

Virtual meeting of the board of the Society of Environmental Journalists. Convened at 12:06pm EDT July 26, 2014.

Board members present:

Don Hopey, Board President

Jennifer Bogo

Jeff Burnside, VP, Programs

Christy George, Secretary

Emily Gertz

Robert McClure

Meaghan Parker, Associate Rep.

Dave Poulson, Academic Rep.

Mark Schleifstein, 2014 Conference Chair

Kate Sheppard

Carolyn Whetzel, Treasurer

Roger Witherspoon

Board members absent:

Imelda Abano

Ashley Ahearn, VP, Membership

Jim Detjen, Founding President

Douglas Fischer, Future Sites Chair

Staff Present:

Beth Parke, SEJ Executive Director

Members present:

Zeeshan Shah

Approval of Minutes

Moved by Burnside & seconded by Witherspoon

Motion approved unanimously, pending a few changes

President's Overview - Don Hopey

The SEJ-IJNR shale gas reporting event was very successful. Attendees got to a fracking site and a compressor station. Special thanks to Dale Willman, Carolyn Whetzel, Bobby Magill and Beth Parke.

Witherspoon – McCormick supported Poynter webinar involvement

What to watch re budget: NOLA attendance, exhibitor income and member involvement

Sell ads! Till last week of August when program goes to printer

Membership report - Don Hopey

Hopey: The join-drop numbers are getting close to even for the first time in a long time.

Bogo: question about member ideas – are new categories discussed in April happening?

Whetzel: we can put it on agenda for membership meeting in NOLA.

Executive Director & Treasurer's Report – Beth Parke & Carolyn Whetzel

Parke: Great. Leadership development is key for the future. Every member should recruit new members.

Nexis project is in limbo, so not firm enough to discuss at membership meeting.

New inquiry in west about similar things as Heinz project.

Election topic is also leadership.

The university pledge has been very helpful; because it's grant money this year, we can use it to cover staff time, tip sheets, other costs not normally usable.

Next year in Oklahoma, we'll need to look for new grants: weather, energy, climate, Native American issues. Project grants come after you cover the basics with unrestricted money, which leverages the project grants.

Whetzel: We need to look for funding opportunities – more grants, keep SEJ in limelight (FOI work), will do conference pitch. The audit looks good. What we need are individual/corporate gifts.

McClure: Give examples of individual gifts board members could get?

Parke: Last year we dipped into reserve; this year we're hoping NOLA will put more into earned income reserve. Unrestricted gifts - you can go to anyone. Selling ads is the easiest thing board members can do. Frank Maisano's group, for instance, gives every year. Westinghouse gave last year, Boeing could give an unrestricted gift. NRDC could give one, too.

Whetzel: Ads are easier for board members – there's no journalistic conflict.

Witherspoon: Will there be test-drive cars this year?

Parke: GM is bringing cars to drive. The goal is to talk to people, companies, groups, who already “get” SEJ, have worked with us & understand the need to fund environmental media.

Whetzel: Maybe we can do something around SEJ's 25th anniversary. Unrestricted and earned income give us so much bang for the buck.

Parke: There's a big transfer of wealth going on right now. Donor-advised funds is the new trend – how do we get SEJ in front of wealth advisors? It's an investigative journalism project. PEW & Ted Turner's daughter Laura may be in New Orleans.

Bogo: How do we approach our parent companies? Examples of language?

Parke: Corporate giving is the hardest, but ads & service sales (membership list rentals) are the easiest entry point for new board members.

Gertz: Freelance members outstrip every other category. It's still hard to explain how SEJ helps freelancers.

Witherspoon: We're a journalists collective; it's like having a newsroom.

Gertz: I don't get services from SEJ I'd get from a newsroom: liability insurance, helping us get paid, purchase plans for computers/other services discounted. I see the same voices over and over again on list-serv, there are fewer mentors.

Whetzel: Our nonprofit status is educational, which limits many of those things.

Hopey: (Board member) Kate Sheppard and (member) Zeeshan Shah just joined the call (at 9:45)

Whetzel: We looked at what we could do for freelancers, insurance, etc. – but it's hard given our nonprofit status.

Hopey: Beyond services, I want to get back to money. Freelancers talk to lots of people who are potential SEJ funders.

