

Minutes of the Society of Environmental Journalists Board meeting - Saturday, June 27, 2015
University of Pittsburgh, Benedum Hall, first floor, 4200 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Board members present: Ashley Ahearn, Jennifer Bogo, Jeff Burnside, Douglas Fischer, Christy George, Gloria Gonzales (incoming), Lizzie Grossman, Don Hopey, Susan Moran, Meaghan Parker, Dave Poulson, Mark Schleifstein, Kate Shepard

Board members absent: Imelda Abano (outgoing), Jim Detjen, Robert McClure & Roger Witherspoon

Staff present: SEJ Associate Director Chris Bruggers, SEJ Executive Director Beth Parke

8:55 call to order - Jeff wonders if starting 5 minutes early sets a record.

Motion #1: Douglas moves to accept minutes, Don Hopey seconds.

Motion passes unanimously.

President's Comments/Jeff: thanks Imelda Abano for her service.

Motion #2: Jeff moves the board accept Imelda's resignation, Kate seconds.

Motion passes unanimously.

Motion #3: Jeff moves the board accept the appointment of Gloria Gonzales to fill the interim vacancy until October, Mark seconds.

Motion passes unanimously.

Gloria: I began working on environmental issues six years ago, and then found SEJ - a great resource: information, tools, network, so it's an exciting opportunity to give back by joining board.

Jeff talks about how the University of Pittsburgh found out about our need for a conference back in April and we are now considering an offer from them in June. It shows the importance of board members promoting SEJ.

Mark: IRE is in New Orleans next year, and SEJ will have a presence.

Kate: I will attend NAJA for a day.

Beth: Our roots were in IRE. Market SEJ everywhere.

Jeff, Lizzie, Chris B, Ashley, Don, Dave, Kate, Gloria, and Meaghan discuss to whom they've given free membership giveaways. Some are already working on SEJ projects. Others have yet to respond, so if they're not sufficiently interested, move on. Chris will send us a link to new Join page, people fill out info with understanding they will be comped, and be sure to tell Chris who you've nominated. Jeff congratulates board for finding folks, something we should keep doing even after freebies gone.

Membership report/Chris B: retooled the "Join" process, combining join and vetting forms; making sure new members know their first year was half-price so they don't get sticker shock the second year, and now some are re-upping, including new international members.

Discussion: Jeff suggests we think like a company and be dedicated to customer service.

Chris B: The renewal process is also streamlined by using Survey Monkey and then to payment site. Then all the steps for joining, being welcomed, and a check-in to see if they're using SEJ resources. Would be great if board members would welcome newbies when they join. We also do a six-month follow up. Encourage them to get on SEJ-Talk.

Meaghan: How about a short survey at six months?

Chris: Great idea, can Meaghan work on what to ask? Also plan to visually spruce up Join page.

Ashley: Why allow people to log in without joining?

Chris: They get more information about SEJ, and we get information about people.

Ashley: Why not make one trail toward membership, and only offer registration if they're not eligible for membership?

Beth: We need photos of faces to entice people in, send pictures to SEJ's Web Content Manager Cindy MacDonald.

Executive Director's Report/Beth: Road Map update - bringing Chris Bruggers back full-time helps with membership experience, also helping SEJ Records Manager Lisa Cosgriff get trained, fresh eyes on our processes. The last four years been very tough. Chris B. left town & became a consultant; but money is going to SEJournal editor Adam Glenn; first assignment is about media money, starting with media outlets who've won awards; also looking at a grant project, total about half spent, money next. Lisa is great, will hire someone later to replace Dale Willman, who's going to Sudan. Kevin Beatty will be paid hourly to fill in for Dale on AV crew at hotel, recording sessions, at Wed. workshops (with hotel people), Jay confident about other elements Dale helped run (tours, advance planning). We can hire more help if necessary.

Program highlights - NYC event huge, amazing; couldn't sustain staffing lots of regionals, this one looks good. Originally former board member Emily Gertz's idea, Adam Glenn helped, Jenny, Gloria and Kate helping now. Technology makes bar higher. Good to see member-driven events re-emerging. Trying to do a lot around diversity in Oklahoma, board can put out messages to register now. Go to talk and freelance to hype your sessions.

10:15-10:30 Break

Beth: FEJ going strong. Upcoming deadlines: conference diversity fellowships 7/7, FEJ deadline 7/15 and conference discount 8/1. Watchdog survey coming in late July, working with Drexel University - can do more.

Lizzie: We could reach out to PIOs we deal with.

Dave: How about a Canada Watchdog Tipsheet?

Christy: A special Canada 'dog edition?

