

Society of Environmental Journalists Board of Directors Meeting
Sunday, July 29, 2012
University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado
9 a.m. MST

Board members present:

Ashley Ahearn
Jeff Burnside, Vice President for Membership
Peter Fairley, Vice President for Programs
Douglas Fischer
Christy George
Tom Henry
Don Hopey, Treasurer
Robert McClure
Sharon Oosthoek, Secretary
Peter Thomson (via Skype)
Jennifer Weeks
Carolyn Whetzel, President
Roger Witherspoon
Tom Yulsman

Board members absent:

Heather King
Jim Detjen (Founding President, non-voting)

President Whetzel called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m. MST

Agenda item 1: Approve May 12, 2012 board meeting minutes

Motion 1: Fairley offers motion to approve corrected minutes. McClure seconds. Passed unanimously.

Agenda item 2: Executive Committee Report

Whetzel advised the board that the executive committee approved the Restricted Earmarked Fund Account agreement with FJC on June 4, 2012, via conference call.

Whetzel advised the board that the executive committee accepted the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga invitation to host 2013 conference, on June 18, via an electronic vote.

(see attached minutes from executive committee meeting)

Agenda item 3: Membership Committee

Motion 2: Burnside moved that the board bestow an honorary membership on Mike Mansur . McClure seconded. Passed unanimously.

Motion 3: McClure moved that the board bestow an honorary membership on Jim Detjen. Burnside seconded. Passed unanimously.

Burnside rallied troops to be ambassadors for SEJ in recruiting new members.

Agenda item 3: Future Sites Update

Fischer advised board of productive meeting with Colorado State University officials in Fort Collins on July 27, 2012. They understand SEJ and have a great space. CSU folks are considering a 2015 bid because of campus construction.

Fischer also advised that a steering committee of Washington, D.C. SEJ members is investigating a conference with various tracks and sponsors. The steering committee will take the next six months to determine if this is viable. While attendees wouldn't see much difference in the annual conference, it would in fact be a new approach that breaks a single conference down into a number of subject areas, each sponsored by a different organization – for example the Wilson Center.

Fischer also advised:

- of ongoing discussions with Boston University. Officials there are daunted by the price tag, but may still be convinced.
- that SEJ member Michael Hawthorne(Chicago Tribune) is in early discussions with the University of Chicago about a potential conference.
- of early discussions with NSF about conference funding that could be applied to multiple conferences. Universities like this model as they general take 45% off the top when handling NSF funds.

Burnside thanked **Fischer** and **Weeks** for their work on future sites.

Weeks advised Tufts University might also be a possible conference host if SEJ considers August dates.

Agenda item 4: Executive Director's Report/Finance

Parke led board through financials and development docket. Some points of interest:

- Awards program entry fees amounted to \$12,500, which will nearly cover expenses.

- Journal is not so financially healthy but ad revenues year to date are “nice-looking.” Trying to mobilize volunteers to sell more ads.

Fairley asked that future reports give more specific breakdown of expenses/revenues for all programs, given our difficult finances. Pointed out some programs are running despite not being fully funded.

Lengthy discussion ensued about cutting expenses ad hoc, versus a more systematic approach.

Whetzel advised of her plans for conference calls for August (focus/planning) and September (budget planning).

Hopey described proposal for more funding from Heinz Foundation and others for exploring the creation of a number of environmental journalism jobs in markets that do not have, and have no plans for, a dedicated environmental journalist. The model could see foundation funding for an environmental reporting position shared among various regional media outlets (starting with Pennsylvania, but eventually expanding across the country). A preliminary survey funded by Heinz shows interest among local media companies. Now we need to gather more info regarding details.

Lengthy discussion ensued about the wisdom of SEJ creating content and the possibility that the program could cause newsrooms to forgo plans for hiring their own environmental reporters. **Hopey** pointed out the model calls for foundation funding to eventually disappear as media outlets take on the full cost of such positions.

Parke gave board an update on positive discussions regarding explorations of a potential partnership with IJNR. (see attached excerpt from IJNR president Frank Allen’s email to the Joyce Foundation regarding funding for joint IJNR-SEJ projects in 2013)

Parke advised board that Grantham is “still in play” and she would be surprised if it didn’t fund FEJ and possibly more.

Hopey rallied troops to get out and fundraise.

Break - 11:00 am to 11:08

George advised board that succession planning for both emergency ED departure and defined departure is progressing but will soon need a subset of board members to get involved, after which a plan would go to the full board for more finessing. She underlined the importance of such planning by referencing a study that shows when

succession is unplanned, 34% of newly-hired EDs are subsequently fired and board members quit.

Hopey moved that the board adjourn to executive session to discuss executive director's annual review. **George** seconded. Motion passed with **McClure** dissenting.

Board moved into executive session at 11:30 a.m.

Hopey moved that the board move back into open session. **George** seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Board moved back into open session at 12:01 p.m.

Agenda item 5: Effectiveness Planning Session Discussion - Follow-up

Lengthy discussion about how many board members were frustrated by consultants' approach to SEJ effectiveness planning – felt it was unnecessarily divisive, forcing board members to decide whether they wished to focus on environmental journalists or environmental journalism. Many felt this was a false choice and that the consultants didn't really understand SEJ. Still, many also felt the framework they presented was helpful as a guide and that we could work with it through our current branding/financial challenges.

**Motion 4: Whetzel moved to adjourn meeting at 12:45 pm
Fischer seconded. Motion passed.**

Next Board Meeting: October 2012, Lubbock, Texas - details to follow.