

Minutes of Society of Environmental Journalists board meeting – Saturday, April 18, 2015
Redwood Room, DoubleTree by Hilton, 2001 Point West Way, Sacramento, CA 95815

Board members present: Ashley Ahearn, Jennifer Bogo , (First Vice Pres. & Programs Chair), Jeff Burnside (President), Douglas Fischer (Future Conference Sites Chair), Christy George (Board Secretary), Lizzie Grossman, Don Hopey (Treasurer & Finance Chair), Susan Moran, Robert McClure, Dave Poulsen (Rep. for Academic Membership), Kate Sheppard (Second Vice Pres. & Membership Chair).

Board members absent: Imelda Abana, Jim Detjen; Meaghan Parker (Rep. for Associate Membership), Mark Schleifstein, Roger Witherspoon

Staff present: Executive Director Beth Parke, Associate Director Chris Bruggers, Conference Manager Jay Letto

Guests: Former SEJ presidents Jim Bruggers & Carolyn Whetzel; SEJ members Hillary Corrigan, California Energy Markets & Muriel retired

Call to Order: President Burnside gaveled the meeting to order at 9:07 Pacific time.

President's Comments: Burnside leads applause for Carolyn Whetzel and event organizers from Capital Public Radio; lays out agenda for road map conversation, Ex-Com meeting, staff discussion of membership (Chris Bruggers) and conference (Jay Letto). Notes that SEJ-ers will attend the upcoming IRE conference and lead two panels: environmental storytelling & oil train issues.

January minutes adopted; Sheppard moves, Hopey seconds, with fixes (McClure present twice, add Abano, excise line in consent calendar that says FOI TF action by Parke).

Executive Director's report: Parke reminds board members to ask their companies for unrestricted gifts - an under-utilized source of money. Media companies can also provide conference support.

Letto: Media companies can also pay for lunch, events, diversity and other fellowships.

Parke: So can individual small donors, foundations and media companies.

Parke's budget report: cashflow doing all right; I always protect the board set-aside. She explains how the \$100,000 FJC grant works: we can use but must replenish the principal. it's there to float conference funding until we make it back or the checks arrives]. We can do a midyear correction if needed.

Programs: We'll have diversity fellowships this year. Conference finances are good because Oklahoma is our normal funding model,. Sacramento will require fundraising. Awards brought in new members but others dropped; will look at board giveaways; could waive dues for people we're recruiting for first year. In short, 2015 is a good year to look at strategy and policy.

McClure: what is Total Info Budget: operating funds/earned income?

Parke: The money we can do anything we want with; an indicator of health that shows where we're doing things that aren't funded.

McClure: Notes that all work is pending. That's a lot. Asks about the line regarding money going to endowment at end of year.

Parke: We take 5% of donor restricted money, per accountant. The board voted on it in January. I always look at quasi-endowment number & subtract it; explanation of index funds & why SEJ puts money there vs socially responsible funds or high-flying coal stocks.

Hopey: asks about cash basis revenue and expenses, earned income from press release distribution service?

Parke: It fluctuates, and it's unclear why it's up and down.

Other prospects: meetings in San Francisco with Hewlett and the Energy Foundation; The Wyss FEJ grant made news and got a great Inside Philanthropy article, which is especially good because tech people read that; Doris Duke Fdn sees we're trusted by other foundations like Grantham.

Road Map Discussion: Building a Team of Experts: SEJ Staff

Parke: After the board voted to give her \$50,000 for development work, she began thinking in terms of staff skill-sets: what we have and what we need. She huddled all day Thursday with senior staff (Chris & Jay) & used spreadsheets; will bring board up to speed on how to run a nonprofit business.

Summary of \$50,000 spending plan: maximize skill-sets of key staff; who's a consultant, who's staff per IRS rules; when Chris moved to Kentucky, we lost a key staffer, now able to come back on as staff; Jay stays a consultant because the conference is a big project; and he can do more, like conf fundraising. In the office, we have Jeanne Scanlan doing more, but will likely hire someone else who ideally knows SEJ's culture and has grant-writing skills.

We'll be able to up membership work, too. Lisa Cosgriff has spreadsheet skills; but most additional membership work will be Chris Bruggers.

