



2023 IMI AWARDS ANNOUNCEMENT

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Austin, TX—The Independent Media Initiative (IMI) today announces the first annual IMI Awards. The IMI Awards honor exceptional independent media creators across platforms to celebrate the intrinsic educational or artistic value of their work.

The Independent Media Initiative is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that helps people discover authentic educational and artistic content. Together we are building a public media ecosystem for the media of today: media made by people, for people. Read more about IMI on our [website](#).



2023 IMI Award Winners

Fusion Award

For long-term creation of exceptional content and leadership in the independent media community, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$250,000).

Awarded to Destin Sandlin and the channel “Smarter Every Day”. Since 2006, Sandlin has used YouTube to explore the world using science. Centering his hometown community in northern Alabama, Sandlin uses his storytelling ability and experience as a civilian US army missile engineer to share the engineering process with millions of people. Sandlin and Smarter Every Day have shaped a culture of curious, respectful and authentic content creation by organizing creator community events and mentoring dozens of creators. His leadership and creative force have been instrumental in building and sustaining educational scientific content as a genre on YouTube, and set the bar for exceptional educational content overall.



About the Fusion Award

Fusion is the process which powers the Sun and other stars, produces virtually all elements, and sustains the star against the pressure of its own weight which would otherwise collapse it. IMI’s Fusion Award recognizes individuals who spark and sustain movements in independent media over many years, honoring their service to the community and the power that they generate which sustains both audiences and creators alike.



Pioneer Award

For pioneering vision and service to the independent media community, fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000).

Awarded to Ryan Ng for the “YouTube New Wave” movement and the video “[Money Killed YouTube, Here’s How We Fix It](#)”. Ng’s autobiographical video essay is a vision for the future of media, in which a ‘new wave’ of story-driven YouTube creators disrupts the traditional media ecosystem and prevailing sensationalism of YouTube to become the next generation of filmmakers. In the last year, the hashtag #youtubenewwave has been tagged in over 2,400 videos from 796 YouTube channels, seeding a movement that continues to gain recognition in the independent media landscape.



Excellence in Audio or Video Reporting



For distinguished coverage of significant issues which serves the public interest using audio or video media, fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000).

Awarded to Erica Heilman for the podcast “Rumble Strip” episode “[Leland is Moving On](#)”. Heilman’s reporting captures deeply personal truths about life in rural Vermont. Heilman’s connection with her subjects over many years of reporting brings a global audience to the biggest and smallest concerns of her home town, and serves as a vehicle to bring her community together.



Excellence in Audio or Video Investigation

For distinguished investigative reporting using audio or video media, fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000).

Awarded to Jane Marie for seasons one and two of “The Dream” podcast. “The Dream” sharply revealed the exploitive and unaccountable nature of multilevel marketing and wellness industries, expertly blending Jane Marie’s personal experience with both industries with deeply researched investigative reporting.



Excellence in Storytelling

For distinguished storytelling in independent media, fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000).



Awarded to Van Neistat for the video “Running Sucks.” Neistat’s videos center mundane everyday tasks, which he masterfully elevates to poetic and self-reflective works of philosophy that inspire people to take action in their own lives.



Excellence in Audio or Video Composition

For distinguished arrangement of audio or visual elements in a piece of independent media, fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000).

Awarded to Anand Varma for “Jellyfish Revealed”. Varma’s work finds the untapped visual potential of scientific subjects. By blending scientific themes with an artist’s point of view, Varma constructs immersive experiences that engage the public with the unseen beauty of the natural world.



About the IMI Awards

The IMI Awards were established in 2023 to shine a spotlight on independent creators. The Awards were created in recognition of the power and ubiquity of independent media, and are the first prestige prizes awarded specifically to independent creators for the intrinsic value of media being created in the place where the modern world listens, reads and watches—the internet.

Award winners were selected on the basis of an “exceptional” piece of work or contribution to the independent media landscape, in the sense that no one “except” for them could have made it. The IMI Awards embrace the spirit and power of independent media, which allows individuals to share their skills, community, creativity and spirit directly with a global audience. The award includes a monetary prize in recognition of the substantial impact that award winners have had on society, and their potential to do so in the future.

The IMI Awards are “no strings attached” awards which do not require specific projects or reports from award winners, or evaluate award winners after the award is made. Award winners are selected on the recommendation of the IMI Board of Directors, with nominations solicited from a community of independent media creators and advisors.