Finance report/Beth: The board has fiscal responsibility for SEJ's finances; describes fiscal tick-tock - what money comes in when; funded programs, partially funded, need to raise it all. One revenue source is relatively untapped - unrestricted gifts from any source; board can do more to raise money; be thinking about where board members could be part of the engine; telling the story is the main thing - we're all good at that, making the ask is just the last step; or get prospects to the pre-ask point so Jeff or Beth can make the ask; maybe create a "grant factory" section on Basecamp. Beth goes through details on charts of budgets, grants, etc...

Discussion: Christy notes she saw the board begging for training on the recent survey results.

Beth: We need to raise enough money to pay both me and a new ED for six months; same for Chris & SEJ Conference Manager Jay Letto. Succession planning is a two-year process.

Discussion about role-playing new ED & his/her responsibility - 3 months, 6-months.

Meaghan urges we role-play on fundraising.

Chris: You guys would be great at making the case.

Susan: Watch Glengarry Glenn Ross! It's a bit frustrating not to know HOW to fundraise.

Don: On Basecamp, the 25th anniversary campaign section includes talking points for media sponsorships, which also work for individual gifts.

Kate: I don't know the people who give money.

Beth: We all know media companies - you need to find out who has the ability to write a check. Get an informational meeting with someone involved in fundraising. Identify what the potential donor wants, identify shared goals. □

Lizzie: Could we get assignments of people already on an SEJ list?

Douglas: Think small at first, exhibits, small gift, work up the chain.

Meaghan: Report on what we've done at board meetings?

Susan: Some people may prefer doing research to asking, etc...

Jennifer: For fundraising assignments, let's have a spreadsheet.

Kate: I need more guidance about what she does vs Beth, need feedback.

Beth: I'll ask people what category they want, grants, media company asks, individual gifts, advertisers/exhibitors, prospecting.

Don: It would be great to see that involvement, start slow & low, 25th anniversary committee already has an ask letter, talking points and an immediate deadline, 4-5 targets per board member, Don in charge.

Lizzie: Do publications run by nonprofits get the same ask?

Christy asked for a show of hands on barriers to asking (journalistic ethics, ignorance of process, have psychological trouble asking for money generally in life); can Beth assess different categories of givers by most bang for the buck; need a primer on why donors want to give money.

Meaghan: Distinguish between viable and easy to sell. The issue is, can we take money for diversity?

Beth: The Board has restricted sponsorship of events.

Christy: We also want transparency of donors, so can we thank corporations on our website for providing funds for diversity fellowships?

Douglas: What about sponsorship of diversity?

Beth: Whatever happened to philanthropy?

Chris: It's easy to put together a package for the \$5K.

Beth: Is there a market for philanthropy?

Lizzie: If we're investing in training, should we do it after board turns over?

Beth: Everyone will hear from Don regarding 25th anniversary fundraising; and a handful of people will help with foundations & ad sales.

25th anniversary fundraising committee/Don Hoey: You can read about details of three conference calls since April, Jim Detjen inviting founders & offering to comp registration, trying for \$25K in large donations for members to match; Looking for more big fish potential donors. Founder recognition at Oklahoma conference on Wed, Fri lunch & membership mtg & at Sat party. Asking former host universities & past conference chairs. Founder & donor ribbons. Don, Beth, Jim D & Christy on the committee, will decide whether to comp registration.

HOTSHEET: everyone has two targets.

Discussion: Christy notes that the Board has often sought balanced funding, e.g., Edison Electric Institute, and Environmental Working Group.

Douglas: How about donor ribbons for everyone who's given?

Jeff: Adam wants to do a story on founders for fall SEJournal; founder profiles.

Meaghan: At registration, how about a board to give, get a ribbon and sign a big birthday card?

Jennifer: Karen Ireland at NRDC is a great sketch artist.

12:06 Lunch break

Committee breakout rounds 1 & 2

Finance & Fundraising Committee Report/Don: We have a \$105,000 shortfall for 2016 fiscal year. Doesn't cover new staff, or ability to cover two salaries for transitions in staff succession. We've discussed possible development director, to help float funding coming into every conference season. Would require bylaws changes.

Programs Committee Report/Jenny: We're focused on social media, propose SEJ's Facebook strategy: a) Facebook group, members-only, and; b) Facebook page, asking current non-members to "like," and be able to comment but not post. Objectives: grow awareness, amplify members' work; reduce need for constant administration and purging. Also discussing starting a members only Instagram account. Visible to everyone, but password protected to limit posts to hashtags. Need language to lay out goals, impact and practices. Also an over-arching social media policy.

HOTSHEET: do by July 31.

Douglas: It would be fascinating to see how these morph; it could replace SEJ-Talk.

Meaghan: Is there any way to monetize Twitter or Facebook?

Dave: Andy Revkin warned that DotEarth sometimes got ads for Exxon.

Membership Committee Report/Kate: discussed ongoing work, seeing bump in members from comped memberships, discussed board member funding in the future. Kate would like the board to pass this now, so new board members running in October would understand they have to recruit, and, ideally, pay.