Parke: All spending is on four-tracks. We need to get into the executive transition arc using the money. She wants a motion to allow her to tweak the Succession Plan with Ex-Com approval; and will be doing cross-training on skill-sets.

Board culture for nonprofit management; understand governance vs task roles; governance is ultimately the board's dominant role - policy-setting & oversight; give or get or be a doer; board

has relaxed because we have a strong ED; in the future, the board needs to be capable of setting reasonable performance goals; so 2015 will be board training year. Parke invites ex officio board members to chime in. The board needs to assess skill-sets that are needed; identify needed skills on the board and recruit people with those skills.

Letto: Six to eight months for hiring - possible ED? 3-5 year plan.

George: how fund new development person after year 1?

Parke: Yes, we'll need to find the money to keep a new hire on.

Ahearn: I'm glad to see someone assisting you; especially if that person is taking over Beth's job, but \$40,000 won't bring in the right person; so if thinking strategically, we need to get more money - \$65-70,000 and hire someone groomable for the ED job.

Letto: I didn't think this was mostly about this new hire replacing the ED.

Parke: Other groups in an ED transition have a crossover period of three to six months where the old and new ED work together. So we need a dowry, about \$150,000. New hires also need equipment - computers, travels, etc... which is why I've always protected the set-aside.

Whetzel: I've observed our chronic issues as journalists - we don't like asking for money; but we all get told no all the time so don't be afraid about being told no. Start small, it's a process of building up SEJ, and building up to an ask, small or big, possible options. The worst that can happen is they'll say no and you move on. Keep your eyes open to opportunities, start thinking about potential funders, just like we look for good potential members. If unsure how to approach someone, ask Beth. If you meet someone at a party, send them a note and offer to meet them to talk about our organization and how to support SEJ.

Grossman: Is there anything we're jotting on paper about transition time and overlap, because I know another organization with a bad transition.

Parke: You can take the cue from me when I actually give notice. I'm looking at the "leaderful organization" idea. There are firms that consult, but that's very spendy; the more we're prepared and thinking through ahead of time, the better.

Letto: There aren't a whole lot of groups that can do it this way. Look at three to five groups, and you'll see this is an opportunity most groups don't have.

Parke: The classic move is the old ED must leave town when the new ED comes in, but the thinking now is don't do that.

George: We should underscore that this is not a resignation now; and the new hire isn't necessarily meant to replace Beth.

Burnside: I'd like us to do committee follow-up conference calls right after board meetings.

Parke: I'd like the board to do a self-assessment, including reading through and identifying top things this board needs training on.

Jim Bruggers: SEJ has a strong board. I attended 62 board meetings. The first meeting I went to, I was welcomed with news we had \$40,000 in bank, but we went forward with the assumption that we'd raise the money and we didn't lay anyone off and we didn't have to - we found the money. I was 35 years old, had no management skills, no fundraising experience, I couldn't stand public speaking, and being on the SEJ board helped me build a whole bunch of skill-sets in service to a great organization.

I also found I had to push my ethical limits around fundraising. I went to the Goldman Foundation and raised \$115,000. I did things that made me uncomfortable at first, but made a transition in my approach. As a board member of an organization, you have responsibilities. It's different from news ethics. It was fun to pitch SEJ. I saw great board members, others extremely effective. We were more flush then, which allowed the organization to ride a bit, but as money

shrinks, we need board members to step up. When there's a vacancy, we targeted people who brought skills as opposed to pure democracy. We need to be sure we recruit good candidates, and have a great year. Be strategic. Your governance role is crucial - read the Bylaws and all the policies. I had some meetings with the original board, when the board voted on things like buying fax machines, then we tried to codify practices into policies for future boards. We had to purge PIOs, rethink membership policies; and the rule now is no paid public relations or environmental lobbying. We're recognizing the transformation in journalism, so we've better articulated definitions of lobbying and PR. I started listening to NPR pitches, and saw they have a broad range of funders, why not us? Board members had to dig down and really learn policies. The membership policies are hard. Use the actual Bylaws/guidelines, not your gut. Membership defines who we are.

George asks Jim what he thinks about a new membership category, without voting rights?

Jim Bruggers: If we create a non-voting category, eventually they'll get to vote, because board members will eventually feel it's an apartheid situation. Can they serve as officers? People didn't want the Sierra Magazine editor as SEJ president. We heard from NASW members who said when they loosened up membership, it changed the organization for the worse. SPJ meetings led me to SEJ. There's nothing more important than how you draw that circle. Changing the membership rules would be a watershed moment.

