended up having somewhat different visions of the story . . . the process has been complicated and slow. Fifty percent of my FIJ grant has yet to be paid—because my work has yet to be published . . . most of this completely beyond my control. Very frustrating.

(print and multimedia reporter, former television staffer, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

When working on a long-term international project, it's often necessary to make multiple reporting trips over an extended period of time. And without an adequate source of funding for the project (that would also cover living expenses), it's often necessary to seek small grants to cover each trip.

(photojournalist, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

It feels risky. In the one case I've done this, I've worried that, in the unlikely event I would receive both grants, I would be put in the position of telling one funder no, and thus potentially damaging prospects of receiving funding from them in the future. But not being able to do so means either foregoing applying for some grants, to avoid angering funders who don't approve of simultaneous pitching, or letting good stories linger for months or years while trying to find funding from outlets/grant makers who cycles are spread out.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Each funder wants sole credit, they don't cooperate.

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

Multiple Grants: Credit

I don't care about how many websites print the story. If both FIJ and Pulitzer want to fund, I'd be delighted. Competition over credit shouldn't stop things. It would be helpful—more money, combined. Modest supplementary. (Interview)

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

I am concerned about balkanization in the nonprofit journalism universe, with too many organizations handing out too many smallish grants that are just large enough to appeal to reporters or organizations, but not large enough to really support a project. There is too much organizational self-preservation, not enough eye on the broader mission.

(non-freelancer, editor who works with freelancers at a major national outlet.)

Often I have to; my latest project received financing from one higher ed. institution, one foundation, and one company. All of that still only covered my expenses, but not the 6-months of full-time work I put into it.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Cumbersome Applications

Personally, I never have the time or interest to spend my time looking for grants, awards, and so on. It is a big distraction from the core work. As it is, I wander off towards higher-paying work because I'm in constantly dire straits.

(print reporter, former internet writer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

Painful. Every grant application is different. Standardization of requirements would be a HUGE help (i.e., summary statement should be 50 words or less for ALL grant applications, not 50 for this one, 15 for that one, 300 for that one, etc.).

(print, television, and multimedia reporter, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

Stressful! You never know what's going to come through, and end up duplicating efforts all the time.

(print and radio reporter, age 24-33, 6-10 years freelancing)

The hardest part was making sure to meet varying requirements for different grant programs, although I was submitting the same information to all of them.

(print reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

I'm putting more time in writing grants applications and related, instead of doing research, reporting, learning new tools and getting better at the reporting language.

(print, radio, television, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Usually [a good story] starts with just an idea. Nobody gives you money till you are half way there. I once saw advice to academics saying they should apply for grants for the project they have just finished since they could write a great proposal! That's what we have to do.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Role of Philanthropy: Fulfill the Promise

Models: when the current system works

I once applied for an Annenberg and an FIJ grant for the same project (Indian youth suicide). Both came through in amounts that, when totaled, allowed me to do the project.

They were happy to coordinate; it [just] involved a little adjustment of deadlines. . . . The organizations also provided different and complementary types of advice and support.

(print and online reporter, former magazine staffer, age 64-73, 0-5 years freelancing)

I have organized projects involving multiple stories, partners and platforms, drawing from multiple funding sources. One advantage is that having money from one source makes it easier to get money from the next (it's a lower-risk investment for the foundation). One challenge is that each foundation runs on its own schedule and requires different things (formats for proposals, budgets, reporting, etc.). One needs to make the project modular so if it is only partially funded it can still move forward.

(print and radio reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

For a book that I wrote with a think-tank, I helped provide info for their grants, multiple ones; the grant paid me a relatively good salary, some \$60,000, and it was a win-win for me and the organization.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper, magazine, radio, and broadcast staffer; age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

These applications were for multi-year projects and books. I was able to finance different parts of the work, from different foundations. I was completely transparent with the foundations, as one must be. I am grateful to these foundations for their trust and support.

(print and television reporter; former newspaper, magazine, and television staffer; age 54-63, 11-15 years freelancing)

I was awarded the Inter American Press Association's annual scholarship. It is for young journalists who want to spend at least a year in Latin America. It was WONDERFUL and I cannot recommend this model enough. [It] allowed me a year to develop great sources and story leads, so much so that I began to work as a stringer for the NYT once my year was done. Scholarships that target motivated, self-propelled freelancers as they embark on a new phase of their life could be a very useful way to apply grant money.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Multiple grants

I give credit to all supporters. It's worked so far.