Motion #4: To continue board complimentary memberships going forward

A motion is to establish that board members will be expected to recruit and sponsor two new members each year. The first-year membership dues will be covered by a pool of money donated by board members, with a goal of collecting \$1,200 per year to fund the complimentary memberships. Board members will contribute a suggested donation of \$80 each per year (as they are able) to support this program.

Kate moves, Ashley seconds.

Motion passes unanimously.

Motion #5: To establish a student award membership program.

A motion to establish an SEJ Emerging Journalist award program wherein SEJ members or academic institutions underwrite one-year, academic memberships for both undergraduate and graduate students who show promise in environmental journalism and who are at least one year away from graduation. Universities will develop the criteria and selection process, and SEJ will provide a congratulatory letter and certificate to the awardees.

Kate moves, Susan seconds.

Discussion: Dave Poulson discusses his proposal. He says academic members could underwrite or ask their institution for money. Goal is to offload the work to sponsoring universities to pro-

tect SEJ staff. Membership in SEJ replaces a plaque, and students can be put on resume. Typically these kinds of awards go to graduating seniors, but those students often take non-journalism jobs. So we are considering requiring students to be more than a year from graduating. Downsides: universities would prefer giving to a senior. One-year specialized grad school programs wouldn't have people eligible.

Motion passes unanimously.

Future Sites Committee Report/Douglas Fischer: University of Pittsburgh letter in packet regarding 2017 conference. Douglas recommends we accept the offer, pending a successful financial agreement.

Motion #6: Douglas moves that the board accept the University of Pittsburgh's invitation for a 2017 conference in Pittsburgh, contingent upon successful execution of a co-signed agreement with the university. Christy seconds.

Discussion: Douglas: the university's letter does not specify an overarching dollar number, but does say Pitt will cover catering, transportation, A/V, etc.. if the conference is held on campus. And either way, the university will cover all printing costs. Vigorous discussion of location.

Douglas: Re: on-campus vs off - extraordinary spaces on campus; but missing any single hotel large enough to accommodate everyone. It's also harder on staff. Replenishing microphones, water, nametags, etc - are all much harder if scattered. Downtown conference all in one place, great hotel, park on the river, more sterile. Hotel costs \$30/night cheaper downtown.

Chris B: Our hosts would like us to be on campus, and would try to make it work.

Beth: Downtown hotel is cheaper \$155, on-campus is \$189, and extremely difficult for staff.

Chris: In New Orleans we had one hour to move hundreds of 50 lb boxes. Sounds like the University of Pittsburgh would supply person power to make that happen. Need to crunch numbers to get a true cost comparison.

Lizzie: Oklahoma and Sacramento conferences will be in strip mall places.

Kate: Would a downtown conference affect university support?

Mark: I got the impression that the university didn't put a dollar amount in the letter because they need to figure out each option.

Beth: It's a cash issue.

Meaghan: Staff is advance logistics support. I trust you to weigh all the consequences. Exhibitors need to be part of the equation.

Don: Ten years ago at Carnegie Mellon University, I was adamant about wanting an on-campus conference to take advantage of access to students, the college, and the Oakland atmosphere. That said, it's ten years later, and downtown Pittsburgh is much different. Hotels downtown are really nice, near an urban state park, restaurants, bars, nightlife - also true here on campus. I've reluctantly come to the conclusion slightly in favor of downtown: everyone would be together, in a really nice hotel facility, We would also want to get people to Oakland as much as possible, on Wed, for tours and mini-tours Thu and Sat, our Sat party might be here, and Sunday end of conference event could be here. Works either way. Speakers coming in from airport are easier at a downtown hotel. Revenue picture is better downtown - exhibit space is way better, and there's no penalty for doing plenaries & parties offshore. Also, at the reception, we'd get several representatives from downtown & regional groups, could offset reduced support from university.

Douglas: To counter, a beautiful hotel downtown is still a hotel, could bus people here. The university energy level would be less downtown. Would like to see how two columns pencil out.

Don: The distance is only 4-5 miles. Could help with SEJ's influence over programming.

Jeff: The campus vibe a great thing, but this is as close as we can get.

Mark: Can we let Beth decide what's best for SEJ?

Motion to hold 2017 conference at the University of Pittsburgh passes unanimously.

Motion #7: Jeff moves Don as conference chair, Ashley seconds.

Motion passes unanimously.

Motion #8: Jeff moves Jenny Bogo as co-chair, Douglas seconds.

Motion passes unanimously.

New Business

Beth: We're redoing our strategic plan, listening to a lot of thoughts around the next generation of journalism, diversity efforts. Will draft an update for board renewal.

Meaghan wants to do a new member orientation in Oklahoma on Wed.

Meeting adjourned at 5:10pm.