Letto: Bud Ward and I didn't fit into membership, so they created the associate membership. People would join without voting rights. What if they had one person on the board they can vote for, just like Associate and Academic reps?

Burnside: Are we talking about this issue now?

Kate: We will discuss after the meeting and put on the July agenda.

Jim Bruggers: Committees would bring proposals, pass them, then go to the Ex-Com for approval, then to full board. Membership changes would require a Bylaws vote by the full membership. One more thing - leadership development retreats are really great.

Hopey: The membership thing is a whole separate discussion.

Break

Burnside introduces Chris Bruggers for a her membership briefing; We could recruit old board members to run again; based on board self-assessment questionnaire and skill-sets we need.

Chris Bruggers: Over 25 years, I've seen big changes in membership, lobbying and PR. If work for an organization that does lobbying or does PR on environmental issues, they're eligible for associate membership. Recent shifts: bloggers who also post on their employer's environmental activity are doing environmental PR. We don't tell people they'll qualify for membership because they might not. Examples: someone worked for a university magazine but did some PR.

Grossman: What is the associate category? Why is Meaghan Parker's work for the Wilson Center okay and that magazine person not okay?

Chris Bruggers: Associate is primarily whether someone is doing journalism for an environmental organization. There's a loophole that says the Membership Committee of the board can okay someone who brings great skills to the board and doesn't do PR or lobbying. Meaghan Parker edits publications, but her employer isn't a news organization.

Burnside: Retired people?

Chris Bruggers: They continue as members in the category they were in when they were working. Joanne Valenti is retired, but she's still in the academic ,membership category.

Hopey: What about bloggers, new media etc..?

Chris Bruggers: Some freelancers have to do some PR to pay the rent. There's fuzzy stuff: for instance, a news organization with an action page. This isn't journalism. PR wasn't press releases, just get facts to news organizations. If someone posts info about the organization, that's PR.

Sheppard: What about Take Part?

Chris Bruggers: They're associate members.

Sheppard: How often do we reject someone?

Chris Bruggers: It comes and goes. Lately, we've been seeing a lot of people who have eligibility issues.

Parke: Government publications?

Chris Bruggers: It's very rare for them not to do PR.

Parke: Filmmakers and book authors?

Chris Bruggers: Generally they're considered actives. All of us can do PR on our own work. Documentary-makers mostly active members. Some films are activist.

George: But the point of view is not relevant. They can do PR if NOT on environmental issues.

AA: What about members of our Facebook page?

Chris Bruggers: It's a great group, but moderators delete lots of posts.

Parke: I'd like the board to tackle social messaging strategy, including the Facebook page.

Burnside: I encourage board members to post their work more frequently.

George: Could we post Joe Davis' EJToday stories?

Parke: No, that's micro-managing.

Poulsen: Students do PR on other department's research. Are they eligible?

Chris Bruggers: They'd be ineligible.

Burnside: Define the academic category.

Chris Bruggers: You must be a full-time member of a faculty who doesn't do PR with an interest in environmental issues.

Sheppard: So scientists can write a paper and be a member, but a Public Information Officer (PIO) who writes about the research can't?/

Everyone: Yes.

Burnside: Should we use the Membership Committee more?

Chris Bruggers: Only if I can't figure out a fuzzy; like a group that focused on water news only. The Membership Committee debated for ten months, and eventually declined. It was a tricky question.

McClure: The membership policies are quite clear, But the loophole? Unpaid PR?

Parke: That's okay. Our lawyer says we need to be super-consistent about enforcing policies.

Moran: I do side editing for Colorado University in Boulder.

Chris Bruggers/Parke: That's okay.

Burnside: Give us one sentence on each category.

Chris Bruggers: Active: full-time journalists, no PR or lobbying.

Associate: substantially engaged in journalism but not qualified for Active for other reasons, eg, the organization lobbies or does PR on environmental issues.

Academic: Full-time professors at accredited academic institution (universities, high schools) plus students.

Honorary: Because you've been a stud, but no voting ability.