Gertz: Excellent point, should be clear to members.

Schleifstein: This gets back to the balkanization of the SEJ-Talk & SEJ-Freelance list-servs. Insurance and benefits are an issue. Staff reporters are going through lots of same problems. A lot of time we're in the same spot as freelancers, could use trainings.

George: The Freelance Task Force could look at new issues.

Whetzel: We already looked at buying incentives. We'd need 5000 people to get discounts.

Witherspoon: The membership committee could look at it.

Whetzel: Look at the audit & the 990 filing – how SEJ functions, DONE WELL.

McClure: Please read financial documents.

Parke: SEJ has three accounts: operating, permanently restricted and board-restricted. That's our backup, how I sleep at night. (Parke explains how she tracks year-to-date, etc...)

(Zeeshan Shah left the meeting & came back)

Whetzel moves to accept the audit report and the 990 filing.

Schleifstein seconds.

Parke: Board is approving the 990 this year so it's in the minutes. In the past, the Audit Committee, which Roger chairs, approves, and they approve it.

Board unanimously approves the audit report and the 990 filing.

Future Sites, Programs & Projects report: Parke, Hopey

Parke: Oklahoma conference agreement signed in January.

Parke: We had a nice meeting Monday at Gaylord, working with all the right people. Worked closely with Nexis through the spring. We hear their Seattle funder isn't coming through. This proposal was part of a cluster of things. Nexis is moving on to other prospects. The budget was always speculative, but I'm still hopeful about ultimate funding. This is the kind of thing freelancers might like (alho there would still be controversy.) Could lift up everybody – freelance and news organizations. We could discuss the Pennsylvania project at the membership meeting in New Orleans, also Climate Nexis at the 50K-foot level. The board is looking at projects that would create jobs/work. Two different feasibility studies – Dale Willman talked to 30-40 small news outlets about collaborative reporting. Phase 2 of the grant defined a territory, chose W-NW part of state, ten smaller newspapers – Altoona, Erie & Greenburg section of News Review. Looked at two models: one reporter embedded in a paper and sharing. Other model to house that journalist at Penn State University, and involved grad students. It's a 3-yr project, news organizations kick in fair market stringer fees & then SEJ steps away. It's a solid plan. Like the FERN network – they cover and syndicate food/ag reporting. We want to create a reporting network. The study we did gives us more credibility as consultants to funders looking for ideas.

Hopey: There's a need for informed reporting on issues. And a need for training for smaller reporting outlets.

Parke: Michigan State University is doing stuff. We have a special relationship to issues that might matter to certain schools.

Poulson: This is our model – students and professionals reporting. We're extremely interested, want to read that report.

Parke: You need to identify the Michigan players.

Poulson: We want to expand to another public affairs reporting.

Parke: We could set up a livestream event.

Poulson: It gets messy really quickly, trying to connect with public broadcasting.

Parke: FOI grant is up for renewal with McCormick. They've never given above \$50K/year, but they're consistent. The renewal request is more aggressive about filing FOIs, working with coalition, and direct work negotiating with EPA, FOI member training and coaching.

McClure: Why hasn't anything changed? They started to look at funding an evaluation of SEJ's FOI program. Beth asked instead for money to have consultants for focus groups, and targeted surveys.

Parke: We've got incident reports, like Lisa Song's story

Gertz: A success metric is how other agencies deal with journalists, like NOAA.

Parke: We could do a report card, with criteria you check off.

Burnside: CNN host Natalie Allen will co-host awards this year.

Parke: The winners are selected, announcements are going out next week. We had a big number of entries this year.

Burnside: It seems the number of entries bear no relationship to the amount of the cash awards. Should we talk about recognizing 2nd-3rd place?

Bogo: Do we pay for winners' travel?

Parke: Who will pay? Do you want to use the board set-aside, funders' money?

Hopey: Let's postpone discussion on this.

Schleifstein: It's been hard to get plenary people to the conference as usual, otherwise we're pretty set.

Burnside: I'd like to see no idling busses.

Schleifstein: I will discuss that with Jay and the bus company. EPA people are coming. We wanted a Public Information Officer roundtable, but Gina McCarthy said no – she's scheduled to be elsewhere. Assistant administrator Nancy Stoner may come. We were frustrated because we had friendly conversations with McCarthy, then she disappeared.

