

## **NASW Grant Proposal (March 2011)**

### **Applicants**

Siri Carpenter (NASW member since 1997) and Jeanne Erdmann (NASW member since 1999)

### **Title of project**

The Open Notebook ([theopennotebook.com](http://theopennotebook.com))

### **Amount requested**

[see detailed budget options below]

### **Description of proposed project**

Despite the shifting marketplace for science journalism, expert craftsmanship still matters. The ability to recognize and sell important stories, ask incisive questions about complex subjects, and tell accurate, compelling stories—on shorter deadlines and with fewer reporting and editorial resources than ever before—is more vital than ever to success.

We often find ourselves wondering how another writer found a particular story idea, came up with a particular angle, got access to certain sources, thought of asking certain questions, decided how to structure a certain story, and so on. To learn how the best science journalists create such outstanding work, and so that others could benefit from what we learned, in October 2010, we launched [The Open Notebook](http://The Open Notebook), a craft-focused website for science journalists. In an ongoing series of question-and-answer features, we tell the story behind a single piece of outstanding science journalism, from initial idea to published article.

The Open Notebook's main audiences are science journalists (and general assignment reporters who cover science, medicine, environment, and technology) who take pride in their work and want to do the best job possible; who want to find better stories and distinguish themselves in their fields; and who are eager to learn new reporting strategies—especially those strategies that work for the best writers in the business. Currently, no other website allows science journalists to glimpse the "story behind the story"—to see how the best science stories got done, from inception to completion.

Each TON feature includes several elements:

- An introduction (and link) to the story being examined, describing the story's importance to science and society and mentioning any awards, etc. that the story has won.
- A Q&A of 1200-1400 words [*nb: most of our interviews are actually more in-depth, running at around 1800-3000 words*], which examines, in detail, how the story was executed. For example, we scrutinize:
  - [*Here we described some of the specific elements of our writer interviews*]
- Supplementary materials that provide a glimpse behind the scenes. Features that we have published so far have included writers' successful pitch letters; excerpts of early drafts presented alongside corresponding segments of the finished piece; outlines, interview notes and audio excerpts; and other materials that illustrate how the story evolved over time.

Q&A features published so far:

- [*Here we provided a list of published and forthcoming interviews*]

### **Impacts on the science writing community**

*[Here we mentioned that since The Open Notebook had launched, many science writers had contacted us to express appreciation for the site. After reviewing our grant proposal, the NASW Program Committee requested further information about the feedback we had received about TON, so we sent a supplementary document with a couple of dozen testimonials from working science journalists, j-school instructors, and students.] Many have nominated stories that they think would make good TON features (some have offered to write features for the site).*

*[Here we reported on our early site stats and Twitter following, and mentioned a few science writers who had drawn attention to The Open Notebook through their blogs.]*

### **Our qualifications**

*[We provided one-paragraph bios here]*

### **Future plans**

The Open Notebook benefits science journalists by providing an ongoing science journalism “workshop” and a unique forum for craft-focused discussion. This undertaking requires a significant investment of time and money. The two of us have underwritten the initial costs of domain registration, hosting, logo development, and design and printing of postcards, which we distributed at the 2010 NASW meeting. We have also devoted many hours to designing the site, writing a business plan, setting up associated Facebook and Twitter accounts, writing letters to colleagues to spread the word about the site, and – of course – creating the 9 features that we have posted so far.

We would like to modestly expand The Open Notebook’s scope and professionalize what began as a labor of love. Our goal is to broaden and deepen this project to include the voices and ideas of the broader science writing community. Specifically, our plans during the next year are to:

- *[Here we laid out, in several bullet points, what we intended to do if we received an NASW grant. This included paying guest contributors and ourselves for Q&As and other features and expanding the site’s scope to include additional content that meets our core mission of promoting science journalism as craft. We provided several examples of new kinds of content that we wanted to expand to include.]*

### **Proposed budget and delivery timeline**

*[We proposed three different budget options]*