Letto: Explains acceptable sources of conference funding: foundations, media companies; universities - those two main sources add up to \$200-300,000. The other half comes from registration, fee for services: exhibits, ads, registrations, foundation fellowships. University gifts go to fund direct expenses: buses, food, etc... - not staff. In a great year, we don't spend our earned income.

Letto: Anatomy of the Conference Year: conference organizers meet, meet with university, etc, get tours going, big stuff, then call for proposals from membership. We got 200 proposals for the Oklahoma conference, with lots of redundancy, so we winnow it down to 36 concurrent panels, maybe add a plenary. Then 50 or more members help organize pieces of the conference; 15-20 proposals on how scientists communicate with journalists; then we put out the SAM - Spring Ad Mailer - with a nearly full agenda. Jay finds moderators; during May-June we add in mini-tours, network meals. Also going on are exhibits, sales team, ride n' drives.

Letto: How we work with universities' desires; we balance bringing in new people vs tried and true; the firewall with the university is that the conference is by journalists for journalists but we

want the best of your researchers. By July, when all the tour leaders and moderators are totally delinquent, we get the university to offer people; by Aug 1st deadline. We have no budget for speakers, but we can do it. Maybe we can offer a tiny bit of money to get people there who couldn't come otherwise. Jay can often talk them into paying all or some. We can waive the registration fee for speakers for the day they speak. Members pay \$195; so we ask speakers to pay the member subsidized registration. lots of speakers do come to the whole conference. Those original 200 ideas winnow down to mini-tours, network lunches, all kinds of things.

Parke: The conference process has all kinds of different agendas, like member development.

Hopey: The future sites chair job intersects with the conference chairs.

Future Conferences Report

Burnside introduces Douglas Fischer, and notes that while he is a school board candidate, there are no environmental issues in his platform.

Fischer: It's an exciting point for Future Sites. We've gone from terrifying to exciting. Oklahoma is the traditional conference model; Sacramento is a new model, with Capital Public Radio as fiscal sponsor, and does fundraising; with a strong firewall. We can't take money from corporations, government, etc - which is why we partner with universities, and now public radio. The question is at what level of commitment do we plant the flag? We need to see half the conference paid for - at least \$200,000. Cap Radio only made a \$50,000 pledge. Grants we raise will cover the other half.

The Chattanooga model was similar, only with a newspaper foundation, and \$40,000 from the university partner, That was a scary conference; New Orleans was a fourth model - foundation-funded (Walton in New Orleans). They both came to the Lubbock conference - Walton & the University of Oklahoma. The challenge ahead is what model works best. Do we want to limit ourselves to universities? Or go where we want to go, like Washington, DC? New York? Or go where money is? I suggest we develop all options so we have a quiver of scenarios. The first question from partners is so we split the cost but SEJ keeps all the income? Another deal is we

bring the conference there, the university says how many people do we need to devote to this, and our answer is one. Plus development people. These are new relationships (funding sources) for our partners.

I'd like to see us leave a legacy, so we don't just roll out of town afterwards. Carnegie-Mellon University started a fellowship program for journalists after our 2004 conference. Oklahoma's j--school Gaylord has lots money. It would be fun to tie in our Freedom of Information Task Force - do an annual workshop there or something. The university would run it, but tap our expertise. It could be environmental reporting, whatever - we could seed programs all over the country.

Models for 2017: maybe export the radio sponsorship to Seattle or Syracuse, where there are strong public media outlets with development sectors, or newspaper foundations, for example in Louisville, there's the Gannet Foundation. If you have money in your community, connect us.

Burnside: The university model is not working; it puts the onus on SEJ to raise more money.

Moran: Colorado State is interested in hosting but not at half the cost. Their development people will help.

Burnside: We're dancing with Western Washington University on being a semi-partner.

Poulsen: Are other orgs doing other conference models?

Parke: Yes, our registration rates are way low. Catering is \$100K alone. Other organizations cut programming, and find sponsors.

Fischer: Lots of other organizations have sponsorships. Different models exist, but without the same restrictions SEJ has.

Parke: With our anchor funding concept, UC Davis's \$50,000 confirmed and Cap Radio's confidence.

Ahearn: Why not use university space?

Letto: We do, but there are lots of problems: football calendar, square footage, but if they work, great.

