

Thursday, December 11, 2014 SEJ Electronic Board Meeting Minutes

Board members present:

Ashley Ahearn

Jennifer Bogo

Jeff Burnside

Jim Detjen, Founding President

Douglas Fischer, Future Sites Chair

Christy George

Lizzie Grossman

Robert McClure

Susan Moran

Meaghan Parker, Associate Rep.

Dave Poulson, Academic Rep.

Mark Schleifstein

Kate Sheppard

Roger Witherspoon

Board members absent:

Imelda Abano

Don Hopey

Staff Present: Beth Parke, SEJ Executive Director

President Burnside convenes the meeting at 12:05 PST.

He explains that the purpose of the meeting is to consider, and vote on a motion for SEJ to oversee a grant to SEJ's Fund for Environmental Journalism from the Wyss Foundation to fund reporting positions at the High Country News and the Los Angeles Times. (see Addendum I - Draft Agreement).

Witherspoon: on Section K: No problem but if folks have an issue, I see no problem having a lawyer append a paragraph about how we interpret it.

Burnside: SEJ's lawyer sent a formal memo with his interpretation and dialogue with the Wyss Foundation

Sheppard and Bogo: are comfortable with the plan, and like having something we can show members

Parke – We will put into the letter of acceptance to state our understanding, also how we disclose our funders

George – Like a signing statement?

Witherspoon – Do we need a transmittal letter?

Parke – We'll clarify members' access to the agreement. It's more how we deal with folks applying.

Grossman – On the other email, outlining bold strategies, outcomes, I didn't realize this was a Fund for Environmental Journalism grant? Not the routine process for it?

Parke – FEJ is a programmatic area in bookkeeping, so when Karen Schaeffer brought in a grant for a radio series, that's the bucket we used to administer it. I see FEJ as a program we can expand. To them (Wyss), they're funding the FEJ and these grants to the LA Times and High Country News are part of it. Not handled competitively in the same way.

Witherspoon – It's not all that dissimilar. Just a year-long grant.

Grossman – It's important to clarify it wasn't SEJ that originated the decision on what to fund.

Parke – It's like a new line of work, functionally very different. The umbrella is bigger.

Grossman – This is one of the things the FEJ can do.

George – Does FEJ have no rules? And should we make them?

McClure joins the call

Parke – FEJ was a 'make it up as you go' program, with the end in mind, but not the mechanics of how. (Former SEJ Treasurer) Peter Thomson offered to look at the financial policies, etc... with this in mind.

Witherspoon – How much goes to administration on smaller grants vs larger grants?

McClure – I'm fine with the licensing language. Why does the motion only talk about FEJ?

Parke – Because it's all within the FEJ.

McClure – I want to clarify the numbers.

Parke - \$175,000 to the LA Times; \$120,000 to High Country News; \$30,000 mini-grants, \$10,000 FEJ, \$50,000 SEJ administration.

Parke – We're voting to do our problematic agreements, and we have till July to figure out how to manage the competitive round of grants.

Burnside – It's new territory, and one-year. If it works, we'll do it more. If not, we don't have to do it again. The overhead is helpful, also the fellowships & mini-grants.

Detjen – It's an exciting new initiative that shows the growth and strength of SEJ.

Burnside reads motion (APPEND): PROPOSED MOTION:

"Whereas the Board of Directors of the Society of Environmental Journalists established the Fund for Environmental Journalists in 2009 to provide incentives and support to qualified journalists and news organizations to enhance the quantity and quality of environmental journalism;

and

Whereas an opportunity was presented by a charitable foundation to extend FEJ grant making to include significant grants that underwrite reporting positions for news organizations or compensation stipends for specific reporting projects;

and

Whereas current members of the SEJ Board have discussed at length the merits and concerns raised by this particular opportunity, now archived on its listserv, that include clear understanding that the journalism produced by these grants will be free of interference from SEJ and the funding foundation;

and

Whereas, in conclusion, the SEJ Board encouraged SEJ's executive director to develop and submit a proposal for a grant in support of the Fund for Environmental Journalism at the invitation of the foundation, the Board of Directors of the Society of Environmental Journalists now directs Executive Director Beth Parke to execute the foundation's grant agreement, attached, to accept the funds and implement activities as proposed, including appropriate procedures and subsequent agreements with grantees of the Fund for Environmental Journalism."

Schleifstein moves the question, Witherspoon seconds.

The yeas have it: 12 yea, 1 nay (Grossman) and 1 abstention (Ahearn).

Parke will notify Mike Bybee and get the check.

Witherspoon - Great job, Beth.

Fischer – What's our plan to communicate to membership?

Parke – Can we wait till January? It's the holiday season and I don't want to be absent during questions, or miss my vacation. I've got some policy work to do as well.

Grossman – Make sure to tell the LA Times and the High Country News to wait for a formal group announcement.

Parke – Good point.

George – Tell the Wyss Foundation, too.

Parke – Should the board direct the Programs Committee or the Excom a role in implementing? The Finance committee & Peter Thomson, or the Excom with Bogo involving the Programs Committee.

Witherspoon – The deadline is when to tell members to apply for jobs/prepare FEJ pitches?

Parke – We can ask people to use the SEJ mail.

Schleifstein – We can make SEJ mail available free for the announcement.

Parke thanks the board for responding so fast.

Burnside reminds board members to make hotel reservations for DC.

Adjourned at 12:31 PST