

NICAR Freelancers

Crowdsourced knowledge from the unstoppable folks at [NICAR17](#)
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Building a network

- Find allies and support among professional groups, especially ones narrowed down to your location or specialty
- Start your own group: I started a [local chapter](#) of [Hacks/Hackers](#)
 - Gave me an excuse to reach out to people instead of just "I'm new, let's hang out"
- Our favorite groups and resources
 - [SciLance](#), a science reporting list serv
 - only 35 folks, limited
 - you can ask if there are openings at conferences
 - keep it small to make it comfortable to talk about things you don't want shared widely
 - wrote a book together
 - [Hacks/Hackers](#), a journalism/tech meetup
 - more than 100 local groups around the world
 - [SPJ freelance community](#)
 - Facebook group open to anybody
 - international
 - also a page with freelance opportunities -- leads, fellowships, etc
 - [JAWS](#) - journalism and women symposium
 - has a lot of people who are indie journalists
 - people share info on the email list, for example, "Does anyone know an editor at ___?"
 - [Meetup.com](#) can be big, depending on your city
 - not specific to journalism, programming or data
 - a lot of women who code meetups in DC, for example
 - Binders Full of Full-Time Freelancers
 - mainly for women writers
 - secret group on Facebook, you must be invited
 - [NASW](#)
 - National Association of Science Writers
 - includes a freelance community
 - [Freelance Cafe](#)
 - open to all independent freelancers working in media

- the [NICAR email list](#)

Finding new gigs

- [Ijnet](#)
 - rolling list of international opportunities, typical jobs, fellowships, freelance gigs, scholarships
 - international-focused
- [Hackpack.press](#)
 - all sorts of opportunities (scholarships, clients, awards)
 - international-focused; items are broken out by continent
- International Journo slack channel
- [CAR Freelancers](#)
 - list of freelancers working in computer-assisted reporting
 - not sure who made this or where it came from
- [Rachel Schallom's](#) freelance [pitch database](#)
 - put together for a cohort of Fusion employees who were laid off
 - includes contact information, average word count, rates
- [DataJournalismJobs](#)
 - not updated very often, so a small sampling
- [Hacks/Hackers newsletter](#)
 - contains a weekly list of data/tech-related journalism jobs
- Set up alerts for freelance jobs on sites like [MediaBistro](#) and [JournalismJobs.com](#)

Engaging clients outside of your regular network

- Contacting editors directly, via email, is far more successful than filing a pitch via the public "submissions" option
- You could also try contacting the reporter working on that topic and ask to be put in touch with the correct people
- Put an open call for clients out on social networks, like alumni groups, just to get the word out there
- Ask friends for an intro at a new place
- Keep an eye out and keep track of new blogs that could become a source for contract work

Grants and funding

- There are often foundations or nonprofits for specialized topics, like food and environment reporting, that offer grants to do preliminary investigations
 - the amount depends on the pitch, could be \$1000 or \$500 to look into stuff
- It's helpful to get someone you know really well, then you can make a less involved and more informal pitch - less upfront work on your part
- Check for nonprofit reporting organizations in your geographic area or specialty area
- [ProFellow](#) offers a database of fellowships, not just journalism-focused

Doing research as an independent

- You can access a lot of databases through your public library, state library
 - one public library even has a bloomberg terminal
- Sometimes can still get access through university/alumni
- [Expertaccess.org](#) is a version of Lexis Nexis for freelancers
 - pay \$20/mo upfront for the whole year
 - they want more freelancers to sign up to prove it's a valuable service
- [GIJN's Help Desk](#) offers resources and databases
- [Data.gov](#) is a national repository of data
 - check for data portals in your city as well
 - watch for errors and limitations in how data is collected
 - Open Knowledge Foundation offers a [data census](#)
 - a list of city data resources and ranks them to get idea of what you can find
 - used to be run by the [Sunlight Foundation](#)
- Smaller, journalism or civic-based groups do their own data collection and dissemination
 - [California Civic Data Coalition](#)
 - [Code for America brigades](#)

The elephant in the room: Money

- Should you charge hourly? Per word? Fixed stipend?
 - If it's fixed, it's either going to work out really well for you or really bad for you. One side is getting a deal
- Not clear what is the going rate for freelance data reporting
 - One freelancer said he charges \$30/hr for bigger clients with national or international readership
 - One said \$20/hr for journalism work, \$50/hr for non-journalism work
 - One said \$1 per word, even for 1,000-word investigations

- This may be higher than what they are willing to pay; but ask for a high amount at the start
 - One employer said the floor on app development is \$75/hr
 - the ceiling depends on how good you are
 - The higher your tech proficiency, the more you get paid
- Recommended reading/watching:
 - [Design is a Job](#)
 - good for any freelancer, not just designers
 - [Fuck You. Pay Me](#)
 - helps get you in the right mindset, especially for beginning freelancers
- If a client is unacceptably slow to pay, threaten to have your lawyer call them (even if you don't have a lawyer)
 - Contrary to what you might think, this is a perfectly polite and professional way to handle the situation
- Sticking up for yourself when it comes to money does not actually reflect badly on the freelancer
 - In fact, it makes you seem more in-demand and serious about your work

Writing for trade publications

- Trade publications pay way better and see it more as a business and not "You should be glad you can write for me"
 - can be a good way to have a steady paycheck at a living wage
 - find a list of trade publications at your local library
 - ask a librarian!
- Think about what data will be of real value to their readers, understand their needs, their value to you
- Think about who the readers are, e.g., "Elevators Monthly" is for people who make elevators, not who ride them.
- Instead of "comfort the afflicted, afflict the comfortable", you're writing for the comfortable
- Try flipping a story for other publications -- e.g., elevator makers may want to know which states have hard regulations so they can avoid manufacturing elevators in those states
 - But regular readers may want to know about the safety implications

Paying taxes

- It may be worth the cost to get an accountant
- Could setup a one-person company as an LLC
 - have to weigh tax advantages versus liability advantages
- Watch out for indemnity clauses in contracts
- Track your business expenses and deductions with an app like [Quickbooks Self-Employed](#)