

TIP SHEET

Striking Out Alone in the World: Winning Strategies for International Freelance Reporting

Excellence in Journalism Conference 2012

Fellowships, reporting trips and international news reporting

- Look for fellowship programs run by organizations such as International Reporting Project, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting or International Center for Journalists that provide financial and editorial support to freelancers and staff journalists. Study their web sites carefully to know what they do.
- If you have a global angle to a local US story, ask editors at local news organizations if they are interested in running your stories and possibly supporting your reporting trip. There are many global aspects to stories in our local communities, in business, health, immigration, religion, arts and culture, sports, environment, agriculture, education and other areas.
- With the cutback in foreign bureaus, many news organizations are interested in running freelancers' stories, particularly from off-the-beaten path countries. Freelancers offering stories from seldom-visited countries in Africa, Asia or Latin American might have more success in having their stories used than freelancers in more frequently visited areas in Europe or the Middle East.
- See the list of resources at the bottom of this tip sheet.

Fixers and planning reporting overseas

- When hiring a fixer, it's often a good idea to start with a "trial period" of a few days to see if you and the fixer are compatible. Otherwise, you might be stuck with an agreement to pay someone who doesn't work out.
- As a freelancer, you should let the fixer/translator understand that you don't have a large budget. Make sure they don't try to charge you rates that they were able to charge large news organizations.
- Good fixers can be found at local newspapers or broadcast stations, particularly at English-language media. Also students at universities can be hired to provide fixer service. Cast wide for editorial and country contacts.
- Journalistic training groups like the International Center for Journalists (www.icfj.org/) and the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (iwpr.net) often support local journalists who can work with you as fixers or give you general advice (ask nicely if you're not offering to pay!)
- Use Lightstalkers (www.lightstalkers.org/) to hire locally or ask for advice, read up on various corners of the world. IJNET (ijnet.org/) is another good resource for trip planning.
- Ask to join Facebook industry groups, such as the "Vulture Club" or the "Global Vjs", to post inquiries for fixers and also possibly outlets, look for opportunities. And don't forget your own j-school listserv.
- Staffers can get buy-in by doing "glocal" reporting first.
- Brush up your foreign language skills (a must if you're a freelancer relocating).
- Make sure you look into a country's visa requirements well in advance of your visit.
- Don't stint on health and immunization advice. Check the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) site for Travelers Health for the country you're going to. Nothing ruins a trip more than getting seriously ill.

- If you're going to a country where there is conflict or the threat of civil unrest, consider taking a course in hazardous environment reporting. Several organizations such as RISC (risctraining.org) and Centurion (www.centurionsafety.net) offer very useful training courses, and some offer discount rates for free-lancers
- Let someone know whereabouts at all times. Never go on an interview without telling someone you trust about it beforehand or giving them an estimate of when you will return. Checking in with the US embassy's press office on your arrival in a country is often a good idea.
- No story is worth dying or risking serious injury for.

Multimedia storytelling and working for multiple outlets

- All news organizations want stories in multiple media: text, video, audio, photo. Offer as many of these media to your editors as possible. Offer to blog for any organization that may want it.
- Keep an eye open for "secondary" stories that might turn into features or sidebars. Stories on travel, food, lifestyle, sports, architecture, little-known historical sites, etc., can make nice sidebars or complementary features to your main stories.
- Never offer the same pitch to more than one outlet. But it's fine to offer more than one outlet slightly different angles, with a different pitch, on the same general topics.
- Once you arrive overseas, check in with local journalists and with any foreign correspondents based in the area. They may have paid assignments for you that you may want to pursue to help fund your trip.
- Be flexible to please your editor; for example, they may not want a 3,000-word print version of your story, but might be open to an audio photo essay.
- If you're a print reporter: Always shoot stills and video even if you're not going to make a full piece out of it; you can give it as handout to an outlet when they interview you as an expert on a topic (even iPhone video).
- If you're a video reporter who wants to sell to multiple outlets: think of stories that are character driven and visual and can be shot in a day or two, so you can do several stories in one trip (rather than one long, complicated story that only one outlet might take).
- Great site for teaching yourself video and editing if you're a print person with no training is Lynda (www.lynda.com). Media Storm (mediastorm.com/train/online) also has online training modules and guides for multi-media.
- Use the iPhone for photography: www.poynter.org/how-tos/newsgathering-storytelling/187447/live-chat-today-how-journalists-can-take-advantage-of-iphone-photography/
- If you think you'll be doing video regularly-enough to validate the cost, consider taking a short video training course. Some options include Bill Gentile (www.billgentile.com), DCTV (www.dctvny.org/workshops), Digital Journalist (digitaljournalist.org/platypus-video-workshops.html), and Media Storm (mediastorm.com/train/workshops).