(print reporter; former newspaper, radio, and magazine staffer; age 64-73, 6-10 years freelancing)

It's only happened once. There were no strings or hassles really.

(print and radio reporter, former radio staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Investigations vs. “undercovered” features

It would be very helpful to have grants on subject areas—environment, civil liberties, et al. So journalists who develop a form of expertise can put that knowledge to work journalistically.

(print reporter and former non-profit journalist, age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

In the world of nonprofit or philanthropic support for reporters, there is a lot of money dedicated to ‘investigative reporting’ but not enough for other types of reporting in the public interest. Stories that are not hard investigative stories, but which cover underreported issues and communities/regions should be given as much support. [Need] more money for under-covered issues, and less just for ‘investigative stories.’

(television reporter and photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Fellowship v. grant: need for money to explore stories

Most of the funders I've contacted only pay for expenses to report a story, assuming that the publication will pay sufficiently to make such reporting worthwhile. But the publication's pay never does. Even funders who do allow for a stipend only allow for a very modest one, in the range of a couple thousand dollars for two months' work.

(print reporter and photojournalist, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

Some funds are explicit about not supporting reporters' living expenses—this, too, is problematic.

(television and multimedia reporter, age 44-53, over 20 years freelancing)

We need to be paid for our time as well as our ideas or get a lot more money for our intellectual work, and we need to be advanced at least expenses if not some percentage of our fee, so that we can regularize our finances and not be in a vicious debt/repayment cycle.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Start shifting grant funding to supporting reporters rather than individual stories. Even \$1000 a month would allow many freelancers to spend less time writing/shooting/pitching crap to websites at \$250/ea and focus on more important projects.

(photojournalist and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

More fellowships and grants, more sources for funding/benefits/sources of stability and support to enable us to keep doing this work.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Support for freelance journalists, not just their ideas. I find most funding opportunities are investments in a project or idea. But I (and other freelancers I know) need support for day-to-day living. Story sales and grants do not cover the time I spend investigating (and pitching/applying).

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

Giving people a kind of floor that would cover the most minimal/basic expenses would permit people to develop long-form work and meaningful investigations without constant financial pressure. That said, I don't believe the current environment is geared to the long form—this is pie in the sky, to the nth degree.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

Contrarian view: fellowships for mid-career veterans

Non-journalism

I think the existence of more fellowship opportunities for mid-career journalists, that take into account living expenses and compensation for journalists' time, even with a modest living stipend or story fee, could go a long way to make continued investigative work more viable. As is, I feel like many journalism opportunities are still aimed at training lots of young reporters up, and getting to the point where they are able to do great work, but then leaving them hanging once they're there. We need something that can help sustain mid-career reporters who have made it to that point, but who are facing the prospect of leaving journalism just at a time when they could be doing their best work, because it's too difficult to live an adult life, let alone start a family, when you get \$1500 for a 4-month investigation.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Grants: what stage of the reporting process most useful

The philanthropic sector could reward successful journalists by allowing them to take risks and stories with up-front costs.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Every stage of story development, from exploring leads through reporting and editing and follow-up, takes time and resources. To pay only for reporting and production is like paying a police officer only for those hours when she or he is arresting someone.

(print and radio reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Money is required for exploration/reporting. It's critical to be able to get out and meet people and do interviews and be with your story. This takes funding for expenses up front.

(print reporter and journalism-based screenwriter, former broadcast staffer, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

My editor applies for grants in subject areas that support certain stories, and occasionally applies for specific grants to fund individual projects, which may or may not overlap with the subject-area grants. More than once, my ability to report out a story has been linked to whether we get funding (or not).

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

Living expenses during first half of the project.

(print and online reporter, editor, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Help earlier on in the reporting/pitching process.

(television reporter and photojournalist, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Contrarian views: fellowships and expenses are needed, but so is time management

It has never occurred to me to ask for support for story searches, exploring leads and the like. I am always doing that, I suppose, so I don't know how to separate it out. For me, it's simply clearer to have money to accomplish a particular goal, finding out about certain things in a certain place, then writing about it.

