



NASW

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER



by Paul Raeburn

Awards program unchanged

At the NASW membership meeting in February, we had a discussion on the merits of creating an NASW award to honor public information and public relations work. I asked Earle Holland, who advocated such an award, to prepare a memo on the pros and cons of establishing a PIO award. Earle, who is the director of research communications at Ohio State University, delivered a long and thoughtful report to the officers a day or two before this year's membership meeting. We discussed the matter again, but did not make a decision. We did, however, ask Andrew Skolnick to do [a piece exploring the issue](#) for the [Summer 2002 edition](#) of *ScienceWriters*. Andy did a nice job collecting opinions from many of our journalist and PIO members, and the officers considered those opinions. And we talked to as many NASW members as we could.

After much thought and discussion, the officers have decided not to create

an NASW award for PIOs. Each of us has his or her own reasons, but we agreed that we do not need another award. As Andy pointed out in his story in ScienceWriters (which you can see on the NASW Web site), science pieces written by PIOs are already eligible for NASW's [Science-in-Society awards](#). It's also true that the Science-in-Society awards are aimed at writing that digs a little, gets below the surface, and often makes powerful interests unhappy. A lot of public-information work does not do those kinds of things, and so it would be unlikely to win. Nevertheless, if PIOs enter work that sheds light on the societal implications of scientific research, it will be eligible. Writing by PIOs can be very good. Their stories can be very newsy and eloquent, but institutional writing rarely shakes the status quo. A PIO award could be established to recognize good writing, but the officers feel that good writing is what we expect of ourselves all the time. Our award should recognize something more than that.

Become involved

For the first time this year, the officers decided to get together for a mid-year meeting. We met in New York in June to discuss various issues that have come up before the officers and the board. I'd like to take this opportunity to fill you in.

The most important thing we did, I think, was to vow to make NASW a much more active organization. We want to be able to respond to public-policy issues relating to science writing. And we want our voice to be heard on broader journalism questions, such as whether it is reasonable to restrict access to government information in response to terrorist threats. We agreed that we would establish more committees to address issues of concern—not only policy issues, but issues related to jobs, the workplace, and training and education, among others. We will be creating new committees, asking the board and officers to do more—and looking for more volunteers.

We will soon be forming a committee, for example, to draft a statement of "good standards and practices" that would apply to NASW members—a kind of code of conduct for journalist members and PIOs. We have also joined a group called the Council of Presidents of Journalism Organizations. The council, whose members include the [Society of Professional Journalists](#), the [Society of Environmental Journalists](#), and many other professional groups, is working to improve the training of journalists and to establish itself as a voice on public-policy issues related to journalism.

We would like to do more to protect the jobs of science journalists during times when newspapers and magazines are cutting back. We're looking for opportunities to expand the kind of training we do with our annual

workshops. We may decide to seek foundation grants to support such programs.

And we would like to address other issues of concern to you. Please send us your ideas about what we can do to meet your needs. There will be more opportunities for you to get involved in NASW activities, and we hope many of you will volunteer. We will let you know when we are forming new committees and undertaking new projects. We are just in the process of putting together a committee to look for ways to improve the nasw-jobs listserv, for example. And we're looking for other ideas.

Please let us—me, the officers, and the board—know what we can do to serve you better.

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