McClure: Every board member should thank Nancy Stoner.

Schleifstein: We did it last time with Gina McCarthy. Also negotiating with British Petroleum for a senior rep on the agenda. First they said we'd have the BP-America CEO, now we're down to a deputy who's been an official spokesperson. We may need to rearrange the schedule. We're looking for balance – a scientist, an environmental person of stature. They're saying it'll be a major speech (about the good things they've done).

Parke: Is that appropriate on Wednesday night?

Schleifstein: We're negotiating with John Holdren, trying for Wed night. Please use social media to promote the conference.

Hokey: The biggest question is who's the Saturday night party band?

Schleifstein: We're still negotiating. Could be jazz brass band (local) or a Latin band (the Iguana) – they're all good.

Parke: The Oklahoma conference is in good shape, we have a site visit the first week of November including the election. Sacramento is looking excellent – no cash yet, but Capitol Public Radio are great partners. The top brass is happy with our business model idea. Development director Craig MacMurray is okay with it. The new VP at UC Davis is on board, and the university may pledge \$50K. I'm feeling confident about seeking permission to move ahead with the necessary agreements – hotel, university, Capital Public Radio, and Carolyn Whetzel are all part of this.

President Hokey asks for a motion to empower Executive Director Parke to negotiate contracts and agreements for a 2016 Sacramento conference.

Schleifstein moved, Bogo seconded.

Parke: We can make this happen.

Whetzel: Joe Barr, Capitol Public Radio's News Director, is willing to co-chair.

Hokey calls the question on giving Beth Parke the authority to sign agreements, and it's approved unanimously.

McClure makes a motion to appoint Carolyn Whetzel and Joe Barr conference co-chairs. Witherspoon seconds.

Board unanimously approves Carolyn Whetzel and Joe Barr as Sacramento co-chairs.

New Business:

Parke: The board candidates are Lizzie Grossman, Bobby Magill, Susan Moran, Roger, and Emily. If board members step down after the election, the board can appoint someone, not necessarily the next runner-up. SEJ Bylaws set a minimum and a maximum number of board members, so you could add, e.g., Oklahoma conference co-chairs Nancy Gaarder and/or Sarah Terry-Cobo.

Hopey: membership issue thoughts?

Burnside: agree with Whetzel to do a brainstorming session at conference, especially about our 25th anniversary.

Hopey: It would be good to look at areas where we don't have many members.

Parke: We want to support people. We want people who are behind the mission of SEJ.

Bogo: Media memberships – did we vote last time on the MOM membership?

Hopey: Not this year, we need to research, and adjust the numbers downward (less than ten, less than 3-5).

Parke: We could do a drive with NASW or another group to do a special discount.

George: We already have a 25th anniversary group of volunteers.

Parke: We could do a conference call, make lapel pins for a year-long campaign to boost membership.

Whetzel: Or put ribbons on badges.

Hopey: I'd like to see us note our 25th year in New Orleans. How about an historical photo montage – next 25 years.

Parke: Most stuff we can kick off in January, and on our Valentine's Day birthday, and then have the big event in Oklahoma. Let's meet next week in a conference call so we can order pins or whatever in time.

Whetzel & Hopey also volunteered.

Hopey: I've lost the Webex main page but I want to establish meeting dates and times in NOLA.

Parke: Sept board meetings will be short. **I suggest convening a short, virtual board meeting between September & January.**

President Hopey asks for a motion to move into executive session to discuss Executive Director Parke's annual performance review.

Witherspoon moves, Whetzel seconds.

Into Executive Session at 2:35pm PDT.

RM moves to come out of Executive Session, Whetzel seconds.

Hopey brings the board back into regular session at 2:58 PDT.

Whetzel: We've got good energy, let's get everyone thinking early about what they want to do on the board next year.

Schleifstein: At the conference, board members should keep an eye on how things are running, step in where necessary, remind tour leaders to tip their bus drivers. Enforce the Q&A rule that members & working journalists ask questions first.

Whetzel makes a motion to adjourn, Bogo seconds.

Meeting adjourned at 3:10 EDT.