Break for lunch

Two rounds of committee meeting breakouts

Programs Committee Report

Jennifer Bogo: we discussed our social media policy, and the purpose of the SEJ Facebook page versus the members-only list-servs. The proposal to investigate: turning our Facebook page into an organizational page non-members can "like" but only members can post.

FEJ: Peter Thomson suggested creating another group or task force to create rules/handle organizational biz for FEJ.

Poulsen wonders if we should create an editorial position to handle it?

Parke: Yes, if we had money;

Grossman: Can we give honoraria to judges?

Parke: Yes, if we had money;

Bogo: Re: conference travel money - can we use half for diversity; half for young journalists?

Parke: I'm fundraising heavily for conference fellowships; maybe Oklahoma University money, maybe two scholarships for the National Association of Hispanic Journalists' Tulsa chapter; rest would be competitive; can keep fundraising; coverage required by Association of Health Care

Journalists? We're leaning on the Native American Journalists' Association for help with diversity fellowships; will let NAJA members register without joining SEJ. We could look at trying to match SEJ conference funds with tribal money to get more people to Oklahoma.

Finance & Fundraising Committee Report

Hopey: we have a draft proposal to create new rules on SEJ financial policies pertaining to FEJ.

Hopey moves, Burnside seconds

McClure: Why are we restricting to foundations and individual donors?

Ahearn: Can we restrict to stories that will go into a publication?

Parke: It's part of the editorial process, not the financial policies.

Ahearn: I'm uncomfortable with the third bullet creating new staff positions.

Bogo: Is this a workaround for SEJ serving as fiscal agent?

Parke: I'd like a competitive fund for the positions.

Grossman and McClure don't like this idea.

Fischer: I'd like it kept in there, to see if there are five more.

Burnside: It's ironic that we're trying to limit something made possible by a big grant to create journalism jobs.

Sheppard: It's okay with me to fund positions.

Grossman: The beat idea allows SEJ to cover something beyond a single article/project; the idea is to fund ongoing coverage, a three-part series, six months of work, etc...

McClure calls the question.

Hopey: We're in the imperfect world of 21st Century journalism, Mark Schleifstein's point is to focus on more and better environment coverage.

The motion carries with nine Yeas, with Grossman and Ahearn abstaining.

Hopey: The committee discussed creating a 25th anniversary fundraising subcommittee - Don, Kate, Jen. The fundraising effort for Valentine's Day brought in contributions from 86 members.

Future Sites Committee Report

Fischer: This is a task-oriented committee again; we've got prospects in the pipeline for 2017, and we need to solidify by summertime.

Letto on the 2015 conference: It's a great conference team, conference is in great shape, John Podesta's office wants to come to give a keynote on climate change. He's Hillary's guy, and is engaged with us. Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK) wants to come; EPA Chair Gina McCarthy is a no-go but Podesta might come. That could leverage Hillary for 2016. It's definitely happening: Seth will moderate a plenary on climate change and extreme weather; we've got Kathryn Sullivan of NOAA (and ex-astronaut); big Native American event on opening night with several tribes; a friendship dance, we'll serve traditional native foods; we've lined up a Sioux chef, and it will have lots of substance: we're trying to line up Winona LaDuke and a global indigenous voice via satellite; we'll be celebrating our 25th anniversary and Jim Detjen is very involved; Bob Engelman may moderate a World Resources Institute panel; Rae Tyson, etc... Saturday night we'll party at the Noble Museum of Natural History, with a great dinner, and good red dirt band,

SEJ's 25th Anniversary Planning

Parke asks for a brief brainstorm: 20th anniversary was a lot of fun but not substantive - maybe during awards, we could do Jeff's thing on ripple effect of all the journalism SEJ-ers have committed.

Grossman: New Orleans was a really long Wednesday night program, let's keep it short.

Fischer: How about an SEJ poster session? Interactive?

Letto: Randy Lee Loftis is prepared to emcee Saturday night, and make people stand up for year they joined.

Hopey: We need to do a fundraising pitch at lunch - have founders up at the microphones.

Bogo: How about a data visualization; have iPhones send our join year to a central graphic?

George: A founder film?

Sheppard: Younger members on SEJ's next 25 years?

Moran: A visual of key milestones?

Grossman: Collect the numbers of books written by SEJ members, films produced, etc... for data visualization, and use news organization logos.