Marketing yourself and the business side of freelancing

- Develop a good website that features your stories, your bio and photo, your blog, significant work you have produced (books, photo essays) and your contact information.
- Keep your story pitches short before you go overseas. Once you are abroad, follow up with a short pitch to editors and tell them anything new that you have discovered.

- Do some online research before you go abroad to be familiar with what stories have been done recently on your area and topic. You don't want to market a great story to an outlet that has just run something similar.
- Use social media to market your stories and yourself before you travel, while you travel and after you finished your trip. Create a Twitter account with your biography and a professional Facebook profile to showcase your clips.
- Visit SPJ's page for freelance journalism guidance (www.spj.org/freelance.asp). The Poynter Institute also has seminars on marketing and disseminating your freelance work and on managing your own business (about.poynter.org/training).
- Pick an expertise. You have one, even if you think you don't.
- Sell your work with gusto. Whether approaching a source or an editor, get someone to introduce you. Sell everything, even the thing you think you "can't" do. Add freebies (especially the thing you think you "can't" do).
- Make peace with your money issues. Know why you're doing this. Know how you'll pay for this. Decide in advance how much money you want/need to make. Before you go, answer, in writing, this question: What would success look like?

Online Resources for Funding, Fellowships, Project Support:

- International Reporting Project (fellowships and gatekeeper trips): <http://internationalreportingproject.org/>
- Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting: <http://pulitzercenter.org/>
- Nieman Global Health Reporting Fellowship (At Harvard, Funded by the Pulitzer Center): <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/NiemanFoundation/NiemanFellowships/TypesOfFellowships/GlobalHealthReportingFellowships.aspx>
- Fulbright Grants (both as fellows and scholars): <http://www.iie.org/en/Fulbright>
- Luce Scholars Program (for Asia, for professionals under age 30): <http://www.hluce.org/lprogram.aspx>
- The German Marshall Fund (Germany and Europe): <http://www.gmfus.org/grants-fellowships/>
- Alicia Patterson Foundation (print journalists only): <http://aliciapatterson.org/>
- Inter-American Press Association Fellowships for Latin America/Caribbean (under age 35): http://www.sipiapa.org/v4/becas_SIP.php?idioma=us
- Knight International Journalism Fellowships (Through ICFJ): <http://www.icfj.org/our-work/knight>
- Arthur Burns Fellowship (Through ICFJ) For reporting in Germany: <http://www.icfj.org/burns>
- IJNET, the online publication of the International Center for Journalists, is a good source of general information from grants to seminars to jobs: <http://ijnet.org/>
- Fund for Investigative Journalism: <http://fij.org/>
- Kaiser Health Media Fellowships: <http://www.kff.org/mediafellows/>
- Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism: http://www.cartercenter.org/health/mental_health/fellowships/index.html
- US-Japan Foundation Media Grants: <http://www.us-jf.org/communication.php>
- Search the Foundation Center database for foundation funding (and use a fiscal sponsor if you're not a non-profit): <http://foundationcenter.org/>
- One resource on finding fiscal sponsors: <http://www.fiscalsponsordirectory.org/>