(print and online reporter, former magazine staffer, age 64-73, 0-5 years freelancing)

If you're doing good work, then you have the time in your schedule to do a little digging on your own and check things out enough to know whether you've got a good pitch. And if you've got a good idea, the reporting and editing phases are then paid for by the outlet that buys it. I think sending money in this direction is potentially a huge misuse of funds, because what you've got is people who just aren't that good at the business end of freelancing sucking philanthropic dollars for things that never turn out to be news. The way story and fellowship grants are structured now, they're flowing toward something that matters. This doesn't need fixing.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Do grants and fellowships undermine fair pay by publications?

The best piece of writing I've done in the past few years was something I only was able to do because a journalism fund paid me nearly 10 times what the actual outlet that ran it did.

(print and online reporter, age 44-53, over 20 years freelancing)

I am in television where not much freelance work is available anyway (unless it comes through a nonprofit for little or no money) and even less interest in paying for long-form or investigative reports or documentaries.

(television reporter and former television staffer, age 64-73, 0-5 years freelancing)

[Funders should] restrict funding to freelance reporters. Often the funding goes to existing outlets, which then use that money for their own reporters.

(print and radio reporter; photojournalist; former newspaper, radio, and wire staffer; age 54-63, 0-5 years freelancing)

Freelance journalism is facing a structural crisis. I am very grateful for the philanthropic support I've received. One concern I have is that people funded by a grant might accept less or no pay at all from a publication because of this outside source of support which would then undermine the quest for publications to pay fairly.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

If New Republic pays well, don't waste The Nation Institute's money. [Don't] end up subsidizing outlets that want to scrimp. (interview)

(print reporter, former magazine staffer and website editor, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

Divert some support from journalism schools

By targeting dollars effectively. For example, colleges and universities are getting a lot of philanthropic support for investigative newsrooms. Why? These newsrooms siphon funding from seasoned, qualified journalists. I think this downgrades the quality of investigative product the funders are getting in the end by putting untrained labor into the projects. And also by filtering funds through a bureaucracy that is likely sucking big administrative costs along the way. . . . Also, students are paying tuition. Colleges and universities are already funded to train students. They should not be stealing funds from investigative journalists to train students so they can pad their own endowments and pension funds with the leftovers. This is just one example of misdirected, wasted funds. But I think philanthropists have to be better at spotting them.

(print,-multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Publicize offerings

Make their offers more known.

(print reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

More marketing. I'm aware this stuff exists, but figured it was for big national stories. Have no idea if any of it is suitable for local, regional work. Nor do I know if such grants would provide enough money.

(print and online reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 54-63, 6-10 years freelancing)

Honestly, we just need more of them. I literally only know of 3 investigative reporting funds (one of which is just months old). The more of them there are—and the more broad their scope and interests—the more stories we could get funding for. But maybe if there are more of them, they just need to publicize themselves more broadly.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

Make themselves more visible.

(print and multimedia reporter, photojournalist, former magazine staffer, age 34-43, 0-5 years freelancing)

Provide more hands-on services, engage more with grantees, publicize their work more

Facilitate interaction with their donor recipients. Offer on-demand services like data mining or research to assist freelancers on specific projects.

(print and multimedia reporter, age 54-63,-over 20 years freelancing)

They could learn more about the practical realities of freelancing, so that they understand why more money overall is needed.

(print reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 44-53, 11-15 years freelancing)

Acknowledge the potential for freelance reporters to advance the public interest in a big way.

(print, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper, magazine, radio, and broadcast staffer; age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Be willing to give feedback and critiques of proposals ideally pre-submission, but also post.

[Funders] should ask reporters what they need, in direct meetings, where groups of independent reporters from different places around the world can show what they do, how they do it, what are the problems to be solved should be more transparent.

(print reporter, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Should ask reporters what they need, in direct meetings, where groups of independent reporters from different places around the world can show what they do, how they do it, what are the problems to be solved. Should be more transparent about the process to give grants and should open channels for critical feedback, putting an internal system in place to hold decision makers accountable; there is no accountability with bad decisions in media assistance, and big donors are trend setters for all other medium and small donors.

(print, radio, television, multimedia, and online reporter; former newspaper staffer; age 34-43, 11-15 years freelancing)

It would be helpful to many freelancers, to be able to discuss their proposals in progress, before spending weeks on something that is unlikely to interest the foundation.