Ahearn: Local membership get-togethers for beer, happy birthday from Seattle, etc...and cut it all into one film?

Sheppard: A wall or whiteboard where everybody can post their vision for next 25 years?

Letto: A site to order t-shirts now with the anniversary logo?

Grossman: Make sure it's not a sweatshop.

George: Create a time capsule for 25 years hence?

Fischer: We've got 2016 well in hand; thanks to Carolyn Whetzel, Chris Bowman, Beth Parke, and Joe Barr and Craig McMurray of Cap Radio. For 2017 and 2018 - we really need to nail down something firm. What will the board feel comfortable with in terms of potential partner commitment? It used to be a firm \$200,000 pledge.

Possibilities for 2017 and 2018: Louisville (Jim Bruggers, the Courier-Journal, and the University of Louisville); Pittsburgh (Don Hopey, the University of Pittsburgh as lead, with Chatham University as a second) - they've invited us for a board meeting in July; Seattle (Jeff Burnside and Ashley Ahearn/Western Wash University is okay to be fiscal agent, and the Bullitt Foundation will hire a fundraiser to make it work). If one of these teams can raise \$50,000 by summer, do we go?

Chris Bruggers: 25,000 Baptists were in town in New Orleans and if that happened again, our members wouldn't have a place to stay,

McClure: Why not a Seattle conference at a Sea-Tac hotel?

Fischer: It would be hard to do beat dinners for SEJ and IJNR, go running, or explore the city. We need the money first. Other farther out possibilities with engineering schools: Syracuse University, University of Minnesota, with the Walton Foundation and its interest in the other end of the Mississippi River; and Colorado State.

Sheppard gives the Membership Committee report;: We have 1190 members; 14 events took place in February and we talked about how to simplify the application process - Chris is working on implementing changes. We're determined to do more outreach to members before they lapse - those to be dropped after one year of nonpayment of dues. The board initiative to award two comp memberships not complete, only two have been identified.

The Audubon awards event gave us a bunch of people we might target for membership; and last, an idea from Dave Poulsen: free memberships to the top two environmental journalism students; one-year free academic/associate membership. We could use Michigan State University's Knight Center for Environmental Journalism as a pilot.

Hopey: Students are an underserved niche; environmental studies students are also interested in SEJ, and that dovetails with our interest in Pitt.

SEJ Awards Program Briefing

Chris Bruggers: Since 2001, we've been trying to hit 300 entries in our contest. This year we got two entries from Playboy!

Mentoring Program Briefing

Dawn Stover and Jane Braxton Little arrived and reported on their high-level meetings at the dog park. The last conference brought together mentor-mentee pairs, new applications for collaborative projects; so we wondered how can we expand on those energies. Two proposals.

1) Parallel partners: match US-foreign journalists, foreign reporting and US-based publications; lead journalist would present proposal and apply for a partner, which would bring international issues to the US public; understand related US issues, bolster stature of foreign journalists with a byline in a US outlet. Through the Fund for Investigative journalism, Jane and Dawn already have been finding mentors for international journalists; freelancers an on hourly basis - 8-10 hours per mentor search. Also would raise money for travel for projects.

Letto: Go to Meaghan Parker at the Wilson Center?

McClure: Why not have the US reporter travel?

Stover: The US reporter might not go there

Braxton Little: She (Parker) inspired this idea.

Proposal # 2) Across the Great Divide - many experienced journalists have great research skills, others have great multi-media skills but lack clips and contacts. An experienced journalist would pitch a multi-media project; the mentoring program would solicit applications from tech-savvy partners and make a match to do projects like data journalism, maps, charts, etc...

George: Data journalism is very hot; maybe a partnership with the Online News Association, which probably needs funding?

Moran: We could partner with Reggie Dale at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Grossman: SEJ-ers are already partnering on US-international story ideas.

Parke: Send all these ideas to me - they all sound fundable; The Fund for Investigative Journalism gets money, so why not get a piece of that?

Burnside: Sets tentative board meeting in Pittsburgh - June 26-27th.

Burnside moves to go into executive session. Hopey seconds. Motions passes with one nay (McClure).

Resume regular meeting.

New business: Hopey invites people to his cabin after the June board meeting in Pennsylvania.

George: If anyone has notes from the membership meeting in New Orleans, please share.

Meeting adjourns at 5:10 pm.