(print and television reporter; former newspaper, magazine, and television staffer; age 54-63, 11-15 years freelancing)

Simplify applications

Make it less time-consuming to apply for grants. Have an initial round where you submit just a 250-word project idea and one clip. Then have them invite the best applicants to submit a full proposal.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Expedite response time.

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Fund reporters' time

What would be really helpful is grants that support my writing for a particular period of time—a fellowship for a year or two—rather than support specific stories. The biggest problem is never finding publications that want my work, it is always finding money. I can't even develop good investigative story ideas when I have to churn through pieces at \$200 a piece just to survive.

(print reporter, former magazine, television, and online staffer, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Provide above-mentioned financial stability, including payment for time and expenses as well as a writing fee.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Support the person behind the project. Offer funding that covers the time we spend investigating, pitching, reporting and writing—not just the equipment, research and travel expenses involved in a project.

(print and multimedia reporter, former newspaper staffer, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

Cover living expenses as well as travel or data expenses.

(print reporter and former magazine staffer, age 44-53, 16-20 years freelancing)

Recognize that it's not enough to simply cover travel costs, and that we also need support for costs of living. Create more opportunities for freelancers to network and collaborate.

(photojournalist, age 34-43, 6-10 years freelancing)

Provide barebones 'living stipends' for promising freelance reporters who make below \$X per year, to ease them of the burden of immediate financial stress.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Invest in more programs where you support a JOURNALIST rather than a project. If someone is doing consistently good work, make a grant that supports them or provides them a living stipend, for, say, 2 years, and see what happens. I think you'd be amazed at what people can produce when they don't have to hustle funds every month or two.

(print and radio reporter, age 24-33, 6-10 years freelancing)

Writers should get annual grants, not based on particular stories, but just to live and do their work. Then the media (print, internet, etc.) could pay for the stories. On the assumption that they are never paying you enough to live on. We need annual grants that pay living stipends. It's the only way.

(print reporter and former newspaper staffer, age 64-73, over 20 years freelancing)

Solution: one simple grant procedure

In a dream world, freelancers could appeal to some central funder or funding organization for bare-bones (basic) support, based on a track record of published works/impact, etc. Giving people a kind of floor that would cover the most minimal/basic expenses would permit people to develop long-form work and meaningful investigations without constant

financial pressure. That said, I don't believe the current environment is geared to the long form—this is pie in the sky, to the nth degree.

(print and online reporter, age 54-63, 16-20 years freelancing)

It would be great if philanthropists and their foundations would pool their money in a truly independent journalism fund. As it is, freelancers spend much too much time hunting for small grants and fellowships, and risk accepting funds from organizations with a clear (or perceived) interest or bias.

(print and radio reporter, age 54-63, over 20 years freelancing)

Less stipulations on funding, less onerous applications, and more (serious) sources of funding.

(print, radio, and television reporter, age 34-43, 16-20 years freelancing)

Every grant application is different. Standardization of requirements would be a HUGE help (i.e., summary statement should be 50 words or less for ALL grant applications, not 50 for this one, 15 for that one, 300 for that one, etc.).

(print, television, and multimedia reporter, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

Coordinate: focus on supporting the reporter, more than getting credit for a particular story.

(print reporter, former newspaper and magazine staffer, age 44-53, 6-10 years freelancing)

I spend one-third of my time simply applying to grants and fellowships. Yes, they're necessary and helpful. But that's an unfortunate expenditure of time that could otherwise be spent reporting. I'd like to see grant-givers give much more serious consideration to how they craft their applications. One, brief, solid story proposal and budget with clips is a lot more useful than a myriad of different short-answer questions and essays, much less letters of recommendation and support from editors. At the very least, allow freelancers to submit brief proposals/applications that take just an hour to complete, and then invite the best ones to submit full proposals.

(print reporter, age 24-33, 0-5 years freelancing)

Share your thoughts on the appendix of this report by emailing: info@projectword.org.

Thanks for sharing in the dialogue.

*To gain an outside perspective, Project Word conducted a parallel survey of 100 nonfreelancer journalism professionals, including staff editors, staff reporters, facilitators, and journalism educators: their responses were segregated